

- **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

Four months of intensive activity has concluded, making MToF, a great learning platform. The MToF participants are now a step ahead in terms of their understanding, abilities and sensitivity in helping farmers to address issues in dryland farming. Groups of enriched and empowered human resources, accessible to local communities, has been the outcome of this programme. The valedictory function held on 30 September was a fitting finale to the whole programme, with all the participants graduating as FFS facilitators.

This pioneering initiative towards improving livelihoods in the drylands, has concluded successfully. Spearheaded by AME Foundation and with the support of institutions like FAO, MYRADA, CMRCs, KVK, TNAU and many individuals. At this point, I wish to acknowledge the support extended by each one of them. This issue being the last in the series, I take this opportunity to thank all the readers, who helped us with their valuable feedback.

G. Ravi Kumar
MToF Coordinator



Participants during a discussion in MToF field

It was a period for consolidating the learnings based on the classroom sessions, discussions, field based experiences, results of long term experiments and short studies. This formed the basis for better understanding and for sharing their learnings with others. This period, apart from a few sessions on technical and Non-formal education aspects, included field days. Participants also prepared follow up plans for the MToF. There were a lot of visitors to the programme during this period, enriching the learning experience.

Being the concluding issue, we bring you a summary of the programme highlighting its salient features and outcomes. Views and opinions on this programme expressed by various people is also presented.

MToF – An Overview

The MToF programme started with twin objectives - building capacities of community level trainers in the FFS methodology and scaling up of knowledge. The 16-week programme commenced on 7 June and concluded on 30 September. For the first time, the FFS theme was dry land livelihood improvement, moving beyond the regular IPM focus. The curriculum which was evolved through a participatory process by all the stakeholders, covered the technical, methodological, organizational and managerial aspects of FFS. Participants were drawn from the farming communities of two districts of Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri. Majority of them were **women** belonging to Self Help Groups. Participants were in the age group of 26-35 years.

A baseline study was conducted to understand the farming situation at the beginning of the programme. The programme was structured in such a way that participants learnt the basics and the theory through sessions, short studies and learning on the MToF field, leased in for this purpose. During the three-day sessions in the MToF, participants experimented on various technical aspects of groundnut cultivation, identified as priorities from the base line study. Seven LTEs and 46 short studies were conducted during the period for learning by experiences. Apart from these technical aspects, 25 topics on Non-Formal Education and six topics on income generation and sustainable agriculture support activities were dealt.

This was supplemented by pairs of participants putting their learnings into practice in selected villages, thus not only learning but also spreading the knowledge. The entire programme was supported by systems for monitoring, review and documentation, many of them being evolved for this initiative.

Participants reached out to 45 villages during their practice FFS. These were situated in Krishnagiri and Dharmapuri districts covering 16 CMRCs of MYRADA. In each of the FFS, 30 topics were covered. Participants got a feel of practicing what they had learnt. A total of 891 farmers (scaling up farmers), 90% of them being women, benefited from this programme. Majority of these farmers were in the age group of 30-40 years.

Each participant pair in turn selected three more farmers, referred to as '**Adopted farmers**' in their neighbourhood, helped them learn and get motivated to adopt SA practices on their farms.

