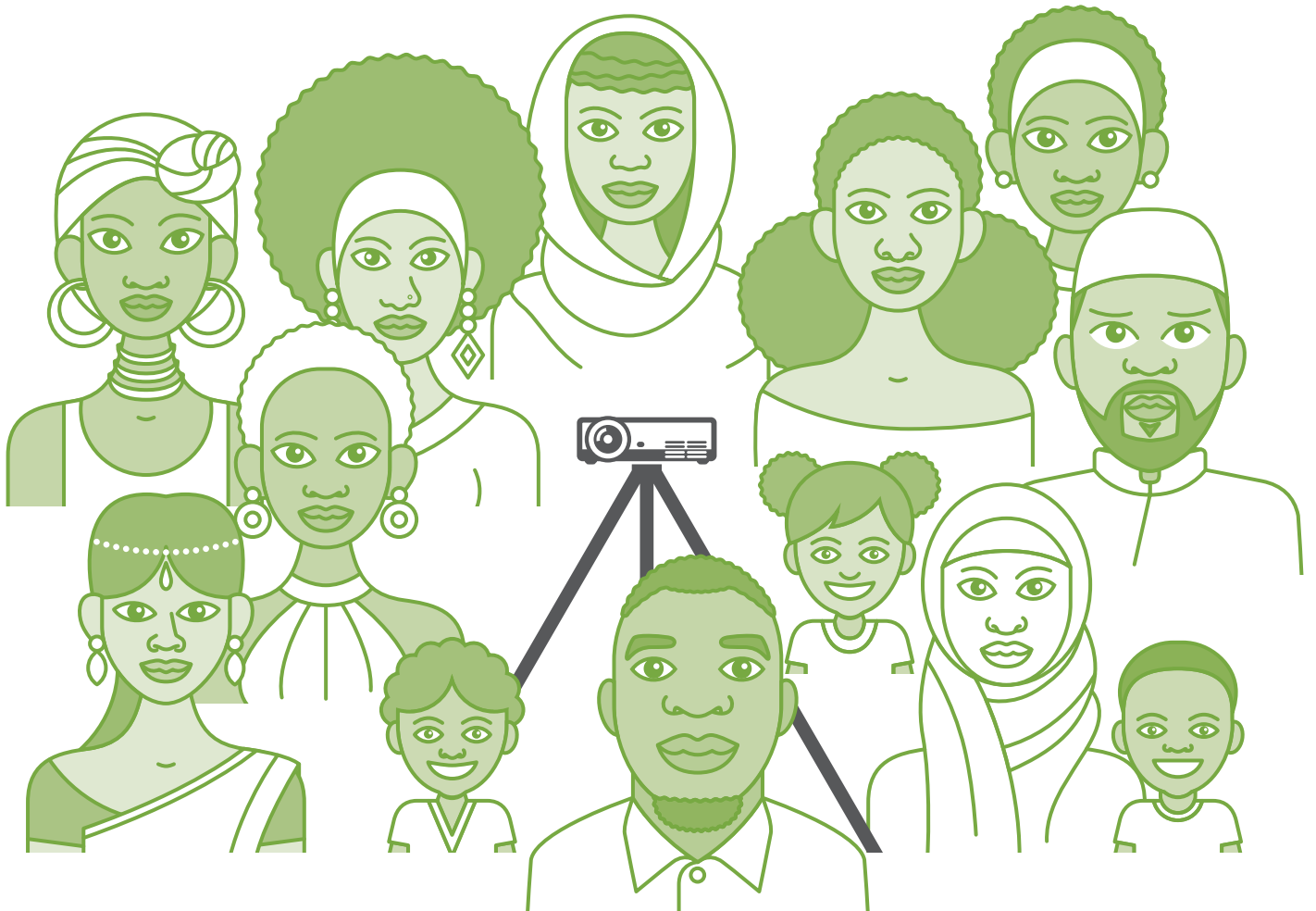


# Young changemakers



## Scaling agroecology using video in Africa and India

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## 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.

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

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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

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# Empowering rural women in mushroom entrepreneurship



**Matsyaraju Vanthala**

Matsyaraju Vanthala comes from a farming family in Paderu, a small town nestled in the lush green, picturesque Eastern Ghats mountain range in Andhra Pradesh, India. Most rural people there belong to tribal communities and have less than 1 hectare of land, growing Arabica coffee, rice, finger millets, pulses, horticultural crops and spices, such as black pepper and turmeric. Closely connected

After obtaining a Bachelor's degree in Arts, Matsyaraju taught for a while before joining the Adivasimitra Welfare Society. This local NGO provides technical advice and enables market access to more than 70 farmer producer organisations in 150 tribal villages. Unlike many rural youths in Paderu, who do not see a future in agriculture and migrate to bigger cities, Matsyaraju farms his own

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with the forests and the hills, these communities have a rich cultural heritage and a strong tradition of eco-friendly farming.

piece of land and assists the NGO in setting up model farms and building capacities of women and youth in mushroom cultivation, floriculture and nursery management.



At Adivasimitra, Matsyaraju came to know about the Andhra Pradesh Community Managed Natural Farming (APCNF) initiative. He received training in natural farming, which relies on locally available products like cow dung and urine, intercropping and mulching to improve soil fertility and crop resilience to climate change. In Andhra Pradesh, about

800,000 smallholders have taken up natural farming.

