



AMRITA BHOOMI

Lush Spring Prize 2018: **Influence Award**

Karnataka State, SW India

Project started: 2013

Project Summary

Amrita Bhoomi is a centre for training peasant farmers in agroecology and zero budget natural farming (ZBNF) and an established pioneer in the movement for seed sovereignty and food sovereignty, based on agroecological self-reliant farming and rural enterprises. Amrita Bhoomi is La Via Campesina's agroecology school in South Asia.



Campaigning is linked to basic and in-depth agroecology and ZBNF training, delivered at the Amrita Bhoomi training centre and demonstration farms.

Amrita Bhoomi's Agroecology Education Lessons

Amrita Bhoomi demonstrates the significant value of:

- A training centre with demonstration farms that delivers agroecology and ZBNF (zero budget natural farming) training for peasant farmers, and that also promotes and enables a philosophy of self-reliance and local self-governance;
- Delivering state-level mass training camps in zero budget natural farming methods (ZBNF), averaging 1000-6000 farmer participants over 5-7 days including women, men and youth;
- Linking agroecology training with seed banking & distribution, for practical approaches to generating seed sovereignty and food sovereignty through zero budget natural farming;
- Providing long term residential internships for young people who are keen to learn agroecology and ZBNF methods.

The Changes Achieved (High Level Outputs & Outcomes)

- It is estimated that 100,000 peasant farmers now practice zero budget natural farming (ZBNF) in Karnataka state as a result of the efforts of the ZBNF movement, of which Amrita Bhoomi is a member and the main training centre in Karnataka state.
- Many training programmes have been delivered for rural youth, women and men on agroecology and ZBNF methods, agroforestry, seed saving, solar drying/energy sovereignty, gender and agriculture, and other subjects.
- Over 220 varieties of native seeds have been conserved and are being distributed among farmers.
- More than 50 long term rural youth interns have lived at Amrita Bhoomi for over six months and learnt how to practice agroecology

Key Project Information (at 2018):

Climate: about 75% of Karnataka is arid to semi-arid (plateau region), also sub-humid to humid tropical in the Western Ghats and humid tropical monsoon in the coastal plains.

Key words: peasant farmers; youth; women; training centre; demonstration farms; farmer-to-farmer training; agroecology; zero budget natural farming (ZBNF).

Primary Beneficiaries: peasant farmers, small farmers, and their families and communities; rural youth.

Core Education Activity: agroecology & zero budget natural farming (ZBNF).

Size: 66 acre training centre and demonstration farms.

Narendra's Story, a Beneficiary

Narendra was a young graphic designer, from a small peasant family but forced to shift to an urban job in the city, with no farming skills. Fascinated by agriculture, he went to Amrita Bhoomi as a volunteer intern for a year and learned how to work the land. Today, he has restored his one acre farm on the outskirts of Bangalore. Previously used as a dumping yard, with glass shards and syringes still dotting the field, Narendra is now using waste water from buildings around his farm to grow flowers. He's now also head gardener at an apartment complex, where he grows affordable organic veggies to sell to the residents.

His father thought he was crazy initially - he's now inspired by his son, and takes care of his field. Narendra sees himself as a lifetime volunteer and supporter of Amrita Bhoomi and is thrilled he could start a new life on the land.



An IPEN Case Study

International Permaculture Education Network (IPEN)

IPEN Case Studies have been enabled by the Lush Spring Prize

Case Study date:

September 2018



Vasantha, Director of the Seed Programme at Amrita Bhoomi

Vasantha's Story – an Amrita Bhoomi Team Member

“Seeds are the soul of farming,” says Vasantha, “unless we control our own seeds we can never be secure about our food security or our incomes. Farmers should ... become self-reliant and independent from expensive corporate inputs. Young people specially should focus on organic farming – unlike chemical farming, which is a road to debt and loans, organic farming is creative ...this is the only way to make agriculture attractive for the youth and healthy and chemical free for all consumers, protecting nature and humanity.” Vasantha Kumri R (31) is head of the seed program at Amrita Bhoomi. She hails from a village farmer's family and has stayed put, dedicating her life to education and training for rural communities and youth, strengthening their self reliance via organic farming. At age 20, Vasantha first learned to work with farmers groups at the community level, as a field worker carrying out training and education work to deal with multiple problems like food insecurity and farmer suicides, and helping set up a community level seed bank.

