

FOOD AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE INITIATIVE
FORESTACTION, NEPAL

Status and scope of organic agriculture in Nepal

consultation workshop report (Draft)



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1. Background

An interactive workshop entitled **status and scope of organic agriculture in Nepal** was organized on 3 June, 2011 in forest action meeting hall in order to strengthen the strong network among different organizations and document the scattered information in the field of organic agriculture. The totals of 18 professionals from different organization, actively involved in organic movement in Nepal were participated in the workshop. Thematic areas of organic agriculture such as history, status, technologies and policy aspects were discussed.

2. History of organic agriculture in Nepal

The organic agriculture is a very common word in Nepali agriculture sector. Over a century, traditionally farmers in hills and mountains are following the farming practice, which is similar to organic farming. However, many of them have no idea that their traditional practice is called organic agriculture. Because of the lengthy certification process the products produced through organic means do not get recognition as organic products. The traditional farming knowledge and skill give the positive point for promoting the organic agriculture in Nepal.

There is increasing trends of using inorganic chemicals terminator seeds and adopting high input technologies. The population growth and demanding cash income to run the

household forced farmers to increase their agriculture production including food therefore farmers started to adopt the modern farming techniques. However, the deleterious effects of excessive and unbalanced use of pesticides and inorganic fertilizers on human health, animal health and the environment have been reported time and again. In the recent past, various environmental friendly agriculture development efforts such as 'alternative agriculture', ecological agriculture/farming', 'bio-dynamic agriculture', 'regenerative agriculture', 'natural farming', 'permaculture', 'sustainable agriculture', with organic agriculture are in practice aiming to reduce the hazardous effect of the inorganic agriculture.

Improving agricultural productivity through increased use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and high yielding varieties are the major intention of the government of Nepal and it is one of the priority sectors of the current 20 years agriculture prospective plan (APP). All the national education, research, extension and communication systems are concentrated in favor of high input agriculture system in Nepal.

3. Status of organic agriculture in Nepal

Organic agriculture was first appeared as one of the priority sectors in Nepalese agriculture since the 10th Five Years Plan (2059/060-2063/064). But nowadays various institutions, individuals and farmers are emergently engaging in this field. There are various local organic practices; some practiced from the ages and some innovating new practices by farmers themselves. At present, some organic products such as coffee, tea, honey, large cardamom, ginger etc are exported to international market. Various institute and individuals think that organic movement in Nepal is quite slow in motion due to lack of clear vision of the government and distorted information flow from the different developmental projects.

Reviewing the government past policy and programs, agriculture production particularly organic productions are never seen in the perspective of the food. The ***national agriculture policy 2061*** clearly stated that the promotion of organic agriculture is only for export. The policy and program guided it from the promotion of business and emphasized has been given for earning more money but never seen from the own food and health. Therefore the organic farming is limited in the only export oriented commodities such as apiculture, coffee, tea, large cardamom, ginger etc and in a certain group of farmers.

Among the individuals and institutions workings in organic agriculture and even in the farmers who are involving in the organic practices (few returning back to organic from the chemical agriculture) do not have its clear definitions. Organizations, individuals and farmers themselves seem to be not clear entirely on what they are doing on this sector. So the exact measurement to measure the quality and standard of the organic products is also not clear. They cannot give proper and prompt answer why it is important and how much is organic and what are the technologies suitable in Nepalese condition.

Various interactions and discussions shows that many farmers engaged in organic agriculture are not confident because some pests and diseases are very hard to control without chemical pesticides. Due to lack of standard guidelines from the government, there are not proper definitions and methods to make the farming practices organic. Local farmers knowingly or unknowingly practicing organic agriculture and have invented various organic techniques but we have not acknowledged them for their contribution.

Nepalese organic products reach the standard for the Nepalese market but competing with the international market is too hard. Because of the complicated certification process, marketing of organic product within our own country is more effective than competing with the international market. Due to the lack of accredited laboratory facility, several cases of return of the certified organic products (honey) had been seen in the recent past.

