



The Milleteer

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Millet Network of India

Volume 1, Issue 2; Oct—Dec 2015

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About 'MINI'

Millet Network of India is convened by Deccan Development Society, which over the last 25 years, has been working with rural communities of Medak District and assisted them in their quest for food sovereignty. The Network has about 120 members across the length and breadth of the country, and is currently involved in a range of interventions in about 8 states including Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Odisha, Himachal Pradesh and Nagaland.

An Appeal

All the members of Millet Network of India who receive this newsletter are requested to make their contributions to it, so that it can be enriched and stories from different corners of the country where not only MINI works but from across the borders can be presented. Photo-features, stories, analytical articles, policy analyses and so on are all welcome.

MINI wishes all our readers a Happy, Prosperous and Peaceful New Year 2016!!

<https://www.facebook.com/milletindia1>



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Growing vegetables, fruits the organic way!

Deccan Development Society has taken up one more initiative – ‘Organic Medak’ – to promote cultivation of vegetables and fruits the organic way. The activities so far were confined only to organic production of millets and crops that would now be extended to vegetable and fruit production. The DDS women farmers are currently working in four mandals – Jarsangam, Zaheerabad, Raikod and Nyalakal. The activity would now be extended to three more mandals – Munipally, Kohir and Manoor.

Initially, the plan is to implement ‘Organic Medak’ by roping in about 400 farmers to cultivate on 1,000 acres land with a target of expanding it to 5,000 farmers and 10,000 acres by 2017. In addition to the existing crops that are being cultivated organically, the DDS has been planning to introduce mango, banana and guava fruits to the basket of organic produce. Different leafy vegetables like brinjal and tomato would also be added to that later. According to P.V. Satheesh, Director, DDS, they have planned to develop the area as production, consumer and service hubs. While production of various farming produces like paddy, maize, sorghum and different millets, vegetables and fruits will be taken up under production hub, offering training to farmers in organic cultivation and guidance will be taken up under service hub by Krishi Vignan Kendra (KVK) in association with DDS.

Under consumer hub, the main focus will be on Hyderabad where large market is available to sell the produce. At the same time, focus will also be laid on Zaheerabad and Sangareddy. Medak Dt. Collector D. Ronald Rose, who is interested in promoting millets and who formally launched ‘Organic Medak,’ visited the farms being cultivated by women farmers and examined their practices.



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Deccan Development Society (DDS), Pastapur



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'Millet cultivation can save farmers fighting drought'

Till not too long ago, Odisha farmers used to take up millet farming. But after Green Revolution, the government laid emphasis on paddy, wheat and other crops. Today, millet cultivation is virtually facing extinction. Experts, including virologist and agriculture scientist Dr Balaram Sahu, said crops like finger millet (mandia), great millet (juara), spiked millet (bajra), Italian millet (kangu), kodo millet (kodua), barnyard millet (khira) and little millet (suan) are more nutritious. These crops are also resilient to climate change, he added.

"These crops could be cultivated in low irrigated and even non-irrigated areas as it needs very little water for its production. It can be raised in upland areas of tribal hilly zones of the state. It doesn't need synthetic fertilizers or pesticide. So a farmer can grow these crops without investing huge money like paddy, cotton and other cash crops," he said.

Das said the millets, which are highly nutritious, have several health benefits, such as its ability to protect one from diabetes, improves digestive system, reduces cancer risk and strengthen immune system. It has also medicinal values which helps human body, he added.

Nirman, an NGO, which has been promoting the production of millets in the state, said these crops have several positive points which need to be included in the food menu. "But it is not happening due to the lack of governments interest to promote these crops or the farmers lack of interest to readopt this," said Nirman chief Prashant Mohanty.

Another expert professor Radhamohan said cultivation area of such farming has declined to 63% between 1978 and 2013. If efforts are taken for the revival of this farming, then the prevailing agrarian crisis as well as the issue of food scarcity would be resolved, said experts. Ranjita Behera, a millet grower of Biringia under Tumudibandha in Kalahandi district, said she has started harvesting millets like mandia, janha, kandula (pulse) and kangu. As her paddy crop was damaged due to scanty rainfall, she said, her family depends on millets in their menu to manage food crisis. Another farmer Bipin Majhi of Kandhamal said he has cultivated millets in two acres of land. Last year, he earned at least Rs 10,000 from mandia and kandula. Though he has lost his paddy crop this year, he said, millet crops will see him through the year.

