Chapter - Four

The Karnataka State Organic Farming Project in Moodanahalli
Introduction

The chapter is about the Karnataka State Policy on Organic Farming Project. This policy was introduced as a project by the Karnataka State Agriculture Department on an experiment in the ‘Moodanahalli village’ in Dakshina Kannada district. I have already discussed the Karnataka State Policy on Organic Farming - 2004 in the introductory chapter; however, a brief overview about the same is given here. This policy was introduced to promote organic farming as an agricultural practice at the district, village and farm levels. The policy was an effort towards popularising organic farming practice through different government funded projects. The state government has consistently projected organic farming policy and the project as a ‘farmer-centred alternative initiative’, primarily an initiative undertaken to help farmers overcome the agricultural crisis in the state.

Taking the discussion on the policy ahead, this chapter tries to comprehend and present as how the Karnataka Organic farming policy was received and operationalised at the village level. It presents the villagers’ perspective on the policy as well as on the implementation of the project in the village. The villagers' perceptions become relevant in elaborating how the state government development programmes have conceptualised and implemented organic farming in the village. The respondents of my research study are conventional and organic farmers, villagers, women, service provider and field officials from Moodanahalli village in Dakshina Kannada. Organic farming, as it appears in the context of the farmers in the village, is interpreted in numerous ways. Given the various ways by which organic farming is now known- nature farming, biodynamic farming, zero farming etc farmers find themselves lost in the proliferation of terminologies associated with the practice of organic farming. For the farmers, the practice of organic farming are informed by a number of practical concerns that the policy does not address, other than the fact that farmers associate organic farming with traditional farming and a way of life.

In January 2005, the Government of Karnataka and the Varanashi Research Foundation (henceforth VRF) came to an agreement, whereby VRF became the service
provider for introducing organic farming project in Dakshina Kannada.\(^1\) In the organic farming policy document, the project implementing agency is referred to as ‘service provider’, and I am using the same terminology while referring to VRF in my thesis.\(^2\) VRF is a charitable trust, run by an agriculture farming family in Bettadka village. From 1995 onwards, VRF has been working in the area of organic farming, by introducing farmers to organic farming practices and technologies, as well as through initiatives to create awareness among farmers to shift towards sustainable farm practices. With the formation of VRF, the agency is now working in a number of villages to promote and encourage organic farming in the region. In 1997, it received the ‘organic farm’ certificate from an International certifying agency, giving it international recognition and place within International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement (IFOAM).\(^3\) Today VRF is recognised for organically grown commercial crops, agriculture commodities, research and extension activities in the state.

In Dakshina Kannada, the village organic farming project was carried out in eight uppa gramas from Moodanahalli and Bettadka villages. The service provider referred to the project area as ‘Moodanahalli Organic Village’ (henceforth to be referred to as project village). Both Moodanahalli and Bettadka are revenue villages from two different gram panchayats of Bantwal taluk. VRF selected Moodanahalli village as per the criteria and rationale mentioned in the State policy document for introducing the village level organic farming initiative.\(^4\) Moodanahalli village had been the site for the watershed development project had benefited through the construction of ‘Community Katta’ (barrage) for irrigation. VRF has its office and organic farmland in Bettadka village. Within the project village, VRF needed a ‘model organic farmland’, for which it used its farm land, where

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\(^1\) It has set-out short-term and long-term goals for the improvement of agriculture and allied fields through research, education, and extension, with special emphasis on promoting eco-friendly and sustainable technologies.

\(^2\) Service provider may be any government (KVKs, State Agriculture Universities, and Agriculture Clinics) or private (farmers groups and NGOs) organizations that are active in organic agriculture.

\(^3\) SKAL-International, a third party certifying agency, has certified the Varanashi farms as being organic.

\(^4\) The policy proposed those areas for the project where there was least consumption of inorganic fertilizer and pesticide. Also, they insisted on areas where crop diversification, potential for the organic source of inputs, existing farming systems such as agriculture, horticulture, sericulture, piggery, apiculture, intensity multi-purpose tree cover, farmers understanding about organic farming was highest. Along with it the presence of farmer groups, SHG or NGO, potentials for export of organic products, availability of infrastructure, identification of the local crop (commercial, subsistence, medicinal, aromatic, etc) and promotion of its production through organic farming, and willingness of the farmers to become the stakeholders in the farmers’ company (FC). (KOFP; 2004).
they could demonstrate different innovations and where farmers could visit, consult, observe and discuss about organic farming as part of the project.

**Agriculture Practices in the Project Village: Prior to the Project**

Prior to the implementation of Karnataka Organic Farming Project, the farmers were practising different types of agriculture. In the quest to increase yields, farmers have adopted new agricultural technologies available in the market, which is also supplied by the state agriculture department in its various district level outlets. Commonly all farmers believe that ‘new approaches and new crops provide quick profits and fetch a good price in the agriculture market’ (Field notes, 2008). However, despite the concerns of profits in agriculture, there are many farmers who continue to debate and practice non-commercial or traditional farming as they consider it as a far more sustainable form of farming in the long run. Even within commercial farming, there are variations in terms of the quantity of chemicals that farmers use given their financial position, as well as access to organic seeds and manures. Clearly, in various ways in which farmers explain their choices in farming which is also relevant in the context of the organic farming policy, as it demonstrates the practical dimensions of farming that has not been unrecognised in policy level deliberations. Presented in this section is an array of perspectives on the practice of both kinds of farming in the project village, and how farmers seek to optimise on the best of both forms of farming to continue to make a living from agriculture.

In the village, traditional farming is associated with the agriculture practised by their forefathers and which was commonplace till the changes wrought by the green revolution. This approach of farming especially can be seen in paddy fields. In the village, a majority of the farmers do not have paddy fields, and so this agriculture practice is in the process of vanishing from mainstream agriculture. Not more than 10% of the farmers are paddy cultivators. The region specific agriculture knowledge, traditional seeds, and practices are in the state of extinction.

Chemical farming is also known as conventional farming, and is the main type of farming in the project village. Chemical farming is associated with commercial crops, practised primarily with the intention of increasing production from agriculture in order to maximise profits in the market. Even as most of the farmers are engaged in commercial farming, they are aware of the impact of the same on the fertility of land in the long run. There are various reasons as to why commercial farming persists despite its ill-effects
being well known among farmers. E.g. Annappa Naik, a 50 year old farmer from Marati Naik, (ST) community, who lives with his wife and three children, prefers commercial farming as only the latter can help him maintain his family through agriculture. He cultivates land, about an acre, that his father received from his Brahmin landowner, during land reforms. With meagre resources, he finds agriculture a difficult profession to sustain. To quote him,

‘A banker's job is easier than farmer's job; even if the banker does not work properly, he receives a salary at the end of the month. A farmer has to wait for the market to decide the value of his products. My father got this land during bhoo kandaya kannu (land reforms act) […]. In early 1990s, the land was for paddy cultivation; in 1994, I converted the land into thota (plantation) and now for consumption, I am buying rice from the market. I am under debt [...] Can I afford to take risk in practising organic farming’? (Field Notes, 2009).

He has taken a bank loan for his children's education, and the only way he can repay the same is by maximizing profits from agriculture. He cultivates areca, coconut, and cocoa on his agriculture land as they fetch a good price in the market. Changing over to organic farming would involve risks which he cannot afford to take given his financial situation. He does not want to disturb the main source of income however detrimental it may be in the future. The dependence of Annappa on agriculture for his income has made him reluctant to bring changes in his agriculture approach. Annappa's situation is shared by many in the village. For many marginal and small farmers, agriculture is the only source of regular income. This makes it difficult for them to change over to organic farming as the latter would involve at least 5 to 6 years stabilising and giving yields similar to what they get now from of commercial farming.

Surya Rai is a progressive farmer from a traditional landowner, Bunt community who inherited five acres of plantation farm from his father and has business outside the village. His position as a medium-sized agriculturist and businessman facilitates changes in his farming approaches. His perspective conveyed how farming is actually done in the village. My interaction with him has further provided me information about chemical fertilizers and its market in the village.

‘Before...farmers’ followed mixed methods; they used a combination of chemical and organic manure on their plantations. In this method, the ratio of organic and chemical manure is 4:1. As much as possible, our effort is to reduce the use of chemical fertilisers. A majority of the farmers have plantation crops; when rainy season is over in the village, the task is to find a proper irrigation facility to provide water for the plants and protect them from dying during the hot summer months. Farmers are aware that the
greater the quantity of chemical use in agriculture land, the higher is the consumption of water by the plant. We have underground and open tank irrigation; there are no big dams or water bodies in the village. Farmers in the district have planned chemical use in their agriculture land, whereas in rainfed areas agriculture is seasonal in nature’ (Field Notes, 2009).

From the above quote, it is evident that the purpose of using the organic manures is to reduce the cost and maintain a balance with nature. Farmers are aware that too much utilization of chemical manure in agriculture land will affect its productivity. And yet, after the rains, most farmers use chemical fertilizers in their fields to maintain the crops, even though chemical fertilisers make the soil dry and cut into its fertility in the long run. However, farmers lack information about the proportion of chemical manures to be used and the purpose of different kinds of manures. Farmers’ ignorance can relate to a ‘village compounder (doctors’ assistance) who prescribes one medication for all kinds of fever’ (Field Notes, 2009). In a farmers’ group discussion, a farmer expressed that, ‘if slight amount of potash has not been given to the areca plantation, then we will not have a good production that year’ (Field Notes, 2009). This is the general understanding among many conventional farmers in the village. Here, farmers identify chemical fertilisers with increased agriculture production and also use it to prevent infliction of pests in standing crops. But, in this process, Surya says,

‘Land has lost its natural fertility and chemical fertilisers have become indispensable for raising crops. It is common practice that when human body has any infection, depending on the symptoms, doctor prescribes treatments, and we do not see any doctor providing medication for healthy body. Unfortunately, in agriculture, you find farmers using chemicals and making the plants more vulnerable to pest attacks’ (Field Notes, 2009).

Thus, clearly, there is a general recognition among villagers on the long-term ill effects of chemical use in agriculture and its impact on human beings and the ecosystem. And yet farmers continue to use chemicals as manure, excluding those who cannot afford and those who voluntarily practice traditional farming in the village. The use of chemicals has led to the loss of fertility, and crops have become dependent on external (chemical manure) output. The commercial crops in the region were exposed to a higher concentration of chemical fertilisers like urea, potash, rock phosphate, NPK, in the village. These chemicals are purchased at a subsidised rate from the cooperative or the village agriculture society. They have undesirable effects as it leads to deprivation of soil fertility, health issues among labourers, and economic burden to farmers.
Analyses of chemical fertiliser use highlight the class character of farmers, not just in the choices they make in agriculture practice, but also unravel the power relations in the village. To present some evidences of the same,

‘Today, chemical industries are minting money, as high demand exists for fertilisers in agriculture. The ground reality is that many of us (farmers) are not aware about the significance and quantity use of chemical manures for plants. After Green revolution, we used this as high yield generator rather than pest controller [...]. We just go to market, bring the chemical, and spray on the agriculture land. [...] Over the years, manures became expensive, and it is difficult to get involved in agriculture by using these manures. During the manure crisis in the district, one bag of urea (100kg) was sold for Rs. 700 and above in the black market, while the real price was Rs. 400-500 per bag. One bag is not sufficient for the farmers; depending on the land area and quantity ratio, the farmer needs more chemical manures and eventually, it becomes expensive. If I use ½ kg of manure this year, next time, when I am using the same manure, I need more than ¾ kg and every year, I have to buy more bags of chemical fertiliser than the previous year. This eventually increases my farm input expenditure [...]’ (Field Notes, 2009).

Mohammad, who is in his late 70s, is a small farmer with an acre of rubber plantation and is a petty shop owner. He belongs to the Muslim community in the region. He shared that,

‘When I was young, I worked as a labourer on the agriculture land; my sahib (owner) used many chemicals on the land. I was handling the chemicals and spraying them to the arecanut and coconut plants. When I reached my home, my hand used to get hurt and burnt and in a few days, my hand became dry, and the skin started peeling from the hand. Later, I gave up the job. Nothing has changed even today, and many labourers keep falling sick after spraying chemical on the agriculture land’ (Field Notes, 2008).

According to him, big farmers use chemicals heavily since they can afford to pay for the manures from the market. In Mohammad’s case or in any other agriculture worker’s case, they are not in a position to refuse the task or work assigned to them, as farmers try to manage the farm activities with the existing workforce. While working in the agricultural fields, workers and farmers (sometime) come in direct contact with chemical pesticides, in the process of mixing and spraying it on the crops and in the field. Their hands and feet are directly exposed to it and also breathe in the fumes. This leads to different kinds of skin diseases, burns, wounds, swellings, skin irritations, asthma, and other health-related problems. In agriculture, workers are not provided with protective gears to protect their body from chemical contamination. The negligence on the part of the farmers, ignorance about the severity of chemicals to human body and the environment, are some of the issues associated with the chemical use in the village. In the past decade (2000 onwards), there has been a general awareness on the ill-effects of
chemical use. This is also accompanied by a shift of labour in the project village from agriculture to non-agriculture work. Agricultural work is now highly priced. High demand in agriculture has improved their bargaining power in the village, as they can now demand better wages as well as working facilities.

