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[inside]



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17th Indian Cooperative Congress: 05
Key Recommendations

Governance Issues in Cooperative Financial 11
Institutions
Krishna Kumar Gupta

Organic farming- 21
A Step Towards SDGs Through Cooperatives
Cooperatives and Achievement of Select SDGs
through Organic farming
Dr. Prashant V Kadam



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Organic farming – A Step Towards SDGs Through Cooperatives

Cooperatives and Achievement of Select SDGs through Organic farming

Dr. Prashant V Kadam*



Cooperative societies assist farmers in expanding their operations by raising the price at which they sell their produce and by assisting them in implementing new agricultural technology by acquiring agricultural production inputs on their behalf in a coordinated fashion. As a result, farmers earn more money and may expand their enterprises. Large-scale operations may also reduce fertiliser use, help the environment significantly, and promote environmental sustainability. Therefore, large-scale farms may increase yields while using less fertiliser.

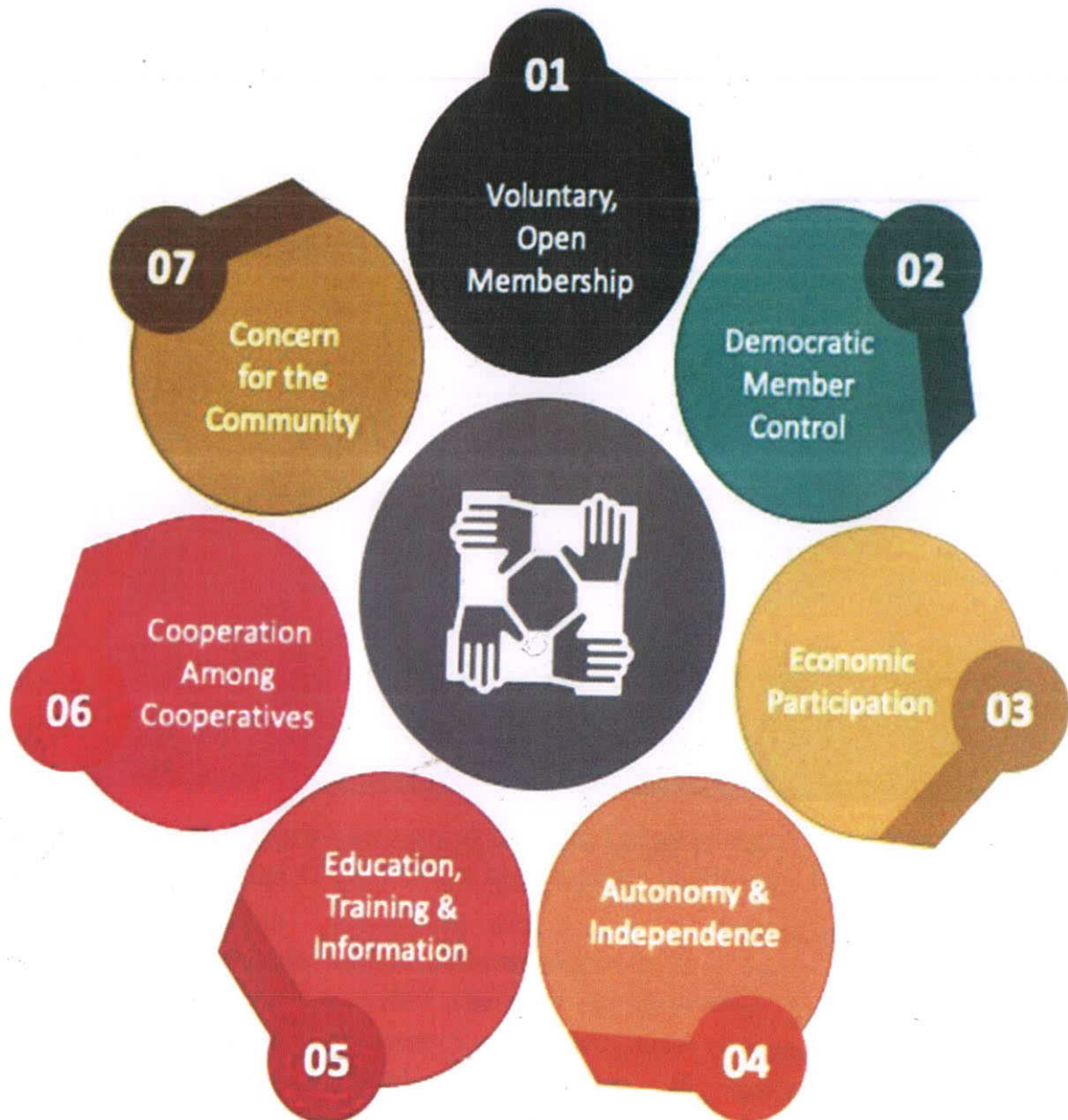
Contrary to smallholder farmers, large-scale farmers grow crops to increase their dependency on the land and pursue bigger economic rewards. As a result, they make investments in environmentally friendly agriculture that will benefit the land in the long run. The small and marginal farmers can benefit a lot through cooperatives as their landholdings are smaller in size and are fragmented.

