Fostering a resilient and self-reliant community: An organic farming revolution

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Abstract

Organic farming contributes to a healthier food supply and a more sustainable environment.

In Tamilnadu, a State in the southern part of India, women are actively involved in organic farming, participating in all stages of cultivation and contributing significantly to the household food security and income-generation process.

This paper aims to explore the notion of women's participation, empowerment and food sovereignty among the marginalized women farmers in Tamilnadu by addressing the following issues :

- ***Does organic farming present a significant scope for women in Tamilnadu?***
- ***How do they overcome challenges like land ownership and the certification processes, finding reliable market access?***
- ***Do government initiatives /community organisations play any role in propelling marginalized women towards a self-sustainable, self-sufficient and self-governed environment in a rural agricultural economy?***
- ***Are educational methods/ practices adopted to train the women farmers?***

By addressing challenges such as social and cultural barriers, access to education and training, land ownership and resource management, organic farming can play a significant role in empowering marginalised women farmers and promoting sustainable agricultural development.

Key words: organic farming, self-reliant, sustainable, empowerment, marginalised women

Organic Farming is a sustainable agricultural practice that emphasizes the use of naturally occurring non-synthetic inputs such as compost manure, green manure and places emphasis on techniques such as crop rotation, companion planting and mixed cropping. It is an integrated farming system that strives for sustainability, the enhancement of soil fertility and biological diversity. Organic farming contributes to a healthier food supply and a more sustainable environment.

Collective and Organic Farming: Food Sovereignty

The concept of collective farming, a relatively contemporary phenomenon in rural agricultural economy is varied according to the local circumstances and contexts. It is closely linked to the notion of grassroot groups. Grassroots groups are community-based, small in scale and scope and focus on issues that directly impact member's lives. Such groups provide a space for women to articulate their experiences, listen to others and consider individual and collective challenges to injustices. Participation in such groups can be critical for the highly disadvantaged, such as the economically weak women who have accepted silence and repression as an integral part of their lives.

The need for collective farming arises out of women's concern for supporting their families due to the low incomes of the male-head or little source of income in rural families, especially the marginalised. This also enhances the collective social spirit by working together in a communion, in co-operation, ensuring each other's well -being and welfare which was otherwise not apparent in isolated living within a family or suppressed living conditions under the male-heads or the domination of in-laws in their families. Hence the practice of collective farming began to be looked up as a long-term sustainable way of living by many of the marginalised women.

Moreover, the requirement for introducing collective farming emerges from the deteriorating condition of agriculture in India, which is entirely dependent on the climatic conditions.

Collective farming is a progressive method used by women, especially the marginalised as it empowers them through participation in the decision-making process in relation to agricultural practices whether it is about seeds, crop-cultivation, harvesting etc. They are not dependant on any external source or authority, no governmental or state apparatus support is required by them in the functioning of this kind of farming.

They also experience financial sovereignty in the sphere of domestic household with no support required from their male counterparts. This enhances the scope and arena of rural agricultural economy by bringing in the marginalised women who were otherwise merely confined to the domestic households.

The need for food sovereignty is felt all the more in the light of depleting economic and financial condition of marginalised families who are affected by the stagnation of traditional methods of farming on one hand and the changing environmental concerns on the other.

This paper aims to explore the notion of women's participation, empowerment and food sovereignty among the marginalized women farmers in the state of Tamilnadu by addressing the following issues:

- ***Does organic farming present a significant scope for women in Tamilnadu?***
- ***How do they overcome challenges like land ownership and the certification processes, finding reliable market access?***
- ***Do government initiatives /community organisations play any role in propelling marginalized women towards a self-sustainable, self-sufficient and self-governed environment in a rural agricultural economy?***
- ***Are educational methods/ practices adopted to train the women farmers?***

Women and Organic farming in Tamilnadu

Tamilnadu is a state in the southern part of India, having a literacy rate of 83%with 32 districts and a population of 72147130 (as per the 2011 census), the sex ration being 996 females per 1000 males.

