Transforming Agriculture through Vermicomposting: A study of five successful models across South Asia

[1]Prachi Rathod*, [2]Mansi Ambule, [3]Madhuri Kolhekar, [4]Pratima Bahekar, [5]Nikita Kahate, [6]Nikita Mankar, and [7]Varsha Dhurvey

[1]Research Scholar, [2,3,4,5,6]Student, [7]Professor and Head
[1,2,3,4,5,6,7]Post Graduate Teaching Department of Zoology, Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University, Nagpur-440033, India
*Corresponding author; email: prchrathod96@gmail.com

Abstract

Vermicomposting is an eco-friendly and sustainable method of converting organic waste into nutrient-rich compost using earthworms. This paper integrates five case studies from India and Bangladesh, highlighting their methodologies, scales of operation, yields, revenues, and socio-economic impacts. Data was compiled from diverse agro-climatic zones, including Odisha, Ladakh, Kerala, Karnataka, and Bangladesh. Comparative analysis reveals common trends, such as the dominance of *Eisenia fetida* as the preferred species and the significant role of vermicomposting in improving soil health, reducing chemical fertilizer dependency, and enhancing farmer livelihoods. These examples also showcase how vermicomposting, when tailored to local needs and resources, empowers individuals and communities, fosters sustainable agriculture, and provides socio-economic upliftment.

Keywords: Agriculture, earthworms, *Eisenia fetida*, vermicompost, revenue.

1. INTRODUCTION

Vermicomposting, often referred to as 'Black Gold', involves the biological decomposition of organic matter through the digestive process of specific earthworm species. This process results in a nutrient-rich humus-like material that enhances soil fertility, water retention, and plant growth. In the context of increasing concerns over chemical fertilizer use, soil degradation, and waste management, vermicomposting offers a viable, low-cost, and eco-friendly alternative.

It is a biologically-driven process that utilizes earthworms to convert organic waste materials into a nutrient-rich, humus-like substance known as vermicompost. This method offers an environmentally sustainable alternative to chemical fertilizers, enhances soil fertility, improves plant health, and supports the broader goals of ecological farming. In an era of climate change, environmental degradation, and increasing pressure on conventional agriculture, vermicomposting serves as a regenerative practice that restores soil health and reduces waste. It can be implemented at various scales—from small household bins to large commercial enterprises—and requires relatively low technical input, making it accessible to farmers of all economic backgrounds. Vermicomposting is one of the most efficient means to mitigate and manage environmental pollution problems [1].

Earthworms such as *Eisenia fetida*, commonly referred to as red wigglers, are widely used in vermicomposting due to their ability to consume and process a diverse range of organic matter. The activities of earthworms facilitate the distribution of both air, water, and microbes through the entire decomposing [2]. The compost they produce is rich in essential nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and micronutrients that are readily available to plants [3][4]. Additionally, vermicomposting supports beneficial microbial activity in the soil, thereby enhancing soil structure and water retention capacity. The key role of vermicompost is change in physical, chemical, and biological properties of soil by earthworm activities and they thus called as soil managers [5].

This paper presents a comparative study of five real-world case studies from South Asia, where individuals and communities have adopted vermicomposting not only to increase agricultural productivity but also to generate income, foster self-reliance, and promote sustainable rural development. These case studies—spanning from Odisha and Karnataka in India to rural Bangladesh and the high-altitude region of Ladakh—highlight the socio-economic transformations made possible through the thoughtful application of organic practices. They demonstrate how vermicomposting can be tailored to local conditions and scaled appropriately to benefit both individuals and communities.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Document diverse vermicomposting initiatives.
2. Compare their methodologies, yields, revenues, and socio-economic outcomes.
3. Identify innovations and best practices for sustainable agricultural development.
4. Provide recommendations for scaling and replication in similar agro-climatic zones.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research compiles five documented case studies sourced from published literature, and online repositories. Each case was analyzed for operational scale, inputs, methods, yields, revenue, challenges, and innovations. Comparative tables and charts were created to visualize production and income differences. All monetary values are presented in Indian Rupees (₹) for consistency.

4. INTEGRATED CASE STUDY NARRATIVES

4.1. Sri Uday Chandra Patra – Fortified Vermicomposting Innovator (Odisha, India)

A retired engineer turned organic farming entrepreneur, Uday Chandra Patra has developed a large-scale fortified vermicomposting unit using the bed method over 1 acre of land in Kuarmunda, Odisha. Using diverse biodegradable waste and *Eisenia fetida*, his operation yields over ₹60 lakh annually through the sale of earthworms, vermicompost, and vermiwash. His innovation includes the addition of proprietary organic inputs and active farmer-to-farmer training [6].

Key Highlights:

- **Scale:** Commercial, 2–3 tons every 45–60 days
- **Income:** ₹40L (vermicompost), ₹10L (vermiwash), ₹10L (earthworms) annually
- **Innovations:** Fortified composting, community outreach, herbal additives

Figure 1: Uday Chandra Patra at his large-scale fortified vermicomposting unit.