In 2022, when Access Agriculture sent out a call for young Entrepreneurs for Rural Access (ERAs) in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Matsyaraju was eager to participate. *“We want to support the tribal people in our area with relevant digital content on natural farming so that young farmers can learn about new practices,”* Matsyaraju says. He along with his team members, Salla Venkata Lakshmi and Pangi Lakshmi who brought in complementary competencies, such as community mobilisation and facilitation skills, applied for the ERA call.

Based on their commitment and experience, they were one of the eight teams who were selected for piloting Access Agriculture’s entrepreneurship model in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. In January 2023, they received a smart projector kit as well as training in basic skills to facilitate video shows in villages using the smart projector and how to collect data on viewings.

*“We were thrilled to have the smart projector as we had already designed a programme to carry out village-level video shows to create awareness on natural farming, and share knowledge and solutions relating to farming challenges in our area,”* Matsyaraju says. *“We were looking for funds to purchase a projector, a public address (PA) system and develop content. So, we were excited to receive the smart*

*projector as it integrates all the solutions into one single package to meet all our campaign and training needs.”*

The smart projector has been very useful to build the capacities of tribal women and youth because it contains more than 120 farmer learning videos in [Telugu](#) language. *“We have strong links with grassroots organisations and have access to village-level*

Thanks to the smart projector, the team was able to increase the number of participants and the number of training days and add value to their training programmes by screening relevant videos.

Matsyaraju’s clients are mostly farmers and the young men and women participating in the Livelihood Enhancement Development Programme. This nation-wide initiative from

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*group representatives. We regularly run camps and programmes for youth and women on agri-entrepreneurship,”* Matsyaraju says.

the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development builds skills of self-help groups covering entire value chains.





Growing oyster mushrooms



## I felt that training was far more effective with video than explaining verbally

The ERA team took the opportunity of the largest festival of the tribal communities in Andhra Pradesh, called 'Sri Modakondamma Jatara,' to organise a series of video shows. This effectively drew the attention of many tribal farmers from different regions.

In 2023, Matsyaraju and his team members trained 555 tribal people (240 male and 315 female). Some of the most popular Access Agriculture videos shown on demand are those relating to [Coffee cultivation](#), [Drip irrigation for tomato](#), [Grow row by row](#), [Mulch for a better soil and crop](#), [Making a vermicompost bed](#), [Organic biofertilizer in liquid and solid form](#) and [Growing azolla for feed](#).

Giving examples of how the videos have benefited farmers, Matsyaraju describes the happiness expressed by coffee growers, when they watched the video [Coffee: picking & drying](#). *"The growers realised that even though they had been familiar with coffee cultivation from their childhood, thanks to the video, they were able to identify their mistake and learnt not to pick the ripe and unripe beans together which reduced the quality and price of the coffee,"* Matsyaraju says.

The Eastern Ghats region is known for its rich biodiversity, including the wide range of mushrooms that can be found in the soil of this region. Because of the huge demand for mushrooms

in neighbouring districts, many people in the tribal areas are eager to learn about mushroom cultivation, which can help them get a decent livelihood with little investment and without putting pressure on the wild edible mushrooms in their forests. Oyster mushrooms are especially popular and consumed across India because they are nutritious and tasty.

The ERA team has been supporting the women and youths of these communities to produce and market mushroom as a livelihood opportunity. *"When I got the smart projector and saw the video [Growing oyster mushrooms](#), I felt that training was far more effective with video than explaining verbally,"* Matsyaraju says. Several farmers have been inspired by watching the video. For instance, two young women from Paderu, Sumithra Kumari and K. Durga, set up an oyster mushroom production business.

*"When they saw in that video*

*young women from Africa successfully cultivating mushrooms by using their available local resources with very little investment, they were confident that they could also do it,”* recounts Matsyaraju. With their first harvest, these two women produced 18 kilograms of mushrooms and made a profit of 5,400 Indian Rupees (60 Euros).

They are using their earnings to take care of the nutritional requirements of their families and re-invest some of it to expand their enterprise. They have not only carved a niche business for themselves but are also inspiring and encouraging other young farmers in the tribal communities to take up the profitable mushroom business and improve their livelihoods.

As people learn about the multiple nutritional and health benefits of mushrooms and the demand for it is increasing, Matsyaraju and his team continue to empower women and youths by providing training and access to mushroom spawn. They have helped the tribal community to set up 42 such mushroom units. One of the trained youths earns 18,000 Indian Rupees (200 Euros) every month by selling mushrooms to nearby hotels.

*“I want to reach more farmers and more villages with the smart projector so that I can bring natural farming to hundreds of youths and help develop mushroom cultivation together with marketing facilities so as to*



## **Matsyaraju and his team continue to empower women and youths by providing training and technical support. They have helped the tribal community to set up 42 such mushroom units**

*make them prosperous,”* Matsyaraju says.

His advice to young ERAs is to continue screening farmer-to-farmer training videos regularly to

increase not only the knowledge of the farmers, but also their own understanding, regarding all aspects of agroecology and organic farming.

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