

1. INOFO - A NEW DAWN HAS COME

Julie Nakalanda Matovu, Freshveggies PGS Uganda, IFAD-INOFO trainee, new INOFO Council member

2014 has been a very fruitful year for organic farmers' organizations (OFOs) across the globe. A series of events, online sessions and trainings in Bangalore (India) and Şile (Turkey) finally saw a team of 40 participants from Africa, Asia and Latin America meet to discuss Organic farmers' business and INOFO's future. The year was crowned by the Organic World Congress, preceded by the INOFO General Assembly, in Istanbul, in which over 60 delegates participated to elect a new council responsible for governance and coordination of INOFO activities. The three-year training project aims at strengthening smallholder farmers to collectively empower them and their leaders to represent their interests towards national and international institutions, to facilitate knowledge sharing and market access.

For the English-speakers program, 24 participants from 10 African and 6 Asian countries, including 5 Indian states, met during two separate workshops in Bangalore, India (July 2014) and Şile, Turkey (October 2014). From 28 July to 1 August 2014, the first ice-breaking meeting brought together the English-speaking participants from Africa and Asia under one roof to discuss the INOFO agenda. The participants were introduced to the background of INOFO and to Organic Agriculture statistics, indicating the major landmarks from 1972 to date. The role and position of farmers in the development of Organic Agriculture was emphasized. It was clearly reflected that the farmer's voice has not been sufficiently represented at national and international levels, and this state of affairs may continue if not given due attention. Non-farmers are dominating discussions and gatherings around Organic Agriculture, leaving out the majority of the farmers, especially smallholder and family farmers, who make up over 70% of the world farming population, most of them in the developing world. Bringing farmer representatives from different regions was to establish a strong network of Organic Farmers Organizations (OFOs).

The INOFO training session in Şile, Turkey was conducted from 5 to 10 October 2014. During the five-day workshop, participants shared their mapping achievements and experience and conducted a SWOT analysis of INOFO. Advocacy strategies as well as the relationship between IFOAM and INOFO were also discussed. The project participants met for the first time with the INOFO Secretary Anton Pinschof who shed light on the current status and operations of INOFO.

The capacity building workshops employed participatory and interactive methodology with several group sessions. Participants were asked to engage with given themes and to think critically about the future development of Organic Agriculture. Among others, the themes included the mapping of Organic Farmers' Organisations in order to determine the INOFO constituency. The leadership role of NOAMs (National Organic Agriculture Movements) and other networking agencies was discussed. Another topic was the impact Capacity Building Program participants could have through the implementation of their individual Development Plans (DPs), which will be submitted by every participant. Finally, participants gathered ideas around ideal sustainable Organic farming systems that are appropriate in their respective regions.

The program included very enriching excursions to inspiring resource centres such as the organic seed saving farm of *Annadana Soil & Seed Savers Network* where participants were presented a practical set up of ideal sustainable organic farming systems that could exist in each specific region of the world. Seeds, as a basis of life, were strongly emphasized during the reflection sessions. This is currently one of the key challenges that the Organic sector is facing - the GMO industry tries to control food and farming, most importantly seeds. The participants also visited a market outlet of *Sahaja Organics* in the city of Bangalore, exhibiting trade as another critical part of a sustainable Organic farming system. At both locations, the role of farmers within their OFOs was well reflected. These two sites presented good levels of participation and ownership by the farmers, which are key aspects that will ensure that the farmers' voice is enhanced through ownership of their farming systems at the grass-roots, which will subsequently be developed up to national and international levels.

Part of the project design includes regular webinar sessions for all program participants. To-date, three webinars of 3 hours each, were conducted in August, September and November 2014. The webinars allow interaction among all participants in an open discussion forum and workspace in separate chat rooms for working teams. Key program themes are introduced, studied and discussed and their relation to real life situations is drawn. Participants learn how their OFOs and the interaction between OFOs can be strengthened in the different localities on the globe.

While in Turkey, the INOFO team also participated in the pre-conferences and main track events of the Organic World Congress in Istanbul. They were recognized during the preliminary opening session and later participated in other side events. The English speaking team, together with the Latin American team and other OFO representatives attended the INOFO General Assembly at which, between them, the 60 delegates represented 2.5 million Organic

farmer families. As at previous INOFO GAs, the assembly required delegates to have a written mandate from their OFOs, ensuring participation and ownership from the existing INOFO constituency.