The Project's story

Amrita Bhoomi was conceived during the 'seed satyagraha', the Karnataka farmers' movement's (KRRS) fight for seed sovereignty against multinational seed companies' attempts to impose patents on life. The KRRS dream was not to just keep protesting against things but to create the world it wanted to see. Professor Nanjundaswamy (1936–2004), the leader of KRRS was described as “India's leading advocate of farmers' rights”. To put this vision into practice, he launched the vision of a farmers training center in 2002, named Amrita Bhoomi, the eternal earth - a space for peasants to build models of autonomy, where they can explore how to restructure food production based on appropriate technologies and local exchange networks. As a Public Charitable Trust, Amrita Bhoomi was first established with the support of the Italian farmers organization, Associazione SUM.

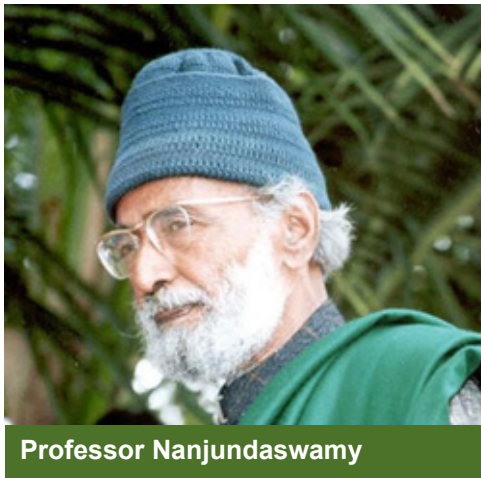
Good Practise: What Amrita Bhoomi Has Done

At the frontlines of the agroecology movement: Amrita Bhoomi has been promoting ZBNF as one of its key agroecological models. Its training programmes and a variety of model plots created on its campus have made it one of the key spaces for the promotion of ZBNF among its peasant members.

Promoting Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF): KRRS was instrumental in up-scaling the Zero Budget Natural farming (ZBNF) movement in the state of Karnataka. One of the most successful agroecology movements globally, ZBNF's leaders claim that millions practice ZBNF at the national level in India, while it is estimated at some 100,000 for Karnataka. Around 60 massive state-level ZBNF training camps have been organised in the last decade, with an average of 1000-6000 farmer participants over 5-7 days including women, men and youth. Districts self-organize locally to promote ZBNF at the grassroots level, without any formal movement organization, paid staff or even a bank account, as it generates a spirit of volunteerism and enthusiasm among its peasant farmer members. 'Zero Budget' means without using any credit or any net spending on purchased inputs. 'Natural farming' means farming with Nature and without chemicals. ZBNF advocates see it as a solution to the agrarian crisis and rising trend of farmer suicides in India.

A grassroots approach to seed sovereignty: As part of its “seed satyagraha” (seed sovereignty) struggle that began in the 1992, KRRS and Amrita Bhoomi have been at the frontlines of the movement for local peasant saved seeds and against corporate controlled patented seeds. Today, one major focus is to conserve drought resistant seed varieties and crops such as millets which are both easier to grow in an increasingly drier, hotter climate, and also have a better nutritional profile than the more widespread water guzzling green revolution crops like rice.

Bringing fundamental social change through education: Training is a fundamental activity for Amrita Bhoomi. There are training programmes for women and men farmers of all ages, and programmes specifically directed at youth. Options for rural youth in the countryside are few, and migration is rampant. Amrita Bhoomi targets young people who don't have the necessary skills to work on the land and trains them to create farming models that are economically viable, agroecological, and which provide a dignified life for their families.



Professor Nanjundaswamy

Amrita Bhoomi's Mission and Objectives

Amrita Bhoomi's mission is to create models of rural autonomy and self-respect.

The centre promotes the principles of Swaraj based on food sovereignty, agroecological self-reliant farming, seed sovereignty, and rural enterprises. It envisions a form of development that is socially just, respects Mother Earth, and creates dignity and equality for all.

'Swaraj' generally means self-governance or “self-rule” – it lays stress on governance, not by a hierarchical government, but by self governance through individuals and community building. The focus is on political decentralisation, so Swaraj was strongly promoted by Gandhi.

Amrita Bhoomi contributes to these SDG's (Sustainable Development Goals) being achieved.