Facilitators

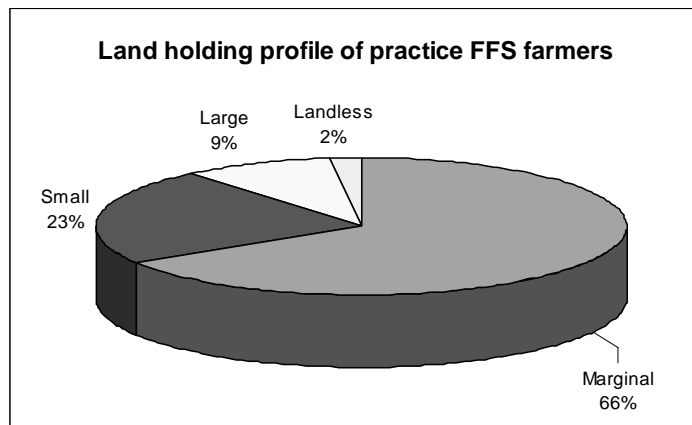
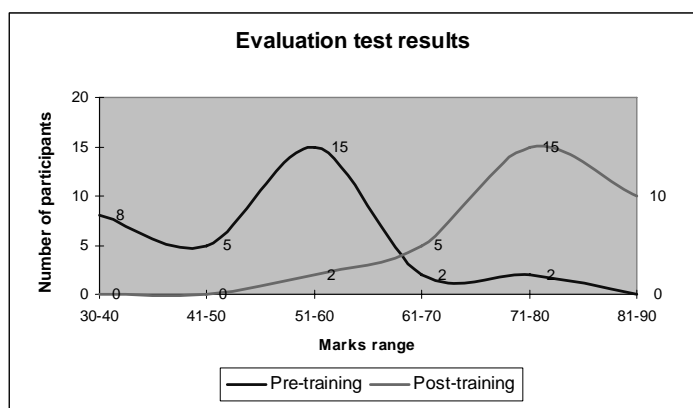
A team of five FAO trained facilitators deputed from the State Department of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, facilitated the process. A team of AME Foundation staff being experienced in promoting dryland farming, supported them. Dr. Balasubramanian, Deputy Director of the Regional Plant Quarantine Station, with his vast experience as an expert facilitator, guided the team. External facilitators from World Education, Hyderabad, KVK-Krishnagiri supported the team in Non-Formal Education and Animal husbandry aspects respectively.

Outcomes

Improvement in knowledge and skills of participants

Various methods and processes helped participants enrich their technical knowledge on sustainable agricultural practices in dryland farming systems. By the end of the programme, participants had a fairly good knowledge about various ecosystems, importance of different living organisms like pests, predators and soil microorganisms in an ecosystem, various ecofriendly practices that enhance the crop yields etc.

Participants learnt various skills related to farming like preparation of botanicals. Also skills like facilitation, organization, management, communication, problem solving etc., were also acquired by them during the course of the programme.



A ballot box exercise and a written exam were done at the pre-training and the post training stages to assess their knowledge levels. Outcomes of these exercises showed that there was marked improvement in their knowledge levels to the extent of 30%.

Scaling up of knowledge

Practice FFS sessions helped in scaling up the knowledge empowerment. There was widespread adoption of practices, influenced by FFS. This was observed both with the participants and 'adopted farmers'. Also, some practices were adopted by other farmers too. Of the 30 topics dealt, about 16 practices, mostly related to soil moisture conservation, were adopted widely (1335 farmers) in the practice FFS villages. Income supplementing activities like azolla production and kitchen gardening were adopted by women. Importance of biomass generation in improving organic matter of soil was well received by these farmers. About 100 farmers went for planting on bunds, fodder cultivation and tree planting for generating biomass. There were instances of innovation and experimentation also.

Adaptation to other crops

Participants tried applying their learnings from the MToF to other crops like tomato. They applied the skills of AESA and pest management learnt in MToF in the nearby tomato field and found it very beneficial.

O U T C O M E S

Participants' short studies - Some learnings

- ◆ Highest number of spiders are found near the pond ecosystem. One spider eating two pests a day is sufficient to manage the pest
- ◆ Microorganisms were found more in soil which had organic base compared to the soil from banana orchard with inorganic base
- ◆ Raising kitchen garden is an added source of income and nutrition to the family
- ◆ The growth of oyster variety is better than milky variety in mushroom production
- ◆ Panchagavya is the best nutrient foliar spray. There is a long term effect if the spray is done in early reproductive stage
- ◆ The water infiltration is more in deep soils and less in shallow soils
- ◆ Sandy soil with vermicompost holds more water when compared to sandy soil with FYM
- ◆ Seed hardening should precede seed treatment

Skills acquired by participants

- | | |
|---|---|
| ◆ Constructing interception bunds | ◆ Preparation of green chilly and garlic extract |
| ◆ Marking contour lines | ◆ Nursery raising skills |
| ◆ Measuring land slope | ◆ Azolla production by pit method and brick wall method |
| ◆ Preparing soil sample for analysis | ◆ Developing kitchen garden |
| ◆ Preparing vermicompost using pit, heap and ring methods | ◆ Skills of judging a healthy animal |
| ◆ Recognising different stages of pest and their habitat | ◆ Presentation skills |
| ◆ Preparation of NSKE 5% | ◆ Communication skills |
| ◆ Mushroom production | ◆ Facilitation skills |

