

PROMOTING ORGANIC AND ECOLOGICAL AGRICULTURE AMONG WOMEN TEA FARMERS

Deniyaya, Sri Lanka

A high rate of deforestation combined with an intense use of fertilisers had made the soil around the city of Deniyaya infertile and unproductive. Farmers were not acquainted with organic agricultural practices, which they feared would impact the size of their yield. Tea farms consist very often of small family businesses, in which women play a major role and tea plantations represent their main source of income.

The programme started in 2000, by identifying 25 farmers who would be willing to embrace new agricultural methods. Organic farming practices were introduced to all members in small steps, converting only a quarter of an acre at the time, to avoid drastic reduction in the size of the harvest and losing farmers' support to the initiative. A series of trainings were held for group members, covering: basic knowledge about organic farming; effective ways of composting; cow feeding; and record keeping. Additionally, producers also received assistance with quality assurance and marketing operations. Tea growers, primarily women, were offered certified trainings in organic cultivation and were also provided with a cow to make their own organic compost and produce milk, for additional income. The farmers have been encouraged to share their experience, acquired knowledge and lessons learned in several ways including by participating in exhibitions, workshops and symposia with Government and the private sector, or by teaching other community members.

Augmented awareness and interest in organic farming among local communities has led to an increase in biodiversity, enhanced soil conditions and better water quality. Farmers have also been able to sell their products at a higher market rate because of organic certification. Villagers have also started growing their own vegetables using the compost derived from the tea plantations.



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<https://www.parcic.org/english/srilanka/tea-project/>

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