

Initially, I was hesitant to express what exactly happened in the practice FFS, thinking that I would be branded poor at learning. But after understanding that this helps learning and self-improvement, I felt I should share my real feelings so that I will get good feedback from the larger group. I am now very confident to express what I experience in practice FFS sessions, because I know it is for me and others to learn together, out of it.

- R. Malar, MToF participant

Dealing with multiple languages in the MToF

Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri, being the border districts of three states, the participants and farmers speak three languages – Tamil, Telugu and Kannada. Naturally, the MToF had to be multilingual. Translations needed to be done in the sessions to all three languages, making time management difficult in the early stages. This caused difficulties in the feedback sessions, when other participants were not able to contribute to the discussion when the feedback was being given in one particular language. This also took more time. A change in the format was introduced. All Tamil-speaking pairs were made into one group and the rest Telugu and Kannada speaking participants were made into another group, only for the feedback sessions. This arrangement worked out well in making the feedback sessions more participative, practical, interesting and short.

Resource person's impressions



Dr. Sutha

I had to design my technical contents to fit into the FFS methodology, with focus on making the participants learn by experience. I felt, this was a tough task, as it posed arranging animals and the right type of learning situation for five sub groups. My task was made easy with the support of the facilitators, who discussed these aspects in detail before the session

and arranged for animals in a nearby village. During the session, I experienced a different learning when I saw the participants work in the sub groups discovering new aspects eagerly, which was not a regular feature I see when conducting animal health camps and training sessions, particularly with large number of participants. Sub groups even brought out interesting new points for discussion, which added value to my own knowledge.

- Dr. Sutha, Subject Matter Specialist – Animal Sciences, Dr. Perumal Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Krishnagiri

Facilitator's impressions

When I was called for the MToF as a facilitator, I foresaw difficulties in packaging technical contents to suit community level participants and the fewer days available for preparation than regular ToFs. But their practical experience as farmers was an advantage over formal qualifications to get the inputs in a much easier way. In the process, I have learnt how to facilitate ToF contents to a level, which I encounter most in my profession. Beyond crop management, the new learnings on natural resources management and biomass production add new dimensions to my knowledge as a facilitator. The additional role I performed, as a material manager was another opportunity for learning the skill of managing material supply to a large number of practice FFS sessions during a ToF. This has been indeed a different experience for me moving beyond IPM and addressing dryland agricultural technologies in the ToF. Despite the hectic classroom sessions followed by guiding the practice FFS. I learnt with the participants and this was the most wonderful feeling I carry with me.

- N. Selvam, MToF Facilitator

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

Coordinator's column

Wednesdays in MToF are tightly packed for all the participants. I shared the same feeling, when one of the facilitators remarked that this had all the fun, thrill, excitement and exhaust as one feels after completing a marriage. True, with participants finishing their late night assignments, starting early to complete field works, planning with facilitators and gathering material before rushing to catch their earliest transport for making it to the next day's FFS session. For facilitators, it is again time to gear up for the next cycle of practice FFS visits and planning for the next week. Learnings from twelve such weeks have progressively refined the process and now it is a regular activity with fewer difficulties. This is one example of how we could constantly reinforce MToF processes with current learnings, to make them effective. This issue shares some arrangements we have evolved to run classroom sessions, followed by practice FFS, every week. I assure an interesting reading in this issue.

G. Ravi Kumar
MToF Coordinator

The MToF period in the second fortnight of August was intensive with much of the sowing happening on arrival of adequate rains. The sowing activity was influenced by the group decisions in all cases and contingency plans were worked out in previous sessions. AESA, as a decision making tool, was helpful to the farmers in all these occasions. AESA was also a basis for making observations in the long-term experiment plots, to know the progress and the observable results so far.

Back in the sessions, the participants had the first opportunity to encounter insects in their crop, and they were enabled to observe their life cycles more closely and discover newer aspects, through establishment of insect zoo. Participants learnt by practice the types of insect zoos and method of establishing them with different kinds of insects, besides learning how to handle them under controlled conditions. This learning motivated them to repeat the same with several other insects found in the ecosystem and also share the knowledge, in the practice FFS sessions. Simultaneously, the participants also studied and discovered the ground level organisms in Groundnut ecosystems and their importance in the ecosystem, by establishing pit fall traps in the MToF plots.

