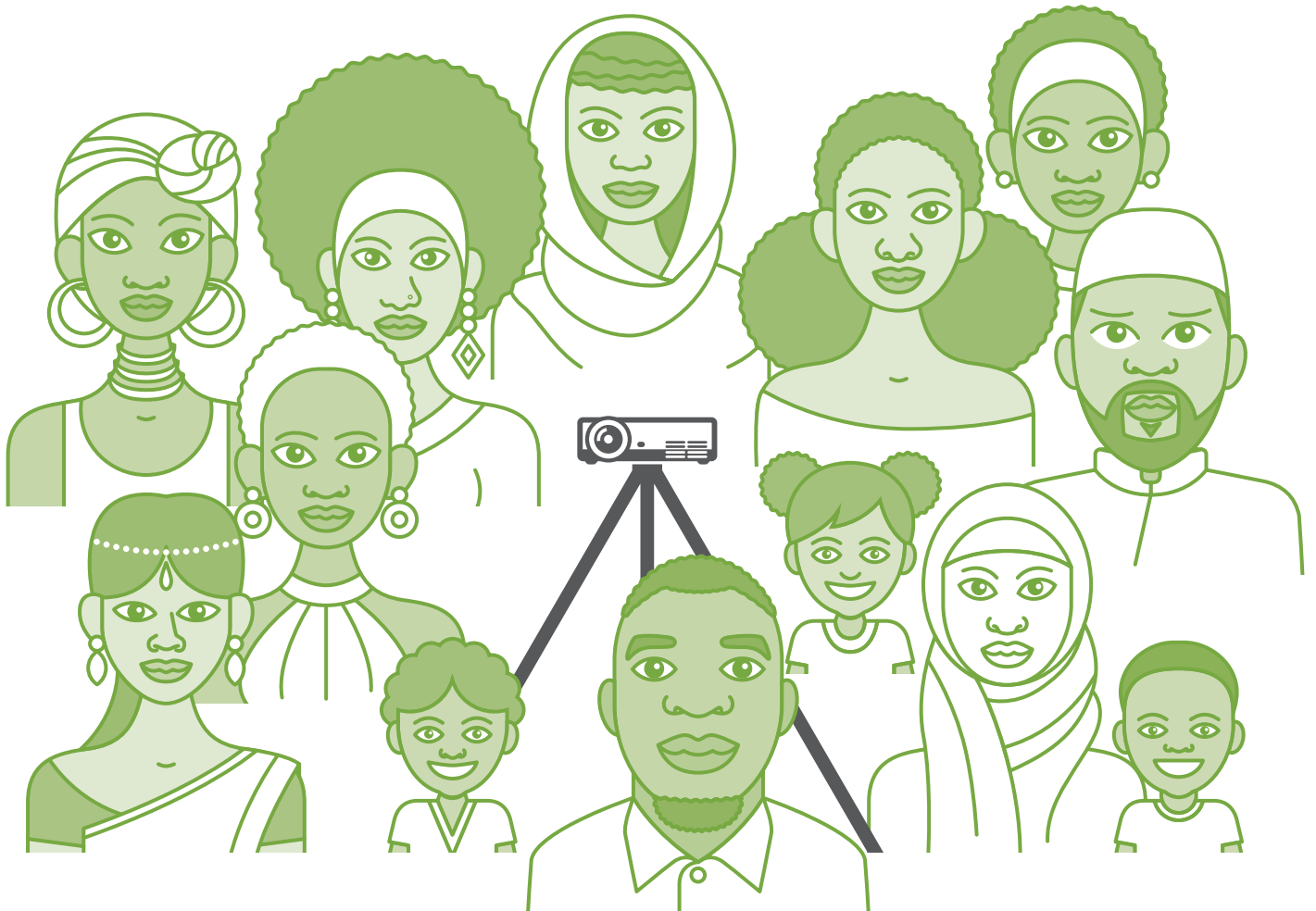


# Young changemakers



## Scaling agroecology using video in Africa and India

Paul Van Mele, Savitri Mohapatra,  
Laura Tabet and Blessings Flao



AccessAgriculture

**giz** Deutsche Gesellschaft  
für Internationale  
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

## Access Agriculture

40 Rue Washington  
1050 Brussels  
Belgium

✉ info@accessagriculture.org

🌐 www.accessagriculture.org



## About Access Agriculture

Access Agriculture is an international non-profit organisation that works across all developing countries to enable the South-South exchange of and access to quality farmer-to-farmer learning videos to promote agroecological principles and rural entrepreneurship. Access Agriculture builds capacity for the production of videos and, upon demand, translates any video hosted on its platform into any local language. It enables access to these videos for multiple stakeholders, including rural advisory services, education

systems, media houses and farmer organisations. By improving access of youth, women, smallholder and marginalised farmers to relevant knowledge, Access Agriculture aims to contribute to more resilient food systems that can counter the changing climate and the erosion of our natural resources.

