

# THE TIMBAKTU COLLECTIVE

## FOR AN AGROECOLOGICAL TERRITORIAL SYSTEM IN INDIA

By Kim Assaël

The [Timbaktu Collective](#), a grassroots non-profit organization, has managed to implement a system of local associations and nine community-owned Cooperatives to revitalize an ecologically challenged area of the Anantapuramu District in the State of Andhra Pradesh, in India.



In the second driest Indian area, the Collective is working since 1990, involving more than 30.000 stakeholders of 182 villages in activities for [ecological restoration](#) of waste lands; [organic farming and marketing](#); credit-based financial systems for [women](#); rearing of [small ruminants](#) by the landless; [disability rights](#); [child friendly](#) forums and sites of learning.



The approach adopted since the beginning by the Timbaktu Collective was to invest in rural villages-based organisations to build solidarity among rural people and address issues of poverty, food security and livelihoods. This approach has gradually generated the organization of several local thematic associations and nine community-owned and managed Cooperatives (registered as Mutually Aided Cooperative Societies) involving small farmers, rural women, agricultural labourers and tree growers, promoting an innovative system of participative governance for sustainable local development.



Inspired by the Japanese agricultural scientist Masanobu Fukuoka, since the beginning the Timbaktu Collective also adopted an agroecological approach investing in organic agriculture, restoring soils, banning pesticides, recovering traditional local crops that are resilient to climate change and require low inputs, all produced by the farmers self-sufficiently.



Today the actors participating in the Timbaktu Collective are all organized around the organic and agroecological principles of territorial development to revive the local economy, enhance livelihood opportunities, help regain food security and food sovereignty. Through the synergic system of cooperatives they [have reached impacting results to revitalize the local economy with great attention to the environment.](#)

The Collective contributed to solve problems of an area mostly affected by chronic drought by regenerating 3,500 hectares of common unproductive lands called Kalpavalli Community Conservation Area. This area is now an important wildlife corridor for many species (Indian grey Wolf, Black Buck, Leopard, Sloth Bear and a variety of birds, insects and reptiles), enhancing biodiversity on a severely degraded landscape. All these activities are managed by the Kalpavalli Cooperative with 110 full-time and 90 part-time workers.



Another example is the Gramasiri Agricultural Labourers Cooperative, setup in 2010 and managed by 1,061 shareholders from 70 agricultural labourers' groups in 59 villages, promoting the rearing of small ruminants (with a livestock of 11,611 animals). The Collective supports the Cooperative developing thrift and credit activities and providing extensive technical assistance on livestock management, ethno-veterinary practices, animal insurance and for day to day operations.

Four cooperatives of women have also been promoted through the Swasakthi project, to provide services as microcredits and legal aid in order to protect the human rights of women, towards their economic independence. Today more than 22,231 women are members and administer a capital of 1.4 million Euro.

In the field of sustainable agriculture, the Timbaktu Collective has achieved exceptional results. Around 75% of the producers are [certified organic as per the peer-based Participatory Guarantee System \(PGS\)](#) inspired by IFOAM. In 2014 Timbaktu won the [One World Award organized by Rapunzel Naturkost GmbH and IFOAM Organics International](#).

The Dharani Farming and Marketing Cooperative Ltd., a producer-owned business enterprise belonging to 2,043 small organic farmers from 60 villages, sells a range of organic food products under the [Timbaktu Organic brand](#) in India. As of today, the Timbaktu Organic shop supplies its [products](#) to over 250 retail stores across India.

Farmers protect the soil by fencing with bushes to reduce fire risks, harvest rainwater to reduce the run-off, revegetate by collecting seeds to distribute and plant during the rainy season in regeneration areas. They cultivate traditional, nutrient-rich and traditionally resilient millet crops, pulses, oil seeds, groundnuts and in some cases vegetables and fruits across about 10,568 acres. They are also building permaculture practices through training courses that are available for farmers and participants from across India.

Managing the entire production chain of organic food (from seeds to cultivation, processing and marketing) through its large number of members, the Cooperative allows to reduce the vulnerability to volatile market demands, securing significantly increased income for the farmers, fostering their livelihoods. Their annual revenue has increased of 22,80% in net sales from year 2018-19 compared to 2017-18. They have achieved not only to be a major supplier of good organic food in the south India's market but also to enhance the leaving conditions and better health of resident people. They also act as a stimulus to neighbouring farmers who are converting to organic with included technology (a tablet-based Management Information System) to test the soil nutrient quality and pesticide residue, to GIS map of farmer fields, to ensure better quality of millet seeds (R&D) and to process machinery for millets efficiently.

The Timbaktu Collective has won numerous [prestigious international awards](#). In 2019 Timbaktu was among the 15 [Outstanding Practices in Agroecology](#) recognized by the [World Future Council](#).

## To know more

[Timbaktu Collective website](#)



[Timbaktu Collective Annual Report 2018-2019](#)

[Timbaktu-Organic.org](#)

[Timbaktu Organic - Stories from the field](#)

[Timbaktu Collective in Facebook](#)

[Timbaktu shop](#)

[One World Award 2014](#)

[Article in IFOAM.bio website](#)

[Article in Atlas of the future website](#)

[World Future Council website](#)

[Article in Springprize website](#)

[Brochure in Lush Spring Prize 2017 website](#)

[Article in ecologia politica website](#)

[Article in Social Initiative Forum](#)

[Permaculture course 2019](#)

[Video 2013 in Youtube](#)

[Participatory Guarantee Systems - IFOAM](#)