Climatically, Tamilnadu is a tropical region with less than average rainfall as compared with other parts of the country. In the context of widespread poverty and environmental degradation, this means an increased work burden, lower nutritional intake and consequent lower health status.

Considering the availability of natural resources, the enhanced farming expenditure, the concept of organic farming was introduced. This has given an impetus to the growth of an agricultural economy by introducing new, innovative techniques and practices of farming which are least dependent on the natural rainfall conditions. Besides, it has also supplemented the financial-social sovereignty of marginalised rural women by giving the entire process of this farming in their own hands, thus enhancing an educative communion among them and thereby enabling them to share their individual experiences of organic farming.

Tamilnadu has emerged as the second largest state in India which accounts for 6% of the nation's total population and 10.6% are urban population (census 2011). Making it the second largest contributor to the Nation's GDP. During covid, it was observed that there was a decline in India's GDP accounting for 24% of April -May 2020. Rural people were badly affected by the loss of income and livelihood.

In 2020-21, the State of Tamilnadu ranked 11th producing 24,826 tonnes of organic food and exporting 4,223 tonnes, fetching a 108crore revenue. The Tamilnadu Organic Certification Department provides training for farmers and has registered over 31,687 acres of land under organic certification. This initiative supports sustainable farming practices and enhances the State's agricultural landscape.

Employment data shows that not only in India but also in Tamil Nadu, the labour force participation rates of women are dropping relative to men. Some key factors behind this are: (a) women bearing greater share of household responsibilities, (b) gender bias in expectations with respect to women and men resulting in limited education and skills investments in girls/women reducing their chances of gaining remunerative jobs, and (c) mobility constraints due to predictable and safe transportation facilities and safety concerns. Newer research shows that unskilled and low-skilled women agriculture workers move into agriculture processing and allied sector jobs in the rural areas, as the first level of transition from agriculture jobs. However, diminishing prospects in the agricultural sector in states like Tamil Nadu have not seen a corresponding increase in job opportunities in other sectors in the rural, rural–urban, and urban areas which can absorb women thus, leaving many of them unemployed and underemployed. The Social Assessment for the project with respect to women's employment revealed that among the potential beneficiary population, 63 percent of the respondent women are either into employment or wage labour. Forty-six percent each get work for about 91 to 180 days and over 180 days, followed by 5 percent who get work for about 31 to 90 days, and 3 percent for about 30 days and less. Only 5 percent of those in employment/wage labour have undergone training and the rest (95 percent) have not had any training. The key constraints identified by those who are either employed or into wage labour were managing household chores, delayed payment of wages/salary, underpayment, and health issues related to work. Lack of finance was reported by 51 percent as the reason for being employed or in wage labour, and not being involved in any economic activity; 25 percent stated that they did not have the required skills; 13 percent were not sure about what activity to undertake; and 8 percent had no specific reasons. Sixty-five percent reported that they were interested in

undertaking economic activity if they were provided with all required support and the rest (35 percent) were not interested.

In Tamilnadu, women are actively involved in organic farming, participating in all stages of cultivation and contributing significantly to the household food security and income-generation process. Women are taking on leadership roles in organic farming, demonstrating their skills and knowledge.

However, some women farmers face discrimination and scepticism particularly when they break traditional gender roles. Many women especially those from impoverished backgrounds lack access to land ownership or resources, requiring them to work on rented land or with limited resources. Some women farmers struggle with marketing their produce and adding value to it, leading to lower incomes. Government initiatives and organisations are working to promote organic farming and provide support to women farmers such as training, certification and access to markets. Many women farmers who belong largely to the so-called lower castes have been marginalized due to the persistent presence of the patriarchal structure and the continued oppression and discrimination in a caste ridden society.

The three concepts of women's participation, empowerment and food sovereignty are interrelated through organic farming practices by marginalised women in the rural hinterlands of the state of Tamilnadu.