For a few farmers in the village, the choice between traditional farming and chemical farming is a choice not dictated by practical considerations but by philosophy. Interesting case is of Mahadesh, for whom his conviction to practice traditional farming came from the philosophy that it espouses. Mahadesh is from a traditional agriculture community (bunts) and practises traditional farming on his ancestral property in the nearby village. He narrates his experience relating to chemical and traditional farm practice and explains his philosophical position on farming. Expressing his displeasure over how farmers are generally viewed to be ignorant of farming and farming practices by agricultural officials and researchers, he illustrates how choices essentially require fundamental shifts in the way agriculture is understood as a vocation.

‘A farmer has the choice between traditional and chemical farming; he can take a call and switch over to any one as per his preference. The selection of farming method comes from what he wants to do on his agriculture land. If he has plantation crops, he would prefer to make maximum profit, and so he would stick to chemical farming. In contrast, the farmer with plantation and perennial crops would go for mixed farming by using chemical and organic farming, respectively. Farmers cultivate paddy for household consumption, and so they avoid using high amount of chemicals; in time of pest attacks, they use small quantity. Farmer who has experienced both the farming systems will voluntarily engage in organic farming. [...] In our district, many farmers today have opted for organic farming because of its market opportunities. When market overshadows the philosophy of organic farming, then there is no difference between conventional and organic [...]’ (Field Notes 2009).

According to him, the use of chemical manure is not an answer for all agriculture related issues like increase in production, improving plants growth, and controlling the pest. Water is the main component for healthy growth of plants, and farmers are not aware of the exact quantity of water required for irrigating the land; it is over or less irrigated, and both can become factors for the poor growth or death of plants. Mahadesh’s interpretation of organic farming comes to closest to more informed, scientific and prudent use of natural resources within agriculture. Most farmers use chemical fertilisers to boost high yields, however, very often poor growth of crops are a result of improper or insufficient use of water in the crops. This according to him is not only unnecessary but also dangerous, as most farmers have no knowledge about chemical fertilisers and use it arbitrarily in their fields. In agriculture, ignorance and negligence by the farmers can lead
to catastrophic experiences and knowledge about farming (approach, techniques), bioscience (crops, yield), and agronomy (soil), which is essential for agriculture development. For as long as farmers are driven by the logic of producing for the market, for greater profits, it would be futile to distinguish between organic farming and commercial farming.

Broadly, all the case studies presented in the section highlight the diverse views of farmers on commercial and organic farming, as well as the context in which the project on organic farming was introduced in the project village.

**Villagers’ Perspectives on Existing Farming Approaches**

While farmers differ in the way they look upon organic farming, in terms of its practice and efficacy as a system in contemporary times, there is a general agreement among farmers that organic farming is the ‘absence of chemical inputs’. In this sense, for many it is akin to the traditional farming or the farming as practiced by their forefathers, while for some it is an experiment to redefine the not just the purpose of farming but also exploring an alternative way of life. This section then presents how farmers reflect on both the philosophy and practice of organic farming.

For Chinappa Rai, a progressive farmer from the dominant bunt community, organic farming is not a new subject for farmers. Prior to introduction of chemical manures in agriculture, his ancestors practised traditional farming. Fifty year old Chinappa lives with his wife Radha in their 4 acres of land. They grow mixed crops such as areca, coco, coconut, banana, vanilla, and in an acre of land they grow paddy which provides food for four to five months. Their children are educated and settled in the city. Chinappa described the philosophy of traditional farming as;

‘My father and ancestors have practised a simple, but very effective farming. They were aware about the contribution of nature and its role in providing farm yield. Agriculture existed in harmony with nature, and mixed cropping approach was practiced. During that time, livestock was considered as an asset; it had greater value (like gold and silver) in the society. The status of the farmer in the village measured through land productivity (fertility), prosperity and existing number of livestock. Farmers performed agriculture with the use of farmyard manures, green leaves, and traditional farm practices for obtaining sustainable yield in farming’ (Field Notes 2009).

Chinappa Rai pointed that farmers practised traditional farming for centuries. Each farmer has diversified the agriculture in their farmland as per the availability of the natural resources in the land. For improving the crop productivity and reduce the natural
factors such as pest, insect attack on the agriculture crops, farmers used mixed crops in the agriculture land which became the natural pest resistant. Mixed cropping was part of the traditional farming and involved livestock which provided its service in ploughing, transporting agricultural commodities and contributed in increasing the soil fertility though the production of organic manures to the farm land. Farmers never considered farming as an occupation rather it was part of their rural life; philosophically, observed farming as a holistic approach. The collective participation of the family, community in the production has increased the social solidarity of the community and community enjoyed autonomy in its food production. Farmers conducted agriculture in harmony with the nature. He expressed that, traditionally, agrarian society had the culture of preparing its young family members in the art of farming and during this process; they received orientation in the natural techniques of farming. This legacy of training the young ones in the family mainly happened through practice, by participating in the farming activities through childhood. The traditional knowledge and legacy of the ancestral agriculture survived until the modernisation of farming. Chinnappa proposes that, organic farming philosophy although has similar traits of traditional farming, but it has emerged as an alternative to the existed tension between the traditional and chemical farming. In the process, it has moved away from the natural, ecological elements of the farming to more technical oriented farm practices and agricultural profit has become the main priority of the farmers.

Prior to the implementation of village project, a few progressive farmers were already exploring the potential of practising organic farming in their agricultural land. Farmers expressed different reasons for adopting organic farming. In paddy land, the environmental and food security issues have been the main concerns, given that farmers produce paddy for self- consumption and therefore desist from using chemicals as that would contaminate the crop. Another reason for more number of farmers being conscious or aware of organic farming is the experience of Padre Village in Kerala with the use of Endosulfan. The village Padre situated at the border of Kerala and Dakshina Kannada faced acute health problems for having sprayed the Endosulfan on cashew plantations. This has dissuaded many farmers from using chemicals in their fields if not reduce or minimise the use of chemicals. Farmers have also opted out of chemical farming in plantation farms due to their economic concern in order to achieve the goal of financial stability in agriculture. It was believed that organic farming is less labour intensive and
farmers can attain economic profit through organic commodities which have high demand in the national and international market. In market, over the years, consumers have become more health conscious and concerned over the heavy use of chemicals in the food production. Many consumers are now supporting organic products and the organic products market is gradually developing in niche areas. Given the potential of the organic products market, many farmers are now interested in converting their land to organic and certify them from the national and international certifying agencies. According to Sanjeev Bhat, the primary school teacher in the project village,

‘Nowadays farmers are showing interest in organic farming. Organic farming is a part of traditional farming, the farming practiced by our ancestors. But organic farming promoted nowadays is dominated by a profit-making approach; it is commercial, as it is proposing farmers to have organic certification. Already farmers are trapped within the conventional farming approach. Organic farming is adding more pressure on the farmers as they are making sudden changes in their cropping patterns to increase their profit. Farmers in the name of organic farming are exploiting nature and its resources’ (Field Notes, 2009).

What Sanjeev Bhat is highlighting is the underlying commercial rationale that is attracting farmers to organic farming in the village. But more importantly, Sanjeev Bhat is reflecting on the nature of farming in the village in the last decade and more. Majority of the farmers in the district and in the village are engaged in producing export oriented cash crops, which has made them dependent on the national and international market for their conventionally produced agriculture commodity. The uneven economic growth and market fluctuation in the agriculture has created a situation where in farmers are introducing sudden changes in their agricultural cropping pattern. The region has seen different crops being introduced in line with the trends in international and national markets such as vanilla, rubber, cocoa so as to register sure returns. The recognition and practice of organic farming as an alternative to conventional farming is only one dimension of the entire discussion on organic farming in the region. The organic market is the major attraction for the farmers to shift from conventional farming. The practice of organic farming has added more pressure on farmers to produce diverse crops based on the market demands, attain organic certification for the land or crops within 3 years, so that they can sell their agricultural products in the national and international organic market and improve their economic situation.

From the above discussion, it is clear that farmers want to shift to organic farming for economic and ecological reasons. Even as they associate organic farming with
traditional farming, they do not use the two interchangeably. Radhakrishna Bhat, a 60 year old farmer from the dominant Havyaka community in the village, actually commented on how agriculture has changed over time. He is one of the pioneering farmers in the village who experimented with organic farming in his ancestral property even before its introduction as a part of the village organic farming project. He practices crop diversification and mixed cropping on his two acres of agriculture land. He is growing arecanut, coconut, cocoa, banana, pepper, cashew nut and vanilla. Radhakrishna Bhat lives with his wife, son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren. He states,

‘Organic farming is a traditional agriculture practice and it still exists in our life, but that does not mean all the components of agriculture have not changed. In organic farming, shifts (changes) happened over time through the way agriculture has been understood and practised by the farming community. [...] Today, farmers are embracing organic farming for achieving profit and becoming financially stable in the society’ (Field Notes 2008).

The modernisation in agriculture has shifted farmers’ perspective towards farming, which I have already discussed in village chapter (Chapter-3), where I have explained that transition has taken place in the agricultural production from food to cash crops. This shift in the agricultural production was mainly due to the increased demand of commercial crops in the International market. The market emerges as an important factor for the change in the farmers’ perspectives. Along with it the Dakshina Kannada agro-climatic zone is more favourable for producing the plantation crops than perennial and vegetable crops which has made it difficult for farmers to grown many products for the market. The demand for organically grown commodities in the local, regional, national and international market has created a sudden interest among the farmers in the region. In the village, farmers have the practice of producing vegetables in a small quantity for personal consumption. These crops were produced traditionally for household consumption and farmers generally do not use chemicals for these crops and which have a high demand in the local market.

Dayal belongs to Rajapuri Saraswat Brahmin community and has five acres of land in the project village. In my interaction with him during a workshop conducted by VRF on organic certification, he observes,

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5 Alluvium soils are acidic in reaction, water holding capacity is low and deficient of major nutrients which require for the cultivation. Here, soils are saline due to low lying and inundation by the seawater. Along with this, major constraints in the region are leaching of nutrients, soil acidity, and crop damage by wild animals, erratic rainfall, and seasonal floods.
‘Organic farming is a co-ordination between nature, agriculture, and human being. [...] Human being is the last creature on the planet, which does not have the power to recreate the things which s/he has polluted, exploited; so I believe it is not in my hand to exploit the land, water and nature (Field Notes, 2009).

His observation brings out the existing tension between the philosophy and the actual practice of organic farming in the village. Many farmers acknowledge the benefits of doing organic farming, as a means of attaining self-sustainability in agriculture, but at the same time many farmers admit that the motivation to take up organic farming in their agricultural land is to primarily maximise returns from farming. Interestingly, many of the farmers who opted for organic farming are small landowners. These farmers have small to big-sized loans in the bank and SHGs. Many small farmers took to organic farming to get the project incentives and facilities provided by the government.

The conventional farmers do not show interest in practising organic farming because of different factors. To quote one common response of conventional farmers, ‘how can you control the disease without the use of pesticides, and can you cure a patient without medication’ (Field Notes 2008). Organic farming is a labour intensive farm practice, and given the problem of labour shortage in the region and the project village, unavailability of sufficient natural manure source is another factor, which is often cited as reasons for not venturing into organic farming. Also, many farmers in the project village prefer to continue with the conventional methods of farming as they express that it is difficult to find the local market for organically grown commercial crops such as areca nut, coconut, cocoa, etc (grown organically) in the region. While there is a provision for organic certification, which is the prerequisite for the organic commodities in the national and international market, many farmers feel that it is very expensive.

In the project village, the general tendency among farmers to assess their agriculture yields is to compare their farm production with their neighbours and the overall performance in the locality. In social gatherings, farmers talk about agriculture, farming, price, market, diseases, manures, etc. It is common to hear farmers saying ‘how much yield did you manage in paddy/areca nut this year’ (Field Notes, 2008). After I started my fieldwork in the village, within 6-7 months, I observed a shift which was taking place as farmers brought drastic changes in their beautiful hilly landscapes as they converted them into rubber plantations. Initially, this shift was slow and silent and only a small number of farmers were shifting their hilly lands into rubber plantations. With the increase in prices for rubber in the neighbouring villages, this shift took place very fast
and within 4-5 months, the lush green hilly areas have been converted into rubber plantations. Rubber is a mono-crop and it degrades the biodiversity and hydrological system. In spite of knowing the ill effects of the rubber to the ecology and knowledge about traditional or organic farming, they ventured into the rubber plantation.

Thus now the shift towards 'sustainable farming' cannot be understood independent of the pattern that has characterised farming in the village in the last few decades. Land reforms changed the social composition of farmers as well as the social relations of production in agriculture; mechanisation of agriculture as also newer technologies within agriculture has changed not just farming practices on land but also labour relations in the village. The policies of the Indian state as well as Karnataka such as land reforms, green revolution and the accompanying economic and social changes have influenced farmers' decisions. In this regard, the Karnataka Organic Farming was critically poised as it had to necessarily address these complexities while implementing the project.