For more information on Access Agriculture, visit [www.accessagriculture.org](http://www.accessagriculture.org)

# Foreword

**The issue of youth engagement in agriculture is a critical concern in both Africa and India. Traditional perceptions of agriculture as a low-status, unskilled occupation, coupled with limited access to resources and market opportunities, have contributed to a significant disinterest among young people in pursuing careers in agriculture.**

that create an enabling environment for youth participation and innovation in agriculture. By recognising and supporting the potential of rural youth in driving positive change in food systems, it is possible to build more resilient and sustainable agricultural systems in Africa and India.

also become catalysts for positive change in their communities.

The stories captured in this book reflect the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the ERAs. From those who left school at a young age to university graduates, and from individuals with no prior agricultural experience to those already running small businesses, the ERAs represent a wide spectrum of young people who have been driven by a common goal – to make a meaningful impact in their home communities. Their journeys have been marked by challenges, including the global energy crisis and the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, these challenges have also served as catalysts, igniting the desire among farmers to embrace ecological farming practices and reduce reliance on expensive inputs.

The impact of the ERAs has been profound, as evidenced by the success stories shared in this book. From training child mothers in Uganda to become beekeepers, securing user rights for youth to access local forests in Malawi, setting up community-managed tree nurseries and addressing deforestation, establishing farmer cooperatives and promoting

In Africa, the rapidly growing youth population presents both a challenge and an opportunity for the agricultural sector. With the aging farming population, there is an urgent need to engage and empower young people to participate in agriculture and agribusiness. Similarly, in India, there is a need to inspire and educate the youth about the potential of agriculture as a viable and rewarding career option. Efforts to promote agroecology and sustainable farming practices can serve as a catalyst for engaging and inspiring young people to contribute to the transformation of food systems in both regions.

Addressing the issue of youth in agriculture requires comprehensive strategies that encompass education and training, access to finance and resources, mentorship and networking opportunities, as well as policies

Access Agriculture has been at the forefront of empowering rural youth to transform food systems through its innovative last-mile delivery model. From 2019 onwards, the organisation has empowered over 120 teams of young Entrepreneurs for Rural Access (ERAs) across 17 countries in Africa and India. These ERAs have been equipped with a solar-powered smart projector containing a vast video library, enabling them to serve as private extension service providers and facilitate the dissemination of knowledge on agroecological practices to farming communities. The ERAs have emerged as dynamic changemakers, demonstrating their commitment to promoting agroecology and sustainable agricultural practices. This book serves as a testament to the resilience, creativity, and dedication of these young individuals, who have not only embraced agroecology but have

organic vegetable production to creating demand for training and fodder production, the ERAs have demonstrated their ability to drive change and create new opportunities for sustainable agriculture. Their efforts have not only led to increased agricultural productivity but have also contributed to the preservation of local food culture and biodiversity.

commitment to sharing knowledge and fostering positive change. Yet, their perseverance and dedication have earned them the respect and trust of local farmers, paving the way for meaningful engagement and collaboration.

As we celebrate the achievements of the ERAs, it is essential to recognise the critical role

of hope, inspiring others to join hands in creating a more sustainable and equitable future for agriculture and rural communities. As we embark on this journey of transformation, let us continue to support and empower the next generation of changemakers, ensuring that their voices are heard, and their efforts are recognised and celebrated.

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## The impact of the ERAs has been profound, as evidenced by the success stories shared in this book

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One of the key strengths of the ERAs has been their ability to engage with diverse target audiences, including rural women, youth, and marginalised communities. By leveraging the power of video-mediated learning, the ERAs have been able to reach out to those with limited mobility and literacy, providing them with valuable knowledge and skills to enhance their livelihoods. The impact of their work extends beyond agricultural practices, encompassing areas such as education, health, and environmental conservation. Nonetheless, the journey of the ERAs has not been without its share of challenges. They have had to overcome scepticism and mistrust in rural communities, demonstrating their

played by Access Agriculture in supporting and nurturing these young leaders. The organisation's coaching and support have been instrumental in equipping the ERAs with the skills and resources needed to succeed in their endeavours. The video library provided by Access Agriculture has not only served as a valuable knowledge resource but has also inspired the ERAs to think creatively and innovate in their approach to promoting agroecology.