Skilling and supporting women entrepreneurs in Tamilnadu

The primary objective of the Tamilnadu Rural Transformation Project (TNRTP) -Vazhndu Kattuvom (Tamil name of the project, meaning "we will live and show") is to enhance financial inclusion and reduce poverty and vulnerability among disadvantaged sections of society, particularly the marginalised women.

The Project operated in 3,994 village panchayats across 129 blocks in 31 districts of Tamilnadu.

Based on the field reality, local, and global program experience, TNRTP has designed a gender action plan that specifically addressed these key aspects. Given that women-led enterprises are also a potential avenue for enhancing women's labour force participation, as women entrepreneurs tend to hire other women, the project will reach a large number of beneficiaries through this strategy.

To achieve sustainable entrepreneurship, TNRTP focussed on key areas such as Producers Group, Producer Collective Business Facilitation Centres, Community Farm Schools, Community Skill Schools etc.

This Project is helping to address the financial challenges faced by women, particularly the marginalised and disadvantaged tribes such as the **Irulas**, a Dravidian ethnic group inhabiting the Indian states of Tamilnadu in selected blocks of Tamilnadu across 26 districts directly benefitting over 400,000 people.

Irula Community – Challenges and struggles

Irula, also known as Iruliga are a scheduled tribe, their population in this region is estimated at around 200,000 people. Traditionally, the main occupation of the Irulas has been snake and rat catching and honey collection. The Irulas are most famous for their expertise in snake catching, a skill that has earned them a unique place in Indian history. They have been instrumental in mitigating the dangers posed by venomous snakes in rural areas. Historically, they used rudimentary tools and their deep knowledge of snake behaviour to capture snakes, which were often sold for their skins (before the practice was banned) or handed over to the authorities for venom extraction.

Irula tribes people are also skilled in rat catching, especially in rice fields where their expertise helps reduce crop damage. Their deep understanding of animal behaviour and their tracking ability has made them indispensable to local farmers.

Moreover, the Irula tribe is known for its knowledge of herbal medicine. For centuries, they have been utilizing medicinal plants from forests to treat ailments. Their traditional healing practices, passed down through generations offer a treasure trove of indigenous knowledge.

Like many other indigenous communities, the Irula tribe faces several challenges in the modern field. Encroachment on their traditional lands, deforestation and urbanisation have severely impacted their ability to sustain their traditional lifestyle. With their forest-based economy disrupted, many Irulas have been forced to take up labor-intensive jobs, often as daily wage workers in construction or agriculture, where they are vulnerable to exploitation.

Many Irulas have been relocated from forest areas to urban or semi-urban settings, where they face social marginalisation and limited access to education, healthcare and employment opportunities.

Illiteracy remains a significant issue within the community. While government initiatives have aimed at increasing educational opportunities for the Irula children, high drop-out rates, poor infrastructure and language barriers have hindered their progress. The lack of formal education has also limited their access to better paying jobs and made it difficult for them to navigate legal and bureaucratic systems that could help them secure land rights or social services.

The Irulas's expertise in snake catching, once a source of pride and economic sustenance has come under threat due to the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, which has banned the commercial sale of snake skins. While the government had implemented compensation programs for the loss of this livelihood, the bureaucratic hurdles and the decline in demand for their traditional skills have made many Irulas economically vulnerable.

In recent years, various non-governmental organisations have taken steps to help the Irula tribe to preserve their cultural heritage and secure sustainable livelihoods.

The TNRTP project specifically supports eligible households from socially and culturally disadvantaged groups to harness their existing assets, skills and resources; enhance their ability to access finance, markets, technology and related support services; and help them graduate to value-added economic activities with higher returns.

This project has been working with targeted households that are already part of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), particularly those led by women, giving them a greater sense of identity, better services and livelihood opportunities. Innovative ideas related to promoting local nutritious food systems, and traditional health practices have been considered.

At least 60 percent women entrepreneurs from the SHG network in Tamilnadu who have the potential to move into the next level of economic growth have been specifically targeted.

