

# FPOs in Coconut Sector

## Coconut Scenario

### **Global:**

Coconut is grown in almost 94 countries in the world of which 90% of the production comes from Asian and Pacific countries. World production of coconut is placed around **71299.41 million nuts** per year. Indonesia, Philippines, India and Srilanka are the four major global players. As per APCC statistics year book 2013, India stands first in global coconut production with over **22,680 million nuts** and has a productivity of **10,615 nuts per hectare**. Among the Latin American countries Brazil and Mexico are the major contributors to coconut production. Though Brazil's contribution to total coconut production is mere 4.9%, it stands top in productivity with **12393 nuts per hectare**. Kenya, Vietnam, Jamaica, Fiji, China etc. are other emerging countries in this sector.

### **India:**

India accounts for **31.46 per cent** of the world's coconut production, and is one of the major players in the world's coconut trade. India is also the highest domestic consumer, at **1494.4 million nuts** annually. Bulk of coconut production in India comes from Western plains and Ghat region comprising the states of Kerala, Karnataka and Maharashtra followed by Eastern Coast plains and hill regions comprising of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. Islands of Andaman & Nicobar, Lakshadweep and coastal tracts of Gujarat are the other traditional coconut growing areas. Certain regions of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, Assam, Tripura, West Bengal and Northern Bihar are other non traditional areas where coconut cultivation has made inroads rapidly in recent years.

Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, the 4 southern states, together account for **90%** of the coconut production in India. Even after such a high rate of production, India's annual export earnings from coconut and coconut based products form just **0.1%** of total export earnings.

## **Farmer Producer Organization - Program Summary**

### **Coconut and Indian Economy**

Coconut plays an important role in social and economic lives of people in India, especially in the states of Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. The name Kerala itself is said to be derived from “Kera” meaning coconut and “Alam” meaning land or roughly put together as Land of Coconuts.

The typical Kerala cuisine heavily depends on coconut. Hindu customs dictate that one should start a new activity only after breaking a coconut in front of Lord Ganesha. In earlier days, leaves of coconut tree were used to thatch huts. The dried leaves are still used as firewood and trunk of the tree is used for making furniture. Husk, shell, kernel and water of coconut are also used in manufacture of various value-added products. Thus each and every part of coconut tree finds use in some form or the other and is rightly described by the old Philippine saying that one cannot find a man who knows all the uses of coconut tree.

In past, coconut was the main source of income for majority of households in Kerala and a household without a coconut tree was rare to find. Coconut was highly valued and was exchanged for rice and other grocery items thereby keeping away hunger from poor households. With the advent of Land Reforms Act, individual land holding size got reduced. This trend continues even today on account of division of land owing to nuclear family culture. Thus, large plantations of coconut started disappearing. Today, **98%** of coconut farmers in the state are small and marginal. In addition, emergence of plantation crops and profits from them attracted many. This led to removal of coconut palms to make way for other crops. Also, lack of labor for land maintenance and harvesting and the high cost of labor have given way to dwindling interest in coconut cultivation. Fluctuating price of coconut features as another mental block for any farmer who thinks about venturing into coconut cultivation. The situation is such that farmers are mere price takers and do not have any say in the price of their produce. All these have led to decrease in status of coconut in Kerala. The once highly valued crop has become a secondary or tertiary crop which no one cares about. Farmers and common people are at the mercy of labour and middlemen for harvesting and selling of their produce. These supply side factors are affecting manufacturers and entrepreneurs who find it difficult to source coconut continuously and operate their business in profit.

## **Coconut Development Board (CDB)**

Coconut Development Board (CDB) is a statutory body established in 1981, under the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, by an act of Parliament, for integrated development of coconut cultivation and industry in the country with focus on productivity increase and product diversification.

### **Vision of CDB in 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan**

Following are the main areas of focus proposed by CDB in the 12<sup>th</sup> five year plan. CDB intends to take up a combination of traditional as well as new projects to achieve these objectives.