"Mixed cultivation and integrated farming will bailout a farmer from crop loss crisis," said Prashant Mohanty, adding, "Millet not only helps farmers earn some extra money, but also adds nutrition in their daily food."

He said mandia, janha and kandula are on demand than other millets. "If the state promotes the farming of millets and includes it in ICDS and PDS system, these crops will stage a comeback and resolve the agrarian crisis in state," Mohanty said.

Prashant Mohanty, NIRMAN, Odisha
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National Convention on Millets 2015, Hyderabad

A two-day **National Convention on Millets** was held in collaboration with **Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS)**, at CESS Seminar Hall, Hyderabad on **25th & 26th November, 2015**. Presided by **Dr. S. Galab, Director of CESS and Shri C. Parthasaradhy, IAS, Principal Secretary of Agriculture, Govt. of Telangana and Shri P.V. Satheesh, Director of DDS**. Attended by 120 people from diverse fields, this Convention brought together Scientists, Farmer leaders, Civil society organizations, Environmentalists, Media practitioners who participated in the Convention and shared their experiences which not only brought forward the collective issues that matter to the country but also has helped to take the debate on '*milletisation*' on to the centre stage of national food security. The theme of the convention which was taken from the UN Sustainable Development Goals - "*End Hunger, Achieve Food Security and improved Nutrition and promote sustainable Agriculture*". Towards the end of the convention, The Hyderabad Declaration on Millets was endorsed by farmers, civil society groups and individuals.

The Declaration

- ⇒ The IV National convention deeply thanks the August parliament of India for having passed the National Food Security Act, and wants to remind the August parliament that the spirit of the Act is still not being realized because of the failure of Food Corporation of India and State government to procure and supply millets in PDS.
- ⇒ While the entire world is turning towards ecological organic agriculture, India is still grappling with conventional models of chemical and high input agriculture, therefore this convention strongly recommends that the Government take note of changing food consumption habits and make India a strong base for ecological agriculture.
- ⇒ The convention recommends all the Government medical institutions – AYUSH and Naturopathy hospitals to serve millet food for its inherent medicinal and nutritional values.
- ⇒ Keeping farmers' parameters at center stage, studying ecological, economic, cultural and nutritional contributions of millets should be in the fore front of the National Agricultural Research system, parent-teacher and children education.
- ⇒ In the light on the Paris summit on climate change, India should make a climate commitment to the world assembly saying that it is providing guaranteed MNREGA employment for millet farming.

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- ⇒ The convention has heard a large number of farmers' experiences from across the country that celebrate millet based ecological agriculture. These experiences could be wove into a policy matrix and ensure that India is food, farming and climate secure and we urge science and research community to recognize millet farmers' knowledge as science.
- ⇒ Millets apart from ensuring security for food, fodder, health, livelihood and climate they also promote peace. ***Millets are the bonding crops in the war tone States.***
- ⇒ We reiterate our demand made in previous conventions to the State governments to increase Minimum Support Price (MSP) for millets.
- ⇒ We urge the Government and civil society organizations to promote millets by celebrating National and International Day of Millets to recognize and respect the contribution of millets to human health and environment and also pitch for special slots for Millets on TV channels.
- ⇒ The convention urges Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) to stand accountable for misleading agricultural advertisements.

The Complete Declaration can be found at the following link:

<http://ddsindia.com/www/pdf/MINI%20IV%20NC%20Declaration%20Nov%202015.pdf>

Secretariat, Millet Network of India, Hyderabad

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Diversity Seed Festival (Desi Bihan Parav)

A one-day Diversity of Seed Festival was held on 28th December 2015 at Kandhumunda of Bargarh Dt., Western Odisha attended by at least 500 farmers, activists, local leaders and children.

This is a post-harvest festival that brought various stakeholders and practitioners onto a common platform facilitating exchange of seed and the experience and knowledge systems associated with the local communities along with small and marginal farmers.

The so called three terms 'Drought', 'Migration' and 'Farmer suicide' have become synonyms for each other in Western Odisha, particularly the district of Bargarh, the driest of state. The land of many rice cultivars, millets diversity and pulses has become input dependent since the post-green revolution era. Its self-sufficiency along with decision making capacity has gradually been taken away by the predatory market driven forces and the state Government machinery. Their vulnerability becomes many-fold with the vagaries of Climate Change as well. In this backdrop, AHINSA CLUB has been working with the vulnerable farming communities within their available resources, ultimately trying to mitigate the external ill-impacts. To date, Ahinsa Club has conserved 120 varieties of dry-land rice cultivars, 8 types of millets and 20 type pulses, 30 type vegetable, 05 varieties of oil seeds as the crops are grown in tandem with each other. Thus, Desi Bihan Surakshya Samiti (an AHINSA CLUB initiative) has been celebrating Diversity of Seed Festival (Desi Bihan Parav) as a conservation approach with the villagers' valorising the seed conservation, cultural, nutritional, social, economical and environmental ethics.

