

Report of the One-Day Workshop-cum-Exhibition on “Safe and Nutritious Food”

A one-day learning-sharing workshop-cum-exhibition titled ‘Safe and Nutritious Food’ was organised by voluntary organisation NIRMAN in partnership with Nabakrushna Choudhury Centre for Developmental Studies (NCDS), Odisha Millet Mission and IGSSS, at NCDS premises, Bhubaneswar on 29th September, 2018. More than seventy numbers of participants including Rooftop Kitchen Gardeners, NGO representatives, Government officials, Agriculturists, Technical experts, Livelihood experts, FPOs, Researchers, and Media persons had participated in the Workshop-cum-Exhibition on Safe and Nutritious Food.

The workshop started at 10 AM with greetings from NCDS Director and welcome address with synopsis of objectives of the programme by Mr. Prasant Mohanty, Executive Director, NIRMAN. Mr. Mohanty lamented that farmers in Odisha usually keep aside safe and organically produced crops for their own consumption and the rest, especially the crops grown with the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides for the market. He stressed on the need for availability of safe and hygienic food everywhere and welcomed the recent steps taken by the State Government in this regard including the formation of Odisha Millet Mission.

Speaking on the prospective of safe and nutritious food in the State, Dr Srijit Mishra, Director of NCDS elucidated how the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides have contaminated the water, soil and the ecosystem and the food we eat today has turned unhygienic being poisonous with chemical content. He cited the Punjab experience and urged the farmers in the State to switch over to organic farming of nutritious millet crops highly fortified with minerals and iron. Dr Mishra added that millets can be grown in multi-cropping method, that is, along with other crops. He expressed happiness that the government, civil society and people have come together to promote the concept.

Agriculture expert and columnist, Mr. Natbar Khuntia dwelt at length on the key issues concerning safe and nutritious food in the State and role of millets in it. He expressed concern that though a highly nutrient food grain, finger millet is no longer taken by the masses as food mostly due the psychology that it is a poor man’s food barring a few people in urban areas who are now aware of its nutritional value. He urged for the inclusion of ragi and other millets in the menu of the masses. He also stressed for opening of stalls in various parts of the state for the promotion of millet food.

Observing that millets are produced mostly in rain-fed areas of the State, Mr. Khuntia stressed for effective rainwater management for their growth and sustainability. He lamented that organic wastes are not being managed properly and added that cow-dung and other organic

wastes can be used as bio-fertilisers along with green manures made from sun-hemp. In this context, he stressed for the cultivation of sun-hemp as earlier practice prevalent in the State.

Speaking on the occasion, Ms Sugata Nayak of Sishu Organics urged for the intake of food grown, processed and prepared in natural, safe and hygienic manner. She said, one can grow one's own vegetables in the roof garden using organic manures for safety. She explained that eating food from crops grown with the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides or using edible oil prepared by chemical processing pose serious health hazards. They may cause cancer and other diseases while eating naturally grown and processed food boosts the immunity system of the body. She also warned on people's habit of keeping the food in refrigerator. Refrigerated food is also harmful for health as it causes a poisonous effect.

At this point Mr. Maheswar Khillar, Managing Trustee of Kitchen Gardener's Association, Bhubaneswar, threw some light on his experience. He dwelt on the way he grew vegetables in 4 acres of land at Deomali and later at other places in the State and promoted the concept among the masses. He stressed that kitchen gardens can be developed in small areas in the premises of one's house or on rooftops. He held that development of kitchen gardens on our own premises would mean ready availability of fresh, naturally grown and nutritious vegetables at our kitchen. He suggested others to contact him to secure any help in the development of kitchen garden at one's own house.

It was followed by sharing of Canadian experience by Ms Samantha King. She said that in Canada some ecologically concerned farmers were growing crops with locally available bio-fertilisers and manures and processing food without chemicals or preservatives. She added that demand had developed there for such food over the GM, or chemically produced and artificially preserved food.

Then there was a short break at 11.30 AM for a finger-millet soup experience.