Amrita Bhoomi's Ways of Achieving Good Practise: How It Is Done

Agroecology training centre and model farms: The 66 acre Amrita Bhoomi agroecology training centre in the Biligiri Ranga Hills, is surrounded by three national parks. Along with a number of model agroecology farms, the centre also houses an indigenous seed & livestock bank, a garden conserving medicinal varieties that currently face extinction, an auditorium for 250 people, and a training centre with classrooms and dormitories, with excellent food provided by the centre's chef. The model farms are run by peasant youth interns, who each manage them for a couple of years under guidance from expert farmers, in order to acquire practical agroecology skills. Amrita Bhoomi currently has model farms for zero budget natural farming, agroforestry, seed production, rice and millets in drought conditions, oil seeds production, vegetable plots, as well as medicinal plants.

ZBNF 'toolkit' and massive ZBNF training camps: The basic ZBNF 'toolkit' of methods was put together by Mr Subhash Palekar, an agricultural scientist. Disillusioned by the ill effects of the green revolution on his own family farm, he drew from extensive research and observation of ecological processes and indigenous farming methods during his work in the 1990's. Palekar dedicates himself to teaching ZBNF at massive training camps across the country, and is its principal resource person or guru, as ZBNF members call him.

Details on core ZBNF methods & practices at:

[La Via Campesina case study on ZBNF in India:](#)

<http://www.fao.org/3/a-bl990e.pdf>

Indigenous Seed Bank: To be at the frontlines of biodiversity conservation and against agribusiness's plans for domination over farmers and nature, Amrita Bhoomi has a fast-growing seed bank that includes at least 100 varieties of rice, 26 varieties of Ragi, 14 varieties of other minor millets, and many vegetable varieties - native seeds are reproduced on seed plots for distribution at nominal prices among farmers. There is also a garden with special local medicinal plants that are endangered and rare.

Livestock Bank: A key problem facing India's livestock sector is a loss of local livestock varieties. The government has promoted crossbreeding with exotic cow varieties, that are unsuitable to the hot, dry Indian climate and which require high inputs and aftercare, medication and water. Meanwhile, India's diverse local cow breeds (*Bos Indicus*) are hardier, and require much less aftercare and if bred selectively, some of these varieties are capable of producing a high quality and quantity of milk. If farmers want to buy local varieties (which cost less than the foreign cows), it's not easy to find them. So Amrita Bhoomi has a small local "livestock bank" with 14 native cows - where it is breeding and reproducing local cow varieties for distribution among farmers, to conserve the disappearing indigenous livestock varieties.

Peasant Youth Internships: rural youth from peasant families are able to manage a small piece of land for a year or two to learn agroecological skills and return as trainers to their communities.

"For me being a graphic designer was boring. I sat at a desk all day long and worked for someone else ... Going to Amrita Bhoomi and learning the practical skills of farming was one of my greatest life decisions." Narendra, Bangalore.

Millets: The promotion of the ancient grain millet is a key campaign, as millets were largely removed from Indian diets and farms because of the green revolution. Amrita Bhoomi houses a large collection of millet seeds, which it multiplies for distribution among farmers, and holds various workshops to train farmers on millet production - at the end of which farmers are given millet seeds for planting. The same farmers are invited to attend millet fairs to sell their produce to urban consumers, linking with urban retail groups to carry out direct marketing to consumers. A first millets fair was held in 2017 for a massive seed exchange in various districts of Karnataka, working with the state government.

Amrita Bhoomi Training Programs: There are short courses (1-2 days) and in-depth courses over a couple of months. These are mostly taught in collaboration with allied teachers, trainers, local NGOs and peasants. Farmer-to-farmer training is a key method used for some of the agroecology courses, where experienced farmers share their knowledge with other farmers, who then engage in a collective reflection as part of the learning process. These courses can take place on the Amrita Bhoomi campus, or also on farmers' fields. Some of the key training topics include agroecology practices and theory, alternative economies/markets, agroforestry, seed saving, value addition, renewable energy, climate resistant peasant crops like millets, gender and agriculture, and a history of peasant movements among others.

Beyond Technical Education: courses are both technical and philosophical/ideological. Major issues addressed, especially among the youth, include understanding their society, their role as farmers, caste, class, gender, religion and power relations. They learn practical farming skills, to put them into practice back home, and to be inspired to slowly make changes to their realities. Practicing agroecological farming on their land, backed up by a more critical understanding of rural reality, helps to put in perspective the importance of their organized efforts.

