

## CONTRIBUTION OF NGOs IN PROMOTING ORGANIC AGRICULTURE MOVEMENT

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper examines the current initiatives taken by NGOs in organic agriculture (OA) movement. The aim of the paper is to document the OA associated activities undertaken by the NGOs and to explore the potentialities of this sector for commercial exploitation. The findings are based on the information collected from ten NGOs working in this sector. The findings show that they have been influential in raising awareness among the different stakeholders and creating an enabling environment for organic agriculture from community to policy level. It has been observed that the many networks have been built by them, thus helping in communication, exchange of ideas and further expansion of the sector. Greater involvement can also be seen at the community level where they work with the farming community providing support to small farmer associations in the adoption of organic methods of production and marketing of the products. NGOs have also been providing services and support in terms of establishing organic certification and standards as well as creating markets for organic product and have also helped the Government in the drafting of regulations. Though not in large scale, on-farm research on organic agriculture is also being carried out by these organisations. However, there are challenges to find the sustainability of the ongoing NGO led initiatives in the future backed by substantial gaps in the present effort which are creating hurdles in the ongoing movement. Therefore a balance effort from its proponents towards a common goal is necessary for the expansion of the organic agriculture movement.*

### INTRODUCTION

It is generally acknowledged that organic agriculture can contribute to socio-economic and ecologically sustainable development, especially in poorer countries (Willer and Yussefi, 2007). This is due to the practice itself, which means management of local resources (e.g. local seed, indigenous knowledge and practices) which are cost effective and secondly provides market for the organic product thereby creating excellent opportunities to improve the income and living conditions of the farming communities. Organic agriculture is one of several approaches to sustainable agriculture development practiced today which is ecologically safe, economically viable and socially acceptable (Scialabba, 1999). Apart from being suitable to marginal as well as productive environments, organic production also contributes to soil, water and biodiversity conservation. It utilizes the local resources and traditional knowledge and thus strengthens the farming communities.

Organic agriculture in Nepal as of now is in the brink, however seeing the present pace of development of this sector it is indeed heading towards a fast tempo growth. Organic farming in Nepal is not a new concept. Practices similar to it have been practiced by the farmers for centuries. Traditionally existing knowledge and skill about organic farming turned out to be a positive factor for promoting organic agriculture in the country. In the beginning the entire OA movement was laid by the NGOs (Sharma, 2008). A systematic approach to promote Organic Agriculture in Nepal was initiated by a national NGO called Institute of Sustainable Agriculture Nepal (INSAN) in 1986 (Ranabhat, 2007). The real development of organic agriculture in Nepal started only in the dawn of the millennium, when the Government of Nepal laid emphasis on organic farming in the Tenth Plan (2059-2063). National Agriculture Policy, 2004 (2061) further emphasized organic agriculture with the provision of support to be provided for quality certifications for the export of organic products. Thus political commitments such as avoiding conflicting drive to maximize production, hammering proactive policy, providing market incentives and institutionalization of Nepalese organic movement were imperative to further enhance organic sector in Nepal (Bhatta, et al, 2007). Subsequently, a lot of activities started to brim up in this sector with the involvement of many organizations, institutions and agencies.

Policies adopted by the Government of Nepal for involving NGOs as developing partners have reassured sector to emerge as an important player in different development areas. One of such areas is Organic Agriculture. It has been seen that government has been providing support to the modern agriculture mainly to increase productivity without considering the sustainability factor. However with the concept of sustainable agriculture, the Government started to take several steps like the enactment of Plant Protection Act, Pesticide Act and Regulation but it has been observed that government has not been able to regulate indiscriminate use of harmful agro-chemicals up to the mark. On the other hand, NGOs are emerging as new leaders in promoting and implementing different OA related activities and are playing a crucial role in supporting the government programme and policies for the promotion of organic farming in the country. These organizations have been promoting organic agriculture through training, research, publications, demonstration, marketing and market promotion, community facilitation, advocacy, certification, production, input supply and inspection (Sharma, 2009).