Great possibility of organic farming exists because many places are still in organic in nature and yet to be not reached the modern technologies and chemical fertilizers. For example- Jumla is already announced organic district by the government, as chemical fertilizer and pesticides are yet to be not reached. This is the traditional practices of the farming which is very close to the organic practices. Such declaration of the organic area are only romanticized which cannot reach the standard of organic certification process.

Many of the farmers in Nepal face problems that the organic products are not perfect in shape, size and color in comparison with products produced by the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. So they are in fear about the consumer preference as they (consumer) prefer by evaluation with their eyes and organic products are hard to compete in the market. They do not concern about the way of production and nutrient content of the product. They think that organic products are expensive and hard to be affording it. At village level the local seeds are completely replaced by the hybrid and imported varieties especially in cereals and vegetables.

It is believed that Nepalese farmers are more committed for the organic farming compared to other south Asian countries. But now a day's particularly youth are distracting from the agriculture field. They think once they have some academic degree, it's not good to work in the agriculture field and playing with mud, plough, FYM etc. is not feasible option and move out from the village in search of employment. Only few farmers are convinced that organic agriculture is possible and the organic pesticides and fertilizers can also contribute in better production as compared to the chemical inputs.

Research organizations like NARC, NARDF give least priority on organic farming. There are limited and scattered researches on organic farming, which are not properly documented and thus repeated on the limited issues.

During the fiscal year 2066/067, government provides only 24 cores of subsidies in organic manures and certification process of organic products. Under this limited

budget, farmers are confused which part of organic agriculture is to expand by the government sector.

4. The initiatives

There are some example of organic farming and the organic products that got popularity in domestic and international markets such as tea, coffee, honey, ginger, cardamom, and medicinal herbs etc. Individual farmers, institutions and GON had initiated different promotional activities of organic farming but these activities are not coordinated and documented properly. One organization is unaware of other's initiatives and achievements. At the same district, different institutions are working on this sector on their own way. Organic farming in Nepal is extended and initiated in different approaches for the completion of development projects.

The initiative of organic farming is carried out by the developmental organization and the activities are limited up to the project period and are categorized as the **forced organic farming**. The sustainability is always in question due to the forced type of organic farming. On the other hand, various farms, groups, individual farmers already started farming without chemicals from their own effort/motivated by the others and they are satisfied with their work. Social prestige is also related with the farmers who think that chemical fertilizers and applying modern technologies in their land is associated with their reputation.

4.1 Technological aspects

Mainly farmers are confused about the basic technologies of the organic farming. They do not realize that hybrid seeds need high inputs for better production. However, they are not satisfied with the production because the yield is not as enough as to cover the cost of production.

Generally farmers think using the vitamins is the practice of organic farming which is their misconception. Due to the lack of proper guidance on organic technologies and insufficient services by the local service centers, many farmers are facing problems in this regard. There are various commitments on organic agriculture in developmental and research projects in Nepal. But the main problem is lack of special package of practices on the basis of ecological region and the needs and priorities of the farmers.

Promoting organic farming in hilly and mountain region are easier than terai region. With the simple modification in the practices, farmers practicing will be easier to make the product organic. Existence of large coverage forest area in the hill and mountain regions makes the organic farming and integrated farming system possible. Forest is important input source for the agriculture practices and livestock which will contribute to farmers for manure. Normally 4-5 local cows in the hills will produce 1 kg of urea in a day which will meet the necessity of NPK in the field. Rearing 4-5 local cows will provide enough amounts of nutrients for the 12-15 ropani of land. It is also found that, in the fodder of

1:3 from the field and forest will provide enough amount of NPK in the form of biomass for organic farming.

Various local innovations are available in our local farming communities which can be continue as new technology for promoting the organic farming. Chopping of the banana trunk and incorporate in soil will increase the bio mass of the soil. This also helps in the increment of soil fertility status in the soil and help in better production.