- **Farmer Producer Company:** Concept of Coconut Farmer Producer Organization was envisaged by CDB with a view to revive coconut cultivation in the state and fetch appropriate benefits to coconut farmers.
- **New investments in coconut industry:** Economically viable technologies will be transferred to interested entrepreneurs for establishing coconut based integrated industries either by individuals or by Producer Companies for making new investment in coconut sector.
- **Promotion of value added products in coconut:** Board is trying to dovetail its future activities in such a way that the dependence of coconut on copra & coconut oil is minimized and more value added products are popularized in domestic and international markets.
- **Development of new technologies in coconut:** Board proposes to develop new, commercial & viable technologies on coconut through sponsored programmes with CFTRI, CSIR & other research & educational institutes having infrastructure & capabilities.
- **Enhancement of export of coconut products and by-products:** Since Coconut Development Board has been declared as an Export Promotion Council by the Union Commerce Ministry, they plan to put forward their best efforts to enhance shares of exports of coconut products & byproducts in the coming years.

- **Reducing cost of production of coconut:** CDB plans to bring down the cost of production by community farming through CPS as well as by adopting good agricultural practices.
- **Productivity enhancement of coconut:** Though Kerala stands first in coconut production in the country, it lags behind as far as productivity is concerned. During the 12<sup>th</sup> five year plan CDB is targeting to improve the productivity of Kerala by implementing schemes such as Replanting and Rejuvenation (R&R) and integrated farming.

Further, three tier structure of Producer Company ensures maximum participation from farmers. As already pointed out, 98% of coconut farmers in the country are small and marginal. If individual farmers are made shareholders of Producer Company, most of the small and marginal farmers would be left out as they won't be in a position to raise the share amount. Also, if number of share holders is very large, managing them becomes extremely difficult. Three tier structure of Producer Company enables more participation and involvement of farmers in form of smaller groups and activities at different levels.

### **Approach**

The Coconut Farmers Producer Organizations thus formed have a three tier structure consisting of Coconut Producers Society (CPS), Coconut Producers Federation (CPF) and Coconut Producers Company (CPC).

### **Coconut Producers Society (CPS):**

CPS is formed by associating **40-100 coconut growers** in a contiguous area with range of **4000-6000 yielding palms**. Farmers with a minimum of **10 palms** are only eligible to be a part of this society. This is under the assumption that surplus coconut after domestic use is only generated in case the number of palms is more than 10. Once the society is formed, it is registered under charitable societies act and also with Coconut Development Board. CPS is registered as a charitable society with the primary aim of spreading knowledge and good coconut cultivation practices among the public as well as to ease the formation of the company. All the societies have a common bye - law.

The concept of CPS is based on the following points:

- A non-subsidized, knowledge based, farmer centered approach in organizing farmers.
- Total inclusive growth of farmers
- Facilitation, handholding, nurturing empowering and finally leading to sustainability
- Group Approach.
- Development of common Infrastructure.
- Reduction of wastages.
- Disintermediation of supply chain.
- Product diversification including by product utilization.
- Enhanced production, productivity.
- Market development

Main functions and procedures of CPS as conceived by CDB are as follows

- Regular meetings, discussion and planning of activities.
- Synchronizing harvesting operation.
- Effective pooling of resources.
- Integration of activities
- Small scale activities at CPS level.
- Better by-product utilization.

### **Coconut Producers Federation (CPF)**

CPF is formed by combining **8-10 CPS**. A CPF would have around **1, 00,000 palms** under it.

CPF is also registered as a charitable society and further registered with CDB.