### **RATIONALE**

Organic agriculture is a very knowledge intensive farming system. Farmers need to rediscover sustainable production techniques, find market information and understand about standards and certification. However, the major constrain is lack of appropriate technology on organic agriculture which is contributed till few years back by low national priority towards this sector. Farmers are lacking of such technologies and information so there is a knowledge and information gap. NGOs have the ability to bridge this knowledge gap through their close connection with the farmers groups and experts in delivering trainings and advocacy. They can thus be regarded as the key communicators in the dissemination of OA information. Although such a mass movement has been going on for more than decade now, a well defined and systematic structure of this sector is still not well developed. Mainstreaming of OA into the national policy though catching up pace is still a critical issue. A number of NGOs are involved in OA promotion; however their work is rarely documented or consolidated into one document and made available to the public. Therefore this paper is an attempt to document some of the initiatives taken by the NGOs in this sector. Also an attempt has been made to measure the contribution and to find out up to what extent the NGOs are contributing for the promotion of organic agriculture in Nepal. The paper also reveals the gaps and challenges faced by this sector and highlight the recommendations for future.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Literature review was conducted for the collection of secondary information on organic agriculture initiatives. Ten NGOs were selected for this study based on their involvement in organic agriculture and the outreach of their operating areas. Information was collected by personal visits, individual interview, telephonic conversations and literature review. A questionnaire was prepared for information collection.

### **LIMITATION OF THE PAPER**

The paper only highlights the initiatives of some NGOs who have been involved with organic agriculture. The paper only records some of the initiatives based on the information collected and is a preliminary attempt to measure the extent of NGO involvement in the OA movement. However these highlights show the crucial role that NGOs are playing in the field of organic agriculture.

### **RESULTS**

#### **Current initiatives taken by NGOs on promotion of OA in Nepal**

The emerging popularity of organic agriculture in Nepal can be attributed to increasing health consciousness among the growing population, rising awareness on the impact of conventional farming on the environment, ecology and biodiversity and Government emphasis for organic agriculture promotion. There is no doubt that organic agriculture is more sustainable and low input based farming system. But there are several challenging issues to be resolved both on theoretical and practical grounds for promoting organic farming in Nepal. Some major ones being development of technologies, setting up own norms and standards for individual product guarantee and certification mechanism and awareness building to state agencies, organic producers, traders consumers and other stakeholders (Pokhrel and Pant, 2008). Non- Governmental

organizations since the last one and half decade have been doing a great deal of work addressing these issues and playing an important role in building the national confidence. Some important initiatives that have been implemented are discussed below:

**Raising awareness among the people:** The conversion of conventional to organic farming system emphasizes the need of raising awareness on the negative impacts of agrochemicals and promoting indigenous knowledge. Organizations like NPG have played a revolutionary role in introducing organic agriculture. Li-Bird through its programme on agriculture innovations on livelihood security has been focusing on promoting local knowledge and innovations. SECARD Nepal has been engaged in awareness raising trainings and campaigns on organic agriculture since 2006. ECOSCENTRE, a Chitwan based NGO through FFS provides an eighteen weeks exposure to the farmers on OA starting from production to the marketing aspect. Similarly, ASHA Nepal is working in the awareness raising activities with special focus on the nutritional diversity, health and sanitation through promotion of eco-friendly farming system as well as using the local natural resources. A wide array of awareness creating materials like paper, posters, books/booklets, reports, training manuals and bulletin related to OA are the regular features of these organizations. These organizations have introduced the different aspects of OA to the stakeholders through interactive programmes like group discussion, conference, seminars and workshops

**Networking:** From the government level all the way down to the grass root level, each stakeholder have their own view on OA. Uniting policy makers, producer, processors, marketers, and consumers interested in OA in the form of a network helps in communication, exchange of ideas and expansion of the sector. The process of building, maintaining and expanding the network of OA is being carried by organization like CEAPRED and NPG. CEAPRED has recently formed the Organic Nepal committee with representation from NAR, MoAC, DoA, NMVF, GSTMTF, NLA, KU, CEAPRED, NASSA, ANFPA, AEC, NAF and Earth Open Source. This network will plan and implement a way forward for organic farming in Nepal. NPG is the member of national network of National organic Agriculture Accreditation Body (NOAAB) and is presently developing the working procedures of the committee. A policy recommendation committee for OA consisting of members from Helvetas, IAAS, FNCCI, and AEC under the leadership of NPG was an excellent addition of another network recently. This committee is expected to identify the current issues and prepare recommendations to be forwarded to the central committee at the ministry level. Nepal Permaculture Group (NPG), Ecological Services Center (ECOSCENTER), Local Initiatives for Biodiversity Research and Development (LI BIRD), Society for Environmental Conservation and Agricultural Research and Development (SECARD) are the members of IFOAM. NGOs are thus helping in creating a positive relationship among the different stakeholder not only at the national level but also at the international level.