A number of outstanding achievements can be related under the IFAD-INOFO Capacity Building Program within this short period. These include establishing the network across continents with a common voice under INOFO; participation in the INOFO General Assembly and renewal of the INOFO council by participants. Furthermore, we have shared experiences, acquired more skills, made friends and alliances and have gained publicity for INOFO as a network. We discussed key issues affecting the OFOs and other parts of the Organic sector and identified major advocacy issues to focus on as we work to build the capacity of OFOs at national and international levels. These issues include governance of INOFO and working method, policy & advocacy, promotion of seed sovereignty, anti-GMO campaign, promotion of PGS and local markets, policies for farmer rights and farmer cooperatives, land rights and food sovereignty.

As INOFO enjoys the positive energy of its new initiatives, some challenges lie ahead; particularly ensuring financial and operational sustainability. The INOFO team is now working to complete the mapping exercise and to implement individual Development Plans. We look forward to rolling out INOFO activities and to building the capacity of OFOs to effectively demand favourable policies. We thank IFAD and IFOAM and all partners who initiated and facilitated the INOFO agenda. We look forward to a future of Organic Agriculture through farmer empowerment and strategic alliances. *22 November 2014*

2. PARTICIPANTS FROM ASIA & AFRICA – first face-to-face training session in India

Claude Alvares, director, Organic Farming Association India, OFAI is IFAD-INOFO regional project partner.

INOFO's Capacity Building Program took off with the first face-to-face training in Bengaluru, India, during the last week of July 2014. The five-day training was held at a small NGO-maintained facility called Visthar. The setting was rural, with trees and organic cultivation, small-decentralized buildings and meeting halls open to the natural environment.

A total of 24 participants, including 12 persons from Africa and 12 from Asia attended the training. As one out of 3 local project partners, OFAI did not only act as the local organizer and host of this training, but also enrolled people from India associated with and working for organization in the program.

Day one began with a session by IFOAM Program Manager Konrad Hauptfleisch on remembering the pioneers of Organic Agriculture. The following exercise to recall each one's personal role model within the Organic farming community was an exciting episode for everyone.

The second session was focused on shaping a common understanding of Organic agriculture, from its principles to applications. Understanding the limits in drawing definitions and their complexity was a challenge for the budding leaders. (Example: If faced with the example of a farmer in Europe who has a huge acreage and therefore must use mechanized equipment, with corresponding mono-crop yet grown with zero chemicals, would this team of budding leaders accept him/her as an organic farmer within their understanding and experience?)

The third session around advocacy and lobbying was educational for the participants as it helped clear the differences between the two terms. While implementing an advocacy strategy, participants understood that five important points are to be considered: 1) Be very clear on why there is a need for improvement. 2) What is the content and what is the message? 3) What is the strategy proposed? d) Who is the advocate? and e) Whom are we advocating the strategy for? Thereafter, mock group discussions were initiated to enable one group to prove the benefits of Organic agriculture, to opposing parties, for example to policy makers who criticize Organic production on various grounds. The chosen subjects included "Organic foods are not healthier than non-organic foods", "Organic agriculture is not better for the environment than chemicals", "Organic farming cannot feed the world" and "Consumers are paying too much for organic food."

Day two started with a session, conducted by myself, on understanding indigenous knowledge systems. Afterwards we conducted a very revealing exercise: in small groups, we analysed how much of our present life is indigenous, including food, clothing, shelter and Organic agricultural practices and how much of it was westernised. The result was fascinating: the indigenous component for all participants ranged from a low of 10% to 80%. By this time, those who had spoken little during the first day of the workshop had begun to speak up with confidence and raise their points. The workshop was humming by now; there was good group work and a sense of purpose emerging.

Day three began with an introduction to Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) by Samraj Gowder from *Keystone Foundation*, who is a CBP participant and became the teacher for this session because of his great experience in conducting PGS trainings on behalf of the PGS Organic Council India.

Samraj's session was followed by a revolving table discussion with a new range of topics. This time, one person had to educate and convince visiting "policy makers" on various topics: "Main-streaming PGS in the Philippines", "Organic, but not for export", "Organic is safer than conventional", etc. The *Hansalim* model from Korea was discussed to stress the alternative models of marketing and to ensure a direct link between rural and urban areas.

On day four every participant was expected to come up with their Organic model farm within the framework of sustainability. Each group had their own priorities on different aspects. The second part of the day was dedicated to achieve clarity on the Development Plans of each participant and where he or she could identify or find a role to play in the Organic movement.