The main activities and objectives of CPF are as follows:

- To ensure integrated socio economic advancement of member CPSs

- To undertake pooling and collective marketing of the produce of CPSs
- To make available good quality seedlings to CPS
- To disseminate latest technologies in production, procurement, processing and marketing
- To undertake R&D activities in coconut based farming
- To help members get credit facilities at lower interest rates
- To train friends of coconut trees (FoCT) and ensure their service for CPS
- To identify good quality mother palms
- To undertake measures for coconut based product diversification and value addition
- To form more CPS in the operational area of CPF, if found necessary

### **Coconut Producers Company (CPC)**

**8-10 CPFs** would join together to form a CPC. A CPC would consist of around **10, 00,000 yielding palms**. This company would be registered under section 581B of Indian Companies Act of 1956. The Producer Company is wholly and fully owned by the farmers.

The main objectives of CPC are as below:

- Logical scaling up of CPS and CPF to PC for ensuring sustainable income
- Development of coconut farmers.
- Decision making for sustained development of stakeholder (farmer)
- Capacity building and trainings for representatives from CPF and CPS
- Venturing into product diversification, processing and export.
- Brand building and market development

Equity for CPCs is raised through farmer contribution. Each farmer member contributes one nut per palm per harvest to the company as equity. An amount equivalent to farmer equity is also contributed by Central and State Government together in the form of subsidy. Companies also collaborate with financial institutions such as KFC, Union bank, Dhanalakshmi bank, KGB, SBT etc to avail loans for initial and working capital requirements. Apart from the financial

institutions, companies are also expected to collaborate with technical institutes, research institutes, management institutes and other consultancies for acquiring the expertise required to move in the right direction during its initial stage. Current status of the FPO formation is included in the annexure.

### **Benefits of forming Producer Company**

Farmers see this collective as a means to come out of their prior conditions. Labor issues are solved to a certain extent through FPO formation. Through Friends of Coconut Tree (FoCT) programme by CDB, many people, both male and female, are trained in coconut tree climbing. They are also provided insurance and similar support schemes for one year. This has by far encouraged the laborers and increased their availability. Further many farmers who wish to engage in some kind of business, but are unable to do so due to financial and other constraints see this as an opportunity to engage in some sort of business activity. While starting a business in a collective manner, the risk involved is distributed among its members and hence minimized. Also, it is easier to approach banks and other institutions for loans and other financial support as a collective rather than as an individual businessman. These collectives also benefit from CDB schemes such as Replanting & Rejuvenation wherein farmers are provided with fertilizers. As a part of FPO, nurseries have also been established to provide farmers with high yielding varieties of coconut seedlings. Fertilizers and the nurseries are the major factors which pulls the farmers towards the collective.

On the other hand, a company so formed derives advantage from economies of scale, scope and integration. The **10 lakh palms** under a Producer Company provide ample raw material to conduct business on large scale. This in turn, leads to better utilization of fixed assets reducing the per unit cost for the product. As we all know, coconut is a zero wastage product. Each and every part of coconut can be utilized to produce a value added product. The same principle is used in Producer Company to gain maximum benefit by complete utilization of all parts of coconut. Finally in economies of integration the company integrates backward with farmers to procure raw material and then integrate forward to take value added products from coconut to markets. Apart from the above mentioned advantages, the company also stands benefited with better support from government and other institutions, comparatively easy availability of loans from banks and similar institutions.

## **CDB's Role in Farmer Producer Organizations**

Coconut Producer Company is one of the most important points under CDB's vision of 12<sup>th</sup> five year plan. CDB has taken up the task of facilitating formation and hand holding of FPOs during its initial stages. There are various fronts in which CDB is currently supporting FPOs.

### **Product Basket of Coconut**

Being a zero wastage product, the product basket from coconut is enormous. Be it husk, shell, kernel or water, each part of coconut can be used to derive numerous value added products. Given below is a list of value added products from coconut.