After the break Mr. Achyut Das, Director of the voluntary organisation, Agramee shared the organisation's experience on safe and nutritious food. He dwelt on food security issues in tribal areas of the State. He reiterated the statement of Amartya Sen, Nobel Laureate about two important aspects of the food security, i.e., entitlement of the food and access to the food. Hence, the entitlement and availability of safe and nutritious food has to be ensured. In this context, he cited the example of an ex-minister of the State levelling mango kernel powder eaten by the poor tribal people as nutritious food. Mr. Das stressed that it must be ascertained if such food is produced without chemicals or processed in the manner that would not destroy its nutritional values. He said this should be the standard for all kinds of food.

Mr. Das explained how they in Agramee dealt with the problem of food insecurity in their tribal areas of operation without destroying the community culture. He cited the example of establishing a grain bank, promoting family farming and commons management in this regard. He added that there was enough opportunity in promoting nutritious and safe food prepared from crops like millets in the community level in tribal and rural areas of the State.

On this occasion Mr Dinesh Balam of Odisha Millet Mission, dwelt at length on various issues on the availability of safe and nutritious food. He pointed out the various challenges involved in producing, processing, preserving and marketing food grains in the State. He stated that too much polishing of millets would damage their nutritional values as the barn and fibre elements in them will be destroyed. He lamented that value chain has not been developed yet for efficient preservation of millets and other food grains against fungal infection. He added that 92 per cent of small farmers in Odisha are subject to livelihood stress. Therefore, it is a big challenge to the State government. In this context, he stated the government aim of promoting millets in fallow land.

Mr. Balram Sahu, Joint Director, Department of Animal Husbandry, Government of Odisha explained how ipomia or amari leaves can be used as bio-fertiliser and also as effective bio-pesticide for crops. He also explained with video presentation the indigenous methods of preserving food grains like cereals, millets and pulses. Various nutritional contents in millets like finger millet (ragi), pearl millet (bajra), little millet (suan), foxtail millet (kangu) etc. were also shown in the presentation. The electronic projection also illustrated the best native methods of animal husbandry that would ensure good health for the livestock as well as safe food products from them like milk etc. Besides, the local and effective method of purifying water and medicinal values of some plants, their fruit, and herbs were also presented by Mr Sahu. He added that all these things were made aware to people at their "Pathe Pathsala" programme.

The presentation was followed by lunch break at 2 PM. palatable dishes like khichdi, dal, porridge, cake made from various kinds of millets and pulses were served to participants in the menu with the basic aim of making them aware of these millet preparations.

The after-lunch session began with Dr. Prabhu Charan Lenka, Retd. OUAT Professor highlighting the sustainable development of orchard for the availability of safe and nutritious food. He stressed on the plantation of native fruit bearing trees like mango, litchi, papaya, bel, and jackfruit. He explained that taken ripe, these fruits provide rich nutrition and contain anti-oxidants essential for fighting diseases. He added that bel fruit has digestive enzyme and papaya as vegetable is the best medicine for stomach ailments. Jackfruit has anti-diabetic and anti-cancer properties. He put stress on maintaining the safety level in growing these trees and urged for the promotion of home garden.

Speaking on his turn Mr. Bidyadhar Moharana, Retd Govt. Officer and Technical Expert emphasized on continuing the practice of traditional and climate smart agriculture in the perspective of rising global temperature and climate change taking place for quite some years. He stressed for sustainable agricultural practices as the latter can be resilient to climate change and emit less greenhouse gases. The significance of climate smart agriculture also stems from the fact that rising population requires more food with safety and nutrition and there is a decline in resources including water. In fact he pointed out the problem of scarcity of water, agriculture alone requiring 87% of the total availability.

