

A new entry point activity

A small mound was made of soil depicting ridge and valley. Water was poured through a sieve simulating a rainfall situation. The participants observed that the fine top soil got eroded and settled in the lower reaches. The participants also observed that the water infiltration at various points on the mound was 'different', progressively increasing towards the valley.

Another similar mound was made and participants were asked to 'identify options' for managing the soil erosion problems. They came up with soil erosion control structures like contour bunds and vegetative barriers. The rainfall situation was simulated again. Participants observed that the moisture retention was possible *in situ* and the silt movement was minimum within the bunded areas.

Participants used this exercise in all practice villages and it did work well.

Watch out this space in subsequent issues for similar 'modifications' experimented in the MToF.



Participants learning about the erosion process and ways to control them through simulation exercises

The participants have covered good ground in the field too. They have learnt the following aspects by doing and also facilitating them in 48 practice FFS sessions.

1. Seed selection and germination testing
2. Seed treatment with biologicals
3. Enriching farmyard manure with Rock Phosphate
4. Slope measurement and identifying contour lines
5. Bunding for harvesting rain water

More of field experiences and updates will follow in subsequent issues.



Participants learning on the FFS plot

AME Foundation promotes ecological agriculture among small and marginal farmers in the semi arid areas of the Deccan Plateau by generating farming alternatives, enriching farmers knowledge, linking development agencies and sharing experience.

To,

Newsletter Committee: Mr. G. Ravi Kumar Mr. B.V.R. Moorthy Dr. J. Diraviam Ms. K.R. Chandra Editor: Ms. T. M. Radha

- Launching of Modified Training of Facilitators (MToF)
- Organising FFS with CBOs
- Broadening FFS Curriculum to include dryland farming for the first time...

Coordinator's column

Modified Training of Facilitators (MToF), an abridged version of ToF, conceptualised by Dr. Balasubramanian, Deputy Director, Plant Quarantine Systems, has been developed into a methodology by AME Foundation supported by FAO. MYRADA extended cooperation for initiating the programme with its large network of Community Managed Resource Centers (CMRC).

For the first time, an attempt was made to address the issues of dryland farming through FFS. Deliberate efforts were made to shift the focus of the programme to dryland agriculture from IPM. AME Foundation with its vast experience on dryland agriculture, provided the necessary technical support. Thus, the curriculum was developed and modified to suit the needs of farmers in promoting sustainable agriculture in drylands.

New programmes like MToF will naturally generate a lot of new learnings. We wish to share this experience with those FFS enthusiasts interested in the processes and outcome of this unique programme. This, we thought, could be best achieved by bringing out a newsletter, like this one, periodically.

Two weeks have passed and we consider it to be the right time to release the first issue. This being the first issue, we would like to introduce the MToF concept as conceived by AME Foundation, its genesis, the methodology, the agencies and the people involved and a little on what has happened in the first two weeks. As we go along, we would share with you interesting experiences, insights and learnings from this programme.

We welcome you to a happy reading and hope to enrich it in further issues! We look forward to your feedback, both on the programme as well as on the newsletter.

G. Ravi Kumar
MToF Coordinator

The Modified Training of Facilitators (MToF) is the first of its kind in the country for training facilitators in FFS methodology. It was inaugurated on the 07th June 2006 at the MYRADA Training Centre at Achettipalli, Hosur. Being unique, both in terms of methodology as well as the content, the programme is expected to generate ample field based experiences to enrich the existing FFS knowledge base. Similar MTOFs in the future could use lessons from the present experience. It is history in the making.

Genesis of MToF

AMEF initiated sustainable agriculture promotion activities in partnership with Community Managed Resource Centers (CMRCs) of MYRADA in 2005. AMEF worked with four CMRCs out of the 18 CMRCs, to start with. In order to scale up Sustainable Agriculture (SA) promotion activities to all the CMRCs, FFS methodology was considered to be a suitable approach. Considering the fact that AMEF had limited number of trained trainers on FFS, it was suggested that a Modified Training of Facilitators may be useful in training staff of AMEF and partner NGOs, simultaneously reaching large number of farmers. The partnership of AMEF, Dharmapuri Unit with MYRADA CMRCs provided a favourable and ready made institutional structure, making it a natural choice for initiating the MToF programme.

Focus on Dryland farming

In line with AMEF's emphasis on the livelihood improvement of resource-poor farmers in the drylands, it was decided to work on dryland groundnut as the core crop in the MToF. Also, it was planned to expand the scope of the curriculum beyond IPM, to focus on the livelihood improvement. Major aspects of dryland farming such as *in situ* rain water management, soil fertility improvement, crops and cropping systems, generating environmental support to farming through biomass promotion, along with other aspects like post harvest operations and income generation activities, were included.

Special features of MToF

The MToF has three distinct areas of action. First is the MToF, where Community Resource Persons (CRPs) get first hand knowledge and skills in FFS methodology. The second part is the practice FFS, where CRPs work in pairs, to practice their learnings in 'practice FFS' sessions held in 54 villages of the two districts. The last part is the adoption of farmers by collaborating farmers for spreading FFS. The first two aspects have been initiated and the third aspect will be a follow up, to be taken up after the MToF.