In conclusion, the stories of the ERAs stand as a testament to the potential of rural youth to drive meaningful change in agriculture and food systems. Their dedication, resilience, and innovative spirit serve as a beacon

Together, we can unleash the power of rural youth to transform food systems and build a more sustainable and resilient future for all. 

Pierre Ferrand  
*Agriculture Officer (Agroecology & Ecosystem Services)*  
*Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)*

# Boosting a rural bio-input resource model



**Abhishekam Vathala**

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**Jasmin Sree Rama**

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From a computer tutor to a farmer-innovator, Abhishekam Vathala from Kalluru village in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, has come a long way. Today, he and his wife Jasmin Sree Rama are pioneering a rural bio-input resource centre (BRC) model, a one-stop shop for farming communities.

farmer, who had already established a vermicompost unit. However, like some of his peers, Abhishekam was initially more interested in a teaching career. He taught computer science on a part-time basis, while pursuing higher studies. After obtaining two Master's degrees – one in Telugu language and another in Education

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## Smallholder farmers who want to shift from chemical-intensive to natural farming lack relevant knowledge and access to quality organic and bio-inputs

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Since smallholder farmers who want to shift from chemical-intensive to natural farming lack relevant knowledge and access to quality organic and bio-inputs, the Indian government has recently launched the BRC initiative to facilitate the preparation and supply of bio-inputs, including bio-fertilisers and bio-pesticides, produced locally with available natural resources. The aim is to establish at least 10,000 BRCs across India to facilitate the adoption of natural farming by 10 million farmers.

Abhishekam became interested in natural farming thanks to his father, an enthusiastic organic

– he started working as a Telugu lecturer.

At the same time, inspired by his father, he started practicing organic farming on his land and took it up seriously after his father died from Covid. *“This motivated me further to produce healthy food for our family and community without the use of synthetic chemicals. We also found that organic farming gave us better yield and profit, so I decided to quit my teaching job and devoted myself fully to organic farming,”* says Abhishekam.

In 2019, Abhishekam joined CSA (Centre for Sustainable Agricul-

ture), a non-governmental organisation in Hyderabad, Telangana. CSA supports the establishment of rural bio-enterprises that produce seeds, bio-fertilisers, bio-pesticides, compost, manure and soil and water-testing labs and then link these to farmers. *“At CSA I learnt how to prepare bio-fertilisers and improve soil fertility. I also learnt to identify crop pests and prepare different herbal concoctions to control them,”* says Abhishekam.

In 2022, CSA supported Abhishekam and Jasmin to establish a BRC in Proddatur, YSR Kadapa district, under the name ‘A J Bio Fertilizers’ with automatic fermenters, a pulveriser, a soil testing machine and a machine to prepare ‘Jeevamrutham,’ a bio-fertiliser rich in microorganisms that is also used as a plant growth promoter. The BRC sells bio-fertilisers, botanical mixtures and beneficial microorganisms, such as Rhizobium, Azospirillum, Pseudomonas, Trichoderma, Beauveria, Verticillium and Metarhizium.

*“We have conducted research on our products to achieve the best results. All the bio-inputs that Jasmin and I prepare are used on our farm and we also sell to farmers, who benefit by using them on their farms,”* says Abhishekam. *“Our first intention is to revive damaged soils and reduce the cost of cultivation. We help farmers to completely abandon chemical fertiliser and pesticides to convert to natural farming.”*

The same year, just a few



months after having set up their BRC, Abhishekam was among 36 farmers across India, who received the ‘Outgrow Kisan Pragati Awards’ which recognises technology-led innovations in natural and regenerative farming. *“I felt very proud that our innovative farming techniques were officially recognised. We have also received much appreciation from the farmers who use our products.”*

As he and Jasmin and their colleague, Bhairav Kumar, were working with farmer producer organisations on organic/natural farming and were eager to create more awareness, they applied as a team for the call for young Entrepreneurs for Rural Access (ERAs),

which Access Agriculture had launched in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

So, they were thrilled to be among the eight ERA teams selected to receive the projector. *“The concept of sharing knowledge from different parts of the world on sustainable practices through videos motivated us and we realised the value of the smart projector as an effective tool to reach more farmers in a short period,”* explain Abhishekam and Jasmin.