Long term experiment on sustainable agricultural practices in groundnut

Long term experiment on sustainable agricultural practices in groundnut crop was carried out. The objective was to compare the yield and cost of production by adopting improved management practices, along with that of the conventional farmers practice, using AESA for decision making. It was observed that the plant height, number of leaves, branches, flowers, pegs and pods were more in trial plot (TP) compared to farmers conventional practice (CP) plot. Soil moisture was found to be available at a depth of 8.3 cm in the trial plot while it was at 18 cm in CP. This was possible due to integrating various approaches, for instance, dead furrows in between redgram rows, mulching and EFYM application. Though the cost of cultivation was slightly higher in the trial plot, it was compensated with higher yield.

What farmers concluded based on LTEs

- ◆ Seed hardening increases the germination percentage, which in turn assures more number of plants per sq.m
- ◆ Seed hardening with Calcium Chloride induces more root length and ensures more plant population compared to other methods
- ◆ Using dried leaves as mulch material conserved more moisture
- ◆ Using paper as mulch absorbed more moisture from the soil. Also, being labour and time intensive, not advisable for dry land farmers
- ◆ Plants can compensate for defoliation upto 50%
- ◆ Potassium Chloride was found to be one of the best anti-transpirants, which could be used during drought conditions
- ◆ Application of lime and P_2O_5 in the form of SSP in acid soils has increased the availability of P_2O_5 at a faster rate resulting in higher growth

Practices adopted by farmers

Sl. no.	Practices	FFS farmers	Adopted farmers	Other farmers	Total
1	Ploughing across the slope	330	226	51	607
2	Bunding	92	16	2	110
3	Compartmental bunds	109	50	28	187
4	Trench cum bund	99	15	1	115
5	Seed treatment with biologicals	560	172	96	828
6	Vermicompost production	154	27	29	210
7	Systematic cultivation of intercrops	442	400	270	1112
8	Use of good quality seeds	226	141	57	424
9	Fodder production	69	1	0	70
10	Azolla production	265	63	34	362
11	Tree planting on bunds	55	0	0	55
12	Kitchen gardening	498	233	52	783

PHOTO



Sowing on MToF field



Planting on the bunds



Spider abundance study near a water body



Establishment of pit fall trap



Preparing AESA chart



In practice FFS

Field action

Short studies

Group work

GALLERY



Dr. C. Ramasamy, Vice Chancellor, TNAU interacting with participants



Dr. Daniel Gustafson discussing with the participants



Learning through group dynamics exercise



Cultural programme



MToF team with Dr. Daniel Gustafson and Dr. Arun Balamatti



Graduating practice FFS group, proudly displaying their certificates

Visitors

Fun in FFS

FFS Team

Enabling farmers interactions through Field days

Field days were organised in practice FFS villages to share their learnings with other farmers in the village. About 41 Field days were organised reaching 3448 farmers during the last week of September. An exhibition was arranged in which the materials prepared by FFS group members were displayed. Participants included FFS participants, adopted farmers, farmers from neighbouring villages, village leaders, NGOs and representatives from the State Departments.

These events helped in sharing the FFS processes and outcomes with various stakeholders. They also provided an opportunity for the participants to exhibit their technical, organisational and managerial skills.

Learning from each other

Many interested individuals and organizations visited the programme. Staff from AME Foundation from its Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh Area Units along with their partner NGOs visited the programme at various stages. The interactions helped in enriching the programme.

Farmers from practice FFS visited MTOF during the last week of September for comparative learning purpose.

Students from TNAU participated in the field and class room activities to understand the process of FFS. As a part of their learning they also visited practice FFS sessions and had discussions with FFS farmer groups. Participants having gained rich experience shared their learnings.



Field day gathering

Visitors

Dr. R. Dwarakinath, Chairman and Dr. Arun Balamatti, Executive Director of AME Foundation participated in a joint discussion with MYRADA on 11 July 2006, enriching the MTOF plan and activities.