**Research, technology generation and disseminations:** NGOs like ECOSCENTER and SECARD Nepal are involved in conducting research on organic agriculture in farmer's field. ECOSCENTRE has conducted research on the effect of *Bakaino* (leaves and fruits) in controlling cabbage butterfly. SECARD, Nepal through its project on Market Oriented Agriculture Promotion Project have emphasized on farmer led research on organic technology development which primarily advocates for utilization of local resources rather being dependent on external inputs. Similarly LI-BIRD has been conducting research to see and compare the effectiveness of "*Jhol mal*" (liquid manure) and use of vermicompost over chemical fertilizers. Development Centre, Nepal has also undergone a research on comparative evaluation on effectiveness of different organic manures in vegetable production to processing with the inorganic nutrients. LI-BIRD has conducted vermicomposting promotion in six districts (Jhapa, Sindhuli, Nawalparasi, Tanahun, Dang and Doti) through community based biodiversity management programme (23 households). Also cattle shed improvement and urine collection in 80 households (Kaski, Nawalparasi) and improve composting demonstrations and promotion for quality manure production and its application (71 households) are some technologies demonstrated and disseminated by LI-BIRD. CEAPRED is also involved in implementation of Integrated Pest Management - collaborative research support program (IPM-CRSP) in Rupandehi and Lalitpur and disseminated IPM packages for vegetable crops and worked towards capacity building of the farmers in adopting the technology.

**Initiatives at community level:** At the community level NGOs have been integrating the experience of pioneering organic farmers and are instrumental in developing many informal working groups, learning resource centers based on voluntary collaboration by sharing information. Development Centre, Nepal has

been working with about 60 farmers in three VDCs of Dhading district. The farmers groups are formed and trained on different aspects of organic farming promotion that includes production, certification and marketing. The farmers are trained on the cost effective technologies that promote the use of locally available resources in different phase of production such as different techniques of compost preparation, bio-pesticide making, and post harvest management. NPG supports nine such resource centers. These resource centers are involved in activities like production, research, training and consultation. CIRDS, Dhading is involved in the facilitation for developing the local agriculture development plan and programme at VDC level through training. The 65 HHs of Arba Village Development Committee, Kaski, produce fresh vegetable, fruits, legumes and cereals under the organic promotion programme initiated by LI-BIRD. ASHA Nepal, a national NGO is also promoting organic agriculture in Okharpauwa village through empowering women's group in sustainable agriculture production. The organization is focusing on activities like cattle shed improvement, use of botanicals and improvement of farm yard manure. LEAD is recently involved in capacity building of farmer's group on organic vegetable production. LEAD Nepal is a first NGO which has taken an initiative towards organic livestock through data record and maintenance for certification.

**Policy, advocacy and lobbying:** NPG have been involved in awareness raising and promotion of organic agriculture through number of policy dialogue workshops and interaction programme at district, regional and national level under the project: Promoting Organic Production and Marketing Systems through Policy, Information and Advocacy (PROMS II). NPG worked closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MoAC) on identifying indicators for government policies. Additionally, through this project the critical issues and needs in research, policy and institutional strengthening were identified and attempt was made to address them. PROMS II has been successful in mainstreaming OA initiatives in the annual action plan of District Agriculture Development Office of Dhading and Rupandehi. NPG and ECOSCENTRE were instrumental in drafting the National Standard and Guideline on Organic Agriculture. CIRDS, Dhading have been involved in developing the district level organic agriculture guideline. Furthermore, it is also facilitating in the formulation and development of agriculture development programme of District Development Committee. It has already organized several district level interaction programme for the promotion of Organic Agriculture in collaboration with District Agriculture Development Coordination Committee. Last but not the least, CIRDS also facilitated in the formation of first Organic Agriculture Cooperatives in Dhading district, the number of such cooperatives have now reached to five in the district.

**Education:** NPG and Helvetas Nepal had initiated and develop the Organic Curricula in collaboration with Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science (IAAS) Rampur, Chitwan. Furthermore, NPG is the permanent partner of CTEVT for the development of organic curriculum for the technical courses. A number of organic agriculture classes at school and college level have been organizing in collaboration with school and college in number of district. The resource persons from NPG involved in number of teaching programme at HICAST, High School in Kathmandu, Chitwan, Dhading and Kavre. Furthermore, LI-BIRD has been involved in providing sessions on Organic Agriculture in various private and government high schools in Kaski. NGOs such as IDRC have been actively involved in promoting school to home programme focusing on practical organic kitchen garden.