- **Tender Coconut Water:** Tender coconut water is rich in vitamins, minerals, proteins, amino acids, sugars and other biological growth factors and has almost same level of electrolyte balance as in our blood. CDB in association with Defense Food Research laboratory (DFRL), Mysore has developed a technology for preservation and packing of tender coconut water in pouches, pet bottles and aluminium cans which can be stored for three months under ambient conditions and for six months under refrigerated conditions.
- **Coconut Vinegar:** Coconut water can be converted into vinegar by a process using vinegar generators. Vinegar is used extensively in pickle industry and flavouring agent in food processing industry and coconut vinegar which is natural vinegar has an edge over synthetic vinegar prepared from commercial acetic acid.
- **Desiccated Coconut (DC):** Desiccated coconut is prepared by disintegrating and desiccating the white kernel of coconut and keeping moisture content less than three percent. It has huge demand in confectionary and food industries.
- **Coconut chips:** Coconut chips is a ready to eat snack prepared by dehydrating the intermediate moisture from the white kernel. It is crispy and can be packaged and has shelf life of six months.
- **Spray Dried Coconut Milk Powder:** Coconut milk powder is the dehydrated version of coconut milk and it retains the flavor, texture and taste of coconut milk when dissolved in water.



- **Virgin Coconut Oil (VCO):** Virgin coconut oil is obtained from matured, fresh coconut kernel by mechanical or natural means with or without application of heat. Virgin coconut oil is used in cosmetic oils and is regarded as extremely good for skin care.
- **Ball Copra:** Ball copra is obtained from husked mature nuts which are kept in storage under shade. It takes around 12 months during which the water and the kernel get dried up. It is used for edible purposes especially in northern India.
- **Coconut shell charcoal:** Shell charcoal is obtained by burning of fully matured coconut shells in limited supply of air sufficient only for carbonization and not for complete destruction. It is widely used as fuel for domestic and industrial purposes. It is also used to produce activated carbon. In modern units, the heat generated from burning the shells is used for copra drying and the by-product obtained is shell charcoal.
- **Activated Carbon:** Activated carbon is a form of carbon produced from carbonaceous material such as nut shells, husk, wood, lignite, coal etc. It contains large surface area with micro pores which helps in the adsorption of gases or vapours and activated carbon made from coconut shell is considered superior because of the small micro pore structure which makes it more efficient. It is widely used for water purification, recovery of solvents and vapours, recovery of gold and in gas masks against protection from toxic gases.
- **Coconut wood products:** Coconut wood is traditionally used for making roofing components, temporary sheds and buildings, furniture, handicraft items, wall panels etc.
- **Husk & coir:** Coconut husk forms the raw material for coir industry. It was used as fuel in households for traditional choolahs and is currently used as fuel in copra kilns. It is also used in coconut plantations to conserve the moisture.
- **Coir Pith:** Coir pith is the byproduct obtained while extracting fiber from husk. It is an excellent soil conditioner, rooting medium and mulching material. Coir pith also known as coco peat is also extensively used in horticulture in domestic market as well as abroad
- **Other products:** 4% fat ice cream, coconut body lotion, haustorium products etc.

### **Neera and its Value Added Products**

Neera is a sweet, oyster white coloured juice obtained from the unopened inflorescence of coconut palm. Neera is a rich source of sugars, minerals and vitamins which makes it an

excellent health drink. It also has a **very low Glycemic Index** which makes it diabetic friendly. Apart from directly taking as a drink, many value added products can also be made from Neera.

- **Neera Jaggery:** Neera jaggery is Neera converted into a solid or a semisolid crystalline mass ready for direct consumption and is widely use as a sweetening agent.
- **Neera Syrup:** Neera syrup is used as a health and energy drink and is prevalently used in ayurveda and other systems of medicine.
- **Neera Honey:** Neera honey is thick, syrup like liquid used as sweetener in confectionary items like ice creams. It is a rich source of iron for anemic patients and hence is largely used in pharmaceuticals formulation.
- **Neera Sugar:** Crystalline sugar made from Neera is known as Neera sugar. It is used to make chocolates, toffees and confectionery items.
- **Other Products:** Bread spread, spicy jaggery, cookies, squash, chocolate, Halwa, Unniappam etc.

