

Sowing Green Reaping Gold

Enhancement of Smallholder Spice Farmers'
Capacities in Sustainable Farming



Commissioned by: Federal Ministry for Economic
Cooperation and Development (BMZ)



Project partners: AVT McCormick Ingredients
Pvt. Ltd and McCormick Switzerland GmbH



Project timeline: December 2020 – December
2025



Budget: EUR 1.25 million



Locations: Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Punjab,
Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu

SDGs addressed:





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Priya Vivekaswamy smiles as she proudly displays the gold growing in her field. She snaps a stem of her farm-grown organic turmeric in half, and healthy, golden turmeric gleams through its brown skin. Priya and her husband Vivekaswamy are organic farmers living in Erode, Tamil Nadu – the spice district of India, where the world gets its high quality turmeric from.

“About a few decades ago, turmeric was a spice of great value – a quintal of turmeric cost about the same rate as a sovereign of gold. However, about fifteen years ago, turmeric prices began to fall steadily. With the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, cost of production tremendously increased, but production itself declined. It was no longer profitable for farmers to produce as much turmeric,” says S. Subramaniam, former district Director, Department of Agriculture, Tamil Nadu.

But in 2020, after the COVID-19 pandemic, the world realised the immeasurable benefits of turmeric and the demand for this wonder spice rose again. If farmers could be trained in sustainable and organic farming, they would soon begin producing quality and certified spices that would not only raise incomes, but also protect the natural biodiversity of the region. In 2021, under the develoPPP funding programme, GIZ along with AVT McCormick Ingredients Pvt. Ltd. and McCormick Switzerland GmbH launched a public-private partnership to empower spice farmers in Rajasthan, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu to adopt economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable spice production practices.

“The project has sensitised over 300 farmers about sustainable spice cultivation and reduction of pesticide usage in Erode, by testing their soil and water and providing personalised recommendations for each farmer. We first encouraged them to switch to sustainable practices and then to transition to organic farming. Trainings and workshops were conducted. All of these led to greater awareness about the importance of biodiversity, pest management, and fertiliser management,” recalls Mr. Subramaniam.



Practices recommended to farmers that choose to join the programme include soil preparation, green manuring, summer ploughing, planting trap crops, cultivating mulch crops and more. Of the 400 farmers that were approached, 238 are Farm Sustainability Assessment certified .





“Birds are a farmer’s friend. They control the insect population, help in pollination, and their droppings make an excellent nitrogen-rich fertiliser,” continues Duraiswamy.

“When the birds arrive, our yield increases,” says Duraiswamy, former administrative officer of the Panchayat in Kanagapuram, near Vellore Bird Sanctuary in Erode.

“Through training and workshops conducted by GIZ, AVT McCormick and McCormick Switzerland, farmers like me learnt of the importance of biodiversity in farming and were encouraged to engage in sustainable farming practices.”

During migration season, the birds rest at the beautiful Periyakulam Lake when they arrive at the Vellore Bird Sanctuary. The water is fresh and unpolluted by chemical fertilisers, and farmers who live nearby, like Duraiswamy, want to keep it that way. However, the lake is already showing signs of the effects of harmful farming practices. Dead fish float near the edge of the lake, a cause for worry for the farmers. Most farmers in Erode live along the river belt, their farms either along the Cauvery or the Bhavani river. When these farmers use heavy pesticides or chemical fertilisers, this leaches into the river water, which is in turn used to irrigate crops. But the salt and alkaline conditions of this contaminated water now prevent the crops from absorbing the nutrients needed from the soil.

The project supports farmers in this certification process that takes into account the social, environmental and economic aspects of sustainable farming and is recognised by markets across the world. Of the 238 farmers in Erode, 94% farmers are silver level certified and 6% had acquired gold level certification in 2022. The project is implemented in partnership with private companies that encourage sustainable farming by buying back produce from certified farmers at established premium rates.

“I realised the benefits of organic farming when other farmers started to ask us how our crops were growing taller than us!,” says Kowsalya Devi, a certified organic farmer-turned-entrepreneur. Kowsalya is a shining example of green turning to gold. She joined the project in 2021 and three years later, grows, value-adds, and sells her own brand of organic turmeric. Through her experiences at exposure visits and farmer exchange programmes organised in other states under the project, Kowsalya was struck by the advantages she had over organic farmers in other parts of the country. This inspired her to pay closer attention at trainings and workshops, putting everything she learnt into practice on her farm. Kowsalya now not only grows organic turmeric, but also adds value to her produce by boiling, polishing, powdering and packaging it. She sells her turmeric from home, where her customers can follow their turmeric as it makes its way from farm to packet. For women farmers like Priya, Kowsalya Devi and the women’s self help group she runs, the project has brought value to their lives that goes beyond the sheen of healthy and health-filled turmeric. It has brought them the taste of confidence. “I never imagined that I would one day speak at a National Spice Conference,” beams Kowsalya. “There is so much that I have learnt about how my turmeric affects the environment.”



Kowsalya Devi is among 32 Master Trainers – farmers who have learnt, implemented and are now training others in sustainable and organic farming practices. Master trainers like Kowsalya and G. Palaniswami, an FSA and organic certified transformative farmer, have opened their farms to other farmers and agricultural college students, to witness and learn from their experiences.

In the five states in which this project is being implemented, spice farmers, especially women, have benefitted tremendously and hope to inspire other farmers across the country.

