

CASE STUDY

KRIBHCO

Supporting Farmers and Cooperatives in Rural India

KRIBHCO's promotional and extension programmes 1984-2019

Programmes organized: **99,358**

Cooperative societies adopted: **2,808**

Village clusters adopted: **1,554**

Income-generation programmes: **1,456**

Soil samples tested: **453,000**

Technical wall paintings: **10,523**

Drinking water facilities: **387**

Total beneficiaries: **14.5 million**

Farmer suicides, nationwide protests: the dire conditions for those working in India's huge agriculture sector make international headlines. But cooperatives can help make life easier for small-scale farmers, promoting the sustainable economic growth, productive employment and decent work outlined in the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 8. One of India's biggest fertilizer-producing cooperatives, KRIBHCO, is working to support other cooperatives with rural development programmes that have so far reached millions of beneficiaries.

Agriculture is of vital importance to India, contributing significantly to the world's third-largest economy. Farming is also how most Indians make their living, with 70% of rural households depending on agriculture for their livelihood. The country's vast swathes of countryside are cultivated mostly by small-scale farmers, with 82% of farmers classified as small and marginal. But family farmers do not have an easy life.

Protests by thousands of farmers in October last year were just one symptom of the grim situation they face, as costs for inputs like fuel and fertilizer soar and they struggle to sell their produce at profitable prices. The uncertainty of the monsoons, exacerbated by the global climate crisis, only adds to their woes. Since the 1990s, many Indian farmers have resorted to suicide, often driven by high levels of debt. Cooperatives can help farmers overcome many of the difficulties they face, through group buying of inputs and the provision of credit and education, leading to an increase in crop productivity and overall income. They have stepped in to deliver goods and services where both the public and private sector have failed.

Krishak Bharati Cooperative Ltd (KRIBHCO) was incorporated in 1980 as a national level multi-state cooperative society, building high-capacity fertilizer plants in Hazira, Gujarat, that turned natural gas into urea and ammonia. The Hazira fertilizer complex has since become the largest single-location urea plant in India, and

KRIBHCO has also expanded into the manufacture of bio-fertilizers and the supply of certified and hybrid seeds. As organic agriculture has emerged as a viable response to land degradation, KRIBHCO has also begun marketing compost made from city waste.

KRIBHCO's members are over 9,000 farming cooperative societies, each with approximately 300 to 400 members. These societies provide agricultural inputs and credit to the individual land-owning farmers, and some purchase the farmers' produce, processing it and marketing it for a higher price. Since 1984, KRIBHCO has put in place an extensive CSR programme of rural development activities, with the ultimate aim of improving farmers' livelihoods, prosperity and working conditions. "We go into the fields, in the cooperative societies, we conduct farmer meetings and other programmes," explains Narinder Kumar (NK) Bhadu, who oversees farmer services for all of India for KRIBHCO.

KRIBHCO has over 2,000 employees, with 364 of them working on these rural development programmes. The head office is in Noida (short for New Okhla Industrial Development Authority, a planned city outside of Delhi), but the cooperative has field headquarters and area offices in almost every state across India.

These countrywide programmes were implemented after KRIBHCO observed that farmers were hesitant to adopt new farm technology unless their whole system would be benefited economically and socially. Farmers are deeply attached to their fields, livestock and cooperative societies, seeing these as their lifelines, and also concerned about family welfare, including health and their children's education, and improvement in the rural areas where they live. So KRIBHCO developed a model based on the five components of farmers, fields, livestock, family and the cooperative society.

KRIBHCO works with small farmers, with just 1 or 2 hectares, usually planted with wheat, rice, maize, cotton and ground-



nuts, across the whole country. There are three main types of programme – agriculture development, cooperative development and village adoption – and most projects last for one year, with new cooperatives and villages selected annually.

The programmes focusing on underdeveloped rural villages, with little agricultural technology update, include farmers' meetings and field demonstrations. Two plots are cultivated, one with the farmers' current practices and one using KRIBHCO's fertilizers and seeds. "We show the results to the farmers," says Bhadu. "It's seeing by doing. When the farmers see with their own eyes then they adopt the practices in their own fields."

Part of the village adoption scheme is an income-generation programme, often focusing on rural women who tend to have little training. Useful skills like sewing or achar (pickle) manufacturing are taught, and equipment, like sewing machines, provided. Promotional and educational campaigns around human and animal health and sanitation are also an important element, as is the provision of safe drinking water facilities and the building of storage-cum-community centres for storing agricultural inputs and organizing social functions. Over 1,500 villages have been adopted since the programme was started.

Underlining KRIBHCO's commitment to strengthening the cooperative model and its belief that the cooperative is one of the best ways to make SDG 8 a reality, it also has a large-scale programme of cooperative society adoption, with 81 adopted in the last year, both members and non-members of KRIBHCO. The society is adopted for a year and provided with amenities like drinking water, given a general face-lift and supplied with technical literature, so

that farmers can get guidance. KRIBHCO also runs conferences for cooperative society officials and group discussions with district level cooperative authorities and agriculture departments.

The agriculture development programmes, meanwhile, aim to educate farmers as well as providing major agro-inputs for improving soil health and crop productivity, through meetings, demonstrations, exhibitions and seminars. For example, says Bhadu, KRIBHCO goes into the fields, into the societies, and tells farmers that before taking their produce to the market they should clean it at home, adding value to the crop and ensuring it gets a higher price. Other campaigns teach local farmers about the importance of soil testing and promote the balanced use of good-quality fertilizers, reducing the use of chemicals and using organic manure and bio-fertilizers instead, thus increasing micronutrient efficiency.

One of the burdens on India's small-scale farmers is the high cost of agricultural inputs, but KRIBHCO is working to ease this. Fertilizers are provided at a subsidised cost, thanks to government subsidies. And the certified seeds that it sells can be multiplied by farmers for three years, rather than needing to be bought every year. Hybrid seeds cannot be produced at the farmer level, he says, and do come at a high cost, but they are also higher quality. "The production of the crop through hybrid seeds increases so they get a good revenue," says Bhadu.

With climate breakdown threatening the future of India's agriculture, farmers will be increasingly looking to agricultural inputs and technology to help them continue to make a living, and KRIBHCO will be there to provide support.