

Go Organic @Bhutan Vol.1



Kingdom of Bhutan is located in the eastern Himalaya, known as its unique policy guided by a concept of “Gross National Happiness (GNH)”. As a means to achieve GNH, Bhutan started an initiative to shift 100% organic agriculture by stopping chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Is it possible to make a whole nation organic? I am interested in this theme, and decided to do internship in Bhutan. Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative (SJI) is a civil society project, started as a pilot model of the organic policy, aiming at improving living standard and food self-sufficiency without harming natural environment and its unique culture [www.sji.bt/]. The district is located at the south east of Bhutan, a border to India, which has fifth highest use of chemicals among 20 districts.



PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AND EDUCATION IN NAVDANYA

Navdanya started as a participatory research initiative founded by a world known scientist Dr. Vandana Shiva in 1987. It was the first initiative in India to promote direct marketing of organic products. Its community-based seed bank preserves more than 3,000 varieties of rice and hundreds of millet, pulses and vegetables to distribute free for farmers. [www.navdanya.org]



■ Training Schedule (Mar-Apr 2011)

25 th	AM	organic fertility management
	PM	Practical, vermicompost, seed bank
26 th	AM	integrated pest management
	PM	Practical soil management
27 th	AM	role of pollination in organic farming
	PM	Practical integrated pest management
28 th		Field visit to Tehri Dam
29 th		Field visit to Sauri village
30 th		Field visit to Chopra village
31 st		Field visit to Devprayang village
1 st	AM	Practical, nutrient management
	PM	economics of organic farming
2 nd		Field visit to Forest Research Institute
3 rd		Reflection
4 th		Field visit to Ranikhet
5-6 th		organic certification and marketing

TRAINING BHUTANESE LEADING ORGANIC FARMERS IN INDIA

10 days training of organic farming started in Uttarakhand, India on 22nd March 2011. 19 leading organic farmers from 11 Gewogs (blocks) of Samdrup Jongkhar district and 4 extension officers participated. First, we visited conventional farmers in Punjab. Green revolution brought a great increase in yield in Punjab, but farmers rely on excessive external inputs and loans. Suicides due to debt became social problem in India. “We know bad influence of chemicals, but if we do not use it, we cannot produce enough yields to get our loans back”. They lost their traditional way of farming, and cannot change their practices easily, once they experienced the benefits of green revolution. Inputs increases yearly, but still yields decreases, according to Punjabi farmers. Bhutanese farmers were convinced that they should try not to depend on external resources.



(L. vermicompost, R. solar dryer)

How to start Community seed bank

1. Select farmers as key seed keepers and train organic plant breeding.
2. Collect indigenous varieties from all over India, and distribute seeds free to farmers.
3. Farmers return 1.25kg of seeds per 1 kg of seeds to community seed bank, or give free to other 2 farmers.
4. Divide into three types of seeds: for exhibition, multiplication, and preservation.
5. Community Biodiversity Registers (CBRs) helps documentation to protect indigenous knowledge against *Biopiracy* of multinational companies.



(Source: presentation at Navdanya by Dr. Vinod Bhatt)

FIELD VISIT TO THREE HIMALAYAN VILLAGES IN UTTARAKHAND

The bus went bumping on the steep cliff of the mountain. I felt the bus was frying, as I could not see the road from the window. I thought I was dead many times. A Bhutanese extensionist said, "Oh, Don't worry, by far steeper and narrower in Bhutan. Only advice I can do is not to take a big bus. It's more difficult to go without falling". I was scared. Thanks to God, it arrived safely without falling! We visited three villages in Rudraprayang district, Uttarakhand state, which has similar climate and culture to Samdrup Jongkhar.



