

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Report for Reddygudem Village, NTR District, Andhra Pradesh

1. Background of Reddygudem Village

Reddygudem is a vibrant agricultural village located in the NTR District of Andhra Pradesh. The village has a significant area under cultivation, with a total sown area of 13,315 hectares. Of this, 4,588 hectares are irrigated, while 8,727 hectares rely on rainfed agriculture. The primary crops grown in the region include Mango during the Rabi season and Paddy during the Kharif season. The Druthi Krishna Farmer Producer Company (FPO) plays a pivotal role in the agricultural activities of the village, supporting farmers with resources, knowledge, and market linkages. The FPO has a membership of 304 farmers, managing a collective land area of 468.04 acres.

2. Participants in the FGD

- **Number of Participants:** 12 farmers from the FPO
- **Participants:**
 - **Farmers:**
 - G. Srinivas Reddy
 - N. Venkata Krishna Reddy
 - Satyanarayana
 - Sitaramulu
 - N. Pichyasu
 - N. Lakhma Reddy
 - Yesuma
 - C.H Rupa
 - G. Sunitha
 - Y. Lakshminarayana
 - **FPO Leadership:**
 - CEO: Sumanth G
 - COO: Ravi Teja Amudala
 - Finance Head: Prakash G

- **Facilitators:**

- Dr. Christophe, Senior Lecturer, Geneva Graduate Institute
- Team CSA:
 - Dr. Gowri Shankar Rao
 - Dr. Shirisha
 - Mr. Bharath Chinnam



Group Photo with participants

3. Introductory Activities

The FGD began with introductions from both the facilitating team and the participating farmers. Dr. Christophe initiated the discussion by asking the farmers about their understanding of organic and natural farming. The farmers described it as a self-sustaining method of agriculture that avoids the use of chemicals and pesticides, relying instead on bio-inputs.



Focused Group Discussion

4. Key Discussion Points

A. Understanding of Organic/Natural Farming

- **Farmers' Perception:** Farmers defined organic or natural farming as the practice of growing crops without chemical inputs, using bio-inputs instead. They emphasized self-sustainability, with prominent methods including pre-monsoon dry sowing and intercropping.
- **Awareness Mechanisms:** The farmers revealed that their awareness is largely driven by local structures, where a Village Officer (VO) manages 200-250 farmers, and a Community Resource Person (CRP) oversees around 200 farmers. Self-Help Group (SHG) meetings frequently discuss natural farming practices.

B. Challenges in Organic/Natural Farming

- **Preparation of Bio-Fertilizers:** Farmers expressed that they do not have sufficient time to prepare bio-fertilizers. However, most follow Non-Pesticide Management (NPM) methods, where VO's or SHGs supply bio-inputs and nutrients at a minimal cost.
 - **Costs and Margins:** For example, Drava Jeevamrutham is sold at INR 500 for 2 liters, with SHGs earning a small margin of INR 2 per liter. SHGs also contribute funds to establish NPM shops, which cost between INR 1 lakh to INR 1.25 lakh.

- **Support to Small Farmers:** It was noted that 92-95% of SHGs serve small and marginal farmers and provide loans to them.



Bio-input (Jeevamrutham preparation) demonstration by Farmer

C. Adoption of Natural/Organic Farming

- **Enthusiasm for Natural Farming:** When asked how many would like to adopt natural or organic farming, 100% of the participants responded positively. However, they highlighted several challenges in fully transitioning to natural farming, particularly concerning market access and the availability of advanced machinery.

D. Farmer Narratives

- **A Progressive Farmer's Story:** One farmer shared his journey of adopting natural farming. After discovering a book on Subash Palekar's farming methods, he began experimenting on 1 acre of land, noticing significant improvements in crop size and quality. Despite an initial yield of only 15-20 bags of rice per acre (compared to his neighbors' 30-35 bags), his yields eventually increased to match theirs by 2019. He emphasized the long-term benefits of natural farming, such as improved soil health and increased earthworm activity, which motivated him to continue despite the challenges.