Land ownership Rights

Women's Land Ownership Rights are a significant concern that contributes to the underrating of their work as farmers. The social norms and institutions that constrain women from claiming and controlling land does cause immense disadvantages to the women. One of the prominent features that evolves is the negligible or absence of land ownership rights for women, especially the marginalised in rural Tamilnadu. The ownership of land usually resides in the name of the male heads of households. This is despite the contributions made by women in building up a strong bond with the land, including providing constant physical labour. The theoretical approach to understand land ownership among women refers to social, political and legal structures and processes that play a role in maintaining status quo and deepening of gender inequality and the consequential discrimination in supporting opportunities that these could provide. Awareness among women and initiatives taken by women to ensure their legal rights are also important aspects. The women's empowerment framework therefore focuses on women's participation in law making, political institutions, governance and such avenues for ensuring women's land ownership and land rights.

Educating women farmers/Producer groups

Education is the most powerful weapon which we can use to change the world as quoted by Nelson Mandela emphasizes the fact that through systematic training, we can improve a country and its people. South Asia which also includes India can benefit from a huge economic gain which will result in an increase in GDP, if basic educational skills are provided effectively.

By educating people on the value of locally-produced food, administrators and local state and national leaders helped create new jobs, strengthen the local economy and build vibrant rural communities for years to come. India today has a bigger base of fertile land than China's and an agricultural labour force of the same size.

This initiative by the Government of Tamilnadu provides training and capacity-building support to small women farmers on the best practices in agriculture, natural resource management and entrepreneurship as a means of improving the agricultural productivity and livelihoods of women farmers in rural areas.

Community Farm Schools (CFSs) have been set up as part of the project to train women farmers and enable them to create natural inputs for their farms. The creation of natural inputs, water management and soil health are only a few of the subjects covered in these institutions. Farmers receive the required tools they need from these institutions to implement sustainable and economical farming methods, which raises yields and increases their revenue.

CFS develops a cadre of service-providers (SPARKs – Skilful, Personal, Ability, Attitude, Resourceful, Knowledgeable) in selected agriculture and allied sectors. Today the country spends only 0.7% of its agriculture GDP on research and development, less than half the global average. There is a lot that basic knowledge and education can achieve. As a result of the training given by CFS, women farmers have been able to increase their yield, resulting in an increase in income, a reduction in farming costs and an increase in the decision-making power for these women farmers .CFS has helped farmers to earn incremental income and adopt the use of natural fertilizers. CFS has not only trained women but also enabled producer groups to be trained in various agriculture techniques through their schools.

Community Skill Schools (CSSs) were established in local communities that offered vocational training and capacity building support to individual women farmers and group enterprises which enabled them to start their own agricultural business. CSS is particularly committed in promoting gender and social inclusion by ensuring the participation of women, marginalised groups and people who are differently-abled in their training programs.

Sustainable farming practices have been embraced by these women farmers, and the natural farming revolution has enhanced agricultural output, enhanced soil health and improved rural community well-being. This all-encompassing strategy supports worldwide initiatives to guarantee food security while encouraging ecological balance and sustainability.

Case Studies

1. Chinna Ponnu, a 60 year old Irula woman leads the other women members in her family in the use of organic farming practices in the small piece of land allotted to them by the Tamilnadu Government in Chembakkam village in Chingleput district, Tamilnadu.

A visit to this farm on the outskirts of Chennai, the capital of Tamilnadu was met with a lot of enthusiasm by Chinna Ponnu and her team members who practise collective and organic farming. She was very keen to explain about the growth promoters used by them in organic farming which is a highly significant input for the crops.