Farmers can also get an exposure to learning and adapting different technologies and professional managerial skills through cooperatives. Small-scale farmers find it

challenging to implement pricey new technology, which makes them less reluctant to embrace green production methods on their own. Cooperatives offer assistance with the purchase and use of green industrial technology as well as technical advice.

In terms of marketing also cooperatives can be a great channel for the farmers to market their organic produce. In order to fulfil the need for sustainable products, cooperatives are encouraged to improve the quality of the agricultural products produced by their members.

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The cooperatives supervise its members' fertiliser application methods and encourages them to follow sustainable farming practises in order to meet market demand, uphold brand image, and guarantee product quality.

As per one of the UN reports, the on-going improper and excessive use of pesticides contaminates nearby soil and water supplies, leading to a

significant loss of biodiversity, wiping out populations of helpful insects that serve as pests' natural enemies, and lowering the nutritional content of food. Both the excessive use of chemical compounds and the misuse of chemical fertilisers, particularly nitrogen fertilisers, have had a negative impact on the ecosystem. In addition to depriving farmers of financial benefits and reducing the safety

of agricultural goods, the rise in environmental pollution puts a significant pressure on the ecosystem. It is here that cooperatives through organic farming can play a significant role in eliminating or minimising the health distractors of the ecosystem.

Cooperatives operate on the basis of the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity.

The seven principles of cooperatives in fact act as an important framework to adopt a local and community based approach in achieving the goals of equitable and sustainable development. There are 1,00,428 Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS)/Large Area Multi-Purpose Societies (LAMPS)/ Farmers Services Societies (FSS) and 619 State Cooperative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (SCARDB) and Primary Cooperative Agriculture and Rural development Banks (PCARDBs) in the agriculture sector (PIB, March 2023). With this strong base of agro cooperatives which have been expanding not only in numbers but also in terms of its revenue and diversifying nature, organic farming can be a source of doubling their income and at the same time contributing to the health of the ecosystem.

About 2.78 million hectares of land in India are used for organic farming. Oilseeds, tea, coffee, dried fruits, millets, cereals, spices, and others are some of the major organic goods cultivated in India. India produces a lot of these goods and exports them. The three states that produce the most of India's organic goods are-Sikkim, Uttarakhand, and Tripura. Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra are other states that practise organic farming.

The global organic market is currently worth approximately ten lakh crores. Cooperatives can play an important role in enabling farmers to take up to organic farming by replacing chemical based practices of agriculture.

The Northeast Organic Farming Association is a non-profit organization of over 5,000 farmers, gardeners, landscape professionals and consumers working to promote healthy food, organic farming practices and a cleaner environment. Sikkim is another classic example where organic farming is at its roots and it has sustained its brand as an organic state till date. Today, Sikkim continues to remain India's only fully Organic State, a feat which can be ascribed as much to its small size which presents fewer logistical challenges, as to the State Government's continuing commitment to the Organic Mission.