Some specific disease and pest are really hard to control as their resistance power is increasing day by day (due to the chemical means) for example; late blight of potato, tomato fruit borer, brinjal fruit and shoot borer which is not even controlled by the chemicals. Farmers raise this kind of question very often "how can this type of diseases and pest are controlled by such JHOL MALL and JHOL AAUSADI".

4.2 Public Policy

Lack of clear vision from government sector is one of the serious drawbacks for the slow development of organic farming in Nepal. The issues and agendas of the organic agriculture are limited on certain people and yet to be not reached in the public mass. On the other hand, serious problem of youth migration hit hardest in the agricultural sector in the village.

Organic agriculture is not in the priority of the government. Ministry does not have any desk with focal person for organic agriculture. In the absence of clear guidelines of using available resources the staffs in ministry are also not clear about the use of the resources. Capable and efficient person does not want to work on agriculture sector which is one of the major drawbacks of its development. The campaigners and organizations working in the promotion of organic agriculture seem to be weaker and loosening to the advocacy power as compared to the past years.

5. Recommendation

Based on the discussion in the workshop, the following recommendations are developed to promote organic agriculture;

- The policy and program should emphasize the organic food rather than market and business oriented agricultural system. If focus will be always given to exportable market, then health certification will be always in question and the promotion of organic will be limited. Once the farmers understand organic agriculture is important for the health instead of cash, then they will in favor of this type of farming.
- Still in hills and mountains regions of Nepal, the agriculture practice is traditional. Little effort will modify the current farming practices into organic. This will certainly achieve the goals and objective of the organic agriculture. Making every

place and area organic is rather impossible and therefore focus should be given to specific crops and specific location especially in mid hill and mountain.

- The promoting of simple processing and modification of underexploited and underutilized crops (*sisnu, khanim etc*) and other local fruit and vegetables; traditional food items such as *mohi, chiura* and increasing their food values will certainly help in the food security in some extinct.
- Sustainable agriculture is best possible approach than the pure organic farming in context of Nepal for better production and domestic marketing. Starting with sustainable will lead to the organic in certain time with some preparations for the possible challenges. Those working under the development of organic farming must show the demonstration for the policy maker and political parties so that they will get impressed from the positive result of this farming and will focus on developing of the organic agriculture in future.
- The cost of production is high and Nepalese farmers cannot compete with the Indian and other international market. Hence Government must provide support to the organic farmers groups, cooperatives in order to minimize the cost and mass production. Subsidy will be provided based upon the volume of production in order to motivate the farmers for easy marketing of the products.
- Due to the lack of awareness, consumers are not convinced for the premium price of the organic product. Therefore farmers need to compete in the international market. Arrangement of the subsidy in price and insurance of the production will be a biggest incentive for the farmers and help in its sustainability. There should be separate and interrelated networking of training, research and technology development, verification and extension of organic agriculture for its development.
- Organic certification is important for the exportable organic product but, small farmers couldn't afford the additional cost, time consuming certification process. There is need of packaged program so that a farmer could be self equipped and prepared for the process of certification.
- There is need to document the innovations from the local level to national level. Research and studies can generate certain findings and evidence based knowledge which can be shared with the likeminded working agencies and directly to the farmers. The publications and media can play important role in bringing its agenda into village and then household's levels.
- There are various non- governmental and cooperatives working in the field of organic farming. Many of them are in inactive and so there is need to revitalize their activities for upgrading organic agriculture.

- There are limited courses and activities on organic farming at school, universities and training institutions. As the consequences, extension services have usually faced problems of trained professionals on organic agriculture. Thus, incorporation of courses related to organic production is necessary in the education programs of primary and secondary school level, universities and training institutions for developing professionals in this field.

- Although there is growing concern about importance of organic farming, there have been limited researches on organic farming by government and non government organizations. Most of the researches are concentrated only with soil fertility status and varietal trials. Therefore it is suggested to conduct research on; Scientific validation of traditional farming practices that could increase land productivity and resource sustainability, identify location specific technology for various locations/regions, selection of suitable crops for organic farming and include it as one of the major components of farming system.