

IMPACT SHEET: Promoting Sustainable Consumption and Production

Promoting sustainable consumption and production systems for safe and organic foods in India



Transforming the food system by bringing together all the key stakeholders of the ecological value chain to promote consumption and production of clean, green and safe food for which farmers receive fair price.



PROJECT BACKGROUND

Food consumption is central to the discourse on sustainable consumption and production (SCP) because of its impact on the environment, individual and public health, social cohesion, and the economy. In India, unsustainability is reflected in dependence on agrochemicals, industrialisation and globalisation, long food miles, increase in use of heavily processed products and the paradoxical lack of food & nutrition security amidst an abundance of food. Led by civil society and with some support from the Government, there have been efforts to promote sustainable food systems, but these usually do not address the entire lifecycle of food beyond production. A holistic and systematic approach to the development of ecological markets for smallholder farmers is therefore required that addresses a number of challenges simultaneously. The programme was designed to create an enabling ecosystem for the establishment of sustainable local food systems for smallholder farmers by addressing entire food value chains. Welthungerhilfe along with its partners VAAGDHARA and IGSSS worked with the farmers, ecopreneurs and consumers to increase the demand and supply of organic and safe foods in northern and western states of India.

CHALLENGE

The organic food market in India is growing and receiving increased attention from all quarters. However, large agribusinesses currently dominate the market, while the smaller actors of organic food systems in India are hardly networked and still very weak. Smallholder farmers growing organic food, are riddled by challenges such as: loss of yield on conversion to organic farming, high certification costs, limited resources and lack of knowledge and business skills. Similarly, the small entrepreneurs driven by ethical and environmental concerns, find it very difficult to compete with large agribusinesses and are hardly able to establish themselves within the organic market segment in the longer term. On the consumption side, the organic produce available in the market are expensive and for those consumers who are willing to pay the premium cost, reliable information and assurances are unavailable.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of the project was to contribute to sustainable local food systems that safeguard public and environmental health and promote sustainable smallholder agriculture.

The specific objective was to increase the demand for, and supply of 'clean, green and fair' foods in selected Indian towns, promoting the switch to sustainable food consumption and production patterns.

TARGET GROUPS

- Small and marginal farmers
- Vulnerable and marginalised sections of society, particularly women, tribal communities, and socially deprived classes
- Ecopreneurs (small and ethical organic retailers/ food businesses)
- Consumers (to create a pull factor by increasing demand of organic and safe food)

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Availability, access and credibility of consumer information on safe and local foods enhanced through sustained campaigning and education.

Over 600,000 urban and rural consumers were reached through various events organised at corporates, hospitality industry, RWAs, schools, institute, online events, and distribution of IEC materials. These events were covered by mainstream media that helped create larger information spread. The campaigns were focused on informing consumers about consumption, identification, sourcing and preparation of organic and safe foods. The consumers were linked with local organic retailers and farmers markets to source organic and safe foods. As per the experience of retailers, there was an increase of 30-50 % consumers that switched to ecological food consumption from conventional food consumption.

Identified retailers and brand owners have extended outreach, and organic farmer producer organisations enhanced value addition and market access.

The brand **Bhoomi Ka** was established to support smallholder farmers and small ecopreneurs to strengthen their networks and build their capacities. The network has over 3,000 certified organic smallholder farmers, 5 Farmer Producer Organisation (FPOs) and 48 ecopreneurs. The retailers have shown 40-60% increase in their sales since the initiation of the project. Over 5,000 smallholder farmers have converted from inorganic to organic farmers, amongst these, 3,330 farmers have been registered on the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS)- India portal. These farmers have been organised into 5 FPOs to directly do business with retailers and improve producer's share in the value chain. These FPOs have each established a common facility centre (CFC) that allows them to carry out value addition of their product and sell their products with good packaging and branding, increasing the margins of the FPO and supplementing farmers with higher income.

Policy advocacy undertaken to create an enabling environment for protecting consumers and promoting the domestic market for local organic foods.

The programme team has worked closely with district as well as state level government officials to inform and make them aware of the programme and engage with them on different workshops and dialogues. In Punjab, with teams advocacy efforts, a circular notice was brought out by the government banning the use of 19 pesticides that had adverse effects on the environment and human health. In Rajasthan, a Poshan Abhiyan (nutrition camp) was conducted in 750 villages to identify Severe Acute Malnourished (SAM) and Moderate Acute Malnourished (MAM) children. Amongst over 52,000 children screened, 17,000 were identified as SAM / MAM. The families of the identified children were facilitated under the camp and provided with healthy food products and recipes to ensure better nutrition to children and their mothers. After the success of the plan, ICDS, Rajasthan issued directives to the Deputy Director (ICDS) of 8 tribal districts to organise a similar programme, promoting a nutritive recipes competition during the Nutrition Month in Tribal districts, which is continuously followed by the Rajasthan government.

At national level, three queries in relation to promotion of organic and safe food were raised in the parliament during the winter session after deliberations with members of the parliament.

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

The Programme covered the entire ecological value chain, supporting the producers as well as consumers while building sustainable market linkages to promote organic and safe foods.

- 631,062 urban and rural consumers were educated on consumption of organic and safe foods through over 200 online and offline workshops and multi-stakeholder events and media coverage.
- Over 17,042 farmers were trained in ecological farming. Of these farmers 3,330 have been linked with PGS certification.
- 21 product lines were developed through 5 FPOs.
- 41 Ecopreneurs.
- 19 agreements have been signed between retailers and FPOs to support the sale of eco-products.
- Introduction of policy for inclusion of millets, and nutrition gardens in schools and Aanganwadi in Banswara district.
- Three queries were raised in the winter session of parliament in relation to policies promoting organic farming.