### **Technology**

CDB Institute of Technology (CIT), CDB's in-house research centre is set up for providing technical support, consultancy and efficient technologies for integrated coconut processing. Quality testing, training programmes, product development and technology transfer support from CIT help FPOs in adopting modern and advanced technologies as per their requirement.

### **Technology Mission on Coconut (TMOC)**

TMOC supports FPOs for establishment of coconut processing units at **25% of project cost** subject to a maximum of **Rs.50 lakhs**. Apart from this, TMOC also does hand holding for market promotion, brand building, product processing and diversification

### **Marketing Support**

Marketing team of CDB facilitates market identification, development and product promotion for the companies. It also works on generating demand through consumer awareness by conducting coconut festivals, exhibitions, fairs etc. Use of potentials of advances in Information technology, exclusive coconut corners, generic product promotion etc. are some other ways in which market building is carried out by CDB.

### **Capacity Building and Trainings**

Friends of Coconut Tree (FoCT) training for coconut climbers, Neera technician training for Neera tapers etc. are some of the trainings initiated by CDB to build skilled laborers in coconut sector. This not only addresses the issue of labour scarcity and lack of efficiency, but also provides employment opportunity with good remuneration and dignity for aspiring people. Trainings and certification courses in coconut processing and value addition are also started to attract younger generation to this sector. Capacity building is also done by conducting leadership and other trainings for directors of the companies.

### **Technical and Managerial Professionals in Coconut Sector**

Absence of sufficient technical and managerial professionals is one of the most important reasons for the inadequate growth of this sector. In order to bridge this gap, CDB has been collaborating with reputed management, technical and research institutes to enable professional participation in this sector. CIT, the in-house research centre of CDB is an initiative in this direction. Through CIT, CDB intends to build up its technical and research side in coconut processing, value addition and related topics. Various trainings and courses by CIT aims at attracting younger generation and developing skilled professionals in this area. Similarly, in the management side CDB has started collaborating with institutes such as Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA), National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), Xavier Institute of Management and Entrepreneurship (XIME), School of Communication and Management studies (SCMS) etc. by providing the students internship as well as job opportunities with the organization. Such a technical and managerial professional base can provide the much required boost by bringing in new culture and face to the sector.

### **Quality Planting Material**

The first and foremost requirement for producing international standard coconut products is presence of high quality raw material base. Currently India faces lack of quality planting material required to build up this raw material base. CDB plans to address this issue by facilitating a decentralized and farmer participatory nursery system. With emergence of FPOs, federations can take up the responsibility of delivering quality planting materials to all CPS under them by maintaining own nursery. This would not only give way to better productivity and quality, but also invoke among the farmers a sense of ownership.

Apart from the above mentioned points, CDB also acts as an interface to help FPOs collaborate with various local, state and central government institutions in matters of financial support and policy advocacy during this initial hand holding phase. CDB has proposed formation of Consortium of Producer Companies to take over the above mentioned role played by CDB and to establish itself as an independent entity which addresses the common needs of Producer Companies and act as a powerful force to build a more favorable business climate.

## **Way forward**

Going forward, CDB plans to form **100 Producer Companies, 1000 CPFs and 20,000 CPS'** in the country. The purpose behind the same is that at least 10% of total production happening in coconut sector should be through Producer Companies. Only in such a situation would the actual bargaining power reside in hands of farmers. Besides, this would also encourage new entrepreneurs to establish business in this sector as the issue of aggregation and organized availability of raw materials would be addressed through FPOs.

Coconut cultivation is a sector with much potential and growth opportunities. As we have seen, there are many health benefits attached to coconut. Coconut being a zero wastage product, each and every part of coconut can be put to some use. There also exists a latent demand for many coconut products. Globally, we can see that there are many companies involved in this sector making huge profits and performing very well. But the sector also comes with lots of challenges. There is a huge lack of awareness among public on benefits of coconut and its products. People also carry some misconceptions regarding coconut which says that it is harmful for their health. The frequently fluctuating prices, low productivity, labour issues etc. have forced farmers to move from coconut to other plantation crops which are more profitable. Thus the need of the hour is to organize this sector in such a way that the bargaining power rests with farmers. Farmer Producer Organizations intend to do the same. With the proper support from government, FPOs have complete potential to benefit all stakeholders namely the government, farmers and the consumers. The export of coconut produce can earn revenue for the government; it can ensure bargaining power and constant returns to farmers; and above all, deliver quality products to consumers. Hence this effort of CDB to form FPOs can be seen as the stepping stone for revival of coconut sector.

