

Agri-Business by Poor Rural and Tribal Women Integrating Livestock-crop Systems and Vermi-composting for Sustainable Agriculture and Empowerment, Gujarat, India

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Abstract

The paper describes an initiative taken under the purview of a bilateral project "Training of Women in Agriculture," funded by Dutch Government to Government of Gujarat, India with focused attention on roles of women in agriculture and increased access and control over improved agricultural knowledge and skills through farmer's training centers. It also adds experiences from an NGO, the Agakhan Rural Support program (India), in providing technical and financial support to women farmers to produce organic manure by integrating livestock and crop systems. Subsequently, the women learnt and experimented with vermicomposting, compost from vegetables and flower waste, vermi wash, pesticides from neem, ipomoea, buttermilk and cow's urine, green manure, herbs for purifying air around crops, and biogas slurry etc. The initiative was undertaken in view of perpetual marketing of low quality fertilizers by outside agencies, use of over doses of fertilizers, growing of water and fertilizer intensive crops resulting in degradation of soil, availability of raw materials, and willingness of women to undertake composting as an entrepreneurial activity. The impact of the enterprise on livelihoods and confidence, soil fertility and productivity, widespread acceptance of the techniques, increased understanding among farming communities to weigh pros and cons of one method over the other, bottlenecks, and the potential in promoting organic farming are also discussed.