4.2. Skalzang Tundup – Cold-Climate Composting Pioneer (Ladakh, India)

Operating in the challenging high-altitude environment of Thiksey village in Ladakh, Skalzang Tundup began with just a few compost beds and expanded to 32 beds and 7 units producing over 3150 kg of compost. By leveraging the *Eisenia fetida* species and using insulated beds, he overcame the extreme cold, reduced dependency on chemical fertilizers, and earned a net income of ₹75,000. His model has become a regional inspiration in cold-climate organic farming [7].

Key Highlights:

- **Scale:** Medium, 3150 kg compost from 7 vermibeds
- **Income:** ₹1.26 lakh revenue, ₹75,000 net profit
- **Innovations:** Cold-climate vermibeds, vermiwash collection, community training, award recipient

Figure 2: Skalzang Tundup with his Cold-Climate Compost.

4.3. Ms. Lysamma Baby and Self-Help Group – Grassroots Organic Model (Kerala, India)

This SHG started small-scale vermicomposting using compost tanks and household organic waste. Within two years, they achieved financial stability, earning over ₹53,000 and cultivating their vegetables organically. The group's initiative inspired neighboring villages and strengthened women's empowerment [8].

Key Highlights:

- **Scale:** Small, self-sufficient
- **Income:** ₹53,000 revenue, ₹25,000 in savings
- **Innovations:** Community-led SHG model, inter-village knowledge sharing

Figure 3: The self-help group members at their vermicompost manufacturing unit at Kozhikode in Kerala.

4.4. Smt. Shantabai C. Ambali – Vermicompost Pioneer and Woman Leader (Karnataka, India)

Shantabai transitioned from chemical-based farming to organic after formal training. Starting with 10 pits, she expanded to 25 large pits producing over 100 tonnes/year. She marketed her compost under "Indian Organic Fertilizer," generating up to ₹10 lakh/year and mentoring rural women [9].

Key Highlights:

- **Scale:** Commercial, 100–200 tonnes/year
- **Income:** ₹7–10 lakh/year
- **Innovations:** Neem cake enrichment, branding, community training

Figure 4: Smt. Shantabai C. Ambali showing her vermicomposting unit.

4.5. Sri Anowar Hossain – Organic Entrepreneur in a Flood-Prone Region (Bangladesh)

Initially a daily laborer, Anowar Hossain transitioned into vermicomposting after training under ADRA Bangladesh's EFPPC project. He adopted the bed method, created ten composting ditches, and implemented sustainable practices such as SRI rice cultivation and vegetable bag farming. His monthly compost yield of 80 kg supports self-sustenance and increased agricultural productivity [10].

Key Highlights:

- **Scale:** Medium, 80 kg/month
- **Income:** Family livelihood fully supported
- **Innovations:** Bag farming, SRI method, community learning

Figure 5: Anowar Hossain sieving his vermicompost after training under ADRA Bangladesh's EFPPC project.

5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Table 1: Core operational and economic parameters of the case studies.

Sr. No.	Name	Location	Scale	Earthworm Species	Annual Production (tonnes)	Annual Revenue (₹ lakh)
1.	Sri Uday Ch. Patra	Kuanrmunda, Sundargarh, Odisha	Open-air method, farm-based	Not specified	NaN	50.0
2.	Skalzang Tundup	Thiksey Village, Ladakh	Medium scale – 32 beds, 7 units	*Eisenia fetida*	3.15	1.26
3.	Ms. Lysamma Baby & SHG	Kerala, India	Small scale – SHG initiative	*Eisenia fetida*	NaN	0.53
4.	Smt Shantabai C. Ambali	Bijapur district, Karnataka	Commercial – 25 pits, 100-200 tonnes/year	*Eisenia fetida*	150.0	8.5
5.	Sri Anowar Hossain	Bangladesh	Commercial – 10 ditches	*Eisenia fetida*	0.96	NaN

6. DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals that while operational scale and climatic conditions vary widely, common success factors include effective training, community participation, and adaptability to local challenges. *Eisenia fetida* emerged as the dominant species due to its rapid reproduction and broad waste tolerance. Innovations such as neem cake enrichment, vermiwash extraction, and flood-adaptive cultivation demonstrate the flexibility of vermicomposting to diverse environments.

7. CONCLUSION, KEY LEARNING, AND SOLUTIONS

Vermicomposting offers a sustainable pathway to address soil degradation, organic waste management, and rural livelihoods. Scaling up requires targeted training programs, initial financial support, and market linkages for compost sales. Future research should focus on optimizing compost quality parameters and integrating vermicomposting with other organic farming systems.

Impact and Key Learnings

- **Economic Empowerment**: All five cases demonstrate income generation potential—from self-sustaining units to commercial-scale entrepreneurship.
- **Soil & Environment**: Vermicomposting improved soil fertility, reduced chemical dependency, and addressed local environmental issues (e.g., flooding in Bangladesh).
- **Social Transformation**: Women-led models (Kerala, Karnataka) empowered rural women through self-help and leadership roles.

- **Scalability & Replicability**: Success was often contingent upon training, institutional support, and adaptability to regional challenges.

Challenges and Adaptive Solutions

- **Skepticism & Knowledge Gaps**: Overcome via training (e.g., ADRA project, KVK support).
- **Climate Vulnerability**: Addressed through shade beds, bag farming, and seasonal planning.
- **Market Access**: Branding (Shantabai) and farmer-to-farmer networks (Patra) helped boost credibility and reach.

8. REFERENCES

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