Along with the organic farming project, the service provider got NCOF (National Centre of Organic Farming) project which was implemented in Karnataka and Kerala. More than 1500 farmers participated in the National Centre of Organic Farming project; however, this project ended abruptly because of lack of funds. One of the reasons for this was that the project was being reframed at the national level. The farmers who were part of earlier projects kept in touch with the service provider, visited the centre and participated in the trainings organised for NCOF and the horticulture department project. These farmers hoped to reap profits through sustained organic farming. Other than financial benefits from organic farming, there are a few farmers who are now convinced of the long run benefits of organic farming, in terms of improving soil fertility, the quality of food grown in the farms as well in terms of an overall improvement in the quality of life.

**Karnataka Organic Farming Project in Moodanahalli**

The organic farming project was implemented on 12 April 2005 as ‘Moodanahalli Organic Village Project’ in Dakshina Kannada district. I started my fieldwork when the project was in its last stage. Therefore, my understanding about the implementation of organic farming project is through the narration from different stakeholders, villagers’ narratives, post project development, and projects that were ongoing in the field. When I
started my field work in August 2008, villagers were still recovering from Chikungunya. During field work, my entry into the village organic farming project was through a service provider; however, when I started my fieldwork I wanted to start as an independent researcher. Therefore, I attended the monthly meeting of Aganwadi teachers and introduced my purpose of doing research and staying in the village. Initially, I used to ‘hang out’ at the Aganwadi centre and made some social contacts with the people who visited the centre. I started conversing with them and first it was about kids, their education, and slowly, they started asking about my personal life, life in Mumbai, and the purpose of this study. After 2-3 meetings, I started asking them about agriculture and allied activities in the district and the village, and subsequently developed a rapport with them. Initially, I collected the basic information about the Moodanahalli and Bettadka from two local panchayat offices and used baseline survey data conducted by the service provider to get an overview about the village and its agriculture practices. The continuous engagement in the field provided me an insight on and information about the organic farming project and its process. Prior to the discussion on the project, let me present the basic features of the project, as it was implemented in the project village.

About the Village Level Organic Farming Project. Under this project, efforts have been made to transform the entire village of 321 families into organic farmers by making it a model organic village. In the village, out of 321 families, 191 farmers have agriculture land. According to the service provider data, more than 77% (148) farm households became part of the organic farming movement in the region. The rest of them (43 families) drastically reduced the chemical use in their agriculture land. According to many farmers, the organic farming approach has been generally successful in the locality. Experts, agriculture officials, and the certifying agency also expressed that the project in Dakshina Kannada has been implemented efficiently and effectively. The focus has been to provide maximum benefits to small farmers in agriculture. Agriculture department officials and the inspection agency called this village site as a successful model for organic farming in the state. The Agriculture Department has rated this site as one of the top organic sites for effective implementation of the organic village project.

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6 In the project village exists seven aganwadis. Aganwadi teachers introduced me to the community. Owing to the dispersed geographic location of people in the region, it is difficult for everyone to know my presence as a researcher in the village.
The village project on organic farming concentrated among small and marginal farmers and it had less scope for 146 landless labourers in the village. Although the project was not focused on them, the service provider made a difference by providing incentives of income creating programmes like pig farming and poultry farming. They provided them with coconut, fruits, and varieties of tree seedlings, and many of them planted these in the backyard of their houses. During my fieldwork, I came across Chandra Parava belonging to a Schedule Tribe, whose caste occupation was performing Bhutakola. He did not follow the traditional occupation of his ancestors, and worked as a daily wage agricultural labourer for a living. He helped me in finding the way for a house when I had lost my way in the village. While walking towards that house, he interacted and told that he is a daily wage agriculture labourer. When I inquired about organic project he expressed that,

'The organic farming project is for farmers and not for cooli (daily) workers. Still a few landless labourers received the incentives [...]this project should have something for us too, which would have motivated us to participate in the project and we could have also improved our situation. As there was nothing for us, so we are not active in the project’ (Field Notes, 2008)

Karnataka agriculture policies have mainly focused on the farming community. A feeling of frustration exists among the labour class as they were always left behind in the state agricultural policies. A labourer in the village expressed his view as; ‘what wrong did I do. Is it my mistake that I happened to be a labourer working on someone’s agriculture land? Do you think I am enjoying this status?’ (Field Notes, 2009).

Karnataka State organic farming project has focused on converting 100 acres of land in Moodanahalli into land solely meant for organic farming. In this process, policy has laid down various programmes to encourage farmers in the region to convert to organic farming by providing different agricultural related incentives. When the focus is to convert the village into a model organic village in the district, where does the category of landless labourers fit in the project?

Similarly, the trading community in the village, primarily the Muslims in the village, did not show interest in participating in the project organised in the village. The Muslim community trade in export oriented commercial crops that do not have a market locally. At the project level, traders viewed organic farming programmes as pro-farmers. ‘If we go and sit in the programme, how I will run the shop. To attend the programme, I have to close my shop and then what about my business?’ (Field Notes, 2009).
As intermediaries in the agriculture market, the traders are sceptical of the project. They fear that the agriculture commodity hike, which the project aspires to bring for the farmers, might bring business from the farmers but the fall will affect their business as farmers will either hoard their commodity until the market recovers or sell them. The local Muslims dismiss the project as a pro-farmer project and kept themselves separate from it. In the village, hardly 20 people have land and a majority of them are not engaged in full-time farming. In many Muslim households, at least one person works in the Gulf, which assures them regular remittances at home.

**Inauguration of the Village Organic Project.** While introducing the project, the service provider had conducted a household baseline survey that looked into households, agriculture, social and economic aspects, landholding patterns, irrigation, and livelihood conditions of the people prior to implementing the organic farming project. From the perspective of the project, conduct of a household survey provided an opportunity for the farmers to come in direct contact with the field officers. Field officers obtained an overview of the socio-economic, agrarian, and ecological conditions of the farming in the village. This village survey brought out many existing practices like mono-cropping, chemical farming, traditional or ancestral farming and organic farming approaches in the village. It even highlighted a few innovative and progressive farmers who engaged in mixed cropping on their agriculture land. Soil samples were collected from 650 different areas to test for soil characteristics in the village. The documentation of the scientific information became handy for preparing action plans and providing scientific guidelines to farmers. To quote Sheela, whom I met in the Aganwadi, a mother of a four-year-old boy,

> ‘Inauguration of savayava Grama (organic village) involved a formal public gathering conducted in our high school and it was open to everyone in the village; a few people got postal invitation, and many received phone call from VRF office regarding the new programme (project) in the village’ (Field Notes, 2008).

I met Sandesh, who is in his 30s at the project centre. He was there to inquire about remaining facilities available for organic farmers under the Agriculture department. During the organic farming project, he had received benefits from the project. He elaborated on how the project was introduced in the region:

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7 Mono cropping is the agriculture practice of growing the single crop year after year on the same land, without crop rotation through other crops.
8 Mixed cropping is growing of two to four or more crops simultaneously on the same piece of land. This method of farming is known as multiple cropping.
A programme was conducted in April 2005 and I was there in the audience observing the activities of the programme. The founder president of CAMPCO, who is from this village, inaugurated it. The program was attended by around 70 people and included farmers, representatives from the panchayat, villagers, nodal officers from horticulture department, and members from Sanghas (self-help group) and organic farmers from the district. In the village, many Havyaka families started practising commercial farming as they had the money to invest on farming [...] VRF belongs to a Havyaka family which was practising chemical farming before they moved into organic farming. Havyakas are known for commercial farming. Other than them, gowda saraswatha Brahmmins, Bunts, Nayaks, and Poojaris were part of the programme. The agriculture project officials informed the farmers about the benefits of the organic farming opportunities. VRF provided information on project objectives and opportunities and its importance in agriculture’ (Field notes 2008).

The village organic farming project was inaugurated in the village centre i.e. in the high school, so as to enable every member of the community access and participate in the program. The program was open to all members in village to actively participate in the project implementation. Through a formal public function, the service provider officially inaugurated the village level Karnataka Organic Farming Project. During fieldwork, farmers expressed that they were not aware about the inauguration of the organic farming project in the village. However, many experience difficulties to travel to the village centre as interior parts of the village do not have proper transport facilities.

**Development Agencies of the Village Organic Project.** The service provider was the main agency that gave guidelines about the organic farming services to the farmers during the conversion period from chemical to organic farming. The Karnataka Organic Farming policy 2004 has mentioned role of service provider as follows:

‘Service provider help in documentation of agriculture practices of the farmers and help in developing best methods and package of agriculture practices. It also provides day-to-day advice to the farmers. It is a local agency, well versed with agronomic practices, availability of organic inputs and technology and provide necessary advice to the farmer groups and play the role of a real friend to farmer when in need. State government fix a nominal fee charged by private service provider from farmers for the services it delivers to the farmers. Some service provider could become input suppliers on their own as a commercial venture’ (KOFP, 2004).

The responsibilities of the service provider have been clearly defined- they were supposed to promote, facilitate organic farming, add value, and marketing of organic production. In the village organic farming project, the service provider played two significant roles: primarily, as an agriculture research foundation since they were experts in the art of agriculture with natural and scientific blend towards farming, and secondly, as organic farmers by practice, they had developed their own philosophical and technological perspectives towards organic farming. They became the mediator between
Agriculture department and stakeholders (farmers), and stakeholders and certifying agency in the village. In order to understand how the service provider implemented organic project in the village, I had conducted interactions with the project and field officials and studied their official documents to have an understanding about the project. Sathish, a field officer of the organic farming project explained that,

‘The ground work for the project was done, before the formal inauguration the organic project. First, a project team was formed for implementing the project in the village. The team consist of our boss (Managing trustee), project director who heads the village organic farming project and he monitored, contributed, and supervised the project. Krishna Banta was appointed as a project officer as he had work experience in VRF. He had the responsibility of managing the action plans, monitoring the everyday functions, and implementing the project with support from field officers in the village. A group (committee) was formed with five local farmers who became the field officials and other than day today guidance, once a month the project office had a meeting with the field staff for discussing the progress of the project in the village. Geographically, the village is very vast (dispersed village) so there were the field officer had been allotted an area to conduct field work, where he had to motivate, guide, and supervise the farmers to become part of the village organic farming project’ (Field Notes, 2008).

At the village level, the service provider had the responsibility to implement the project; however, at the state level, the ‘Organic Cell’ had the authority to decide about implementing and sanctioning programmes for the stakeholder through service provider. Organic Cell has been created as a permanent sub-department for monitoring the organic programmes and administrative powers have been rested in the hands of Deputy Director of Agriculture department. For the effective project management purpose at the village level a ‘Single Window Approach’ was introduced wherein all the departments became part of the Organic Cell. The cell had the responsibility to monitor and coordinate different departments and agencies for effective functioning and implementation of organic project in the village.

In the state, it had to assist the State Level Empowered and Working Committee on policy implementation. District Nodal and Site officer facilitated service provider in preparing action plans and their implementation for the selected villages. Organic Cell had to provide technical, financial support, and promotion of organic farming through propaganda like mass media, posters and charts along with planning seminars and workshops for producers and consumers at the state and district levels. A market is an essential prerequisite for farming and emphasis has been made for the creation of awareness about organic food and its consumption among the consumers. Organic cell had the responsibility of providing a compilation of information on organic farming under
different crops, certification procedures, technical information, national and international organic production, and domestic, export market opportunities, and disseminate this knowledge to field functionaries and farmers.

The government authorized the Director of Agriculture for the release of grants to the selected NGOs for implementation of organic farming promotional activity in the state. The funds for project are allotted under two heads of accounts, agriculture and horticulture department. The Director of Agriculture shall allocate the funds to the service provider based on the needs of the farmers considering their existing facilities and infrastructure. The working committee on organic farming inspected the action plans prepared by the service provider; budgets had been worked out by the organic farming cell and funds were allotted to the service provider for need-based activities. Funds were released to the bank account of farmers’ associations and it was operated jointly by the service provider’ representative, site officer, and a farmer’s representative from the village. Funds were released by the Director of Agriculture on instalment basis subject to satisfactory progress achieved by the service provider.

**Strategies for Implementation of the Village Organic Project**

For effective implementation of organic farming projects at the village level, the service provider used different strategies suggested by the project committees and experts from the field, depending on the local needs of the beneficiaries.

**Project Management through Committees:** For effective management of projects at the village level, development agencies require guidelines, support and motivations to realise the project objective. In reaching its goal, the organisations had to collaborate with experts to provide maximum benefits to project stakeholders at the village level. The village has a ‘District Level Advisory Committee’ that was formed with the approval from the State Advisory Committee. The committee had progressive organic farmers, assistance of Director of Agriculture, officials from Nagarika Seva Trust (mainly working in the areas of environment) and representatives from agriculture, horticulture and

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9Agriculture department had two funding facilities; firstly, state sponsored scheme for organic farming manures and secondly, it is centrally sponsored by Mack Management scheme and the organic farming project in the state. The financial assistance has been provided for distribution of green manure seeds, oilcakes, enriched compost and preparation of syllabus on Organic Farming. Under the centrally sponsored program, the preference has been given for the INM demonstrations, distribution of micronutrients and vermicompost. Under Horticulture Department, financial assistance has been provided for development of organic horticulture in the state.
sericulture departments and nodal officers of the organic village as the members in the district.

