

Local Organic Bazaars for Sustainable Development

Markets play a significant role in the livelihoods of the small and marginal farmers. It is the markets that mostly determine the production systems at the farms – organic or conventional, the types of crops, and quantity of production. It is also the markets that may either improve the farmers livelihoods or lead them to despair when markets fail. The small and marginal farmers are the most affected by market failures as they do not have economic buffers or alternative sources of incomes. However, the upcoming market systems does not consider the needs of the small farmers and neither are they sustainable in terms of the environment or nutritional requirement of the country.

The market forces favour the production of certain food crops over the others. This may be for the ease of processing, transportation, and the varieties of derived food products. The crops that are resilient to drought and were traditionally consumed are now being replaced by rice, wheat, and few favoured vegetables. This has resulted in decreased biodiversity and even the nutritional levels. For instance, the millet production has become more or less stagnant and the country is still the biggest importer of pulses. The National Sample Survey (NSS) data shows that the average calorie intake per person per day has fallen in the rural areas from 2256 calories in 1972-73 to 2020 in 2009-10. To add to this, there is also the environment and economic costs involved in cultivation, storage, preservation, and transportation of food for distant markets. So, what then could be the markets that improve livelihoods of small farmers, conserves biodiversity, and also provides better nutrition.

Asrabai, a traditional woman farmer from Marathwada, shows how a small woman farmer could sell her produce as organic in a nearby city. She hails from Dhangaon village which is 30 kilometers from Aurangabad city and owns a small patch of land less than an acre where she mostly grows traditional vegetables. *Aloo*, *Dhodke*, *Kharli*, and *Gawar* are some of the vegetables she grows. Until few years ago, she used to sell her farm produce to a local middle man who in turn sells it for a higher profit in Aurangabad city. Though a traditional farmer, she had not realized until a decade ago that the produce of her farm is actually organic with greater benefits to the consumer than conventional produce. With the realization that the organic farm produce is superior to produce available in conventional markets, Asrabai wished for a greater appreciation of her efforts while improving her income. She, along with some other farmers of the group, decided to jointly market her produce in Aurangabad city without a middleman. IIRD helped them to identify a venue for the market and continues to provide technical guidance for branding and promotion. Thus, the organic bazaar was established at Aurangabad in mid-1999. In the organic bazaar, Asrabai interacts with the consumers and educates them about organic farming practices. The relationship and trust between Asrabai and her consumers improved through her regular interaction and participation in consumer-farmer workshops. Now, Asrabai and the other farmers who participate in this organic bazaar have increased their profits by about 40 percent.

Like Asrabai, many other farmers in Aurangabad have benefited from the organic bazaar. The concept of organic bazaar spread to other districts of Marathwada and to other states of India representing different socio-economic and agro-climatic conditions. Currently, the organic bazaar is operational in 14 different locations providing better livelihoods to thousands of farmers and healthy foods to many more.

The means of guaranteeing the produce as organic at the local level, by systems

established by the group of farmers themselves, makes it more relevant and appropriate. This type of guarantee system commonly termed as the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) is flexible as it allows for documentation and procedures based on the ability of the farmers and their socio-economic context. This also enables farmers to learn from each other and enhance knowledge in organic farming. Recent discussions with farmers of Aurangabad have revealed that there is return of old traditional knowledge being practiced which may have otherwise been lost if not for the inclusion of old farmers in the group, who pass on this knowledge. Such peer support, commitment, and enthusiasm of the farmer groups in the villages, encourage other farmers to join the organic movement. Thus, the awareness and spread of organic agriculture happens without many external interventions.



Organic Bazaar in Aurangabad

In a country where there are clear indications of despair among farmers, more efforts like those of Asrabai and her fellow-farmers will not only improve their livelihoods but also increase the organic food supply. As organic bazaar targets the food needs of the local consumer who trusts the farmer, there will be increase in the production of traditional crops as opposed to crops for either exports or far-off national markets. At the national level, this will mean more healthy food available to the ordinary citizen at lower costs while creating opportunities for rural livelihoods.