Day five was used to discuss all issues around the Mapping component of the Capacity Building Program. As a group, the project participants came up with a mapping template to collect efficient and meaningful standardized information regarding Organic Farmers Organizations worldwide.

One measure of success of the workshop included the ability of participants to become familiar with the full forms of IFOAM, INOFO, OFAI, NOGAMU and ANPE and to get a better understanding of the project potential. Additionally, they were able to meet in person for the first time, were able to get to know each other and each other's personal names with all their local nuances and spellings.

By the end of the workshop, courage was supreme, ready to take on the most daunting tasks. There was a 20-meter deep dry well on the campus. Even those with extremely deep personal fears and anxieties overcame them to descend into the abyss using a circular staircase that looked intimidating from above, but was found easy to negotiate once one commenced the descent. The exercise was symbolic in a way for the INOFO workshop. So intimidating to commence such a long journey uniting the Organic farmers and their' organizations of all the continents of the world. But as the people who were ready to undertake that journey met each other and shook hands and ate together and laughed and gestured, it didn't look that difficult after all. *20 November 2014*

3. PARTICIPANTS FROM LATIN AMERICA - first face-to-face training session in Sile, Turkey

Patricia Flores, IFOAM Latin America office coordinator.

The IFAD-INOFO Capacity Building Program was launched through an open call for representatives of Organic farmers' organizations in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In Latin America, more than 80 candidates submitted their application, and 14 delegates were selected to participate in the two-year program.

The 14 delegates from Puerto Rico, Mexico, Nicaragua, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and Chile attended the first face-to-face training in *Doğa Tatil Köyü*, Şile in Turkey from 6 – 10 October. They also attended the Organic World Congress pre-conference on PGS on 11 October, the INOFO General Assembly on 12 October as well as the Organic World Congress and the IFOAM General Assembly from 13 – 17 October.

The first week was exclusively dedicated to the capacity development training addressing the leaders of organic farmers' organizations. They learned about the development and history of the organic movement, the organic pioneers and about the evolution the movement has gone through since the pioneers, through the current practitioners and the future innovators. Additionally, topics such as advocacy, the participants' development plans, mapping of organic farmers' organizations at regional level and the participants' commitment to the training process was discussed. It was also a time to recognize existing alliances, point out the need to build new ones, and decide how to better integrate farmers' voices in relevant platforms and discussions. The interaction with farmer delegates from Africa and Asia was very valuable.

The amazing city of Istanbul, with its 14 million inhabitants, its wonders and contrasts, was the venue for the project participants to share experiences and to strengthen their voices and network. The Bosphorus as the meeting place of Europe and Asia, this magic place of three important empires – Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman - was the wonderful venue where delegates and lead farmers of many cultures met. Here they shared their commitment to foster the necessary change to move towards more sound policies in Organic Agriculture as well as in social inclusion and development. They now have to perform their project tasks and will meet again in Latin America in March 2015 to share interim results and achievements and to take INOFO several steps further. *23 November 2014*

4. MAPPING EXERCISE – census of organic farmers organisations

Shamika Mone, OFAI Research Director India, INOFO Council member and IFAD-INOFO CBP Participant.

Over 15 years ago, French organic farmers supported the idea of INOFO and kept it alive ever since. It was felt that a specific body belonging to organic farmers' organizations (OFOs) should be created, which is why this Self-organized Structure was initiated within IFOAM. The Capacity Building Program for INOFO is bringing together local experts, representing organic farmers' organizations, to upgrade their outlook and to face future global challenges in the field of organic farming, with an exclusive focus on organic farmers themselves.

The mapping exercise was the first important constructive activity to be introduced through this training program. Indian participants were not unfamiliar with this exercise and interested in improving their mapping of organic farmers' organizations. The first pioneering effort to systematically document organic farmers in India was initiated by Claude Alvares through the Organic Farming Association of India (OFAI). It has benefited the organic movement by helping build the organic farming community. OFAI is the only national association of Organic farmers. It was through its different workshops, trainings and organic farmers' conventions that many farmers registered over the years. The growth of the database made the maintenance of the association's records tremendously labour-intensive for office staff.

Hence, the need was felt by the newer OFAI generation to update the database. The IFAD-INOFO project provides an opportunity for OFAI to update its organic farmers' database and to find a system of self-update. One major problem for example is, that farmers who registered with OFAI many years ago could only provide a postal address but no phone number. Additionally, language and script were challenges.