## Annexures

### **Annexure 1: Coconut Cultivation – Global Scenario\***

<b>Country</b>	<b>Area (‘000 ha)</b>	<b>Production (Million nuts)</b>	<b>Productivity (nuts/ha)</b>
Indonesia	3,787	16,463.00	4,347
Philippines	3,550	15,353.00	4,325
India	2,136	22,680.00	10,615
Srilanka	395	2513.32	6,363

*\*Source: Statistical Year Book 2013*

### **Annexure 2: Coconut Cultivation – Indian Scenario 2014-15\***

<b>State</b>	<b>Area (‘000 ha)</b>	<b>Production (Million nuts)</b>	<b>Productivity (nuts/ha)</b>
Tamil Nadu	465.11	6917.46	14,873
Karnataka	515.03	5141.15	9,982
Kerala	649.85	4896.61	7,535
Andhra Pradesh	105.99	1463.56	13,808
West Bengal	29.41	372.23	12,657
Odisha	50.68	324.89	6,411
Gujarat	31.63	295.03	9,328
Assam	21.14	237.49	11,234
Maharashtra	28.10	187.44	6,670
Bihar	14.90	141.38	9,489

*\*Source: Department of Agriculture and Cooperation (Horticulture Division)*

**Annexure 3: Current status of FPO formation in India\* (As on 31-12-2016)**

<b>State</b>	<b>CPS registered with CDB</b>	<b>CPF registered with CDB</b>	<b>CPC registered</b>
Kerala	7146	456	29
Tamil Nadu	546	60	17
Karnataka	397	125	12
Andhra Pradesh	991	82	7
Odisha	15	0	0
West Bengal	187	0	0
Maharashtra	1	0	0
Gujarat	4	0	0
Assam	21	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>9308</b>	<b>723</b>	<b>65</b>

## Annexure 5: Case Studies

### 1. Case Study from Philippines

Jerry Taray and his wife are the owners of Tree Life Coconut Plantation which is the biggest producer of organic coco sugar and coco syrup in Philippines today.

Jerry Taray has a plantation of 60 hectares area with **8000 dwarf varieties** of coconuts which have reached their fruiting age. The fruiting coconut tree produces 8 mature nuts per month, i.e. 96 nuts per year. These **96 nuts** translate into **21 kgs** of copra which fetches an average of **P15 per kilo** or total of **P320 per tree**. One-third of this usually goes to harvester as his share. On the other hand, **480 litres of sap** is obtained from **one coconut tree in a year**. **8 litres** of coconut sap yields **1 kg** of coco sugar when cooked. This is worth **P200 per kilo** at current prices, even higher in the retail market. Thus, the **480 liters** of sap per tree per year becomes **60 kilos** of coco sugar worth **P12, 000**. Assuming that even if the net profit from coco sugar production were only 10 percent, the profit from one tree would still be **P1, 200**. And since there are 140 trees per hectare, the net profit per hectare would be **P168, 000**.

Coco sugar production provides employment to more people than when the coconut is intended for copra production. To produce the current amount of eight tons of coco sugar per month, there are 25 to 30 tappers who are formed into teams. At the end of the day, each person can collect **90 to 120 liters of sap** for which he is paid **P4.50 per liter**, which means a take home pay of **P405 to P540 per day**.