Participants practiced the production skill of the Oyster and the Milky mushroom in the MToF, as an income generating and food supplement producing activity. Two types of mushrooms have been laid out in experiments for observing and evaluating the growth, yield, management problems and the economics, in the coming weeks. The period also helped the participants to consolidate their learnings.

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, [BOOK POST](#)

Short study – How do inorganic fertilizers influence the soil life?

Participants found that they affect microorganisms in soil adversely, by doing a simple exercise. They experienced that the number and type of soil fungi is reduced in heavily fertilizer-applied soils. Soils taken from a banana plantation (applied with more fertilizers), from a dryland (no fertilizer application) and that under a wood lot (with rich humus) were serially diluted and cultured in petri plates. After incubation for a period of one-week observations showed that the number, variety of fungal colonies and area covered by their growth in the soil with rich humus was more than the other two, signifying the importance of organic matter to microorganisms and the effect of the excess use of inorganic fertilizers. Participants felt elated and confident that they could take up exercises, which they thought only scientists could do.



Inorganic fertilizers influence the soil

Newsletter Committee: Mr. G. Ravi Kumar Mr. B.V.R. Moorthy Dr. J. Diraviam Ms. K.R. Chandra **Editor:** Dr. Arun Balamatti

Methodology focus

Project support activities

Being the first of its kind, much of the programme management systems for the MToF had to be evolved based on day today experiences in implementation. Monitoring and follow up planning was required to keep up with the pace of the programme.

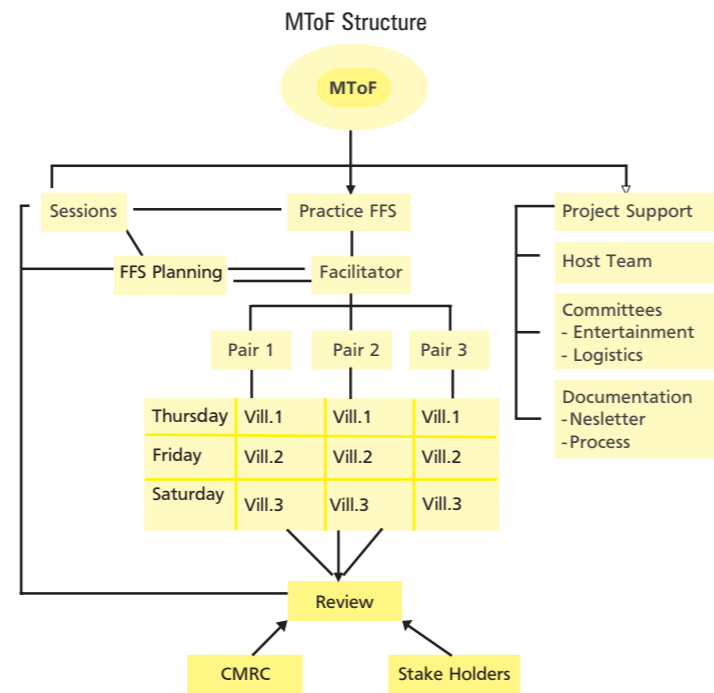
A simple structure was first evolved. One full session on the first day of the MToF weekly sessions (Monday) was used for reviewing practice FFS sessions. The practice FFS sessions conducted in the previous week, farmers' feedback, problems faced are reviewed. After the feedback session in two sub groups, the main outcomes identified were discussed in the larger group to consolidate the learnings.

The third day in the MToF (Wednesday) is essentially for planning. Participant pairs plan for their practice FFS sessions, in discussion with their allotted facilitators. Planning included the framework for the week's sessions, schedule for the practice FFS and the session guides – detailing the planned activities, their objectives, methodologies to be used and the materials required for the same. After this detailed planning, the participants make sample presentations and the whole group discusses and suggests improvements. It is on Tuesdays that the participants concentrate completely on classroom sessions.