The committee had the responsibility of providing guidelines in the preparation of action plans, and identifying the agriculture needs of the organic village project. It was functioning until the project termination, and annual meetings took place once a year for evaluating the progress of the project. For active and smooth functioning, a local site-specific committee had been formed and regional action plans were prepared in consultation with actors and site officers. The committee had four local farmers, a nodal officer of horticulture department, managing trustee of VRF, a Project officer, and three field officers. Site level committee contributed towards improving the action plans and bringing farmers felt needs into action. They had monthly evaluation meetings to supervise project progress that provided an opportunity for service provider to fulfil the project plans more effectively in the field. Monthly progress report of village organic farming project was prepared and communicated with the district nodal office.

**Raytha Samparka Kendra** (farmers’ communication centre) existed until the project termination in Moodanahalli to provide information on different farm related queries, project related inquiries, applications for different agriculture, and organic farming benefit in the village. The centre existed in the middle of the project site, away from the project office to create a communication channel between farmers, project, and field officials in the village. Through this Kendra, field officers provided services and built a direct contact with the farmers. For gathering information about the centre and its activities during the project implementation time, I randomly visited nearby houses to get a glimpse of their perspective about the centre and its contribution to project implementation. I met Kariyapa Naik whose family has less than an acre of land and agriculture labour is the main source of livelihood for the farmer and his family. His income from agriculture is not sufficient for sustenance; therefore, family members have to work as agriculture workers in the village. He narrated that,

‘Raytha Samparka Kendra was active when the project was going on in the village. We (farmers) had an opportunity to clarify our doubts about the project, benefits, and organic farming with the officers. Office timing was one hour in the morning and evening and for the rest of the day, they were in the field, inspecting farmers’ fields. [...] Rajanna Nayaka was helpful in writing my applications and providing benefits from the project. The office was near my house and this saved time and money for travelling to the main office that exists three kms away in the adjoining village. We found it very
useful. Now, the centre has been closed and we have to go to the main office for any organic farming related works’ (Field Notes, 2009)

Agriculture extension with farmers was essential in the village to rebuild the community network, access and participation, and market channels for the project. The farmers viewed their association with the service provider as a channel to increase productivity by taking advices on farm related issues and market linkage to access the organic market in the region. Raytha Samparka Kendra worked towards developing a linkage between farmers and service provider through the extension activity and provided scope for farmers’ participation in the organic farming project. Baseline survey and farmers’ interaction in the Raytha Samparka Kendra were significant for the service provider to understand the condition of agriculture in the village. The data showed that, farmers are unaware about many aspects of agriculture and there is confusion over the concept and practice of organic farming. Understanding the farmers’ ignorance in the organic concepts, service provider gave preference for sharing the knowledge of organic farming among the farmers.

**Programmes of the Village Organic Farming Project**

During the village organic farming project implementation, the emphasis was on the programmes that are highlighted by the project. The significant programmes are as follows: training and capacity development programme like dairy, honey, vegetable farming, azolla farming, compost making, land and water and soil preservation, insect and pest control methods, medicine plants, Madagascar methods of paddy cultivation, storage and preservation of agriculture products. However, I present some of the most significant programmes of the village organic farming project.

*Organic Farming Knowledge through Training:* Knowledge is a precondition for adopting innovations in agriculture and farmers’ acceptance of innovation depends on their awareness about the subject. Knowledge of organic farming will provide assistance to farmers in following a particular farming method provide a different outlook towards agriculture (Naik, Srivastava, Godara & Yada, 2009). State organic mission provided financial support (Rs. 21000) annually for different capacity development training programmes in the region. More than 20 different training and capacity development workshops have been conducted in the organic village to develop a strong base among
farmers on the sustainable agriculture practices in farming. The trainings were
carried out throughout the village in farmers’ field, project office, Raytha Samparka
Kendra, and schools depending on the subject, and interest of the farmers. Other than the
experts from VRF, local progressive farmers, agriculture, and allied experts were the key
speakers in these training workshops. Three important approaches were adopted by the
service provider for the effective implementation of the program.

**Farmers’ Field School (FFS)** approach was adopted to provide the theoretical and
practical understanding of the organic farming. For knowledge dissemination, innovative
techniques were adopted in the training workshops as such lecture method, field visits,
farm walks, group discussions, and interactive sessions in the field area. Collective
participation of the farmers in these trainings was the greatest challenge for the service
provider in the village. These workshops had variations in farmers’ participation and
participation was subjective and personal, but on many occasions, it was the topic of
discussion, and key speakers had their influence in farmers’ participation.

During fieldwork, I was able to attend training workshops conducted by the
service provider through the National Horticulture Mission, which has introduced the
organic farming project in the region. The trainings conducted were on organic farming,
pest management, and farmyard manure, vermin-compost and bio-fertiliser, bookkeeping
and certification, post harvesting the crop, value addition, and marketing of organic crops.
For farmers, it was difficult to participate in all training sessions, as they had their
personal, social commitments, day-to-day farm activities, and distance between home and
training venues made it all the more difficult for participation.

**Farmer to Farmer Approach** was used to create a deeper knowledge associated with
organic farming as well as to build interpersonal communication among the individual
farmers in the region. In this approach, one farmer shares his knowledge and expertise
with another farmer, for which farm walks were organised in a farmer’s field. Lastly,
**Study tours** were organised; they visited several farm fields processing units within and
outside the district to provide firsthand knowledge on farmers’ initiatives in organic

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10 On farmers demand, trainings were conducted on organic and related issues like water, land, soil
preservation, dairy, honey, vegetable farming, composting, bio fertilizers, processing, post harvesting, and
pest management, value addition of agriculture output, certification, and market for organic commodity.
11 Farmer-to-Farmer (FTF) is a program of the United States Agency for International Development
(USAID). The program provides for the transfer of knowledge and expertise from volunteers to farmers,
farm groups, and agribusinesses in developing, and transitional countries (Henk van den Berg, 2009).
farming in the state. Extension activity through tours and training provided an opportunity to broaden farmers’ horizon, and it helped in fight off the sceptical thoughts about this practice and many readily accepted organic farming. Project period observed wider transformation and knowledge innovations in the farmers’ field area, as training conducted in the allied areas of farming has boosted the production capacity and farm income. Farmers expressed that training is a way of ‘acquiring new skills and knowledge about farming and it helped in addressing many doubts and problems related to farming’ (Field Notes, 2009).

Farmers’ participation in organic farming project was not mandatory as there are different factors involved; the service provider made it a personal choice of the farmers to recognise themselves as organic or conventional farmers in the village. Venkappa Gowda who is a farmer in the organic village project, has 3.40 acres of land and he is growing arecanut, coconut, banana, cashew nut and he got an acre of soppina gudda (hill with bushes and green vegetations) which is also the source of the green manure to his farm land. He lives with his wife Sumati, mother along with the two high school going children. I met Sumati through a SKDRDP (Shri Kshetra Dharmasthala Rural Development Project) group meeting where I became a frequent visitor to understand the daily struggles of the rural women in the village. When I visited her house, Venkappa and Sumati took me on a tour of their agriculture land. It was an interesting visit as I learnt new things from them about agriculture, nature, farming, and human relationships. After spending roughly around 45 minutes on the agriculture land, we went and sat in the Chavadi. After the informal, personal questions asked towards me, I slowly pulled him to the conversation on the organic farming project. He was one of my respondents who elaborated on the project, its activities that were being carried out in the village. He expressed that,

‘The village project has given importance for self-reliance (swavalambane) and VRF (service provider) tried this through workshops, constant field visits and monitoring of agriculture land by the field workers and organisation which gave a scope for reducing farm expenses by introducing different sustainable farm programmes in the village. Project officials explained us to use the local varieties of seeds, told us to preserve, share, and exchange them within the neighbourhood. Local vegetable seeds were preserved and distributed by the VRF for minimum price. Project has emphasis on maximum reduction of external farm inputs and large-scale production of organic manures, natural nutrients as neem cake, and sustainable use of agriculture land. They restricted the chemical and pesticide use, promoted, and trained us in the natural pest

12 In House, Chavadi is the meeting place of the guests or villagers.
control measures. Land and soil fertility has given importance through practice field demonstrations in preparing farmyard manure in the land. It gave scope for the conservation, protection, and development of forestland in agriculture. Soil preservation methods have been adopted to control topsoil erosion from agriculture land during monsoon. Income generating occupations have been introduced for small and marginal farmers to overcome their bank loans by distributing livestock at nominal subsidised rate’ (Field notes 2009).

**Soil and Water Preservation Approaches.** The service provider gave maximum emphasis on soil and water preservation. Soil and land fertility decides agriculture production in quality and quantity and depletion in soil fertility affects crop production leading to less production profit and it affects the farmers’ financial situation. In agriculture, from a socio-economic perspective, an imbalance is seen in investment, production and actual returns the farmers receive from the market for their commodities. At the end, farmers receive economic returns depending on the existing market conditions for the commodity. On many occasions, production costs offshoot agriculture returns and farmers find it difficult to sustain financially through agriculture. The increased cost of agriculture inputs, labour and technology, reduction in land productivity, environmental concerns, soil health, farming approaches, post harvest management, and supervision are to be blamed for this depleting condition of agriculture.

The different state developmental projects have neglected the traditional water conservation knowledge and such practices have vanished from agriculture. Conventional farming does not have scope for conservation, preservation and protection of existing water; dearth of traditional knowledge and practice is responsible for water depletion in many parts of the state. Farmers have not experienced drought conditions; however, compared to rest of the district, this area which is situated in rain shadow area making it ‘prone to drought kind of situation for irrigation’ during summers. During summer months, people suffer from water scarcity to meet the household and agriculture needs of the community. The area receives less rainfall than other parts of the district. The service provider understood that the need of rainwater harvesting was to increase the water table of the area. Hence, the project promoted the methods of rainwater harvesting like growing forest, catching pits in tree basin, check dams, providing a curved path for flowing water, roof water harvesting, and percolation pond.

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13 The average rainfall in Dakshina Kannada is 2850 mm (114 inches) ranging from 1500 to 4000 mm. During monsoon, there are heavy showers in the district from June to October.
Farmers created trenches in their land, constructed Kattas for water conservation and preservation during post monsoon for irrigation purpose, and helped in recharging the underground water table. The water management laid emphasis on establishing permanent tree cover areas in the agriculture land and the service provider encouraged farmers to grow forest trees and for this purpose, through the horticulture and forest department, they distributed different forest saplings to farmers. Awareness programmes were organised to train the farmers to overcome the problems associated with water and soil in the region. Workshops and seminars were conducted to give an insight on different traditional methods of water and soil preservation techniques. Prior to commencement of the village organic farming project, watershed development programmes had been promoted by the service provider. After the organic project implementation, the service provider, with the use of minimum technology, implemented the rainwater harvesting techniques in their agriculture field.

Over the time, farmers were able to see the effect of technology and natural assimilation in the region; they were able to preserve rainwater and increase the underground water table. Altogether, 16 methods were identified and depending on farmers’ facility and resources, emphasis was laid on water conservation and reusing the household wastewater in irrigating the plantation and agriculture farm. The service provider recognised innovation and the innovative farmers who by their experience made remarkable contribution to rainwater management and agriculture in the region.

**Promotion of Mixed Farming.** Decline in the crop production affects the financial situation of a farmer; therefore, the project focused on monitoring agriculture production. In the farm, wider variation exists and factors like environment, pest and insect attack, poor irrigation, and lack of proper monitoring are responsible for production loss in agriculture. The existing studies, facts, and effect of mono-cropping have made farmers move towards mixed crop cultivation and project has also promoted mixed farming practices. Quality decides the market price for products and quantity leads to food security, market demands, higher buying power, and repayment of loans. Lack of proper post harvesting management affects the crop quality. In organic farming market, it is difficult for marginal farmers to compete in the international market for a ‘permanent place’ for their commodity, unless they are united and reach the expected export oriented quality.
A wider scope has been provided for farm, crop, production, and development of agriculture in farmers land. For increasing food security among farmers, the project has created awareness about the existing crop varieties; assistance has been provided for developing innovative methods of food cultivation, use of technologies for crop production, and low input cost productions. Service provider encouraged the farmers to go for food crop cultivation by incorporating new technological practices to reduce the production cost in the land. They promoted System of Rice Intensification (SRI) method for rice cultivation with its principle of less seed, less water, and no chemical fertilisers in the paddy fields. Workshops provided awareness about the traditional food habits and consumption patterns and motivated farmers to consume traditional recipes in their houses. By creating awareness, an effort has been made to provide the market facility for the locally available agriculture crops.

