

This Hyderabad-based organisation has helped over 2.5 lakh farmers through permaculture

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Aranya Agricultural Alternatives is striving to achieve ecological and sustainable agricultural livelihoods through permaculture farming.

Narsanna Koppula's Aranya Agricultural Alternatives has helped thousands of farmers through permaculture

The word 'permaculture' is derived from PERMANent agriCULTURE or PERMANent CULTURE. It stands for responsible and wise use of natural resources in a way that will sustain life for the present as well as future generations. It is a philosophy and practice that enables people to design and establish productive systems to provide for their food, energy, shelter, and other material and non-material needs, in harmony with natural systems.

Narsanna and Padma Koppula believed that permaculture has the power to solve many challenges faced by Indian farmers. With an aim to provide alternate solutions to the present chemical agricultural practices, the duo founded Aranya Agricultural Alternatives, an environmental and developmental NGO, in Hyderabad in March 1999. 'Aranya' in Sanskrit means forest and forests were considered as the home for all life forms by ancient Indian mythology.

Practices for a greener globe

Narsanna, 57, was introduced to the concept of permaculture firstly by Dr Venkat with whom he was working at DDS (Deccan Development Society) at the time. The latter organised the visit of Bill Mollison (co-originator of the Permaculture concept), and Robyn Francis (one of his close collaborators) in India in 1987. On the occasion, Narsanna participated in the first Permaculture Design Course in India and was very inspired by the two, whom he calls now his mentors.

Permaculture is particularly relevant to India given the declining water resources, soil health, biodiversity, and wildlife habitats, as well as associated social issues including increasing farmers' debt and the loss of traditional agricultural practices.

The organisation has been working towards promoting alternative and permanent agriculture practices with a focus on sustainable natural resource management, along with strengthening the rural and farming communities to achieve food security.

"Permaculture is based on the three ethics of earth care – which is provision for all life systems, people care, provision for people to access all resources necessary for their existence, and fair share to provide for the first two principles," says one of the members of Aranya.

Keeping in tandem with the ethics of permaculture, Aranya has been striving to promote biodiversity conservation, natural resources management with emphasis on climate change mitigation.

Empowering women, in particular, to facilitate processes through which they would gain access and control over natural resources, and promote sustainable livelihoods by the use of indigenous and native technologies have been the main objectives of Aranya.

Natural resource management

Aranya believes in sustainable agriculture and subsistence farming systems for enhanced food security. It also ensures sustainability of livelihoods through natural resource management.

In tune with Aranya's objectives, programmes on Natural Resources Management were launched and implemented since 2001 and till day are being continued through several projects. These projects have been developed and implemented under the categories of soil and water conservation, biodiversity conservation, water resource conservation, and green resource management and development.

Watershed programmes were put in place through implementation of water harvesting structures such as percolation tanks, sunken pits, dry wells, contour trenches, ponds, and forestation of wastelands.

To keep soil erosion in check, various methods of vegetation development are followed such as nursery raising for wastelands and homesteads, plantation, establishment of vermi-composting units, horticulture, and agro-forestry.

For green resource management and development, Aranya has been practising integrated agri systems and tree-based farming through its various projects over the years. The organisation runs a training centre which trains in capacity building of farmers (awareness, trainings, demonstrations, exposure visits, and hand holding support on all above said), conduction of Permaculture Design Course that now attracts international participants as well, and development of model farms.

"They wanted to make a difference also by encouraging better implementation of government projects, especially on watershed management and their role quickly became essential in creating a bridge between the community institutions and government departments," says Padma.

Till date, Aranya Agricultural Alternatives' work has been impacting directly and indirectly 2.5 lakh farmers in the states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Last year, the first-ever *National Permaculture Convergence* was organised by Aranya Agricultural Alternatives with a strong intention to be as inclusive as possible, inviting all alternative schools of thought to join the event and share their experience, everyone being under the banner of ecological farming.

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13th International Permaculture Convergence

Aranya Agricultural Alternatives will be the host of the 13th *International Permaculture Convergence* in Hyderabad from November 25 to December 2, 2017.

"This event will guide and inspire more than 1,200 participants from 100 countries and also give a significant impetus to the permaculture movement in India and around the world," says Padma.

In preparation of this important event and to let the urban population know more about permaculture, Aranya Agricultural Alternatives will celebrate this week-end the International Permaculture Day organising an event in Hyderabad at three different locations in Hyderabad (Lamakaan, Kalaachakra and Our Sacred Space). The event will be two days of interactive discussions on aspects of permaculture, where nature lovers can exchange or buy seeds and books, watch movies and know more about what Aranya is doing for the International Permaculture Convergence (IPC India 2017).

"The permaculture movement in India is getting bigger every day. More and more people have started to be more conscious about the ecology and the environment and find, in permaculture, the solution they are looking for. Once one understands the concept of permaculture and its diversity of application, there is great enthusiasm to take actions for a better India," says Padma.

Aranya is organising a **crowdfunding campaign** for the International Permaculture Convergence. The team hopes to invite as many Indian farmers as possible to the Convergence.

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