Dr. Palanisamy Pachagounder, former Country Officer (EU – FAO Cotton IPM Programme) and an expert in FFS methodology, visited the MTOF on 4 September 2006. He visited the MTOF learning plot and the exhibition organised by the participants.

Dr. Daniel Gustafson, FAO representative in India and Bhutan, visited on 21 September 2006. He appreciated many of its unique features, such as broad based curriculum, participation of women SHGs in FFS and the initiative to focus the MTOF on dry land groundnut.



N. Palani Murugesan

Meet the Honeybee group

The group's name signifies apiculture as a livelihood support enterprise, widely practiced in the hilly tracts of Krishnagiri district. It also signifies hard work in a team, aptly demonstrated by the group members. Majority of them, mostly women, came from far off places and yet demonstrate commitment to the programme. Mathumalar, the youngest in the AME Foundation team, co-facilitated the group. With the support of her colleagues, she managed the finances in the MTOF.

Mr. N. Palani Murugesan facilitated the group and this is his first MTOF, after graduating as FFS facilitator in Raichur (2000). Residing now at Madurai, he has been serving in the Department of Agriculture for the past twenty years. The MTOF team congratulates him on being promoted as Seed Certification Officer, during this period.



Honey bee group

MToF - A new experience

AME Foundation is supremely happy about the successful completion of the MToF. It gave us lot of insights into training the participants drawn from CBOs on FFS methodology in Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri districts of Tamil Nadu.

It is seen that about 40 per cent of the borrowings by the members of SHGs are normally invested in agriculture. This money is mostly spent by the farmers on procuring seeds, fertilizers and plant protection chemicals. For majority of the small and marginal farmers it is not a simple off-the-shelf purchase of agricultural inputs. Their credit requirement, in general, is more than the money at their disposal, which forces them to depend on traders providing inputs on credit basis. This arrangement imposes two serious disadvantages on the farmers, apart from the exorbitant rate of interest. One, the choice of inputs is made by the traders. Two, the produce has to be sold to the same trader at throw-away prices, on many occasions.

It is this issue that AMEF had planned to address. Training SHG members on LEISA practices was expected to help them in making informed decisions and thus reduce their external dependence, gradually. About 40,000 members, mostly women, organized into about 2500 SHGs and 18 CMRCs, was a unique platform for us to contact, and a challenge of this magnitude required an innovative programme.

The roadmap to accomplish this goal included working with chosen CMRCs. Working with four selected CMRCs in the year 2005 was aimed at getting a closer understanding of working of the CMRCs so that the plans of LEISA promotion efforts could help us reach the last member of the SHGs. This has also helped us to familiarize ourselves with the diverse agricultural scenario in the two districts. At this juncture, when the concept of MToF was mooted by the FAO, it was appealing to us for two reasons. One, it aimed at training volunteers of CMRCs who could develop as 'service providers' to cater to the agricultural development needs of SHGs, and two, the MToF design provided a mechanism to reach large number of farmers, in quick time.

The four months of intensive training programme has brought out many useful lessons. As many as 32 volunteers (Community Resource Persons, CRPs) are trained on groundnut FFS with focus on critical issues in dryland agriculture, like on-farm rainwater management, soil fertility improvement, dealing with crops and cropping systems, the need for increased generation of biomass and to supplement their income with allied income generation activities. The team of facilitators has been successful in converting AMEF's substantial experience in dryland agriculture into interesting learning exercises. While long dry spells are not uncommon in dry farming, the facilitators have succeeded in keeping the participants' interest in the programme intact by reorganizing the curriculum with focus on allied income generation activities.

The event is historical in many ways. For the first time, members of CBOs are trained in a ToF, the focus of FFS was extended to dry farming to widen the scope of FFS beyond IPM, the participants learnt the skills of facilitation and tried, hands-on, to apply the facilitation skills by running practice FFS, in pairs, every week. For the first time, about 900 women have been reached in one ToF by way of involving SHGs in practice FFS. However, the third level of capacity building, which aimed at practice FFS farmers further influencing a few more farmers by way of adoption, though was not so successful. Thus, the MToF, designed to provide the trainees an opportunity to learn the skills of facilitation, apply the freshly acquired skills by conducting practice FFS, and to get the feedback from farmers for refining the curriculum on a continuous basis, was indeed innovative and contributed to effective learning.