Some of the key natural growth promoters/ processes displayed in her farm include the following:

1. Sour buttermilk which is obtained by fermenting the buttermilk for three days, controls all kinds of fungal diseases, Blight, Blast and Mildews in different crops.
2. Brahmastram/ Decoction from leaves
   Five types of leaves which may include Neem, Pongamia, Custardapple, Calotrophis, Vitex, Datura, Papaya, Lantena, Guava, Bitter Gours and Castor are ground to a paste and added to water in a pot and kept overnight. The water is boiled the next day and to this cow dung and cow urine is added.
3. Egg Amino Acid
   About 12 eggs are placed in a long glass jar and enough citrus juice is poured to immerse the eggs. After 10-12 days, the eggs dissolve into the citrus juice and black jaggery is added and this prevents the seeds from becoming shelled. This also enhances the flowering of the crop and reduces the flower drop.
4. Pelletization is a process of covering the seed with layers of biostimulants, fine clay, ash and water to help the seed stay viable for a longer duration when sown in dry atmospheric situations in anticipation of small and moderate rains for germination and establishment.
5. Drava Jeevamrutham
   Cow Dung and Cow Urine is added to several litres of water in a huge drum. To this is added jaggery, pulse flour and virgin soil and is left for fermentation for three days. This mixture enhances the activity of the soil microbes, soil fertility and availability of nutrients. Crops also become pest and disease resistant.
6. Beejamrutham
   A mixture of Fresh cow dung, Cow Urine, Lime and Water protects seeds from seed borne diseases and seedlings from early seasonal diseases and insect pests. It also improves germination and healthy seedlings.

7. Neemastram
   Neem leaves are ground to a paste and mixed with water, cow urine and cow dung and soapnut powder, fermented and used against insect larvae of all pests.
8. Agnastram
   Neem leaves, Green chillies and garlic are ground together, added to water in a pot and boiled. Tobacco waste and cow urine are added to this and used to control all kinds of stem and fruit borers in different crops.
9. Saptha Dhanyakura Dravanam
   Seeds which include Gingelly, Green gram, Black gram, Horse gram, Cow pea, wheat and Bengal gram are allowed to germinate and ground together. To this is added a huge amount of water, cow urine and used for spraying after a day in paddy at milking stage to avoid chaffy grains. In the case of fruits and vegetables, it can be used from the flowering to the maturity stage .
10. Dasaparni Kashayam
    Ten types of leaves such as Neem, Pongamia, Datura, Calotrophis, Custard apple, Vitex, Lantana, Basil, Papaya, Andrographics paniculeta, Neerium and Parthenium leaves are ground together and added to enough water and cow urine and left to ferment for ten days. This is used for effective control of pests on all crops.

The sustained use of these growth promoters has yielded good results which could be seen in the form of healthy vegetables such as brinjal(eggplant), lady's finger, corn, different varieties of greens, cluster beans etc. in the farm which were being carefully harvested and sold to local buyers.

Organic farming practices are significant for their contribution to environmental sustainability, human health, and economic viability. By relying on natural processes and avoiding synthetic chemicals, organic farming promotes soil health, biodiversity, and ecological balance, while producing nutritious and chemical-free crops. These practices help mitigate climate change, reduce pollution, and enhance the resilience of agricultural systems.

Key Significance and Practices:

- **Soil Health:**

Organic farming emphasizes building and maintaining healthy soil through practices like crop rotation, composting, and cover cropping. Healthy soil is crucial for nutrient cycling, water retention, and overall crop productivity.

- **Pest and Disease Management:**

Organic farming relies on natural methods like biological pest control, crop rotation, and companion planting to manage pests and diseases. This reduces reliance on synthetic pesticides, which can harm beneficial insects, wildlife, and human health.

- **Water Conservation:**

Organic farming techniques like efficient irrigation and mulching help conserve water resources. By reducing water wastage, organic farming contributes to sustainable water management, especially in arid and semi-arid regions.

- **Reduced Chemical Inputs:**

Organic farming avoids the use of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides. This reduces the risk of chemical contamination of soil, water, and food, promoting a healthier environment and safer food supply.

- **Biodiversity:**

Organic farming practices encourage biodiversity by creating diverse ecosystems on farms. This includes planting a variety of crops, maintaining hedgerows, and attracting beneficial insects and pollinators.