Mr. Moharana urged for rotation of crops, cultivation of millets, maize and pulses in dry areas with multi cropping and organic practice. He also suggested for SRI method for cultivation of paddy and millets and use of aerobic paddy that requires less water and added that these adaptation measures can beat climate change. Besides, Mr. Moharana stressed for rearing of desi (indigenous) varieties of cows for desi ghee and milk and use of cow-dung in agriculture. He suggested right mix of nitrogen (from bio-fertiliser) for nitrogen smart agriculture and use of biogas as a means of achieving energy smart agriculture.

Mr. Prabodh Mohanty, CEO, I-Concept shared the experience of the organisation. Lamenting on the decline in badi or backyard farming and people's trend on buying chemically treated nice looking vegetables from the market, he stressed for promoting people for organic farming. He explained how they promoted organic farming of fruits and vegetables with the formation of 10 Farmers' Producing Companies. However, the problem arose with marketing of these products. Therefore, they formed a marketing wing named 'Sabujavarna'. The latter markets the products of the farmers with a marginal distribution cost. Besides, he stated that they have promoted four numbers of rooftop gardens in Bhubaneswar and taken up 107 acres of land for organic farming. They are tying up with OUAT and planning to do so with a Swiss university for further technical help.

Mr. Jagdish Nayak from Living Farm NGO shared their experience in promoting organic farming and stressed practical implementation of the work on safe food. He added that a relationship must be built between the farmer producers and consumers for the promotion of safe and nutritious food and explained how they promoted community nutrient garden in Rayagada.

Mrs. Puspanjali Panda, Chief of the PRERANA Welfare Trust, Bhubaneswar also shared her experience in promoting safe and nutritious food processed/ prepared from native crops. She said, barring a couple of cases like tomato ketchup where they had to use preservatives, all the food products produced and marketed by 'PRERANA' was free from any chemical. Most of the products prepared by the firm are prepared from naturally grown millets enriched with vitamin and minerals. She urged for change in people's mind-set so that they would demand such safe food than low nutrient and chemically treated products sold by big companies.

Sharing his experience, Mr. Siba Prasad Sahu, Secretary of Ahinsa Club, Bargarh stated how he struggled in educating the village communities for cultivating crops with organic manure following sustainable agricultural practices by drawing the flak of the vested interests who were behind the promotion of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. But he gained support from the community and today he, along with his wife and child, is performing acts in villages educating people on the benefits of organic farming.

This was followed by a discussion between the experts and stakeholders. Senior agriculture expert Shri Sisir Parija explained answering a query that scepticism persists among some people on one hundred per cent use of bio-fertilisers, so they mix a little chemical fertiliser and pesticide. But it is incorrect to think that the crop yield would come down with application of

organic manures. He stated how robust yield was recorded in the field of a farmer who applied only organic manure on his advice. He said, farmers in Canada are demanding bio-fertiliser these days. But do not get enough. Therefore, they have to compromise with the practice of integrated nutritional and pest management method.

Technical expert Mr. Ekadashi Nandi, Organic Expert clarified that safe and nutritious food come from safe soil and seed. Chemicals and pesticides destroy the soil and the seed. He added that food grains of large quantity could be produced without using chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

The workshop was concluded at 4 PM with a formal vote of thanks by Mr Suresh Chandra Bisoyi, Programme Director, NIRMAN.

The exhibition of safe and nutritious food items was also organised on the same day from 3 PM to 8 PM where variety of millets and value added products (biscuits, cakes, halwa, chocolates, mixtures, monda, khiri etc.), pulses, rice, turmeric, ginger, honey, desi oils, spices and vegetables, were displayed. **During this exhibition, Kandhamal Farmers Producers Company Ltd. (KFPCL) promoted by NIRMAN, PRERANA, I-Concept, Living Farms, KASAM and Ahinsa Club had participated in the exhibition and explained the values of the Safe and Nutritious Food items to the customers and also sold the their food and other items to the public.** Many consumers had enquired to the Exhibitors on the food items and further availability of the products. Moreover, they had also shared their views and feedbacks on the quality of the fast food like ragi soup, millet manda, millet cake and kangu khiri etc. Finally, the exhibition was ended over by eight – PM with good experiences and feedbacks for future course of action.