However it's worth noting that in spite of having a brand of being an organic State, the farmers have not yet been able to reap the economies of scale as the promotional measures announced have remained on papers. This is not only the situation of Sikkim, but also other states like Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh etc. There is a need for an integrated approach, so that organic farming a tool to achieve some of the SDG goals

can go a long way in creating a robust healthy ecosystem in a sustainable manner. Though some cooperatives have made their mark, but they are scattered and as such, there is a need to bring them together. This will not only help the organic growers, but will also contribute towards a positive climate change.

The Ministry of Cooperation is undertaking a variety of additional steps to speed up organic farming in the nation, which will increase the value of the farmers' organic output and make it easier for Indian organic goods to enter the global market. As per the available records, utilising organic manure and other organic inputs, a total area of 29.41 lakh ha, 38.19 lakh ha, and 59.12 lakh ha have been converted to organic farming in the previous three years (2019-20, 2020-21, and 2021-22). These areas make up 2.10%, 2.72%, and 4.22% of the 140 million hectares of arable land, respectively (PIB, 19th July, 2022). In addition, Integrated Nutrient Management (INM), encourages the balanced use of fertilisers such as chemical, organic, and bio-fertilizers, is recommended for all cultivable land in the nation. Through the specialised programmes Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) and Mission Organic Value Chain Development in North East Region (MOVCDNER), the government has been

encouraging organic farming. Organic inputs including seeds, bio fertilisers, bio-pesticides, organic manure, compost or vermi-compost, botanical extracts, etc. are subsidised financially for farmers.

To enhance the area under organic cultivation utilising organic manure or bio-fertilizers, big area certification and organic farming on each side of the Ganga River have also been adopted under PKVY. Further, with the assistance of the pertinent ministries, the Union Cabinet made the historic decision to establish and promote a multi-state cooperative society at the national level for organic goods. It is promoted by Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing federation, NAFED, National consumer's federation of India (NCCF), NDDDB, and NCDL. To realise the aim of "Sahakar-se-Samridhi," every effort is being made to take advantage of cooperatives' capabilities and turn them into prosperous and thriving business businesses. To take advantage of their comparative advantage, the cooperatives are trained to think globally and act locally. By offering certified and genuine organic products, the cooperative organisation will oversee a variety of operations relating to the organic industry. The society is expected to assist in maximising the

demand for and consumption of organic goods in both domestic and international markets. By permitting testing and certification at a reasonable price, it will also facilitate cooperatives and eventually its farmer members in benefiting from the high price of organic products through aggregation, branding, and mass marketing. Additionally, financial assistance for organic farmers will be arranged through member cooperatives, such as Primary Agricultural Credit Societies/ Farmers Producer Organisations (FPOs), as well as institutional support for organic product marketing, branding, labelling, packaging, storage, and testing. Through its member cooperatives, the organisation will oversee the full supply chain of organic goods made by cooperatives and affiliated organisations.

The ground-breaking initiative will help cooperatives, and ultimately their member farmers, benefit from the high price of organic products through aggregation, branding, and marketing on a large scale by facilitating testing and certification at a reasonable cost. It also aims to improve farmers' livelihoods and assist India in becoming a \$5 trillion economy as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. By adopting several business models and using the brand and

marketing network of AMUL, it would manage a variety of cooperative organic sector operations from aggregation to marketing while concurrently developing the same on its own. Additionally, it will make it easier to provide technical advice, training, and capacity building for organic growers, among other things.