Through the forest and horticulture department, more than six thousand (6025) different forest plants have been distributed to the farmers. Organic farming cell provided Rs. 40,000 for preserving water, soil, and land. For preserving the top soil in the rainy season, the service provider encouraged the farmers to create trenches in their agriculture land. Within three years, more than 11,684 trenches were created by farmers in their agriculture land. More than 132 farmers created trenches in their agriculture land. The project has given scope for biomass expansion, soil preservation, and enrichment of the soil. Farmers expressed that trench creation has reduced water seepage in the well during summer and they expressed that they see increased availability of water in their land.

**Study Tour and Extension Activity:** Information dissemination is an essential component for farmers’ participation and effective implementation of programmes at the grassroots level. Although organic farming practice is a part of traditional farm practice, with Green Revolution, this practice has been sidelined and it created dearth in the existing knowledge about organic farming. In the project, different departments came together to provide assistance in developing ‘model farms’ across the state. Farmers have been supported and guided to bring out their innovation in farm practice in the state. The service provider organised study tours and extension activities to bring changes in people’s perspective about organic farming.

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14It is more economical for farmers and today, they have been actively practicing this method in their agriculture land. Rice is the staple food in the region, SRI method helps in reducing the production cost and managing the ground water concerns.
The service provider took interest in the promotion of organic farming, sustainable agriculture, and rainwater management through propaganda. They conducted programmes and workshops among the primary and secondary schools to engage children in environment friendly activities. Through propaganda, the service provider had taken interest in promoting organic farming. Mass awareness was conducted through 100 different graffiti in Kannada along the roads, at bus stop, and on school compound walls. The graffiti propagated different messages on protecting ecology, water, agriculture, and biodiversity in the community. Handouts and books have been published by the service provider, explaining the experience of the farmers in organic farming and traditional water management (Katta).\textsuperscript{15}

According to the program needs, a documentary was made on an organic village. The service provider built a strong network within the state and at the national and international level with people who are a part of the organic farming movement by participating in state and national agriculture exhibitions and international conferences. The service provider has the agriculture field expertise and the awareness that market development is crucial for any agriculture innovation at the grassroots level. The local organic market can be developed through collective actions. Therefore, the project gave importance for creating village level farmers society and its membership was open to farmers who are a part of the organic farming project in the village.

**Organic Farmers Society:** Organic farmers' society was formed as a group, society or association to provide a cooperative, collective platform for the farmers to approach the organic market and it provided an opportunity for group certification for their organic commodity and reduce their financial burden as group certification is economical than single farm certification. ‘Varanashi Organic Farmers Society’ or VOFS has set up to unite the scattered farmers under one single group as ‘organic farmers\textsuperscript{16}’. This society was formed to ensure collective action among farmers, to lobby for a better market price, collective marketing of organic product in the national and international market, and assistance for organic group certification in the region. It is a registered body working with the service provider where membership comprised of farmers from both Organic

\textsuperscript{15} In this book, different farmers and experts have shared different methods of traditional small dams and clearly explained the ill effect of government funded big dams.

\textsuperscript{16} The VOFS has been formed under the National Centre of Organic Farming, the Government of India, as well as the Organic cell, the Department of Agriculture, Karnataka State.
village and NCOF projects. During its formation, it had 1800 farmer members (approx. 2500 Ha) from Dakshina Kannada and Kasaragod Districts, who are organic or willing to become 100% organic. Nevertheless, after finding many flaws in the system and NCOF funding problems, it now has less than 1000 members in the society. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was made on 4th August 2007 between the Varanashi Organic Farmers Society by its project co-ordinator and proprietary of the Varanashi Agro Sustainable Technology Centre (VAST). The Varanashi organic farmers’ society along with the service provider tried to market the organic products in the national and international markets but they had little success in their initiative. The Varanashi organic farmers’ society aims at improving the welfare of its members by promoting sustainable organic agriculture by

- Improving the quality of their organic produce through technical support.
- Mobilising the farmers to form organised structures through the Internal Control System.
- Offering services such as input supply, logistic support and joint negotiation in future and grading the quality of organically grown produce to fetch premium prices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Products</th>
<th>Quantity (k.g)</th>
<th>Market price (Rs.)</th>
<th>Market price (organic) (Rs.)</th>
<th>Profit for organic farmer (per k.g)</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Arecanut</td>
<td>4569.100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black pepper</td>
<td>6403.490</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutmeg</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source VAST (2009)

The service provider had a long-term approach to develop an effective market for organic farmers in the region. The NCOF project existed for a year and service provider received first year’s funding to conduct activities in the district. Later, they did not receive the financial aid and for one more year, but the service provider continued the project with their internal financial source, which they were able to adjust with the organic manure marketing. Later, they could not continue the NCOF project, as policy makers were busy with reviewing the existing programme at central level. Meanwhile, in the second year, the inspecting agency found that many farmers went back to chemical farming. The farmers’ rollback attitude has to do with several factors. The major allegation was against the field officers for including the farmers without proper evaluation of the farmers’ perspective on organic farming. Those who believed and
practised conventional farming became a part of the NCOF to avail the incentives of the project. In the second year, 500 farmers were found to be defaulting, with prior-notice their membership has been omitted from the Varanashi organic farmers’ society. In 2009, they got a project from the National Horticulture Mission (NHM) for promoting organic farming in plantation and commercial crops and creating new 59 farmers group from particular region by providing training, incentives, and motivating them to be a part of organic farming. During the end of data collection, the village situation was such that the Karnataka Village organic farming project had completed its term; the NCOF project abruptly stopped financing the organic project and the National Horticulture Mission was under progress. The service provider through this project made an effort to keep alive the existing network of the organic farmers. Nevertheless, a few Karnataka Organic Farming Project beneficiaries actively took part in the trainings with interest and engaged in discussions with farmers during training programmes.

**Responses of Villagers to the Karnataka Organic Farming Project**

Initially, farmers were sceptical and the local panchayat president was vocal against the service provider and the organic farming project in the Grama Sabha. The blame was that through the organic farming project, the service provider was seeking personal gains in the village. The service provider countered the accusations by sharing the financial details of the project to assure the villagers. During a speech, a political leader explained that-

> ‘When VRF started the project, we were sceptical about organic farming and had doubts about them. After seeing the positive response from the villagers on organic farming, we recognise the work they put in into our village’ (Field Notes, 2009)

The service provider did not ally with the political fronts as they have remained neutral in village politics. Farmers also blamed the service provider for taking up NCOF project when the organic farming project still existed in the village. Farmers expressed that the project area for organic farming increased and fieldworkers’ frequent farm visits reduced as they had to cover a larger geographical area. Farmers who actively engaged in organic farming project got disappointed with the service provider’s approach. Savithri, a farmer with an acre of land expressed that, 'the project deviated when VRF got the NCOF project to carry the activities in Karnataka and Kerala' (Field, Notes, 2009). Radhakrishna Bhat, a big progressive farmer from the village, expressed his views as follows,
‘The VRF should have developed the village project first rather than entering into the NCOF project in the region. The village project was for three years, and when the NCOF project came, our project was in the completion phase. While selecting the area for the NCOF project, they did take our village into consideration and VRF justified that we already have the benefit of the organic village project. I do agree that we received many programmes from the State government’s project, but three years are not sufficient to change the mind of farmers to continue with organic farming. We lack market for organic products in the area and are still in transition phase; this is why farmers today are thinking of moving back to commercial farming’ (Field Notes, 2009).

Farmers had a different expectation from the service provider and they wanted the service provider to focus on the village organic farming project and make it a strong collective group before moving towards the NCOF project. The NCOF is again a major project with regard to its large area of coverage, and it distracted the service provider’s attention from the organic village project. The latter project could not develop a well-established organic market for farmers due to lack of production, supply and demand in the local market. The Karnataka Village organic farming project was for all sections of the population irrespective of caste, class, and gender. The visible stakeholders had the voice to bring changes in the project. At the project level, project and field officials belong to these communities (Havyaka, Bunts, Nayak, and Maniyani), and it was easy for the farmers to inquire about different agriculture related issues with these officials.

Depending on the farmers’ choice, agriculture training was conducted and the initial project benefits were given to the farmers who had some understanding of organic farming. Later, facilities were extended to other farmers who were seriously engaged in organic farming cultivation. Since the project concentrated solely on farmers, and not farming as a whole enterprise involving various other services such labour, household and market, it excluded women, landless labourers, and traders in the village who were also integral to the farming economy of the village. One of the reasons for this omission was perhaps that they were not consciously discussed as significant stakeholders in the project. Secondly, while women are an extremely important part of household farming, they were reticent to participate in the project publicly. Landless labourers also felt left out of the project evident in this statement by a labourer in the village, ‘we do not have the land for farming; why would government want to include us in the project, and what will they get from us […]’ (Field Notes, 2008).

Organic farming policy and project have treated gender as a separate category, with women as a special target group, rather than the one through which the approach to development should itself be re-examined. Organic farming in principle emphasizes
family farming, which are largely supervised and managed by women, and the assumption has always been that organic farming would in the long greater participation of women in agriculture. The success of organic farming hinges on availability and regular supply of farmyard manure and labour, thereby increasing the workload of women in the household as well as making their participation even more critical to the project. During my house or farm visits, the male members became the active respondents, and women only supplemented the answers of the men when prodded. In some households, women are active in providing agriculture inputs and they are vocal about their participation in the project. Mohan Nayak, whom I met through his wife Vasantha, shared his experience as follows:

‘After my graduation, I started helping my father in agriculture; he died before I could gain the agriculture knowledge from him. I had awareness about plantation farming, but I had no clue about paddy cultivation, that was when my wife entered agriculture. She taught me everything from land preparation to final post harvesting the paddy for self-consumption. She came from a paddy cultivating family and so she has better knowledge about agriculture; hence, I consult her for farm activity […]’ (Field Notes, 2008).

The patriarchal tradition has given higher authority for men in the decision making. The higher caste women have less mobility as compared to backward caste women in the society. Many women felt that it is still difficult for them to be involved in social organisations or to play an active role in the family farm management. Jayanti (a common name in this district), narrated her story while she was preparing lunch for her family in the kitchen.

‘You asked me about the organic village project, but for me the world is my home; I need to take care of my family, children and my house. I do not know about what is happening in the community and my husband does not tell me the current events in the village. When officials visit home for inviting for function or to collect information about agriculture, I do not have anything to share with them. If my husband is not at home, I do not know what to say and what not to say to these field officials. When I am alone at home, how can I allow him to come inside the home? I tell them to come some other time when my husband is at home. I am interested in taking part but someone has to be at home in my absence, as I cannot leave the house. My husband asks me who will give food to the workers in our agriculture field. Now you tell me, is it possible for me to go against my husband’s wish and then think what society may think about me. If I go against his wishes, then they will call me ‘gandubeeri’ (literally, it gives the meaning of a tomboy) in the society. Do I need to do all those things and ruin my family life? After marriage, we have to compromise on these issues’ (Field Notes, 2009).
The ‘women farmers’ participation has been limited to the agriculture land, and women were absent in the social gathering at the project level. The organic farming seminars or trainings had been mostly male-dominated farmers' groups. During the project time, there was active involvement of the respondents; later, there was a gradual decline in the participation of women in the organic initiative. This lack of active involvement of the women adversely affects the whole process of the proceedings of the organic farming in the village. Even though the service provider gave importance to women's participation, there was less participation. The existence of self-help group by different organisations had their implicit impact on the project. The existence of SKDRDP and government run SHG (both of which I discuss at length in the fifth chapter) made the task of project burdensome in some areas. SKDRDP bought the people under one head and there was a financial benefit in the form of easy loans to the people in the village. When asked about their participation in NCOF and Horticulture department project, they expressed that ‘what is the point of sitting and listening to different talks in those programme. We do not understand anything and we do not receive any financial loans from the foundation to practice agriculture’.

Nagaraj is a small landowner who has two acres of land. He is a young, new generation farmer. He wanted to work outside, but family problems made him to take the decision to stay and continue farming. He constructs his view about farming and the project as follows:

‘Organic farming is a ‘hosa vishaya’ (new subject) and practice for me. For my grandfather, this was the way of life….The karyagara (training) helped me in knowing about organic farming, rainwater harvesting and issues about farm practice. We neglected these on our agriculture land…. The programme had ‘bhashana’ (lecture) and demonstrations (practical) followed by discussions. This programme gave a ‘mancha’ (raised platform) for us to talk about ideas, doubts and experiences […] Trainings were conducted in different farmers’ agriculture land. This gave an opportunity to visit different farmers’ land and explore their agriculture land with a field walk and their view about the farm practices […]. Commonly, in the village, we farmers do not have the practice of visiting farmers’ field to know, learn, and understand the experience of the farmers in their farmland. This training created an interest and awareness among us’ (Field Notes, 2008).

