



## PERFORMANCE OF NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION IN ANANTAPURAMU DISTRICT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO TIMBAKTU: A THEORITICAL APPROACH

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### **Abstract**

*The Timbaktu Collective is a voluntary organization initiated in 1990 to work for sustainable development in the drought prone Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh, India. At this time a group of likeminded people working in development got together and bought 32 acres of totally barren waste land which was named Timbaktu. The following five years were spent nurturing the land. Within eight years the trees, the birds and animals returned, the water table rose and the land began to produce. People from the surrounding villages came and cut the grass for thatch, for brooms and to feed their animals. Sticks were collected for wood and berries to eat. The phenomenal change in the landscape encouraged the Timbaktu team to made contact with villagers in the surrounding area focusing on the landless, as well as small and marginal farmers. They were especially interested in the lives of women, children, youth and Dalits – the people most affected by situations like chronic drought, unproductive land, unemployment and poor infrastructural facilities. Eighteen years later the Collective works in 140 villages of Chennekothapalli, Roddam and Ramagiri mandals serving more than 10,000 families. It runs two schools one in Timbaktu and one in the village of Chennekothapalli and it services three others schools in the area. It recently set up a Children’s Resource Center and an Arts and Crafts center for children and youth from the community. Timbaktu Collective is presently moving towards the promotion of cooperatives with a livelihood focus. This was seen as a logical next step to promoting a social and economic base in the villages. The present paper highlighted that the performance of nongovernmental organisation like Timbaktu as theoretical aspect in Anantapuramu district of Andhra Pradesh.*

**Keywords:** *Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), Timbaktu.*

### **Introduction**

In April 1, 1978, a social activist from Mumbai named Bablu Ganguly arrived in Anantapur, a small city in the south-central Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, to take a job with a grassroots organization fighting for land and income rights. For years, a focus on short-term gains left the region’s ecology damaged and its farmers struggling. Ganguly began to explore how Indigenous agricultural practices might revive the area’s natural and civic life.

Ganguly soon met a social worker named Mary Vattamattam. The two began working together to support marginalized groups, fight poverty, and improve the environment. In 1990, they married, purchased 32 acres of land, and created a nonprofit organization called the Timbaktu Collective. Vattamattam worked to create a system of microfinancing while Ganguly planted thousands of trees to revive the forest. When the ground proved too arid, Ganguly concluded he needed to take a broader approach to environmental regeneration. “This land needs healing,” he said. That healing, he decided, required the rich wisdom and knowledge of the land’s native peoples.

At the center of the Timbaktu Collective is the *dharani*, a communally governed farmer’s cooperative that uses traditional farming methods and a locally controlled system of production and distribution.



Coming from the Sanskrit word for *earth* or *land*, the dharani promotes regenerative agricultural practices and offers farmers access to financing, seeds and equipment, training, and distribution networks. Over the years, the dharani has helped once-vulnerable farmers to take charge of their destiny.

Three decades after its founding, the Timbaktu Collective has restored the region's ecological health and improved the livelihoods of thousands of families in the area. Timbaktu has replaced systems focused on short-term profits with ones focused on long-term value. By updating traditional practices, the collective has restored the land and reclaimed the community for present and future generations. The organization's grassroots model can be used in any community eager to embrace its past to preserve its future.

### **Concept of Non-Governmental Organisation**

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Anantapur district operate on the core concept of **grassroots, community-led rural development**. Given the region's chronic drought conditions and semi-arid landscape, these organizations primarily focus on ecological restoration, sustainable agriculture, women's empowerment, and providing basic human services like healthcare and education to marginalized populations.

### **Objectives**

1. To study the concept of Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs).
2. To analyse the performance of Timbaktu in Anantapuramu district.

### **Methodology**

The present study is based on the secondary sources only. The entire data was collected from website of Timbaktu and other sources.

### **Regeneration**

The animating principle of the Timbaktu Collective is ecological and agricultural regeneration. The collective has drawn on Indigenous wisdom, modern science, and trial and error to restore the soil and biodiversity of plants and crops in the area.

After a series of conversations with residents in the area, Ganguly and fellow activists began experimenting with ecological restoration. They surveyed the land and hills and spread seeds to determine which native plants would thrive in the area. They kept copious notes and tracked what they learned.

Starting in 1995, the collective undertook projects on watershed development, land development, and local traditional seeds. The collective held seed exhibitions and conducted trials on organic farming. In 2005, it held its first project in organic farming, using agro ecological practices with a focus on food security, crop biodiversity, and enterprise development.

Because of an arid climate, most farms at Timbaktu can only grow and harvest one crop a year. Farmers with better irrigation systems can complete two (and, rarely, three) harvests a year. By managing the land better, with earth-friendly methods, they hoped to improve agricultural yields while restoring the land. "Agriculture," as Ganguly said in a 2015 documentary, "is the art of living with land"—not dominating nature.



Collective adopted a traditional form of mixed cropping called *navdanya*, an Indian concept that literally means *nine seeds* or *new gift*. This approach promoted crop diversity (with an emphasis on crops that offered high nutritional value), soil replenishment, and the use of traditional farming methods. At the center of the program was millet, an ancient grain that thrives with other crops. Though it had been cultivated in India since as early as 3300 B.C.E., millet farming had become a lost art amid the boom in monoculture crops. With the restoration of diversified agriculture, the land began sprouting companion crops, including local varieties of chilis, mustards, and tomatoes.



Barnyard millet crop outside of Ganthimarri village.

Timbaktu Collective, 2021

While diversifying their crops, farmers also embraced ancient farming rituals. Planting and harvesting followed moon cycles and monsoon rains. Those ancient practices included using compost for fertilizers and using roots, leaves, and seeds for pest and disease control. When the crops were brought in, the community held harvest festivals.