There were a few limitations in the MToF, too. The design required a lot of time for planning for practice FFS sessions and taking feedback from the participants every week. In the process, finding adequate time for classroom sessions was difficult. Weekly travel to more than 40 villages for conducting practice FFS, some of them in remote corners of the two districts, coupled with the long days of classroom sessions in excess of 10 hours a day, almost induced fatigue among the participants.

By all means, it is a long leap in the direction of developing service providers within the CMRCs. The 32 CRPs are ready to take on the arduous task with necessary skills and enthusiasm. But then, the journey towards helping farmers make informed decisions and impacting investment in agriculture by the farmers has just begun. MYRADA has its task cut out to nurture the CRPs and guide the SHGs and CMRCs in moving towards SA.

For AMEF it has been a good opportunity to take up such a special capacity building initiative. AMEF acknowledges the support extended to us by the FAO and the contributions of all who made it a success.

-Arun Balamatti

Valedictory Function

The MToF was concluded formally on 30 September 2006, marking the valediction and graduation of the participants. Dr. C. Ramasamy, Vice Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University was the Chief Guest. Dr. S. Jayaraj, Dr. M. Mahadevappa and Dr. K. Shivashankar, Trustees of AME Foundation were the special guests for the event. Dr. Ramasamy distributed the certificates to the participants and released the draft MToF report. Participants and practice FFS farmers shared their experiences during the event, detailing on their learnings and future plans. The dignitaries observed that the type of knowledge empowerment gained through the FFS methodology was impressive and needs to be scaled up. The event was covered in the media.



Release of draft MToF report

Feedback

- ◆ Your concern with dryland farming is most commendable

Dr. Norman Uphoff, Director, CIIFAD, Cornell University

- ◆ Thank you very much for sending us Farmer Field School newsletter to us. I shall be grateful if you could kindly conduct this kind of Farm Field School (Dryland) in our Village Knowledge Center villages

Mr. S Senthilkumaran, M S Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai

- ◆ Congratulations from APFAMGS Project for initiating the MToF in an FFS mode. The theme of improvement in livelihood of resource poor farmers is a subject that needs critical attention by all. Your first issue makes very interesting reading and looking forward to learning from the various experiments in MToF. The layout of the news letter is excellent

Dr. K.A.S. Mani, Project Leader, APFAMGS Project

- ◆ It is a good effort to enhance sustainability of farming in dryland agriculture situations. I would be interested to know few more short studies and experiences during the MToF. Quality is improving at every issue and congratulations to the newsletter committee members for publishing regularly

Mr. S.S. Kandagal, Subject Expert - Agriculture, APFAMGS Project

- ◆ Informative and interesting, keep me on the mailing list

Ir. Paul ter weel, Former First Secretary to the RNE

- ◆ Thanks for the MTOF newsletter. I am sure it will be very interesting

Dr. Palaniswamy Pachagounder, Country Programme Officer(Retd.) FAO-EU Cotton FFS in Asia

- ◆ This is the first time we understood that we can do other things in the SHG other than savings

MToF participants

- ◆ I am privileged for getting this opportunity to participate in this training. I have learnt the skills of facilitation and training others. I believe that there would be significant development in my life.

Mr. C. Sivalingam, MToF participant, Bettamugilalam (Bettamugilalam CMRC)

- ◆ With this training, I have learnt to differentiate between harmful and beneficial insects. I feel confident of taking decisions to any problem in my farm. I wish that every farmer benefits from such programmes.

Smt. R. Jegadeeshwari, MToF participant, K.N. Halli (Odasalpatti CMRC)

- ◆ I have learnt the skill of facilitation, working out the precise quantity of organic manures, botanical pesticides to be applied to the crop and the art of decision making without consulting others. Although I did not have the opportunity to go to college for study, this MtoF programme in one way has fulfilled my ambition.

Smt. M. Jamuna, MToF participant, Puhureddiyur (Kadathur CMRC)

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

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