It may be stated that organic farming in India exists, but lacks a uniform approach in terms of required logistics in the hinterlands and the rural India. The lack of infrastructure very often has adversely affected the marketing of the organic products and infact has deprived many farmers of their actual returns. The cooperatives being 'vocal to Local' and local to vocal can play an important role in bridging the gap between the farmers and the market delivery so that the farmers get the actual market value or at least close to the market value for their organic produce. The initiatives of Ministry of Cooperation and the Ministry of Farmers Welfare will also play a significant role in integrating cooperatives with organic farming so that not only the farmers benefit, but the nation and the world will also benefit through Sahakaar se Samridhi in the preservation of the health of the ecosystem through cooperatives. ■

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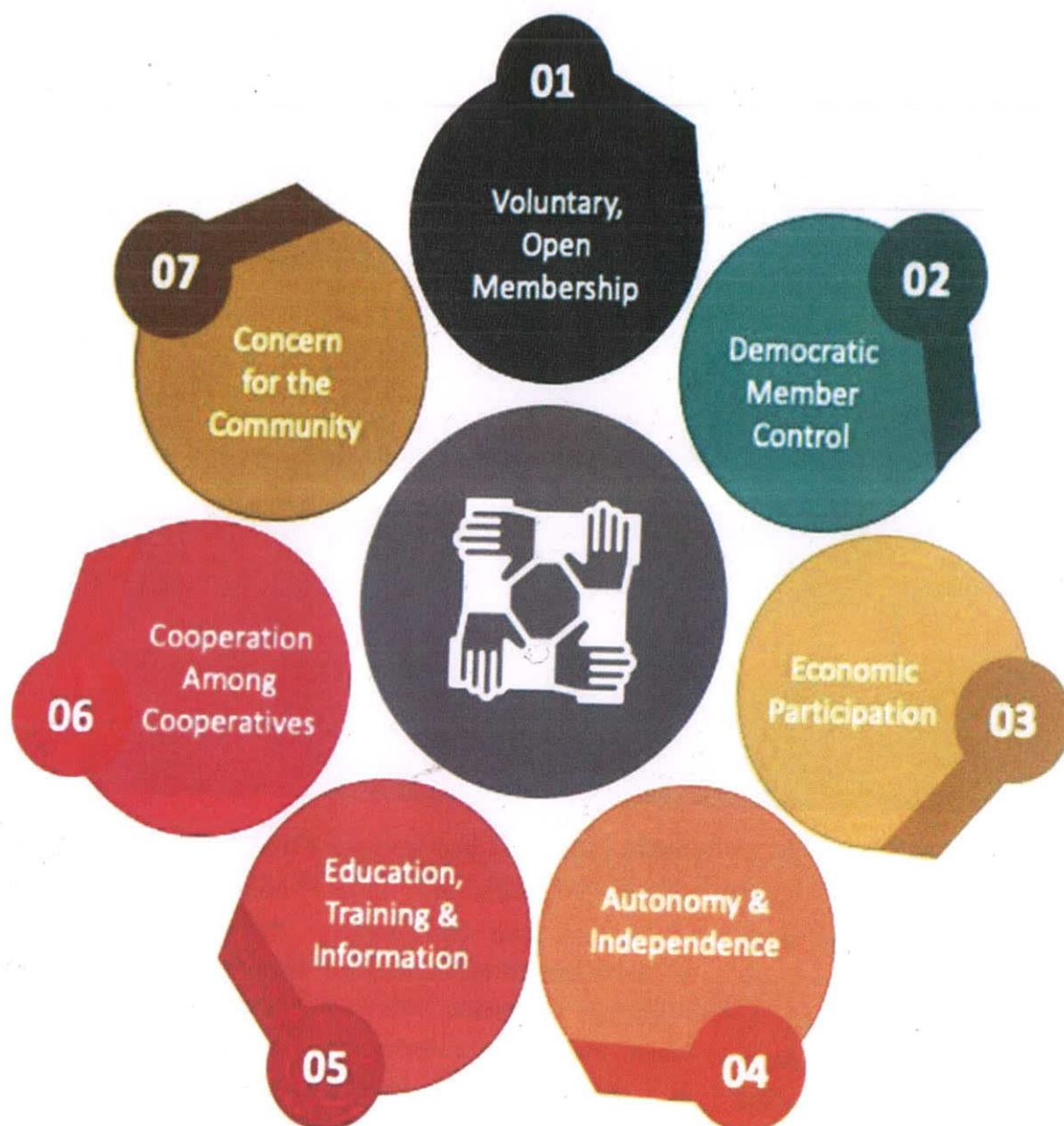
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