Siba Prasad Sahoo, Ahinsa Club, Odisha

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Mobile Biodiversity Festival: 2016 flagged off

On the day when farmers in this semi-arid region of Telangana celebrate their food and seed, Deccan Development Society launched its Mobile Biodiversity Festival to carry the message of food diversity.

A colourful caravan of bullock carts laden with boxes containing several varieties of millets was rolled by from Yedakulapally village in Jhrasangam mandal on Thursday the 14th of January, on the eve of Makara Sankranti. It will travel through 55 villages before the festival draws to a close on February 13 at Machnoor Village where DDS Green School and Sangham FM Radio are located.

The festival comprises public meetings in all villages the caravan passes by, where farmers would discuss the importance of biodiversity and seed diversity. At the launch, Commissioner and Director of Agriculture Ms G.D. Priyadarshini, who was the Chief Guest for the occasion promised to introduce millets in hostels if there is an increase in production. Millets set aside after the farmers' use could be allotted for government hostels, she added. Dr. TG Nageshwara Rao, Director, Indian Institute of Millet Research (IIMR) who was the Special Guest for the occasion announced a series of steps being taken up by the Institute to promote millet farming among the people of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. The institute has prepared 20 food items from Jowar and certain 'ready-to-eat foods' using Jonna, Raagi and Sajja like Vermicelli, biscuits, pasta, puffs and heat exuded products using Jowar. Calling upon the millet farmers of DDS to not only produce millets but also learn to make these food preparations and market them, he announced that IIMR was also offering free training to the farmers every month so that they could become more self-sufficient, earning higher profit margin for their products.

Mr. PV Sathesh, Director, presided over the function, said millet farmers would increase production and contribute to the public distribution system, where he said at least two kilogram of jowar should be distributed along with four kilogram of rice.

Ms Rukmini Rao, Director of DDS requested Dr Nageshwara Rao to consider IIMR training certificates given to the farmers after the completion of training as consideration for giving bank loans instead of property pass books which are usually sought by the banks while giving loans. She said that usually the property would be in the name of the husbands, due to which the women farmers were being devoid of financial assistance. Seeking bankers' help, she hoped women going in groups for loans could be given loans in a liberal manner.

Pointing out the huge discrepancy in the farmers' sex ratio (only 13 female farmers per 100 male farmers), she hoped that the government should recognise women farmers as farmers as well, who should be extended all kinds of support by the government, she added. - Deccan Development Society, Pastapur

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Emergence Of Telangana State Millet Forum: PEACE

In December 2015 PEACE initiated a state level millet forum comprising mainly state level NGOs to promote the cause of millets which was held at Satyodayam, Tarnaka in Secunderabad.

As many as 30 civil society representatives from various parts of Telangana state participated in the event. The meeting has ignited a dialogue with the like-minded stakeholders on the lines of sustainable agriculture through millets, increasing it's productivity as well as consumption in the state to address the issues of hunger, malnutrition, farmer suicides, food security to name a few.

Mr Spurgeon Raj from DDS was the resource person of the meeting along with other activists and NGO heads. Mr. K.Nimmaiah spoke about the agriculture scenario in the state of Telangana which clearly brought the issues of "grow more food campaign" and green revolution. It was further concluded that our food security and nutritional security lie in our own hands.

Also, the current scenario is more Market driven rather than maintaining standards wherein majority of the control is in the hands of private companies, corporate honchos and handful of a few rich. The meeting felt that the state has to come out of the current mess and there is, however, a need to promote millet based diversified farming systems. Mr Raj from MINI spoke at length about the background of Millet Network of India and its current interventions across the country, and the urgent need for the revival of millets. The participants have shown their interest and willingness to join hands with PEACE and MINI in order that the millet cultivation be scaled up in the state in spite of the current obstacles.