Future areas of interest:

- **Rural Enterprises** - a rural enterprise training center is planned for women, men and young farmers to set up self-help groups, local cooperatives and collective production models - for peasant families to improve processing and marketing, and to add value to their raw produce. Pilot efforts underway include producing jaggery (a local type of brown sugar), with many possibilities such as oils, pickles, ghee, and handloom products among others.
- **Green School** - primary and high school for rural children providing free education, with an aim of fighting rampant child labour in the area. Many impoverished children work in the silk industry and for food. Amrita Bhoomi hopes to provide free meals to all such children and involve in them in its educational projects.

OUTCOMES Achieved

- Small farmers create more resilient food growing systems, are more financially self-reliant and more self-organising to meet their needs.
- Farmers are able to save seed and apply ZBNF methods effectively, improving their livelihood and their family's food security in so doing;
- Peasant farmer suicide rates are greatly reduced.

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



15 LIFE ON LAND



17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



Permaculture Principles & Design in Action

Amrita Bhoomi demonstrates the successful development of 'relevant-to-user' agroecology education and demonstration, in the most relevant physical context, listening and responding to local needs.

Relative Location: combining work on seed sovereignty and practical agroecology methods, enables two key issues to be co-located, with mutual benefits to peasant farmers by doing so, which enables more dynamic, effective and creative sharing of best practice through farmer to farmer training.

Small change for big effects: by organising mass training camps, while this is no small challenge it means that one single training event can create massive benefits for many people.

Permaculture Principles in Action: multi-function; multi-supply; relative location; observe & interact.

From Inspiration to Action

The Amrita Bhoomi focus on ZBNF with a practical toolkit, with farmer-to-farmer training, mass training camps, and the inclusion of training on philosophy and ideology creates highly effective systems of education-for-action tailored to men, women and youth, which have multiplied and grown the diversity of beneficial impacts they produce.

What experience from Amrita Bhoomi could help your project, community or network in relation to:

- Linking basic permaculture design education more directly to practical training in agroecology methods, such as the ZBNF toolkit?
- training young people and small farmers to be teachers, alongside the creation of demonstration plots that relate to local and social needs of your region?
- Project development and evolution, and scaling-up practical training in valuable ways at the local level?

The Difference arising from the Lush Spring Prize

A great dream of Amrita Bhoomi and KRRS that is slowly coming true has been to have a public policy on Zero Budget Natural Farming in Karnataka and across India. The neighbouring state, Andhra Pradesh, launched a policy recently to scale up ZBNF among 500,000 farmers. It supports ZBNF as a solution to farmer suicide, and works through grassroots farmer institutions and farmer to farmer training.

Amrita Bhoomi and allies in Karnataka held several meetings with officials in the state to have a similar initiative in Karnataka. Great news arrived in June 2018 when the Karnataka government also announced an investment in ZBNF. The Lush Spring Prize funds also arrived in June! So Amrita Bhoomi's next steps are to use the funds to join others in the ZBNF movement to support the government policy, monitor its impacts and work to expand the scaling up through civil society efforts. "The Zero Budget Natural Farming policy is such a lovely policy that is based on farmer initiatives, and when the state puts its weight behind agroecology then a lot can be achieved," explains Chukki Nanjundaswamy, the Karnataka State Farmers Movement (KRRS) president and Amrita Bhoomi's coordinator.

Legal Status, Structure & Size: Project start date: 2013

Amrita Bhoomi is a registered Trust under the Indian Trusts Act. It has a team of 20 volunteer staff, including a coordination team, seed team, training team and youth interns.

Funding, Finance, Resources

Amrita Bhoomi was originally launched with the support of the Italian farmers organization, Associazione SUM. It received a further grant from the Karnataka State government in 2013. Since then, Amrita Bhoomi has received some small donations, the Lush Spring Prize (2018, Influence Award), and it is also earning from production on its farms.

Potential Areas for Collaboration with Project (Local, Regional, National or International)

Project Needs: Food processing and marketing. Amrita Bhoomi is looking to establish various processing units run by enterprises of rural women and youth using local produce. Processing can include production of food, cosmetics, fibre, etc.

Project Offers: Amrita Bhoomi welcomes groups looking to learn Zero Budget Natural Farming & seed saving techniques.

Contact Information

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