**Marketing and certification:** Marketing and certification is one of the sectors where NGOs have taken lead role in Nepal. In fact, this sector was initiated by the NGOs and later taken up by the private sectors. LIBIRD was one of the first NGO involved in promotion of organic indigenous crops such as finger millet through product diversification such as cookies, biscuits, breads etc. Promotions of Internal Control System (ICS) and Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) on the way to certification process are the two aspects that are being promoted by NGOs like NPG, SECARD, ECOSCENTRE and CIRDS. SECARD has been directly involving with the community peoples of Chitwan, Dhading and Kathmandu in market oriented organic production program to uplift the organic products with more focus on ICS. NPG in collaboration with OCN have conducted training on organic certification in eight districts (Morang, Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Kaski, Rupandehi, Bardiya, Kailali and Sunsari). The trainings were conducted in close coordination with the District Agriculture Development Office and local organization and are focused on the process of certification at local level. A number of factors like lack of market information and high transaction cost restrict the access of small producers to market. Some of the NGOs also address this constraint and have been encouraging the farmers to carry out market oriented production and finally linking them to the niche

market. Development Centre, Nepal helps the farmers to sell their products to Nepal Healthy Agro-food Products Pvt. Ltd. in Kathmandu. Furthermore, NPG also facilitate to establish good linkage among the cooperatives and the producers with Organic World Fair Future. This outlet further supplies the products to sixteen department stores in Kathmandu valley. Additionally, few NGOs like NPG and LEAD- Nepal have also tried to capture the consumer perspectives through the market research on willingness to pay for organic products.

#### **Gaps**

- Integrated efforts of NGO's in promoting OA is missing. Several NGOs are working individually to promote OA in Nepal.
- Lack of integrated effort to work on promotion of research on indigenous knowledge for the development of organic agriculture.
- Very little on farm research and dissemination regarding various aspects of OA.
- Lack of clear policy support to carry out the organic promotion movement that encourages small holder's farmers at the field level.
- Low priority areas of research on organic agriculture.
- Insufficient incentive and price premium on organic products dampening the spirit of the farmers in putting extra effort on organic production.
- Weak institutional capacity of the national committees on OA like the NOAAB and NCCOAPPS.
- Too many Committees and bodies at different levels working on OA which is creating competition among the stakeholders itself.

#### **Challenges**

- NGOs interventions are short-term and targeted to confined area.
- Absence of an organized market and distribution system.
- High price for certification which discourages the FG to go for certification.
- Lack of a reliable and consolidated database on OA.

### **CONCLUSION**

The study revealed that NGOs are playing an influential role in the national OA movement by raising awareness starting from the grassroot to top level. They have also been promoting the different alternative production technologies among the small farmers. NGOs have been instrumental in providing services and support in terms of establishing organic certification and standards as well as creating markets for organic product. A major role has been played by the NGOs in supporting small farmer associations in the adoption of organic methods of production and marketing of the organic products. It can also be seen that many of them have close contacts with the National and International OA networks and sufficient expertise to help the Government in the drafting of regulations and in other negotiations as well. Thus NGOs have the potential to come in the forefront and can be considered as partners in supporting Organic Agriculture.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

#### **For the policy makers**

- A concrete plan of action with implementation strategy is required.
- The existing OA committee (NOAAB and NCCOAPPS) should be more inclusive, active and functional recognizing the diverse role of the stakeholders.
- Government should offer the subsidy for the production of organic pesticides and organic fertilizers at local level (e.g. cattle shed and FYM improvement).
- Should develop strategic plan to support the NGO initiatives.
- Should establish and strengthen a proper market information system.
- Should provide insurance scheme for organic farm that reduces the risk of farmer in case of failure of crops.

#### **For the NGOs**

- Increase public awareness on the different aspects of organic agriculture
- Document and share the various OA initiatives.

- Link the OA promotional activities with the relevant government programmes to maintain the sustainability.
- Facilitate and support the linkage of field tested technologies with the research institutes for validation.
- Develop consolidated database on OA

***For the education, extension and research institutes***

- Incorporate subjects and syllabus with focus on organic agriculture.
- Exploit the potential of organic farming through more commodity based research.
- Organise Organic Agriculture research in consolidated manner.

***For the traders, consumers and producers***

- Develop a proper marketing network and offer continuous organic market information.
- Promote the domestic market for organic products.
- Develop a strong local market to support conversion and further development of this sector.
- Expansion of awareness programme and communications of the benefits of organic farming ( healthy food, protection of the environment, biodiversity conservation)

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