LESSONS LEARNED

Most of the programme envisaged the creation of large gathering places to facilitate interactions between producers, retailers, and consumers. Conducting such events became a challenge after COVID-19 pandemic restrictions were imposed. Many programmes that were organised through schools, institutions and restaurants were stopped for almost a year. But other events shifted online. Webinars and online dialogues were organised around eating healthy, purchasing organic and safe foods, maintenance of hygiene and following the COVID prevention protocol. Moreover, during the pandemic, many migrant workers were left stranded in major cities without proper food and shelter. Through the programme, these workers were provided food packages and information on safe food and healthy local recipes. Another challenge was that several small businesses that were supported before the COVID-19 outbreak were forced out of business.

Among the lessons learned during project implementation:

1. To create sustainable linkages between actors in the organic value chain it is critical to provide a platform that promotes networking and communication amongst them.
2. Smallholder farmers and FPOs need vigorous capacity building and training for strengthening their institutions and growing their business.
3. Consumer awareness and education is very critical for driving the demand. It needs to be done on a large scale to create larger impact.
4. The policy framework around organic food systems needs to be more inclusive and favourable for small holder farmers and small businesses.





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Bhoomi Ka, literally meaning 'of the earth', is a network of farmers, ecopreneurs and experts that establishes producer-consumer connect and increases access of smallholder farmers and small businesses to clean, green and fair markets.



Long-term project sustainability

Over the course of four years, the project has strengthened the capacities of smallholder farmers in ecological farming, facilitated sustainable linkage for their certification and linked them with FPOs to support them in taking a bigger role in the value chain and earn higher profits. The programme has also established linkages between the FPOs and ecopreneurs to ensure the long-term sustainability of the value chain while simultaneously building capacities of the ecopreneurs in marketing and communication skills.

Bhoomi Ka, a social enterprise, has been established under the project to continue supporting the FPOs and Ecopreneurs' network. The enterprise will take up the role of ecosystem enabler by supporting producers, building value chains and creating market spaces to encourage consumer-producer engagement.

Project contributions to Climate Change Mitigation and SDGs



The objective of the programme was to transform the food system and promote sustainable consumption and production of organic and safe food. The project contributed to climate change mitigation by introducing ecological farming practices and promoting local food systems. Over 5,000 acre land was converted to natural/ecological farming, 3,330 farmers were certified under the programme and linked with 41 local Ecopreneurs to promote organic and safe food value chain. The retailers engaged observed 40-60 % increase in their sales and approximately 30% increase in their consumers.

The action contributed to transforming the local food systems that safeguard public and environmental health and promote sustainable smallholder agriculture. This is in line with the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, with a specific focus on [SDGs 2, 8 and 12](#).

SDG1: Income of farmers and small businesses in eco-value chains has been improved through application of sustainable farming practices and better market linkages. This has contributed to poverty reduction. **SDG 2:** Zero Hunger: The programme has worked with small and marginal farmers and rural consumers to introduce integrated production practices and nutrition gardens to provide for them and their families food and nutrition security throughout the year. **SDG 8:** Decent work and Economic Growth: The action has contributed to providing smallholder farmers with higher income and created job opportunities at village level to work with FPOs and CFC. It also supported small businesses to improve their sales.

Impacts at a Glance

Economic Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30-50 % of consumers have converted from conventional food consumption to ecological food consumption. • The supported Ecopreneurs observed 40-60% increase in sales since the inception of the programme. • An Eco-food van was introduced in Rajasthan to provide a door to door organic retail service. Products worth INR 1,670,000 were sold from the outlet. • Farmers have switched to a less-input intensive farming system, reducing their cost of production. • Consumption of well-balanced meals by farmers and consumers has improved their nutrition and health
Environmental Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of mixed farming system has improved bio-diversity in the region. • Improved Organic matter in the soil with regular application of organic manure. • Soil moisture retention capacity improved • In-situ soil and water conservation methods such as farm bunding, mixed cropping, natural fencing, among others, are applied on farmers' field to reduce soil and water run-off.
Social Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 631,062 urban and rural consumers reached. • Over 17,042 farmers were trained in ecological farming. They produce natural food at least for self-consumption. • Project provided dry ration kit to 1,000 migrant and daily wage earning families in Delhi NCR and 3,000 ration kit were distributed in Rajasthan. • Farmers are trained to practice improved ecological farming practices including: integrated pest management, intercropping, border cropping, identification of useful pests, etc.
Climate Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 5,000 acre land converted from conventional farming to natural/ecological farming i.e., no chemical input. • Increased adoption of climate resilient crops like millets, local short duration paddy varieties, pulses, etc.
Target Group Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3,330 farmers certified as organic farmers under PGS. • 5 FPOs each having 1 CFC for value addition and processing established. • 21 Product lines promoted by 5 FPOs. • 41 Ecopreneurs supported. • Over 200 awareness events organised to inform consumers. • Key stakeholder involved in the project: farmers, consumers, retailers, hospitality industry, schools, health groups, grassroot level government officials.
Policy Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 queries with regards to natural farming and policies were raised in the parliament. • 19 pesticides with adverse effects on the environment and human health were banned for use in Punjab with the advocacy efforts of the team. • Introduction of school nutrition gardens, as well as healthy nutritional recipes in Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) integrated in Bansiwara district. A Circular to introduce similar practice in 8 other tribal districts was circulated by the state government. • Inclusion of millets processing machines in the Subsidy list of machines by the Agriculture Department and two more millet processing units were established in Punjab.



FUNDING

EUR 1,426,897
(EU Contribution: 80%)



DURATION

Jan. 2018 - Oct. 2022



PARTNERS



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This impact sheet is developed together with SWITCH-Asia Policy Support Component

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