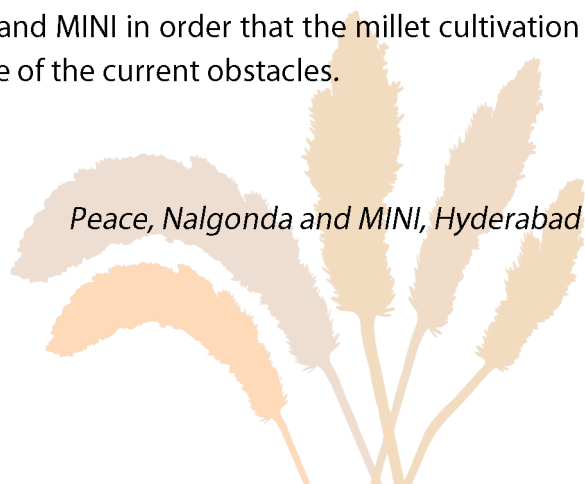
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Peace, Nalgonda and MINI, Hyderabad



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Sustainable and resilient farming: Women Collective's efforts

Although most women in the rural areas work full time on farm, they aren't recognized as farmers. In as men to land ownership, which limits them from accessing inputs and finance and affecting their independence and social status in their communities.

Under such situations, women's collective started working since 1994, with dalit farm women. Beginning with issues of health, soon expanded its goals to find sustainable solutions to food security and family health as both were closely related. For the collective, agro ecology means traditional sustainable and resilient farming practices sustainable to the local context.

Women's Collective organized various trainings and workshops on healthy foods and healthy soils. Farmers are trained on production of biological for plant protection and organic fertilizers. They learn to use locally available ingredients like cow dung, urine, milk – thus reducing their dependence on external inputs and farming expenses. While work load may not be lesser, agro ecological practices certainly result in lesser expenses, healthier families and household food security.



Members are encouraged to adopt mixed cropping systems than mono cropping as they create a natural ecosystem rich in biodiversity which is better for the soil and better harvests. Women farmers adopt agro ecological practices, primarily for household food security, and produce on a small scale. Although not all members of the collective are able to access or lease land, they are encouraged to have an organic kitchen garden. Farmers are encouraged to grow millets which are rich in nutrients and suitable to local conditions and culture. Millets are the traditional foods in the region. But green revolution agriculture had promoted conversion of traditional mixed farming to paddy cultivation. Importantly, in most districts of Tamil Nadu cultivating rice is difficult due to water scarcity. The Women's Collective therefore, promoted cultivation of millets, as the women farmers would have fewer problems with water scarcity and malnutrition.

The network deals with issues of lack of formal credit and ownership of land. They hardly have access to conventional banking systems. Each member of the sangham saves at least 100 rupees per month, which is spent on seeds, health and educational expenses. As is the case in Tamil Nadu, women's access to land is minimal and approximately, only one percent of the one lakh strong Collective owns land.

As a network, they find strength in working with each other and are encouraged to express themselves and become leaders. The social network helps women to maintain a certain level of food security through collective farming and sanghams - lowering the risk of absolute poverty with improved yields and financial / social support. The children of these communities are able to see their mothers, sisters taking charge and raise their voices. Having women role models working with agro ecology sustains farming traditions and inspires younger women.

*Sheelu Francis, Leader of Women's Collective,
Also partner of MINI, Hyderabad*

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Condolences

Reminiscing Deeds of LATE SRI BHARME GOWDRA



Sri D.D. Bharmegowdru, Formerly President, Organic Farming Association of India, native of Shirhatti Taluk, Gadag Dt, Karnataka.

We received the news of the demise of Sri DD Bharme Gowdra with immense sadness. His life was a saga of great inspiration to everyone who believed in organic farming, dry land agriculture, biodiversity and a non-mainstream articulation of farmerâ€™s issues.

Sri Bharme Gowdra was a living example of how a small farmer from a rural hinterland could rise to the position of being the President of a National organization such as the Organic Farming Association of India from his native village of Yealavatti, Gadag District in Karnataka. Sri Bharme Gowdra demonstrated how it was possible to articulate the issues of true sons of the soil without using jargons and highfaluting languages. His straight-from-the-heart and directly-from-the-soil brand for advocacy on the strength of organic farming and dryland agriculture made him a natural leader of people who valued the leadership of peasant farmers.

Deccan Development Society deeply mourns the death of a dear friend a comrade who was always available for any advice and consultation. Sri Gowdra was highly appreciative of the grass root work of DDS with peasant women farmers in promoting their ecological sensibility and deep traditional knowledge.

We will forever miss your friendship camaraderie and the fragrance of the soil that you brought to all our meetings. May you rest in peace forever after having spent a lifetime serving your people.

- MINI Secretariat and Deccan Development Society,

Hyderabad

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