Equipped with the materials and the session guides, participant pairs leave for their villages to conduct practice FFS sessions on Wednesday evening. Facilitators and co-facilitators join them in rotation in their respective cluster of practice FFS villages, as observers to help them fine-tune their methodology and technology aspects by giving feedback in a structured observation format.



Photo Caption



At the macro level, two levels of review and planning occur. One at the cluster level, where after the FFS sessions of the week, the facilitators discuss on progress with the Resource Center Managers. At the larger level, all 16 Resource Center Managers, the participants and facilitators discuss the outcomes and processes in a review and planning meeting. The first level is a weekly event and the second is done once in a month.

At the facilitators' level, there are everyday discussions on the progress of planned and achieved activities. After the weekly sessions and practice FFS visits, they review the whole week based on the curriculum and plan for the week ahead with the master facilitator.

This system has produced two outcomes: the constant monitoring of the progress for refining the process and the curriculum as such, so that the participants get the appropriate support for both learning and to practice the FFS methodology. Secondly, it has helped in addressing the emerging needs.

There were difficulties, too. Managing time for this intensive activity was not planned earlier, which meant that these had to be accommodated in the rest hours. Due to the tight schedules, documentation of the process suffered and many of the important outcomes had to be recalled from personal memories, after a small gestation period.

Practice FFS at Bettamugilalam

Bettamugilalam forms part of a difficult hilly terrain, off Denkanikottai in Krishnagiri district. With difficult access to the villages by road, the tribals live in 35 hamlets spread across the forest. Dependent on forest for collecting non-timber forest produces, they face difficulties in raising enough food and income to support their families. The tools used and their knowledge of agriculture is limited. With poor yields they struggled to manage two square meals for a full year.



Bettamugilalam tribal farmers trying improved seed drill

Ultimately, their only source of livelihood is their degraded land, most of which is uncultivable due to large boulders inside. The main crop being Ragi under subsistence production system, the major need of the community is to get an extra bag of grain to feed the families for a full year. When three villages were selected for the practice FFS, the aim was to train the farmers on improving the productivity of Ragi.

Eventually, the long term experiments were laid based on two of the major problems in improving productivity. Based on the needs assessed, good quality seeds of four varieties (L5, INDAF 5 & 9 and GPU 28) have been introduced in the FFS plots. Sowing methods being the next problem, Ragi sowing using improved and local seed drills have been tried. The farmers in the FFS will now be able to evaluate the varieties and the sowing methods, based on AESA observations and yield analysis.

Though results are awaited, important outcomes stand achieved with the establishment of the trials. Tribal communities, who were earlier not speaking to outsiders, now articulate their learnings. Their confidence to discuss and take decisions has improved progressively with the FFS sessions, leading to a form of social change in inaccessible terrains.

- C. Sivalingam and K. Madesh, MToF Participants

Know the people

Lady Bird Beetle Group



Raghavendra Bommigatti

The Ladybird beetle group in the MToF is women dominated, with only two male members who share the same name 'Muniraj'. All the female members are married. The group comprises people speaking all three languages. The elegant ladybirds are a source of motivation across groups, due to their supporting nature in field and classroom activities. Krishnan, one of the senior members in the AME Foundation team and the Co-facilitator of the group is specialized in Agricultural Extension, having experience in watershed projects.

He shares the responsibility of managing lodging and boarding facilities for the MToF participants.

Raghavendra Bommigatti, the facilitator of the group is an Agronomist, graduated from UAS, Dharwad. He is an agricultural officer serving the State Department of

Agriculture, Karnataka. Thirty-four year old Bommigatti was trained in the FAO Cotton ToF, Raichur (2000). Hosur MToF is his fifth in his career as a facilitator, including three state level courses. Bommigatti is a talented singer and stage performer, naturally suiting the position of cultural and sports committee convenor in the MToF. His wife is an officer in an insurance company. He has one girl child, who entered kinder garden classes this year.

Specialty: Hard working and never tiring. Participants enjoy the wildest of energizers from him, whenever they work in long sessions.



Lady Bird Beetle Group