



One Earth, Many Hands

2008 Annual Report



International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements



Giving Farmers a New Tool for Rural Development

Participatory Guarantee Systems allow us to bring a large number of farmers into the organic fold who have not been able to access the third party systems of being certified organic.

- Mathew John



Asrabai is a farmer from Dhangaon village in the Marathwada region of central India. She owns a two-acre farm where she grows millet and vegetables. For years, Asrabai worked alone and struggled to make a living. She sold her produce to a local middleman, who in turn sold it for a higher profit in the nearby city of Aurangabad.

But now, thanks to an innovative system championed by IFOAM, Asrabai has been able to join with other farmers to form the Aurangabad Organic Bazaar. Here, she interacts directly with her customers and educates them about her products and organic farming practices. By marketing her produce directly, Asrabai has developed new skills, built social capital, and increased her profits by 40%. The Aurangabad Organic Bazaar has been so successful that it now operates in 14 locations and has improved the livelihoods of thousands of farmers like Asrabai.

The system that has helped put Asrabai in control of her own fate is called a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS). Through her PGS, Asrabai is now able to join with a network of farmers, producers, and consumers in the community to jointly certify their products as organic using a system of standards that have been developed to accommodate their own local needs. Built on a foundation of trust, social networks, and knowledge exchange, Participatory Guarantee Systems are powerful tools for improving local socio-economic and ecological conditions of farmers and rural communities around the world, particularly in developing countries. With PGS, Asrabai is able to get her products recognized as organic without the prohibitive costs of traditional third-party organic certification. And in the process, farmers are able to learn from each other and enhance their knowledge of organic farming. Old traditional knowledge, which may have otherwise been lost, is now being practiced and passed on as a result of including some of the older farmers into the group.

IFOAM leads the world in advocating and supporting Participatory Guarantee Systems. Assisted by a team of PGS experts, IFOAM supports the development of PGS in India and countries all over the world as a means for smallholders to enter a system of committed organic production and to provide more consumers with high-quality organic products.

At last count, there are 237 local rural development groups working with PGS in India. One of these groups is the Keystone Foundation, which supports indigenous communities in the Nilgiris, a district in India's southern state of Tamil Nadu. An IFOAM member, Keystone's mission is to enhance the quality of life and the environment of these smallholders by using eco-development approaches. Keystone's Director, Mathew John, believes that PGS has been a vital tool for assisting in this mission. He states, "Participatory Guarantee Systems allow us to bring a large number of farmers into the organic fold who have not been able to access the third party systems of being certified organic." Mathew has not only been facilitating PGS in his community but is currently an active member of IFOAM's PGS committee. His participation enables him to support his local community and bring the Indian experience of PGS to the rest of the world via IFOAM.

The experience in India has shown that the major benefits from working with PGS are farmer learning and empowerment, facilitating development of local markets, encouraging community building, supporting local economies, building social capital, and supporting the growth of organic agriculture.

Mathew sees IFOAM as a vital partner in Keystone's efforts. "IFOAM has helped us to coalesce our work by opening up a huge network of ideas and partners who are working on similar issues around the country and the world. It has brought together a whole set of institutions working on organic agriculture and focused on a very strong platform of Participatory Guarantee Systems."



2008 IFOAM ADDRESSES

Rural Development

IFOAM's work on Rural Development in 2008 emphasized Participatory Guarantee Systems as a powerful tool that empowers smallholders and producers to secure their income and build social capital in their community.

◆ In June 2008, IFOAM established the international definition of PGS: *Participatory Guarantee Systems are locally focused quality assurance systems. They certify producers based on active participation of stakeholders and are built on a foundation of trust, social networks, and knowledge exchange.*

◆ IFOAM developed a voluntary questionnaire in multiple languages for PGS participants to evaluate how they are meeting key PGS requirements. This tool is also being used by IFOAM to collect information about existing PGS worldwide and facilitate information exchange and network building.

◆ IFOAM established an online PGS platform providing a global overview of PGS initiatives and making available pertinent documents.