These rituals held symbolic meaning that strengthened the farmers' sense of community, tradition, and belonging. "Navdanya [is] the symbol of this renewal of diversity and balance, not just of the plant world, but of the planet and social world," said Vandana Shiva, a celebrated environmental activist. "It is this complex, relational web which gives meaning to biodiversity in Indian culture and has been the basis of its conservation over millennia."

Ganguly and his team looked not just to Indigenous wisdom, but also to modern techniques. They drew inspiration from the approach of the Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki to assess the soil, climate, and ecosystem; select trees to form the layers of a forest; and then plant dense groves of trees. The hardiest trees survived and eventually produced a dense, lush forest.



### The Ten Elements of Agro Ecology

The Timbaktu Collaborative follows the United Nations standards and values for sustainable agriculture practices, outlined in a 2019 report.<sup>2</sup>

1. **Diversity:** To ensure food security and nutrition while conserving, protecting, and enhancing natural resources.
2. **Synergies:** To enhance key functions across food systems, supporting production and multiple ecosystem services.
3. **Co-Creation and Sharing of Knowledge:** To assure sustainable, effective responses to local challenges and needs.
4. **Efficiency:** To promote innovative agroecological practices, using fewer resources.
5. **Recycling:** To manage agricultural production with lower economic and environmental burdens.
6. **Resilience:** To adapt to a wide range of environmental, economic, and social developments.
7. **Human and Social Values:** To use sustainable food and agricultural systems to improve rural prosperity, equity, and social well-being.
8. **Culture and Food Traditions:** To foster healthy, diversified, and culturally appropriate diets while maintaining the health of ecosystems.
9. **Responsible Governance:** To promote viable visions and manage different scales of operations, from local to national to global.
10. **Circular and Solidarity Economy:** To connect producers and consumers, providing a process for honoring the environment and its people.

### Cooperatives

Organizationally, the Timbaktu Collective is based on community-level cooperatives. As of 2022, more than 39,000 families from across 310 villages in the greater Anantapur region were members of Timbaktu cooperatives. The organization includes eight diverse but related programs. These programs are designed to empower people at the grassroots level by providing them with the knowledge and resources to take control of their economic livelihoods.

Timbaktu's first cooperatives were women's groups established by Mary Vattarattam. She called these cooperatives *sanghas*, a Sanskrit word meaning *assembly* or *community*. In her social work prior to the launch of the collective in 1990, she would convene these *sanghas* so women could propose and discuss solutions for social and economic challenges in their lives.

The women reported that a major hurdle to empowerment was a lack of access to credit for business activity. In 1992, Vattarattam established Swasakthi, a community savings and microfinance program for the women's cooperatives. Each member contributed 10 rupees per month to the collective savings fund. Members could then apply for fixed-interest rate loans from the fund to start or expand a microenterprise. The program was a success. As of 2022, more than 31,000 women were members, with the community fund holding some \$5.4 million in savings.

### The Timbaktu Collective's Eight Programs

Since its creation in 1990, the Timbaktu Collective has created eight distinct programs. Six of these programs have been branded with Sanskrit words that describe their purpose and values.

1. **Kalpavalli (Eternal Source of Abundance):** Started in 1992, this program coordinates community-based projects for conservation and biodiversity.



2. **Swasakthi (Power of Self):** Begun in 1992, this program empowers women through mutually aided credit cooperatives.
3. **Chiguru (Tender Leaf):** Started in 1992, this program advocates for children's rights and alternative education and programs.
4. **Militha (Inclusion):** Started in 2004, this program promotes the rights and well-being of people with disabilities.
5. **Dharani (Earth):** Established in 2008, this program promotes nature-based farming practices, organic farming, food processing, and marketing by small farms.
6. **Enterprise Development:** Registered in 2008 by the Timbaktu Shop, this program markets organic farm products, soap, textiles, and pickles.
7. **School of Regenerative Agriculture and Pilot Initiatives:** Started in 2018, the school trains the next generation of sustainable farmers.
8. **Gramasiti (Wealth of a Village):** Formed in 2020, this program offers the opportunity to raise small ruminants, mostly goats and sheep, to farm laborers.

### Conclusions

The Collective also promotes organic, sustainable and traditional farming practices among small and marginal farmers, who are engaged in the cultivation of nutrient-rich and climate change-resilient millets, pulses and oilseeds. A cooperative was setup in 2008 in order to enable farmers to gain control over the agriculture value chain and improve their returns. The producer-owned-and-managed business enterprise today markets its produce under the brand name 'Timbaktu Organic. Going ahead, the Collective aims to scale up livelihood generation activities within the Kalpavalli Community Conservation Area and work more intensively within each of their programmes to expand stakeholder benefits. Sanctuary readers can assist the Timbaktu Collective in their awareness campaigns and explore internship, volunteering opportunities within the 'Kalpavalli programme as well as other opportunities for on ground wildlife work and collaborative research.

### Reference

1. See Ashish Kothari, "Very Much on the Map: the Timbaktu Collective", in *Ecologies of Hope and Transformation: Post-Development Alternatives from India*, ed. Neera Singh, Seema Kulkarni, and Neema Pathak Broome (pune, India: Kalpavriksh and Soppecom, 2018).
2. *The 10 Elements of Agroecology: Guiding the Transition To sustainable Food and Gricultural System* (Rome, Italy: Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations, 2018).
3. Rintu Thomas and Sushmit Ghosh, *Timbaktu* (Black Ticket Film, 2012) film, commissioned by India's ministry of Information and Broadcasting, [Blackticketfilms. Com/timbaktu/](http://Blackticketfilms.Com/timbaktu/).