Training programmes have promoted farmers, to create an on-site production of organic inputs like manures, vermicompost, compost, green manure, and plant and

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17 In the field, there were a few women farmers who were active in their agriculture land, although they did not participate in the training programmes. On their own, they were contributing to the agriculture system of the region.
animals based pest management, and organic liquid manures in the village. Through training, farmers were able to prepare and produce manures within their agriculture land. Many farmers stopped purchasing manures from the market and it reduced their agriculture cost and they used naturally available substance for the organic manure production. Farmers who did not have sufficient green manure in their agriculture land were encouraged to grow more forest, manure related plants, and trees in their agriculture land. From the project, farmers those who were financially weak and those who were interested were provided cows at a subsided rate for the creation of farmyard manures in the land.

It promoted the development of forest trees and encouraged farmers to go for suitable trees planting (live fencing) on bunds, wastelands within, and around the farmland. It has encouraged them to plant different forest species useful in pest and disease management, which contribute significant biomass in the region. The service provider has tried to create awareness about the suitable cropping plants for the Agri-Horti-Silvi-Pastoral fodder system at the individual farm level. The inter-cropping, mixed cropping, and crop rotation practices were encouraged. Along with this, the service provider produces the organic manures for commercial purpose through their sister organisation namely VAST centre and during project, they provided the manures to the farmers at a subsided rate. Ramachandra Bhat, a Brahmin, is a medium-sized farmer with arecanut, coconut and banana plantations. His observations on organic farming as follows:

‘I do not agree with the perspective of the foundation (VRF). Growing forest trees is good in the village.... Nevertheless, why I should grow them in my agriculture land; why are they not grown on community forestry land; if I grow forest tress, what I will produce? To cut the tree from my land, I need to take permission from the forest officers. How can I use the forest tress as my profit base? If I opt for plantation crops, after few years, it will give yields and I do not need to take permission from forest officials to cut down the arecanut, coconut or coco trees’ (Field Notes, 2009).

Dairy farming is a part of organic farming, as it gives milk, milk products, gobar gas for cooking and importantly cow dung as manure in the agriculture field. Hindus consider cow as an auspicious animal and it has religious and cultural symbol in the social life of the farmers. Dairy farming has been considered as a secondary source of income to the

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18 In a house warming ceremony, cow’s milk is brought to boil on the stove before cooking anything else in the kitchen. This is considered as auspicious and associated with abundance and prosperity.
farmers. When the project was initiated, farmers did not engage in dairy farming on their land. During that period, less than 50\% of the farmers (70 out of 180) were engaged in dairy farming and farmers either brought farmyard manure from outside or used the chemical manure from the market. In organic farming, dairy farming was looked as an allied farm practice, which provides manure, inputs and reduces the farmers’ external dependency.

In the past three years (2005-2008), 41 families received financial aid for the purchase of a cow; the majority of these beneficiaries are poor and small farmers. In the project, selection has been made based on interest, ability and resources to sustain the dairy farming. Awareness and capacity building trainings have been organised on organic manure and experts were invited from different parts of the district and regular training provided about different naturally available manures. When the project got over, more than 111 families had a farmyard in their land. Farmers recognised the importance of dairy farming and explicit accounts have been provided about the benefits of dairy in agriculture land. Raju is a progressive farmer and after experiencing life in city for a few years, he moved back to village and engaged in agriculture. In my interview, Raju pointed out that,

‘[…] farmyard manure helped me in reducing my cost on external inputs. Today, I am following the traditional manure practice in which I am using only the farmyard manure and green leaves in my agriculture land. I even stopped removing weeds from the land. They help in enriching the fertility of the soil [...]’ (Field Notes, 2008).

Case Study of Krishna Banta

The organic farm approach goes with dairy farming as it makes the practice of organic farming sustainable. This is illustrated in the narrative from a farmer who with the existing 1.5 acres of land has successively managed to adopt organic farming from 2001. Krishna Banta (52) is a farmer from the organic village site who owns 0.34 acres of irrigated and less than 0.24 rain fed agriculture land. Besides this, he has an acre of gudda (hill) where he grows cashew nut and forest trees. The foliage from the same provides for the green leaves and dry litter for agriculture manure. His agriculture land has multiple cropping patterns and he has adopted the rainwater harvesting method on his agriculture land.
Initially, he had only one cow, but over time has established a dairy. He pointed out that the regular maintenance of cows is the most important feature for gaining maximum profit in dairy farming. Through dairy farming, he gets a regular supply of milk, gas for cooking/light and manure for agriculture and additional income through the sale of milk. Cow dung is used in his gobar gas unit for generating energy, which is then used for domestic cooking and lighting purposes. He has even channelled the toilet waste of the household to the biogas unit. The slurry from the gobar gas unit is used to make either compost or directly feed the plant basins in his land.

### Table 4.3 Family Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Rs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dairy farming (1.5 years)</td>
<td>60,004.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture (one year)</td>
<td>51,740.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,11,744.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Income</td>
<td>7,645.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Today, he has two Jarsi cows; the big cow produces about 22 litres of milk and small cow yields about 15 litres per day. He feeds his cows with healthy and good quality food, and the quantity required is 10 kg per day. He has adopted a system in his dairy farming and he found that that system is beneficial for him and his dairy farming. He explained his system as;

### Table 4.2 Agriculture Details of Krishna Banta

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Different Crops</th>
<th>Number of Trees/ Plants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arecanut</td>
<td>480 (including 100 young)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coconut</td>
<td>85 (including young)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pepper</td>
<td>200 (including young)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banana</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cashew nut</td>
<td>125 (mostly young)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread fruit</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honey colony</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pineapple</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocoa</td>
<td>26 (young)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanilla</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetable Cultivated</td>
<td>for own use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azolla</td>
<td>For Fodder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Initially, he had only one cow, but over time has established a dairy. He pointed out that the regular maintenance of cows is the most important feature for gaining maximum profit in dairy farming. Through dairy farming, he gets a regular supply of milk, gas for cooking/light and manure for agriculture and additional income through the sale of milk. Cow dung is used in his gobar gas unit for generating energy, which is then used for domestic cooking and lighting purposes. He has even channelled the toilet waste of the household to the biogas unit. The slurry from the gobar gas unit is used to make either compost or directly feed the plant basins in his land.

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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
‘I attached a fan in my cowshed to keep the place cool and during hot summer, water sprinklers are used for an hour so that cows can be kept cool in the heat. I play music in the cowshed for an hour in the morning and evening. They are like human beings and if we treat them with respect they will show their respect in giving more to the human beings in the form of milk or cow dung’ (Field Notes 2008).

Table 4.4 Dairy Farming Income Details (2006-2007) Cost- Benefit Account

Cow type: Heifer- First: 27.07.2006 and Second: 28.07.2006; Started Milking: 05.08.2006; Last date of Milking 30.07.2007 (details given by Krishna Banta, 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Cost(Rs)</th>
<th>Total (Rs)</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Cost(Rs)</th>
<th>Total (Rs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Milk to cooperative Society</td>
<td>9558</td>
<td>10.75-11.25</td>
<td>1,02,755</td>
<td>Cow Food</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>425.00</td>
<td>21,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk Sold Outside</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>Cow Food</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>425.00</td>
<td>21,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk use at home</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>4,400</td>
<td>Nanddini</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>390.00</td>
<td>25,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gobbar Gas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manure</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.50 per day</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>1/2 day</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>9,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gobbar light</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3000.00</td>
<td>3,000.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heifer Cost</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,32,935.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>81,725.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Net Income: Rs. 51,210.00; Monthly income: Rs. 4,267.50

As a farmer, he leads a disciplined life and also follows a strict routine in his farm activities. He is an example for the local farmers as how one can attain agriculture productivity and profit with a small piece of land and how to use the existing resources to develop agriculture in the region.

But within a year, the field area has experienced a declining trend in the dairy farming. Small farmers who practice dairy in their land slowly felt disheartened and felt it as an economic burden than a secondary source of income during the transition phase. This tendency is because the cost of animal food, fodder and other requirements increased which farmers could not afford to manage. Therefore, farmers who could not manage the price hike sold their cows and kept 1-2 cows in their agriculture land for household purpose. The decline in the number of cows reduced the milk production, consumption and basic requisite of farmyard manure production for the organic farming practice. Today, lack of sufficient organic manure has caused the farmers to go back to the market

Rs 500 for 50 Kg bag cow feeds and Rs 12-13 for dry paddy straws.
in search of organic manure for the agriculture. The organic manure has now become expensive due to the hype of organic farming in the district.

The famous scientist Albert Einstein said, ‘If the bee disappeared off the surface of the globe, then man would only have four years of life left. No more bees, no more pollination, no more plants, no more animals, no more man’. This quote narrates the symbolic relationships that exist in the plant kingdom, where everything is interconnected in the ecosystem. On the earth, each component has its role and it depends on many other components for its functioning as it creates the symphony of life. Organic farming has the principle of developing biodiversity of flowers, plants, trees and animal species thereby creating a sustainable and environment friendly ecosystem for the living beings.

Honeybees contribute in enriching the biodiversity and provide income to the farmer; therefore, the project has provided prominence for developing honeybee colonies in the region. Beekeeping once was a thriving industry in the district and it received a severe blow in the 1990s with the ‘Thai Sacbrood’ disease to bee colonies. Thousands of bee colonies perished and it affected beekeepers economy and the consequence of this was that many left beekeeping and honeybee farming became extinct in the district. Therefore, the project took this initiative of rejuvenating the existed honey farming in the area and preference was given for growing bee population in the village. Trainings were conducted on apiculture farming and several orientations were given on harvesting, processing and marketing of honey in the market. Honey fetches a good market (Rs 150-200 per Kg) and farmers can earn good income through minimum maintenance and chemical free environment in this farming. For encouraging farmers to practice honeybee farming, the project distributed 99 honey boxes across the different stakeholders who showed interest in this farming. These boxes are expensive in the market but the farmers who received them are not using them and they became merely symbolic in many farmers’ houses to tell that they received the project benefits.

The biomass, composting and mulching of soil in the land has provided self-sustainability for farmers. Few farmers had constraints in doing composting in their land as they have shortage of natural resources and the labour intensive nature of composting. For some farmers, this appeared as an ‘expensive technology’:

‘We learned a new technique of composting. In this, we keep plastic sheets in the ground and fill it with all farm inputs such as dry leaves, different types of farmyard manures, through a systematic technique […]. Later cover the compost pit with the
plastic sheet. This technique is good as there is no depletion of manure components during rainy season, due to water retention. [...] But, I am not able to use this technology because plastics are too costly for me’ (Field Notes, 2008).

**Case Study of Rajanna Naik**

Rajanna Naik and his wife Roopakka are from the last five years practising *savyava krishika* (organic farmers) in the village. He is in his late 60s and has faced different hardships in the life—They are having two acres of agriculture land and the whole land looks green with plenty of water, and he is not having water scarcity in the summer for irrigation. When he received the land from the landowner where he worked as a daily labour, ‘there was no greenery here; only some dry grass grew and it was a barren hilltop’. He explained how he received the agriculture land and how he made the barren area into a fertile agriculture land in the present context. He shared that,

‘... one day with hesitation, I went and asked ‘Annere yenku paniithu krishi madyara bhoomi korpara yekku yenave ayina kandamadpodu’. (Translated from Tulu to English as Sir, Can you give me small part of the land for agriculture. I want to do my own paddy cultivation). He thought for a few seconds and told me ‘Rajanna niku jagabodatha, aaandu nikku jagakorka. Darkastha gude undatha avu korka auvatha’ (Translated from Tulu to English as Rajanna you want land, for you I will give land. That darkasthu hill is there you know will give that to you’ (Field Notes, 2009)

He started agriculture on the land by bringing water from a foothill pond that existed half a km away and it was not an easy task for him. He realised that it was difficult to achieve the dream of having own agriculture land without proper irrigation facility. There was no water in the land. During that time, he did not have money (he referred money as energy) to have a bore well in his agriculture land. As the land was sloping, he was sceptical about availability of getting water from the open well and he was not able to hire workers for this task. Instead, he started digging small trenches in his land area and tried to control the flowing of water in the rainy season. He had to find a permanent solution for water scarcity in the land and for this, he thought of adopting the traditional ‘*suranga*’ method. Altogether, he made seven surangas in the land; today he does not have water crisis issues in the summer.

‘Today, I do not have the problem of water scarcity. I have built three separate tanks to store the suranga water. Irrigation is done with sprinklers and hosepipe. I refill all dry surangas with water during rainy season and other times when water flows excessively in my land. I kept entrance of surangas little inclined, so water can easily go inside. This

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20 It is traditional horizontal man made cave and this type of water source exists in Dakshina Kannada and Kerala.
helps me in preserving the top soil from heavy rain. Prakruthi (Environment) gives many things to us but we are not giving anything back to Prakruthi. ‘Nnak boomi boodu, avu nnaak krishk bekayina mathlala korpundu. Appga namala Bhoomigu nama kainachina sahaya madodu atha (Translated from Tulu to English as We need land and that gives us whatever required for agriculture. So, in return we also need to contribute back to the land...)’. Refilling the suranga may be useful for me but it will also help in maintaining as well as improving the water level (neerda matta) in the locality. I am aware of the judicious use of this resource. I have constructed an earthen tank near the suranga; water comes to this tank from where the water goes to home through the pipeline for irrigation purpose. As the land is inclined, there is no need of electricity or pump facility to fetch water from suranga, tank to irrigation land’ (Field Notes, 2009).