Even though it is a herculean task to carry out this update, as our mentor and Project Manager Konrad Hauptfleisch said, there has to be a start. And a start needs constant update. The mapping task will remain a continuous assignment. I agree that it is a challenging task and that on this endless road the best efforts will achieve results that look rather small and unsatisfactory as it is merely the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Eventually though, this work will result in regional maps revealing details about organic farmers' organizations in every country. *20 November 2014*

5. SEED SAVERS NETWORK

Krishna Prasad, OFAI (India).

SEED, the mainstay of agriculture, plays a key role in ensuring sustainable livelihoods of small and marginal farming communities that have been embracing biodiversity for generations. Provided with a wealth of diverse plant genetics, combined with indigenous knowledge of crop diversity, farmers were able to create sustainable and climate-resilient agricultural ecology based on their needs, conserving and breeding crops for taste, nutrition, adaptability and productivity, availability within their regional boundaries, and in harmony with nature. As the population increases, food and livelihoods crises have become prevalent. The revolutionary intervention in agriculture by big business, paying and hiding behind the academic and research fraternities, focused on promoting mono-cultures of selected high-yielding crop varieties, was supposed to be an alternative and a cure for this global challenge. Over the years, this trend has wiped off millions of indigenous crop varieties and shifted the farmers from leading a self-reliant lifestyle to a state of dependency on external players, which eroded the farmers' innate capability to breed plants and to collect and save seeds and have driven so many to suicide. The loss of agricultural biodiversity and of indigenous knowledge have made them vulnerable to market fluctuations and climate change in the present agricultural scenario.

As organic farming is gaining momentum, availability of high-quality organic seeds is becoming more challenging. Mushrooming transnational companies that have firm control over global seed supply are inevitably a threat to our indigenous crop varieties revered for their cultural heritage, nutritional values and suitability. When this issue was addressed during the INOFO Capacity Building Program held in Turkey, the participants showed their willingness to collectively raise voice for seed sovereignty and sustainable agriculture. In order to share and exchange pertinent information, 18 participants from 14 countries have consented to form the *Global Seed Savers Network* for the purpose of global awareness on seeds. It serves as a platform for seed enthusiasts from diverse backgrounds across the world. It draws farmers, plant breeders, youth and students, agribusiness representatives, policy-makers and researchers at all levels of government and non-governmental organizations to explore current issues related to seeds, towards achieving sustainable agriculture and seed sovereignty.

If you are interested to be part of the global seed group, please send your request to prasadgk12@gmail.com or globalseedsaversnetwork@googlegroups.com. *20 November 2014*

6. SEED NETWORK - farm visit of indigenous paddy varieties under SRI and organic inputs

Soumik Banerjee, OFAI Field Coordinator, IFAD-INOFO training participant.

An exposure visit of 17 farmers from 2 states of India (Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh) was organized at SAMBHAV (Nayagarh, Odisha India) from 13 - 14 November 2014 to showcase more than 400 indigenous paddy varieties being grown under the System of Root Intensification (SRI) and organic inputs.

The primary idea was to demonstrate the potential of indigenous paddy varieties under SRI and organic inputs in comparison to “modern” paddy varieties that are being promoted by mainstream agencies. Farmers of neighboring states will initiate farmer field trials in their respective locations across four East Indian states in the coming cropping season in 2015. The session included group discussions, farm visits and group activities on indigenous rice characteristics and their special features. I was an organizer and resource person for the event. *24 November 2014*

7. SEED NETWORK - organic seed production workshop

Soumik Banerjee, OFAI Field Coordinator, IFAD-INOFO training participant.

A three-day workshop on organic seed production was held from 20 - 22 November 2014 at the Agriculture Training Centre Fulia, (Nadia, West Bengal, India). 45 participants from 17 organisations across seven states of India participated to learn from practitioners across the country. Krishna Prasad and myself, both participating in the IFAD-INOFO CBP, participated as resource persons for this workshop.

The *Save our Rice Campaign*, the Agriculture Training Centre Fulia and Paschim Sridharkati Janakalyan Sangha jointly organized the workshop that involved interactive group work along with field visits. The participants displayed their traditional seeds from different regions, prepared organically grown food and were presented a screening of short documentaries.

Being one of the first programs of its kind, the primary focus was the revival of genetic diversity with a systematic approach to conserve and promote biological diversity through the maintenance of seed diversity blocks. The workshop addressed representatives of facilitating organisations at the grassroots and community level.