The special features of MToF are:

- The operations under MToF include presowing on-farm NRM to post-harvest operations, unlike from seed to seed as in regular ToFs.
- Participants belong to local area with 2-3 years of farming experience. No formal education in agriculture is required.
- It is a season-long process with 3 days residential training and 3 days of practice FFS.
- Participants in pairs conduct practice FFS.
- Pairs of practicing farmers adopt few more farmers for spreading FFS.

A preliminary Curriculum Development Workshop (CDW) was held during 1-3 June 06 to prepare a broad curriculum for the MToF. This was followed by another workshop to broaden the curriculum by including dry farming aspects, based on the needs of the farming community in Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri districts.



Participants developing curriculum during the CDW

Agencies involved and their roles

Three agencies are involved in the whole process. AME Foundation, as a resource organisation, is coordinating the process with lead roles in providing technical content and logistics support. Six of its staff members participating in the process will also support the monitoring system and documentation efforts.

MYRADA and its CMRCs will play a lead role in developing human resources on operationalising Sustainable Agriculture in dry farming and its scaling up. MYRADA has identified the CRPs and villages for practice FFS. MYRADA's training center is being used for the programme. CMRCs will play a major role in follow up activities in the identified villages. Self help Affinity Groups (SAG) will identify the collaborating and scaling up farmers.

FAO, as the partner agency, is providing support of resource persons on the methodology part. A team of five facilitators have been deputed from State Agricultural Departments of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, through FAO's efforts.

Extension agencies like the State Department of Agriculture and Krishi Vigyan Kendras, Research Institutions like Tamil Nadu Agricultural University and its stations, other NGOs and farmer groups will play a role in enriching the process, by sharing experience as the programme progresses.

Methodology and area coverage

The MToF sessions will be conducted for about 20 weeks. The participants would undergo residential training for 3 days in a week, throughout the season. The rest of the 3 days, the participants would conduct 3 practice FFS, in pairs. It was planned to train 36 CRPs from 18 CMRCs.

Each pair of CRPs, during the MToF, would be conducting 3 practice FFS in 3 villages under each CMRC, thus covering 54 villages in the two districts, Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri,



MYRADA Training Center

reaching about 1080 farmers. In the practice FFS, it is expected that the participating group of farmers, in pairs, would be encouraged to adopt and influence another 3 farmers in the field activity during non-FFS days. In total, 540 pairs of farmers under the CMRCs will reach another 1620 farmers. At the end of the season, the total farmer outreach is expected to be around 2700.

Facilitators

There is a young and energetic six member facilitator team in place. The team includes Mr. N. Selvam and Mr. N. Palani Murugesan from Department of Agriculture, Tamil Nadu; Mr. I.S. Hiremath and Mr. R.B. Bommigatti from Department of Agriculture, Karnataka and Mr. B.V.R. Moorthy from Andhra Pradesh. They are experienced Master Facilitators in previous FAO facilitated and State Government run ToFs. Mr. G. Ravi Kumar from AME Foundation coordinates the programme.

Participants

A total of 33 CRPs, (of the 36 planned), including 17 women, are participating in the programme. The CRPs are the educated local youth employed by the CMRCs for conducting

specific trainings to SHGs and anchor development programmes of CMRCs in the villages. Six staff (three of them women) of Dharmapuri Area Unit also participate, to gain experience as FFS facilitators. They also support the CRP teams in group works and the facilitators in monitoring practice FFS sessions.

Putting systems in place

A monitoring and followup system has been evolved to support CRPs in practicing FFS at the field level. Each facilitator, along with one staff from AME Foundation, will support 3 pairs of CRPs and nine FFS, on a rotational basis.

CMRCs are being supported by a Manager, who is a key person in the entire training. To create support systems for them to understand and enable the process, MYRADA has decided to depute them on a rotation basis to the weekly FFS review and planning sessions for the week.

The reporting and documentation team is formed to work on two aspects – the documentation of the daily sessions focussing on bringing out the learnings and the compilation of the process document. Dr. J. Diraviam, Ms. K.R. Chandra and Mr. B.V.R. Moorthy will be the core team members in documentation.

What has happened till now – Field experience

Following are the highlights of the first two weeks' sessions.

1. Grouping of participants using group dynamics
2. Preparing individual profiles
3. Norm setting
4. Experiential learning cycle and its importance in non formal education
5. Preparing session guides
6. Planning and preparing for practice FFS sessions (conducting general discussions, identifying participants and forming groups, orientation meetings, conducting base line study, etc)
7. Taking pre MToF evaluation test and the pre training Ballot Box test
8. Laying out experimental plots

Some constraints were also observed during these two weeks. Weekly sessions of three days campus training makes it difficult to accommodate the regular features of a ToF. The diverse backgrounds of the participants, in terms of education and language skills, makes the situation much more complex. For instance, five of the group have difficulty in understanding Tamil language, making it necessary to translate the sessions into Telugu and Kannada.



Participants recording germination test results



Participants quartering soil sample for analysis