Due to Rajanna Naik’s contribution, which is also publicly acknowledged by many in the project village, farmers living in the foothill now receive sufficient water in their wells during summers. Ajith Bhat who is from Havyaka Brahmin community and lives near to Rajanna farm expressed that,

‘Every summer we had water scarcity in our well and we depended on bore well water for drinking. One year, I noted that our well had not dried up and for the entire summer, we used the well water. I was curious to know the reason and then, I came to know about Rajanna’s efforts on his agriculture land. I visited his land and any farmer will appreciate his effort to preserve the water and we farmers have many things to lean from him. After seeing his hard work, I at least recharge my bore well in rainy season. I am not sure if I would have done this, if I had not experienced effective result of rainwater harvesting in my own well’ (Field Notes, 2009).

Farmers got financial support as an incentive for the formation of trenches. A guiding measurement has been created for trenches, financial estimation has been formed, and payment has been made according to estimation. There is no limit on the number of trenches. A farmer can construct as many trenches on his field. Given the undulating terrain of the region as well as high rainfall, topsoil erosion is rampant. At first, the farming community opposed the creation of trenches, as they believed that it would reduce their land area for production and lot of land area will simply go waste in making trenches. Nonetheless, today in the region, farmers are pleased with the results of the trenches in their land area. Ramachandra Nayak, a farmer from the village who is into small business, explained that,

At first, when they (VRF) told [...] to create trenches on our (farmers) agriculture land, I laughed at them and told that who will show interest in such unproductive work. This view changed when we had field visits to a few farmers’ agriculture land and with the available resources, they could manage irrigation of their agriculture land. Then, I realised the importance of trenches and their contribution in stabilising the underground water table in the region. In May 2008, I had water in ‘kere (pond) for irrigation of agriculture land; I was surprised as this was not the case in the previous year. In my previous year, I had to depend on bore well for irrigation. Now, farmers know that trenches are important and they are constructing trenches with self-interest on their land’ (Field Notes, 2009).
Now, farmers repair the old trenches every year and create new ones on their agriculture land without asking for any financial support for its creation. Shree Padre expressed that,

‘When I told about rainwater harvesting a few years back, the Dakshina Kannada farmers laughed at me, but today they understood the impact of the water scarcity in the district. Many farmers today are becoming aware of importance of rainwater harvesting and implementing it in their agriculture land. There exist potentials in organic farming to introduce and incorporate the rainwater harvesting’ (Field Notes, 2009).

In the village, farmers followed different methods of irrigation like the drip, sprinkler, and traditional irrigation method of Katta or check dams. In the watershed development programmes, the service provider encouraged the restoration of traditional water management systems and the construction of Katta. Traditionally, farmers constructed mud Katta but it had some technical problems for which the practice was given up. However now, with certain experiments on the system, the problem has been attended to and this system has found favour among many farmers in the region. The barrages were made after the heavy rainy season in October, as there continues to be a heavy flow of water in the river. The farmers have now collectively constructed the Katta across the river. The farmers noted that the construction of the barrage helped overcoming the water shortage in the summer months of March, April, and May.

In May 2008, a state level seminar was organised with the financial assistance from Argyam’. The seminar highlighted the importance of different sustainable methods of barrage system for farmers. In this program, the government officials from department of watershed development were invited as the key speakers to the programme. They gave their inputs about the different schemes that exist for watershed management in the department. Temporary barrages like Kattas’ do not have scope in the department of watershed and they do not have subsidy schemes for these kinds of traditional water preservation techniques. In Dakshina Kannada, concrete barrage cannot hold the flow of water force in the rainy season. This seminar gave an understanding that region specific programmes are important in agriculture and government projects need to be aligned with the farmers’ demands and needs. The state sponsored watershed development projects provider finances for the cement barrage construction and deny finances to traditional techniques of barrage. Today, cement barrages in the district are non-functional, as they are unable to local needs. In the modern cement barrages, preserving the water has become very difficult, as these barrages are unable to hold water. Despite this, the
watershed development department sanctions 100 cement barrages each year, to be constructed across the public streams in the district.

Natural resource production and biodiversity are a part of organic farming philosophy and increased biodiversity improves and safeguards ecological services, such as pollination, pest control, and maintenance of soil fertility; thus strengthening farming systems and practices (Partap & Vaidya, 2009). The project received Rs 30,000 financial aid towards the development of a natural resource system in the region. This money has been used in delivering forest and horticulture plants to the farmers. More than 2975 forest saplings bought from the forest department were delivered to 132 farmers. Horticulture department provided 750 different fruit seedlings and five seedlings each were distributed among small and marginal farmers. The scope was given for the soil preservation, water management, biodiversity of the land, importance to forestry and greenery in agricultural land.

In village, perennial farming practice is slowly dying and many traditional seeds have vanished from the community; therefore, we do not find community seed banks. Farmers have the practice of preserving the seeds for next agriculture cycle in the region. The service provider has a seed bank in their project office and a well-established nursery for providing seeds to the farmers. They understood that providing free incentives to farmers would go waste as they do not bother to use the given incentives. As they set up this seed bank as a commercial venture, a minimum rate is charged for the seeds and so those products will not be wasted on farmers' land. Farmers have been encouraged for using traditional seed varieties to protect the diversity in the land. Farmers borrow seeds from other farmers and many do not use the ‘government seeds’ as they had the complaint that, those seeds ‘will not grow properly with organic manure’. Seed banking is a traditional method practised by the farmers for protecting the seed diversity of the region. With the Green Revolution and commercial farming, the good practices have vanished from agriculture and farmers are now dependent on different sources to get the seeds for cultivation. The different traditional food seeds have become extinct, and with that many flowers, vegetable seeds, fruits, forestry, medical and herbal plants, bamboo seeds, samplings are becoming extinct.
A villager constructed the story about vanished seeds as follows:

‘Geographically, these regions had rich natural resources, dense forestland, and farmers had surplus to eat and sustain. Farming co-ordinated with nature; they respected the nature and its diversity. This was during the Indian freedom struggle. But after the freedom movement, the Green revolution has brought about changes in agriculture. Farmers went for ‘government seeds’ (HYV), and it was easily available with the Grama sevaka. As they shifted, the organic seeds slowly started vanishing from the farmers land. There existed different kinds of paddy seeds with medical value and used as resistant against diseases. Each village over the centuries produced its own variety and we lost those century old ‘knowledge seeds’ within 30-50 years due to our hunger for prosperity (commercialism) in farming (Field Notes, 2009).

Although farmers have awareness on different traditional seed storage techniques, modernization has brushed even seed storing techniques. They have stored in plastic bags and kept near the fireplace for constant flow of heat.  

21 ‘Pataya’ (Storage space) exists in small, medium, big farmers’ field and it is constructed in a simple way for preserving agriculture products from moisture, dust, pest, and disease for long duration. In the airtight compartment, the farmer preserves his post harvested commodity and when the market price is high, he takes them to the market. In the agriculture market, quality determines commodity price and storage techniques were essential to store non-perishable goods in the house. Farmers always aim for higher crop production in the agriculture land. In this process, farmers neglected post harvest methods for crop production. Poor management of the post harvest techniques affect the agriculture commodity and within a few months, one can see changes in the colour, flavour and taste of the commodity. Every crop has its own elements and farmers need to make sure the crop is dried properly for long-term storage. Arecanut, for example, needs to be dried under the hot sun for 40-45 days to make it fully dried and stored in a dry place or in ‘pataya’. Below (box 4.1) I have given a narrative from the village that provides insight on why farmers need to give importance for post harvest techniques.

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21 Traditionally, good varieties of seeds are kept in an earthen pot and sealed by dry cow dung.
While in the field, the service provider received an order for a black pepper commodity from a Kerala based organic farmers association. Through field workers’ telephonic conversation, the information about black pepper purchase was disseminated to organic farmers of the study village and NCOF villages. Organic market expects a quality product as it pays a premium price for the commodity. A quality inspector visited the organic farmers’ houses and in many places, the black pepper was rejected as it had fungus, dust, and change in its colour, texture, and smell. In an incident, a farmer from the neighbouring village had hoarded 5-6 years yield of black pepper in his storage with an intention to sell them when better market comes for black pepper. However, inspector and examiners understood after seeing his product, that he didn’t even check the quality of his commodity after post production. Post production, the quality of yield becomes an important asset for capturing the organic market. In the village, a farmer received Rs 123 per kg for his organic black pepper for its quality, package, colour shape, etc, whereas the same farmer would have received the actual market price of Rs 100 per kg in the local market.

Today, farmers identify a successful farmer as the one who is able to sell his agriculture commodity for a good market price. For a good commodity, there always exists a market, and so if a farmer maintains a standard in his quality, half of his labour invested in the field will definitely yield good returns from the market.

In the village, an organic shop has been opened to create awareness about the post production, and to provide a market for organic farmers at the local level; the creation of consumer awareness about the use of organic products in the region. This shop has been named as ‘Halli Angadi’ (village shop). Villagers are aware that organic products are available here and many are willing to pay more for the organic produce. A farmer can, if he wishes to, keep the excess vegetables in the organic shop, where vegetables have higher demand among the villagers and so he can sell them at a higher price in the region. There is a high demand for organic vegetables in the village, but the supply is low as farmers are not directly involved in vegetable farming in the region. The existing geographical and soil pattern is not a favourable for the vegetable production. Majority of the households have their own small kitchen garden in the backyard of the house. The landless labourers and workers buy vegetables from the shop.

Box 4.1 Post Harvesting – Black Pepper Experience
According to the project officer,

'Organic vegetables are having demand in the local market. In our Halli Angadi, we sell the vegetables at a rupee more than the market price. The purpose of this practice is to provide a good support price for the farmer and to encourage him to move towards organic farming practices. Within a day the fresh organic vegetables have been sold in the market and people do not mind paying that extra one rupee for the product' (Field Notes, 2009).

The service provider tried to expand the local market and partially became successful in providing a market for agriculture products. The Village Organic Market is in a premature stage and there are theoretical and practical difficulties in developing organic market in the region. Firstly, farmers are still in the transitional phase, and the certifying agency does not recognise their products as organic. Only a few farmers have achieved the organic tag for their farm products. Secondly, organic commercial crops do not have a local market, and the export oriented market has many constraints, which include strict adherence to crop quality and yield. Negligence and poor post harvesting practices of the farmers many a times result in their crops getting rejected.

In order to market their commodity in the international market as an organic product, farmers need to follow the organic certification procedure. In the certification procedure, a farmer has to fulfil the different requirements of the organic farming and it is only after the examination, that is, evaluation by the third party or a certifying agency, that farmers get the status of an organic farmer. The validity of certification is for five years. Organic farming is having certification and marketing related constraints as these are expensive for farmers. For reducing the cost of certification on individual farmers, importance has been given to group certification. The farmers who had practised organic farming from past three years had to wait another year to get certified as ‘organic farmer’ as there exists less farmers in the region. Venturing into the certification process will be a costly affair for these farmers. The service provider had difficult moments in managing without the financial support for certification and marketing of the crops in the district. Those farmers who are already producing export oriented commodities benefited the most from this booming sector. Small farmers have to overcome several constraints before they can become certified organic producers, such as lack of technical knowledge, inadequate market information, limited storage and processing facilities, and complex certification processes.
In project officer's words,

‘Still, we do not have proper supply chain for organic products in the village. A few organic growers are there who enquire about the organic market and when demand rises, we give opportunity to sell their products in the market. To develop a chain of organic market, we need a minimum of 300 organic farmers in the ‘Varanashi Organic Farmers Society. We have farmers as members in this association but they have not yet received the group certification and a majority of them are in the transition stage. The group certification procedure has been adopted, as it will be easy for the farmers to remove the burden of financial support. We have our own internal controlling system (ISO) which is monitoring, inspecting and documenting the activities of the farmers. Documents are important for this and are maintained by each farmer. These documents explain what they grow, crops, seeds, fertilisers and the income received over the period of four years’ (Field Notes, 2009).

A majority of the farmers are having export oriented commercial crops, and prices are based on market economy with little scope for domestic market. It is difficult to venture into the international market without proper demand and supply chain within the village. Recently, the service provider within their network made an attempt to provide market for organic nutmeg and was able to provide a premium price higher than the local market price. Organic farmers think themselves as individual stakeholders as they do not have a major role in the project execution in the village. Organic farmers are members of Varanashi organic farmers’ society, and sadly, many of them are not actively involved in the meetings, and so there is a lack of collective action in the decision making process.