Further, the sap is converted into sugar by heating it in huge vessels by stirring continuously and crystallizing it to coco sugar. This process is done by women workers who are paid by the number of kilos they are able to cook in three shifts of **6 to 8 hours** each. They can each make a daily take home pay of **P250 to P350** which is higher than the minimum wage in the province.

Taray's organic coco sugar and coco syrup are certified by Ceres, a certifying body based in Europe. With the organic certification, the Taray couple is able to export their products to buyers in Europe and other developed countries.

## **2. Case Study: Palakkad Coconut Producers Company Ltd. (PCPCL)**

Tom Thomas, a farmer from Palakkad Producer Company, has generated **an income Rs. 55,000 by tapping 17 coconut palms** for Neera. This has brought up the average income from Neera to **Rs. 3200**, more than double the expected amount of **Rs. 1500 per palm**. Tom Thomas said that the yield from a single palm went up to **3.5 litres a day** against the estimated average of 1 litre per palm per day. At the same time, two other farmers, Uthuppu and Thomas got an amount of **Rs. 22879 from 11 palms and Rs. 11599 from 10 palms** respectively. All three farmers together have incurred a net income of around **Rs. 89000** from Palakkad Company by tapping Neera. These farmers are a part of Muthalamadha federation which comes under the Palakkad Company. According to the company chairman Mr, Vinod Kumar, farmers having **15 palms** under Neera tapping can earn up to an average of **Rs. 45000** a month with the current price of Neera. Apart from farmers, Neera technicians, the skilled labour force involved in Neera tapping, is also earning a good income. There are 25 permanent Neera tappers in the federation who are paid **Rs. 20,000 a month** as salary and incentives, along with additional **Rs. 5000** towards their social security net.

Of the 1500 palms marked in Muthalamada federation, Neera tapping is currently done from 250 palms. Entire Neera collected is sold through Neera parlour in Vytilla hub in and another stall at GCDA complex in Kochi. Neera is sold under the brand name “**Pamdew**” for **Rs. 25 per 200 ml**. Owing to the huge success of Neera sales at these two sale points, Palakkad CPC Ltd intends to open 50 more Neera outlets within Cochin, Thrissur and Palakkad districts.



### 3. Friends of Coconut Trees (FoCT)

Friends of Coconut Trees (FoCT) is a programme initiated by Coconut Development Board to train unemployed youth and women in coconut climbing. This programme tries to achieve the twin objective of overcoming shortage of coconut climbers and providing employment to rural youth and women. The **6 day FoCT workshop** covers basic aspects of coconut cultivation besides practical sessions on coconut climbing, nut identification, identification of pests, safe handling of nuts, harvesting etc. Physical exercise every day before training session is another highlight of the programme. “The training gave us a sense of confidence that we can do anything if we have the will. Moreover, we are now able to earn a good amount by spending three to four hours a day,' says Aneela Mathew from Peruvannamuzhi, a practicing woman climber. “By using the machine I can climb **25 to 30 trees a day** and manage to earn around **400 rupees within three hours,'** says Reeja VG, another women trainee who has taken up this as a livelihood. It is quite encouraging to see women from various backgrounds coming forward to attend the training and then taking up coconut climbing as their job. FoCT has helped women to be economically independent and make a living with dignity.

FoCT has also changed the lives of many rural youth. It is a known fact that many youth from Kerala migrate to Middle Eastern countries, away from their families, in search of employment opportunities. Most of the times, they end up doing small jobs, earning meager income, struggling to make both the ends meet. FoCT brings before such youth an opportunity to earn better income, staying with their family. **Usman from Tirur, who has worked in Gulf for 14 years, now realizes that he has gained more in last one year by climbing coconut trees than what he has during his 14 years in Gulf. He earns three times more income now than what he used to earn in Gulf.** Another interesting observation is that people from various backgrounds such as engineers, teachers, business men, students etc. are also coming forward to try their luck in coconut climbing. Thus FoCT has been successful in changing the face of coconut climbing. It has turned coconut climbing into a job for layman, with no barriers on gender, age or qualification.