They have organised video screening sessions using the smart projector during regular farmer group meetings, self-help



women group discussions, village-level events and also during promotional campaigns when they set up small bio-input stalls on the streets. They used the screening sessions to advertise and sell their bio-input products.

Managing false smut of rice



A participatory guarantee system



For instance, during the training sessions with video shows on [Managing false smut of rice](#), [Managing the rice leaf folder](#) and [Managing bacterial leaf blight in rice](#), Abhishekam motivates the rice farmers to use the products prepared by him. *“The farmers who bought from us got good results on their farm,”* says Abhishekam.

Abhishekam also screened the video [A participatory guarantee system](#) (PGS) for many farmers across several villages. PGS involves the active participation of producers and other stakeholders to ensure local produce is organic. Abhishekam has used these occasions to urge his audience to learn from the video regarding some of the conditions for obtaining a PGS certificate, such as the use of

organic fertilisers. This has boosted his sales of bio-inputs by 35%.

After watching the video [Better seed for green gram](#), some farmers adapted the idea and treated their groundnut seed with *Trichoderma viridi* and *Pseudomonas*. Besides having better harvests, they made extra profit by reducing their expenditure.

bought four goats to expand her goat rearing business.

The team also use the smart projector when they are invited to give guest lectures on sustainable farming to college students. Besides showing Access Agriculture videos, they screen their own presentations on bio-input preparations. *“We also show the videos*

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## I learnt how to prepare bio-fertilisers and improve soil fertility. I also learnt to identify crop pests and prepare different herbal concoctions to control them

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Jayamma Viparapuram from Thallamapuram village, Andhra Pradesh, used to have very low vegetable yields, but learned about natural farming from the team. After watching the video [Taking care of okra](#), she started growing okra and aubergine using the practices shown in the video. She made 20,000 Indian Rupees (220 Euros) profit, with which she

*in schools as we believe children will effectively communicate the natural farming practices to their parents,”* says Jasmin.

In one year, the CSA team has reached over 600 participants (about 400 male and 210 female), including 120 participants below 15 years. Some of the popular videos include [Insect nets in seed-](#)



[beds](#), [Drip irrigation for tomato](#), [Root and stem rot in groundnut](#), [Managing aflatoxins in groundnuts during drying and storage](#), [Managing aphids in beans and vegetables](#), [Organic biofertilizer in liquid and solid form](#) and [Teaching agroecology in schools](#).

Jasmin and Abhishekam were delighted to obtain a collateral-free loan from a government scheme to scale up their A J Bio Fertilizer BRC into a fully commercial venture. They will pay back the loan of 2.5 million Indian Rupees (over 27,500 Euros) from the profits they earn from selling their bio-fertilisers and bio-pesticides.

*“Individual farmers need a lot of time if they want to make their own plant concoctions and soil applications. If they want to buy commercial organic inputs, these are either not available or they are expensive,”* Abhishekam says. *“Farmers can reduce the cost of cultivation by buying bio-inputs from BRCs, such as ours, at a low cost.”*

Jasmin and Abhishekam’s products have reached more than 8,000 organic farmers across six districts in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. By using their products, banana farmers were able to save 13,600 Indian Rupees (150 Euros) per hectare and rice farmers saved 32,000 Indian Rupees (350 Euros) per hectare. *“We are also supplying our products in bulk quantities to two mini BRCs of CSA in Andhra Pradesh,”* Abhishekam comments. *“I also screen videos and give training to farmers and*



*NGO staff on preparing bio-inputs, for which I charge 500 Indian Rupees (5.50 Euros) per person.”*

smart projector and the testimony of farmers who trust and use their bio-inputs have added

## We have used the video shows to advertise and sell our bio-input products

Abhishekam and Jasmin plan to continue using the smart projector to train farmers on organic and natural farming practices, especially relating to seed storage, pest and disease management and kitchen gardening. They will also make use of it to promote their bio-inputs. On the business side, they are planning to brand and label their products and do online marketing to increase their sales.

to the credibility of Abhishekam and Jasmin, who have emerged as role models in their area for rural entrepreneurship. *“It makes us happy to know that the production of the bio-inputs has not only become a source of income for us, but has also helped us to support the increasing number of farmers who are interested in moving towards organic and natural farming,”* they declare.

The video shows with the

### Contact Abhishekam Vathala

- ☎ +91 949 322 1047
- ✉ [Abhikallur8@gmail.com](mailto:Abhikallur8@gmail.com)
- 🌐 [m.indiamart.com/aj-bio-fertilizers/](https://m.indiamart.com/aj-bio-fertilizers/)