✚ Sauri village

Sauri village is located at the food path of hilly Himalayan mountains under the auspice of Rudraprayag River, the origin of River Ganga. They were traditionally organic, but agricultural officers forced them to use HYVs and chemical fertilizers. HYVs mass-produced in Punjab were not well suited in this area. Farmers were confused what to do. After the organic farming training from Navdanya, they got confidence in their original way of farming. They started to make farmers group, mostly consists of women, and process organic products such as jam, juice, spices for additional income generation. They also make community seed bank and micro-credit system.



(L. farmers' meeting R. processing Rodadranden flower)

Lunch provided by villagers was filled with chilies! I was crying to eat the firing spicy food, "No chili, no satisfaction", said Bhutanese farmers with full of smile. I should train my tongue to survive in Bhutan...

✚ Triyal / Tirua village

Triyal and Tirua village are sister villages with marital relationship. Each village has a women's group, consists of 10 members to collectively process fruits and raise fund. They process pickles from Mango and Amla (*Emblica Officinalis*). In this village, most of men work in cities and women are main workers in the field. Many young Indians are eager to become doctors or engineers. So do young in this village rather than staying in the village. According to Bhutanese, same thing also happens in Bhutan, too. Some young people do not like to do farming, and there is chronicle labor shortage.



(L. drying straw on tree R. seed storage made of bamboo)

ORGANIC CERTIFICATION AND COMMUNITY BUSINESS IN RANIKHET

We visited local NGO, "Grassroots" in Ranikhet after Navdanya to learn community-based organic certification and marketing. Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) is a certification system that assures organic practices within a group. Compared to Internal Control System (ICS) which gets certification as a group by third body (i.e. IMO, ECO CERT), PGS is a more trust based system without inspection by certification company. Each member approves the other members' practices following by organic standard. Once a year, Organic India Council checks selected farmers if they keep standards. In addition, the groups formed community-based company to process raw materials and collectively sell their products with label [www.grassrootsindia.com]. The important thing is "farmers invest for their facilities by themselves so that they are not dependent on external aid", said the NGO staff. Currently, Bhutan has no community certification system. Farmers group in Bhutan are based on specific products (i.e. milk cooperation, mushroom cooperation). This collective action seems to inspire Bhutanese farmers.



- *Punchgavier (bio-fertilizer) is easy and interesting. I will try in Bhutan.*
- *I want to disseminate how to make organic solution to other farmers in my area.*
- *We need to buy spray to spread bio-pesticides solution. I want to ask government to subsidize for this.*

Q2. Are you using chemical fertilizers and pesticides? Why?

- *I've never used. Pesticides are not good for our health, and also for animals living in the field. Small animals disappeared from inorganic farmer's field.*
- *Not so many farmers use chemicals in Bhutan. Mostly used for growing potato or fruits.*
- *Government distributed chemical fertilizers and pesticides for free before. Now we have to buy. It is too expensive to afford for that.*
- *Livestock department still distributes Urea for pasture.*

Q3. Did you experience night hunting before?

Let me explain about night hunting before the answer. There is old custom to make love by visiting girls' house secretly at night in Bhutan. Giving a special gift like *Doma* (Arecanuts) to a girl is a sign to make appointment that night. If the girl receives *Doma*, it means she accepts his love. Boys will visit girls' family after one or two weeks of the incident, and engage their marriage. 6 out of 4 farmers got their wives like this. Indeed, high possibility! However, a farmer said he would not allow his kids to do night hunting.



(L. Company Logo R. Direct shop)

INTERVIEW BHUTANESE ORGANIC FARMERS

The participants of this training are selected by community head based on their motivation and influence on other farmers. Out of 19 farmers, 10 are men and 9 are women. The youngest farmer is 19. I interviewed them at the last day of training.

Q1. How do you think about this training?

- *We are already doing organic practices, but the way of making organic fertilizers and bio-pesticides are different. I got new idea from this training.*
- *Confused. It is different from what we learnt from agricultural officers in Bhutan.*

After 36 hours long travel by train from Delhi, finally we arrived at Bhutan. To be continued...



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