- **Climate Change Mitigation:**

Organic farming helps mitigate climate change by sequestering carbon in the soil, reducing greenhouse gas emissions from synthetic fertilizer production, and enhancing the resilience of agricultural systems to climate change impacts.

- **Economic Viability:**

Organic farming can be economically viable through higher market prices for organic products, reduced input costs (especially after the initial transition period), and diversification of farm income through integrated livestock and agroforestry systems.

- **Human Health Benefits:**

Organic food is often perceived as healthier due to its higher nutrient content and absence of synthetic chemicals. This can contribute to reduced exposure to harmful pesticides and a healthier diet.

- **Social and Community Benefits:**

Organic farming can strengthen local food systems, promote community engagement, and preserve traditional agricultural practices. It can also create opportunities for local food production and consumption, reducing reliance on long-distance food transportation.

Empowering the Irula community: The Irula community is also being supported by the Tamilnadu State Government by providing them with small independent dwelling units which has enough land for developing a kitchen garden. These women are being trained to grow seasonal vegetables and fruits thereby providing nutritional enrichment for their families. In addition to seasonal vegetables and fruits, medicinal plants and herbs are also cultivated and used in times of need.

The Irula tribe of South India possesses extensive traditional knowledge about medicinal plants, utilizing a wide range of local flora for various ailments. They use different parts of plants, like leaves, bark, roots, and whole plants, in various forms such as juices, pastes, decoctions, and powders, to treat conditions ranging from common colds and coughs to more serious illnesses like diabetes, snake bites, and jaundice.

The Irulas have documented the use of numerous plant species for medicinal purposes, with many species identified having undergone scientific validation for their medicinal value. The Irulas utilize plants to treat a wide range of ailments, including common illnesses, digestive issues, respiratory problems, and even snake and scorpion bites. The knowledge of the Irula community is deeply rooted in their understanding of the local environment and the plants that grow there. The Irulas have developed and refined traditional methods for preparing and using medicinal plants, including decoctions, pastes, and powders. Studies have shown a high level of consensus among Irula informants regarding the medicinal properties of certain plants, indicating a well-established and shared knowledge base.

Examples of medicinal plant uses:

- **Cyclea peltata:** Leaf juice is used for cough and body pain.
- **Ruta graveolens:** Leaf paste is applied for stomach ailments.
- **Ailanthus excelsa:** Pounded bark is used to treat fever in cattle.
- **Andrographis paniculata:** Used as a body wash for pain relief.
- **Glycosmis arborea:** Used to treat tumors.
- **Hibiscus ovalifolius:** Leaf juice acts as a refrigerant.

The Irulas' knowledge of medicinal plants is a valuable cultural asset that needs to be preserved and documented. The traditional knowledge of the Irulas can provide insights into the medicinal properties of plants, potentially leading to new treatments and therapies. The Irulas' knowledge of local flora can help in the sustainable use and management of natural resources.

Keeping this expertise of Irulas in mind, it is planned to develop medicinal plants and herbs in larger spaces in the agricultural land allotted to them.

Innovation Promotion : Mooligai Café (Medicinal plants café)

As a part of promoting rural enterprises, The Tamilnadu Rural Transformation Project is promoting farm, off-farm and non-farm sectors with a blend of innovation. This initiative is an innovative café owned by the Irular Tribal Women's Welfare Society. This innovation is about promoting organic food in food trucks.

1. Organic rice cultivation
   In Kottamedu, not far away from Chembakkam, are a group of farmers cultivating traditional varieties of rice crops using organic farming methods. These different varieties of rice have medicinal value and are used to treat muscle cramps, wheezing, bad eye sight, and for strengthening nerves and gut health.

   In addition to the use of growth promoters, a method of Pre Monsoon Dry Sowing (PMDS) is used in farming wherein 35 varieties of seeds are mixed together and sown to enrich the soil quality and to activate the microorganisms by way of Nitrogen Fixation. The water holding capacity of the soil also increases as a result of this method.