Farmer rice field visit to observe natural/organic farming methods

E. Preparation and Use of Bio-Inputs

- **Soil Preparation:** Farmers prepare their soil using oil seeds, cereals, spices, green manure, and pulses, incorporating the grown crops as manure after 40 days.
- **Bio-Fertilizer Application:** Root treatment is followed by spraying Jeevamrutham every 15 days, with 1 drum sufficient per acre. Azolla is used for nitrogen fixation and soil fertility improvement.
- **Green Manure:** During tillage, 4 tonnes of cow dung and green manure are used, with crops like jowar, sajjalu, korralu, and others incorporated.
- **Observed Benefits:** Farmers observed increased soil porosity, improved water absorption, and better rooting due to these practices.



Integrated farming of rice and mango field

F. Marketing and Technological Challenges

- **Limited Support:** Farmers highlighted the lack of support for marketing and the unavailability of advanced machinery for bio-input application. Unlike chemical inputs, ready-made bio-inputs are not easily accessible, and there is a scarcity of manpower due to migration to cities.
- **Community Farming:** When asked about community farming, the farmers expressed reluctance due to mistrust among themselves. However, they indicated a willingness to participate if supported by an external institution.

G. Economic Considerations and Farmer Preferences

- **Market Challenges:** Farmers expressed concern over the lack of market facilities for organic produce, which is often more expensive than conventional produce. High manpower requirements for bio-input preparation were also noted as a challenge.
- **Proposed Solutions:**
 1. **Bio-Resource Center:** Establishment of a center to provide bio-inputs.
 2. **Community Custom Hiring Center:** Access to machinery through a community-based system.
 3. **Marketing Facility:** Improved market access for organic products.
 4. **Drone Technology:** Use of drones for the application of bio-inputs, particularly Neem oil.
- **Pricing and Support:** Farmers emphasized the need for a minimum support price premium for organic growers and improved payment timelines from traders.

H. Socio-Economic and Agricultural Risks

- **Income and Employment:** Farmers reported earning INR 500 per day as agricultural laborers, with an expenditure of INR 100-200 on food daily. There is a peak work season from July to August, with lower employment from mid-March to May.
- **Natural Risks:** The biggest risks include cyclones, insect attacks, and droughts. In 2023, the village faced a 60-day drought.
- **Market Dependency:** 90% of the farmers' produce is purchased by the government, with the remaining 10% sold to private buyers. Monkeys were identified as a significant problem, particularly for Mango crops.
- **Health and Environmental Impact:** Despite lower yields, farmers believe natural farming will improve health, soil quality, and the environment over time.

I. Crop and Livestock Details

- **Major Crops:** Mango, paddy, and vegetables are the primary crops. The paddy season runs from June 15 to December, and the mango season from December to May.
- **Livestock:** The village has buffaloes and cows, with 75% of the milk sold to Krishna Milk Collection. Backyard poultry is also present.
- **Livelihood Diversification:** 75% of the villagers are engaged in farming, while others work as carpenters, construction workers, or agricultural laborers.
- **Support Programs:** The government's Raithu Bharosa program, providing INR 13,500 to farmers, is availed by all the farmers.

J. Comparative Insights

- **Vietnam and Bolivia Examples:** Dr. Christophe shared examples from Vietnam and Bolivia, where farmers continue chemical farming despite knowing the risks, due to immediate needs and staple crop considerations. Indian farmers, however, emphasized their understanding of health benefits and expressed a willingness to transition fully to natural farming if market support is provided.

5. Outcomes and Recommendations

- **Immediate Actions:** The FPO leadership, along with Team CSA, will explore the feasibility of establishing a Bio-Resource Center and a Community Custom Hiring Center in the village. Efforts will also be made to enhance market access and explore the use of drone technology.
- **Long-Term Goals:** The establishment of a sustainable organic farming ecosystem, with full market integration and support for bio-input production, is envisioned.
- **Follow-Up Actions:** Regular meetings and Farmer Farm School sessions will continue to ensure the ongoing education and support of farmers in transitioning to natural farming practices.