The topics covered on-farm conservation and multiplication of traditional seed varieties, the establishment of seed banks, diversity blocks and maintenance of the genetic purity of seeds. Furthermore, improved agronomic practices for enhancing production, the promotion of rice based cropping systems as well as aspects of indigenous vegetable seed production and the setup of small scale seed businesses was discussed. *24 November 2014*

8. IFAD-INOFO CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM - what participants have to say about it

INOFO enabled me to have a better understanding of how a network functions. Comprised of organisations from various regions worldwide, their representatives strengthened each other during the capacity building program and INOFO GA and during the Organic World Congress (OWC). Indeed, better than reading papers or watching videos, the direct dialogue helps to better understand trends in various parts of the earth. When talking to stakeholders in their home country, I am convinced that each participant will include a global perspective in his or her specific context. I also appreciate the fact that INOFO's agenda is built by the network itself, and not from the top down. **Famara Diédhiou**, Senegal

After the initial excitement of travel and landing in India, and receiving Indian hospitality, I met some kindred spirits in the dynamics of organic farming. It brought home that we are not in isolation and I was now part of a learning experience to build “capacity” - this was a new word - and I had no idea what it entailed. After one week in India and one week in Turkey I was enlightened. Now I am part of a group of people sharing this learning experience and creating working platforms for others to participate. Thank you to all for enabling this. **Janet Gracie**, South Africa

Working with a farmer-led network (MASIPAG) is a privilege for me, for it allows me not only to contribute to rural development, but also to continuously gain knowledge and rich experiences from the grassroots. It deepens my understanding of the small-scale farmers' situation and how they positively act on it. My INOFO experience is giving me the same privilege: the interaction among farmers from different regions, the sharing of experiences and the exchange of brilliant ideas from like-minded individuals further broadens my perspective and strengthens even more my desire to work for the small-scale farmers. **Lucille Ortiz**, Philippines

INOFO is the perfect platform for me, who is representing the farmers in rural Africa. It is a well-organized structure in terms of strategy to get our voice heard at all levels. I am thankful to be given the opportunity to be exposed to so many ideas and in touch with so many people who are involved in the same project. Namibia as a country will start and has already started to benefit from the INOFO activities. **Nathaniel Shikongo**, Namibia

To learn about other realities and realize we all face the same challenges. To be part of a project that promotes unity, collaboration and solidarity is a priority for Boricuá, and it is an honor to be part of the same effort on an international level. The experience put many things in perspective, from the notion that farmers truly do not have a space to voice our realities, to realizing that there are possibilities and opportunities to do so. **Yanna Muriel**, Puerto Rico

For me, the experience in Turkey was characterized by meetings and perspectives: meeting people and unique institutions that give me the certainty that the organic world is evolving and full of possibilities; perspectives and messages that we bring from our home country, share and discuss in favour of millions of people who are in need of agro-ecological and organic production. We are working towards giving continuity to this process and value the efforts that were made up to this day. **Dercilio Pupin**, Brazil

The experience of participating in the INOFO training session in Turkey, allowed us to not only see the wonders of a historical country, it also allowed us to contribute by sharing the realities of different countries and cultures.

The language challenge was no obstacle to participants recognizing each other as peers: We all have the same ideals and are eager to take our noble activity - sustainable agriculture - to the level of global recognition. The main actors, we farmers, are the key to bringing change and positioning this activity at a level that allows us to sit down and properly discuss our needs, desires, as well as manage the necessary changes for this activity to remain the engine of the world. The challenge is to develop sustainable agriculture to a level that allows us to pass on to our children and grandchildren the privilege of being a farmer. **Mónica Erpel**, Chile

I see INOFO as a great initiative that will empower farmers through knowledge regarding various aspects of Organic Agriculture and concerning the latest trends, enabling us to take our rightful place in the world by using INOFO as a true farmers voice, for farmers, by the farmers. The training we have been receiving gives me a lot of self-confidence and makes me really believe in myself to bear testimony to the above. I am impressed by the high level to which PGS has developed in various parts of the world and how it has been used for the benefit of both, the producers and consumers. **Charles Mubanga**, Zambia

The INOFO Capacity Building Program has been a very insightful and invigorating experience. The training sessions and the interaction with the other participants left me wondering what is keeping this beautiful way of life from growing more rapidly. My contribution to the growth of the organic movement in the coming years will be wholehearted and in depth. **Samraj Gowder**, India

The IFAD-INOFO program has helped me break barriers in innovation and communication. It has opened a platform for exchange of ideas, practical project implementation and adoption. **Tendai Gonese**, Zimbabwe