2. Organic farming revolution led by women in Uthiramerur
   Post covid, Deepa, a 36 year old woman farmer took a firm decision to return to traditional methods of traditional farming . The Covid-19 Pandemic had wiped out low income jobs for the village women. So Deepa was not alone in this silent revolution. Inspired by the efforts of the Nandivarman Mathi Women Farmer Produce Company Limited (NWFPC) , hundreds of women farmers from Uthiramerur Block in Kanchipuram district of Tamilnadu embraced a more natural way of farming. With the help of the Tamilnadu State Rural Livelihoods Mission, small farmer groups were brought under a producer company.

   The major crop in Uthiramerur is groundnut which is cultivated using organic farming methods. Their company is also certified by the food safety department. An interesting aspect to be noted is the barter system being followed by these enterprising women farmers. Groundnuts harvested by them are exchanged for various types of millets grown in nearby Jawadhu Hills and these millets are a part of their product range also.

   Special sales stalls are organised at various locations to raise awareness about their products. Furthermore, they are preparing to launch online sales through a dedicated website and mobile application.

   The goal of NWFPC is to empower women in rural areas, not just financially but also by fostering a self-reliant community.

   TN-RISE – Women start-up council

   As enterprises grow and mature, they need higher-order advisory services, mentorship, financial and appropriate legal advice. The women particularly rural women struggle a lot to identify and access these supports. To cater these higher-order support services to the growing women enterprises, the Tamilnadu Rural Transformation Project proposes to set up a strong support system exclusively for women entreprenuers of Tamilnadu, called as TN-RISE Women Start-up council with the objectives of enabling the rural women entrepreneur to have Access to government; Access to Entreprenuerial and Corporate Community; Access to Support Community and Access to be a part of entrepreneurial eco-system of the State.

Every single day, we consume food without even questioning where it comes from. Without realising that the chemicals used to grow it are not only depleting the quality of the soil but also posing major health threats. Organic farming is a slow process but highly effective. It takes nearly two years for the land to detox and become suitable for the traditional farming process. Whatever is grown is ploughed back into the soil, giving it the nitrogen and

nutrition it needed. This biomass coupled with cow dung serves as natural manure. But these two years of waiting becomes difficult for small and marginal farmers. Here's where the government can play an important role in supporting them financially and help these farmers move towards organic farming.

The Tamilnadu Rural Transformation Project worked with targeted households that were already part of Self-Help Groups) SHGs) of which 3,25,000 households were organised into Enterprise groups and Producer Groups. The Project which was implemented in a phased manner focussed on households represented by women as the unit of planning.

Based on the success of this project, The Tamilnadu Rural Transformation Project will soon be replicated with funding from the Indian Government in four districts of Tamilnadu covering a large number of villages, particularly women farmers. A scoping exercise will be carried out to identify prospective farmers and train them in organic farming methods.

Mahatma Gandhi believed " The future of India lies in its villages". As per the 2011 census, there were 6,49481 villages in India. Around 833 million Indians, which is more than two-thirds of India's population reside in rural areas. Rural-urban distribution is 68.8% - 31.1%. in India. Rural entreprenuerhsip will facilitate the growth of rural areas through the maximum utilisation of local resources (Nwanko,,F.O., &Okeke, C.S.,2017.)

Sustainability has become a priority for people, companies, governments and nations of the world. People are realising and adopting eco-friendly practices, be it individually or in groups in the hope of making a greener, happier and brighter future for the generations to come.

Sustainable natural resource management in rural communities reduces poverty and enhances their economic progress.

The practice of collective and organic farming has introduced and made remarkable changes, enhanced awareness about Farming and its significance for women, the utility and long-term effectiveness of farming as a dynamic practice rather than a stagnant one, imparting informal education on farming techniques and functioning of machinery and equipment , addressing environmental concerns by invoking a sense of belongingness, and a sense and spirit of social, ethical and moral responsibility by taking into account their views and perspectives in participatory decision-making.