

Bhubaneswar Declaration on Millets

EASTERN INDIA CONVENTION

Reimagining Agriculture

Community Voices and Solutions to Challenges facing Agriculture

Venue:

*Odisha University of Agriculture & Technology [OUAT]
Bubaneswar, Odisha, India*

Coorganised by:

*NIRMAN, Odisha
Agragamee, Odisha
&
Millet Network of India [MINI], India*

We the farmers cultivating millets in various parts of Eastern India -- from the predominantly adivasi areas of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Odisha have met at Bhubaneswar in Odisha on December 14th and 15th to discuss the millet landscape, the challenges facing them and the probable solutions for these challenges

A large number of Listening Sessions over these two days provided opportunity for farmers from various parts of Odisha, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh representing the East Indian millet farming areas an opportunity to vividly articulate the millet situation in their respective states and regions within the state.. We also heard presentations of millet conservers, activists and scientists from Odisha and Chhattisgarh.

The emerging issues were put a detailed discussion by all of us as a result of which we have, through a participatory process, arrived at the following Bhubaneswar Declaration on Millets in Eastern India. This Declaration is intended to address the millet communities of India in general and Eastern India in particular. We place this Declaration in front of policy makers, politicians, scientists, academics, environmentalists, civil society activists and all the national and international development agencies.

As farmers we are gratefully aware that millets helped us to remain strong and working through the day. For our working bodies Kodo and Mandua are very essential. Many of us never knew what a doctor was and never went to a hospital all through our lives. But now our rice based diets, instead of keeping us healthy, have become prescriptions for illness.

We are also painfully aware that rice makes us feel sapped. Rice sold at very cheap price in PDS has become a vehicle of our decline by trapping us into a food system we were not used to.

What is true of our health is also true of our farming. We have been trapped again and again. Our farms were taken over by eucalyptus promoting firms at one point of time which left our lands barren and unproductive. Once we got aware of this and escaped this trap, cotton promoters came and laid siege to our farming through multiple temptations. None of them gave us either economic benefit or food security. Therefore we now demand a cropping system that restores our independence food sovereignty and dignity as farmers.

Cash crops have dominated the Orissa Agricultural policy. Oilseeds, sugarcane and rice rule this policy. It has not cared to focus on millets, unlike Chhattisgarh where the government has sensibly recognised millets as an integral part of the states food and farming systems, and has taken steps to promote them. We demand the same kind of millet promoting policies from the Government of Orissa.

We wish to underline the fact that biodiversity has played a critical role in our farming. Millet farming is a symbol of this biodiversity. Therefore behind our demand for millets is our consciousness of the importance of biodiversity on our farms. In order to make this possible in our current farming landscape, we must establish Community Grain and Seed Banks in our midst which offer us diverse seeds for our farming and diverse grains for our food. This is the crying need of our farmers, particularly in the adivasi communities. Government must stand behind such efforts and promote every effort at setting up community grain and seed banks.

In Odisha, out of 30, 24 districts grow millets and many districts of our state are above the national productivity average. We need to research the benefits of millets for the Odia populations. With 23% of our population being adivasi, and over 60% being poor, we must do serious research on the possible contribution of millet farming systems to alleviate this poverty and cater to the well being of adivasis.

We welcome the introduction of millets into PDS. But it is time in our history to move beyond and bring millets into all the public food systems such as ICDS, Midday meals, social welfare hostels and food for work programmes. This will not only ensure the food security of our children but also their health and nutritional security.

- ❖ Our lands are being taken away, on our traditional farms coffee has become a colonial crop and is introduced under the guise of many other horticultural crops. This is destructive to our food, land and farming.
- ❖ In Santhal areas, peoples lands are being occupied by maize and Soy which are aggressively promoted by the government. They procure these crops promoted by them and make our farming maize dominated. This is offering a market attraction no doubt. But we also understand that in the long term these are suicidal for our food and nutritional security. Hence we demand that.....
- ❖ These newly introduced crops demand huge amount of irrigation and therefore our traditional systems of irrigation which used water wisely and economically has been rendered completely useless. This has also pushed us into borewell irrigation and over the years even these systems have become defunct. As a result we as farmers have been rendered completely useless unable to carry our traditional profession.

- ❖ One of the ways of overcoming these problems is to help the farmers to carry out their own breeding within their own farming systems and increase the productivity and make their farming profitable. ICRISAT and NBPGR must return their seed wealth to farmers and help the regeneration of their agriculture.

As farmers we demand our own rights to grow the kind of food that are in harmony with our food and farming cultures, our ecosystem and helps us to stay food sovereign. We believe that millets are best suited to our food sovereignty.

We demand that all the institutional financial supports such as crop loans, insurance and other support offered to farmers who grow rice, wheat, sugarcane, cotton and other commercial crops so that there is a level playing field for all of us.

However instead of demanding subsidies that other farmers demand, we demand that the government offers each millet farmers the following bonuses;

- ❖ Biodiversity Bonus
- ❖ Water Conservation Bonus
- ❖ Nutritional Bonus
- ❖ Climate Change Compliance Bonus.

We will not accept cash or food coupons in lieu of food grains in PDS.

The areas where millets are grown have to be studied from the standpoint of the culture of that region; and duly recognized as Biodiversity Heritage Sites.

The germplasms that are currently being held by research institutions like ICRISAT should be placed in public domain, and opened to access by farmers; thereby bringing them back into cultivation.

Government and civil society must take extra steps to spread awareness about the nutritional and medicinal properties of millets.

Endorsements from farmers & Civil Society

1. Radha Mohan Prof., *Leading Environmentalist & Former Info.Commissioner, Odisha*
2. Natwar Sarangi Mr., *Eminent Farmer Leader from Odisha*
3. Jagannath Chattarjee Mr., *Regional Centre for Development Cooperation, Odisha*
4. Rajashree Purohit Ms., *Prog. Officer, Centre for World Solidarity, Odisha*
5. Ashok Kumar Padhi Dr., *Sr. Scientist, AICSMIP, CPR, Berhampur, Dist. Ganjam, Odisha*
6. Simhachal Sahu Dr., *Sr. Breeder, Centre for Pulse Research , Berhampur, Dist. Ganjam*
7. Achyut Das Mr. *AGRAGAMEE, Kashipur, Rayagada, Odisha*

8. Aurobind Behera Mr, *IAS, Member, Revenue Board, Chairman Western Odisha Development Council, Odisha*
9. Satheesh PV Mr, *National Convener, Millet Network of India, Andhra Pradesh*
10. Chitta Behara Shri. *Right to Food Activist, Odisha*
11. Sandeep K Mr, *Coordinator, Millet Network of India, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh*
12. Santosh Kumar Patra, *Faculty, SIRD, Odisha*
13. Jacob Nellithanam Mr., *Richaria Campaign, Chattisgarh*
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