The experimental project of the state government has mentioned this as a ‘bottom up’ approach, but this is yet another state governments ‘top-down’ development initiative (refer the chart below). For conducting all activities and programmes, the service provider has to send the action plans according to the existing programmes drafted in the policy. Documents in the service provider’s office show the detailed action plans that have been prepared in consultation with farmers for their needs. The project has its own limitation in getting access to the on-time financial support from the state government and incentives from different departments to the needs of the organic farmers in the village. From project to sanctioning of financial support, the state government had supremacy over the service provider and farmers. Although policy makers were aware that certification requires three years of organic farming, still the project was sanctioned for exact three years in the region. When the project was over in the region, farmers felt as though they have reached the dead end, with no further road ahead on their path towards organic farming. Village organic farming project got over when farmers were about to get an opportunity to receive the group certification and refer themselves as organic farmers
in the society. Termination of project programmes became a setback for overall efforts of the farmers and service provider in the region.

In the village, the project has not been decentralised, neither in terms of project responsibilities nor in relation to the finances involved in the project. There has been a lack of collective participation from the farming community. The service provider concentrated on farmers’ field and played an active role in promoting organic farming; however, there were no initiatives to make sure that farmers follow organic farming after the completion of project. Other than training, capacity building programmes, interaction, and activities were between the individuals, and collective action was missing from the project itself. Although policy suggested the establishment of a farmers’ group for commercial purpose in the grassroots; farmers have not shown interest in starting any venture on organic farming as a collective.
Chart 4.1 the Karnataka Organic Farming Village Project Structure

Karnataka Organic Farming Cell [Karnataka State Agriculture Department]

State Level Empowered Committee

Working Committee or District Advisory Committee

Site Specific Committee

Project officer & five field officers

Varanashi Organic Farmers Society (VOFS) - FARMERS

Varanashi Research Foundation [Service Provider]

Horticulture Department

Reporting the progress

State level

District level

Village level
Chart 4.2 Power Structure And Responsibilities Of The Karnataka Organic Farming Project:

- Project implementation
- Action plan
- Incentives to stakeholders
- Internal control system
- Monthly progress report to organic farming cell
- In charge of Halli Angadi

- Financial allocation
- Action plan
- Monitoring the activities of NGO through progress report

- Marketing of agricultural commodity
- Group certification

- Individual Stakeholders
- Members of VOFS

- Financial allocation
- Action plan
- Monitoring the activities of NGO through progress report

- Marketing of agricultural commodity
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By Way of Conclusion: Critical Reflections on the Policy and the Project

The policy and project are two parts of the same development initiative and they influence each other variously, evident in its implementation. The policy defines the project that has to be implemented at the village level and project defines how well policy has been proposed by the policy makers at the administrative level. The policy and project interface the existing gaps, loopholes, socio-economic, political, and cultural factors of the state policy and village project. Therefore, it is important to look critically at the Karnataka State Policy on Organic Farming and the village level organic project.

The criterion for selecting village sites is interesting in that the project was implemented in areas where farmers have some understanding about organic farming. With that criterion, it was easy for the service provider to implement the project without resistance. The focus was not on those areas, which were most affected by and had the highest concentration of chemical and pesticide usage for agriculture. Instead, it showed its interest in areas where there is least usage of these inputs and awareness among farmers to move towards organic farming. Another interesting aspect of this choice of specific ‘alternative zones’ for promoting organic farming was that the selected project site should have reasonable secondary source of income other than agriculture. Noteworthy here is that the areas selected were not as acutely affected by agrarian distress as other parts of Karnataka.

Clearly, the government was cautious in its approach and sought to send out a positive message about the success of organic farming. Being the first state to come up with an organic farming policy in the country, it indeed wants to show to the public that alternative model of organic farming is successful in overthrowing the farmers distress in the community. The state government is keen to portray itself as ‘pro-organic’ in the country which is interested in providing an organic farming platform for development initiators, traders, and industrialists in the state. By providing such a platform for investors, it is trying to develop an organic market and trying to mobilise revenue into the state treasury.

Village organic farming project has received less financial support in comparison with the subsidy the central government provides for chemical industries to grow in the country. The Indian government spends about 10 thousand crores for the import of chemical fertilisers and subsidises it to the chemical companies. However, the central government’s contribution for organic farming initiatives in the country is minimal as
compared to the support given to chemical industry. State provided a total of Rs 1,324,100 for three years in the organic village farming project in Dakshina Kannada (Project Documents). It is difficult to implement all the 32 programmes that have been listed in the Policy in an effective way.

I personally feel that the policy was highly ambitious. The state policy tried to accommodate every feature of sustainable farm practices within the policy, that too, to implement it three years. Policy provided for the development of 32 programmes; however, in its implementation, the project did not provide scope for all and the service provider could not develop all the aspects of the policy due to constraints of resources. Clearly there were huge gaps between the policy and its implementation. After the completion of the project, people went back to the conventional farming because they never had an opportunity to know the positive aspects of sustainable farming.

The policy has mentioned the provision of credit facilities for the farmers; however, until recently, the national and regional banks did not have any such scheme or loan for the organic farmers. In May 2009, the Corporation Bank has made a MOU with the Karnataka State Organic Farming Mission for promoting organic farming in the state. According to this, Organic Farming Mission has nominated Corporation Bank as the preferred bank for financing farmers who are moving towards organic farming. Bank has agreed to provide assistance for setting up of seed banks, marketing outlets, libraries, and goshalas in 176 talukas.

Organic farming proponents say that this farming requires less physical labour in farming; however, farmers pointed out that there is an increased need of farm labour in organic farming. Organic farming is understood as a holistic farming and a farmer is expected to carry out dairy farming, have farm agriculture inputs like organic manure, bio-fertilisers and pesticides from the nature, creation of farm ponds, and trenches for water management. The plantation farms are already a labour intensive farm sites and practising of organic farming means a further demand for physical labour on the field.

The service provider highlighted that the nature friendly farm mechanisation is an alternative to overcome the agrarian problems in the village. Science and nature can work together for developing agriculture in the village. These technologies are the alternative farm technologies developed by the farmers across the state for the improving their farm conditions, and many of these can really reduce the farmers’ burden in agriculture. Farmers stopped thinking agriculture as a source of livelihood and they expressed that it
is essential to think of agriculture as an industry. An organic farmer from Tumkur asked me similar question three years back,

‘Why should farmers think that agriculture is the only way of life we have here. I think it is time for us (farmers) to start thinking of it as an industry. We will grow depending on our family needs and consumer needs in agriculture. Why are we exploited? Because we think that agriculture is our source to survive, so we become weak in front of the powerful (market) and allow them to exploit us. Farmers feel they are weak because we have a family to feed and agriculture is considered as the main occupation, there exist alternative occupations like dairy, honey, etc, that can contribute in supporting agriculture. Do you think by introducing organic farming in the state, farmers’ problems can be solved? Can government give agriculture the status of an industry? A fellow farmer understands farmers’ plight and even you cannot understand the pain when a crop has failed, productivity is lost, or market prices have fallen (Pilot Study Notes, 2007)

Culturally, the district is has an individualistic approach towards farming, with minimum social or collective action. The farmers lay emphasis on individual preferences than social preferences at the community level. There are also individual and household disparities which inhibit flow of communication. The farmer lives on his land and land is a boundary for his action in the village. Farm development deeds keep farmers away from the public life and they are engrossed in farming. This inhibits the farmers to look outside their boundaries and they just go with the existing norms and ideas and slowly, they become reluctant to change their agriculture practices and ideologies. Lack of belief of the farmers on organic farming made it difficult for the service provider to carry out the project. It was found that farmers went back to chemical farming over time. Nevertheless, it has been noted that 60% of farmers converted to organic farming with self-interest and they find it is sustainable. As farmers were aware of the benefits of the organic farming and good rapport, use of scientific knowledge and personal interest of the service provider in the promotion of the organic farming in the region has increased the percentage of the progress of the farmers converted to organic farming as compared to many other parts of the state.

Agriculture is interrelated with the other allied practices of agriculture. Agriculture alone is not a profitable occupation; it is a source of living for farmers and to sustain in agriculture, they need a secondary occupation. Dairy farming is essential here, as it will provide manure to the farm and milk and milk products to the farmer. According to the service provider, one-cow is sufficient for providing the manures for the two acres of agriculture field in the project area. However, farmers are not able to sustain with the dairy farming only, as there exists a lack of support for milk production in Karnataka and
Chapter Four

Karnataka State Organic Farming Project in Moodanahalli

to promote farmers to move towards dairy farming in their agriculture land. Over time, farmers sold their cows and kept only one/two cows to ensure that the basic needs of the family are met. It resulted in the lack of farmyard manure availability for agriculture purpose.

It has been observed in the field setting that transition to organic farming is difficult for the farmers to manage without the timely and adequate financial support there needs for input incentives, and soil fertility enhancement in the agriculture land. After the conversion stage, organic agriculture produces higher yields with low external inputs. With the engagement in farm practice, there will be an increased knowledge, experience, and improvements, and this will help in increasing the organic stability in the land. In the end, the performance of the organic farming will increase with the improvement in the ecosystem and proper farm management skills. The organic project design, implementation and management (process) depends on the way farmers and stakeholders’ are involved and work together for the development of organic farming in the area. Rural population is not a homogeneous entity; here society is a heterogeneous in its social setup. In the village life, there exist differences with regard to wealth, gender, caste, ethnic background, and political preference. The majority of them have less than an acre of landholding while a few are having more than 5-10 acres in the community. The quality of the land, access to irrigation, available natural resources, and the number of farm labour vary in many parts of the community. In this society, people have access to resources, livelihood strategies, own rights, cooperation and divergence approaches, and conflicting interest and perceptions about the local condition. Considering this diversity in the region, it is interesting to know the active farmers who opt for organic farming and the passive farmers in the field area.

In the village, the project has observed a mixed participation from the farming community and it has seen participation from people belonging to different castes, classes, and social status groups. However, better off farmers adopted innovation sooner than the rest, as they are in the better position to take risks. To a certain extent, this is applicable to organic farming. However, those farmers who used chemical on their agriculture land are excluded from the organic project. Financially capable farmers went back to chemical farming and these farmers have higher socio-economic status and other
means of the income for their self-subsistence. Why did these farmers take the initiative of the programme to move towards organic farming in the beginning then?

During the phase of post organic farming project, in the village farmers are looking at agriculture as an industry than just a source of livelihood. The approach towards agriculture changed and a few farmers started using the cost-benefit analysis in agriculture and in this way, they minimized chemical use in agriculture land. The project helped in strengthening of the already existing informal network between the farmers based on caste, class, gender, etc, and it gave scope for interactions related to organic and sustainable farm practice. It created innovations among farmers and innovation in techniques and methods of farm practice moved from field to theory and from theory to field in the area.

Organic farming requires hard work, dedication, and continuous engagement in agriculture. This farming is difficult for the farmers who practised chemical farming, and the initial period of organic farming will reduce their production for 2-3 years. It is a slow process in enriching the soil fertility and in the fast phase of life, farmers find it difficult to engage in this farming. The policy was universal for the entire state and farmers felt that the policy spoke what the farmers were already aware of about the basic principles of the farming. Farmers felt that, theoretically, it is fashionable to be part of organic farming, but there exist practical difficulties, which they expressed during my extensive fieldwork in the village.

Education and power in the society provides elites a better position to access resources and information on organic farming and achieve necessary services and skills to look after the agriculture farm organically. Farmers who initiated organic farming prior to the project and the service provider intervention are having higher caste affiliation and they were the leaders in adopting innovations in village setting. Adoption of organic farming requires certain amount of secondary source of income to compensate the income loss in the transition period. Farmers with better education and social network outside the village have engaged in off-farm actions and this is a secondary source of income to them and is less dependent on agriculture.

In agrarian development, the issues and concerns that keep arising are as follows: if development is not going to benefit the farmers, the project or programme sponsored by the state will not have any collective collaboration and the money, energy, and efforts of
the people will just go waste. If the state approach is to develop the farmers and agrarian society, then is it not possible to achieve it without the active involvement of farmers.

Those who have more stable, secure land tenure will have a much greater incentive to make the required investments in land-conservation measures. Existence of landholding with the farmers will give them a feeling of security and they can feel motivated to go for the sustainable farming practices. Landholding becomes a base for any innovation and expansion of agriculture in the rural India. For farmers, land and existing farm practice is a comfort zone, which they were born into and brought up with. It is difficult and time consuming to motivate farmers to move from their comfort zone to something innovative, which they have not practised in their lifetime. The feasibility of organic agriculture will be much greater if farmers are highly motivated, especially by health or environmental concerns and not solely by economic advantages. If the farmers are already using the production systems approximating the organic farming on personal level, it will be easier to meet requirement of organic certification. These farmers will motivate other farmers to move towards organic farming. They create examples as ‘community innovators’ and work towards developing their neighbourhood.

Formation of farmers’ association in the case of Dakshina Kananda has helped farmers to implement organic farming and the institutional framework of its market. Farmers’ association can bring changes in the existing farm practice and can improve farmers’ agrarian condition. Farmers can opt for group certification, as it is cheaper, and they can come together as a collective group and sell their products under their own logo. Farmers will have their voice to sell the commodity at a premium price and contribute towards a better organic market for the organic producers in the regional, national, and international markets.