



A REPORT ON

SEED FESTIVAL 2014

August 30, 2014

Organised by Development Research
Communication and Services Centre, Kolkata

Supported by **Aid India, Boston**

Co funded By **Action Aid**

Introduction

Seed is the keystone element of our entire agricultural system. India is known for its rich cultural heritage, conventional knowledge and seed diversity. However, it took only few decades after 'Green revolution' to supplant our native crops with improved hybrid/Genetically Modified crops endangering the entire agro-ecosystem and sustainability of millions of livelihoods dependent on farming. Roughly, 100,000 global plant varieties are endangered today. Extreme weather events, over exploitation of ecosystems, habitat loss, and lack of public awareness threaten future plant biodiversity. Conservation techniques, such as the creation of seed banks and seed exchanges among farmers, gardeners, and even nations, play an important role in preserving ancient, heirloom varieties of important food crops.

Seed Festival 2014 was organised at Sahid Surya Sen Bhaban, Jodhpur Park, and Kolkata on 30th August. Its main purpose was to create awareness and to share the knowledge of conservation practices of crop genetic resource and exchange seeds at greater level. The festival was utilized for knowledge sharing of resource farmers saving traditional seeds. Various discussions and interactions were held on sustainable agriculture, Seed Bill, GM crops and its future effects on farmer & society. People from different discipline, media personnel, Govt. officials, donor bodies and other stakeholders were invited to the program with all together 130-140 participants. The seed festival also organised for a seed exhibition for the purpose of seed exchange and for exchange of knowledge and ideas. The program was supported by Aid India, Boston and Action Aid.

Mr. Sanjib Chattopadhyay one of the staff of DRCSC initiated the day's proceedings with a warm welcome for all the dignitaries present i.e. Sri Ardhendu Sekhar Chatterjee, founder member of DRCSC; G. Krishna Prasad, Director Shaja Samrudha; Dr. Tushar Chakraborty, Senior Scientist, CSIR- Indian Institute Of Chemical Biology. The festival was inaugurated by Narayan Chandra Bachar who has been practicing Integrated Farming System and organic farming from last 30 years. He Said, "*amar desher beej amar beej*" means "*my country's seed is my seed*". The chief guests received a memento from DRCSC.

Discussion on sustainable agriculture and indigenous seeds

Ardhendhu Sekhar Chatterjee was invited to put forward his views on sustainable agriculture and indigenous seeds. His main thought was that all people around the state are suffering from hunger and the agricultural pattern in the country sees it as a business. One must keep in mind that the service Centre works mainly where seed supply is less like Sunderbans, hilly areas and flood prone areas. While working in this field it is seen that most percentage of farmers is not having proper supply of seed due to which they run into debt for which price of electricity and natural oil is increasing. He also discussed various problems related to agriculture like previously 10 to 20 years back price of tomato seed was for rupees 10 but now 1gm of seed costs rupees 100, the price that is paid for a commodity only 20% reaches the farmers, the water level have got down and finally the seed company do not have idea about the use of hybrid seeds at proper place due to which the farmers have to pay the price. He also suggested various remedies to come out of the sorrowful situations like seasonal vegetables should be grown during off season when the price is high; farmers should be trained to keep good seeds.



BEEJ SWARAJ MANCH

G Krishna Prasad, Director of Shaja Samrudha, Karnataka, discussed about the Beej Swaraj Manch. He started Sahaja Samrudha to conserve indigenous seeds they are working to promote sustainable agriculture to make organic linkage with the market. He said, "Seed is our mother. Seed is our culture. It is the basis for agriculture." He started seed conservation 39 yrs back. He went to a remote village in Bangalore to search for black paddy seed where he met an old woman who was growing traditional variety of it. The lady was an inspiration and received the Sristi Samman Award. Next he talked about the various varieties of rice like govind bhog, kala namak, rattan chur, charulata and mayurkanth. All these varieties have different uses. Farmers are like scientists they visit the field, select the best variety, and select

the seeds. In his speech, he emphasised on creating marketing linkage and product promotion. In this regards he said that the seed festivals should be used for creating consumers awareness and product promotion. He also told that consumers are not familiar with the varieties, so grain should not be sold by its traditional names but by their special quality. As for example 'biryani rice', 'pregnant women rice', 'diabetic rice', 'kheer rice' etc. It has been found in Karnataka that consumer are always ready to pay a good amount for such products. Sahaja Samruddha adopted this concept few years back and now they are running a successful business. He also told that they registered a native seed producers



company limited in Karnataka. It is a collective of organic seed producers and seed savers with a mission to conserve and promote landraces for more than a decade. The seeds are marketed under the brand name 'Sahaja Seeds'- high quality, organically grown, traditional, open pollinated vegetables and cereal crops seeds. Our seed producers are located across India adaptable varieties conserved by farming communities over generations. He added 'We seek to bring back the tradition of seed saving amongst us by collecting, propagating, and exchanging indigenous and rare varieties. We seek sustainable living and a more self-reliant lifestyle". He suggested DRCS to involve in such consumer awareness activity and media.

A National level 'Beej Swaraj Manch' was formed with 100 dedicated seed committees from 18 states of India. They are organising seed festival, marketing support and organising support for seeds. Lastly he requested to look into the angle of seed conservation and wants to organise a desi rice mela in Kolkata.

GM crops and its future effects on agriculture

Dr. Tushar Chakraborty, Senior Scientist, CSIR- Indian Institute of Chemical Biology, Jadavpur University, discussed about another fear that has come up since the decade that is GM crops. He said that Sahid Surya Sen Bhaban is the appropriate place to hold the seed festival because first 100 years the farmers were under East India Company and they used the country. Similarly Monsanto is another East India Company. We are going back to the earlier phase. So now he wants to bring back family farming. If farming is used as an art then there would be no shortage of food. When farming is done on a large scale it is mainly done for business. The big companies are seeing human beings as insects. They are deciding the price of the food grains. If local food remains at hands of local people then its price remains

reasonable but if it goes to hands of big companies its price increases. So one must bring back family farming.

In 1983 the work of gene came forward which was not prevalent earlier. Monsanto tried to engulf the entire seed market and started taking away all the patents. They selected four countries America, Canada, Brazil, and Argentina. At that time America was going through an economic crisis and they were bound to take such seeds. Now they are trying to get into India as it is a country of agriculture.

Lastly he put forward some of the arguments regarding the GM crops:

- The seeds that are being grown by gene regulation are not tested for their safety while using in the fields and the produce is safe or not for the consumers.
- There is no form of control measure. The weedicides are eating up those insecticides and pesticides due to which they are growing to super weed which is becoming impossible to remove.
- Whether the toxin is going to cause harmful effects on the health.
- Insects that are dying due to the toxin maintain our ecological balance.
- Whether the nearby land is going to be affected.
- Whether the produce will increase or not.
- Whether the price of seed is going to lessen. Organised

Kishan Swaraj Samiti

Nimai Mondal, Secretary of West Bengal state level Kishan Swaraj Samity, talked of the present situation where the traditional seeds are losing its importance. He is presently the member of Kishan Swaraj Manch and is fighting for the farmers rights. He wants the farmers to produce seed themselves so that they can sell it in the market. The amount that the farmers get from the government is not enough. The farmers must be given pension similar to the government officials. The forests are being destroyed and priorities are being given to the industries.

Felicitation of Resource farmers



23 resource farmer from across the state were felicitated on that day.

Knowledge and experience sharing of farmers

Lastly few of the farmers were invited to the stage to share their ideas regarding the conservation of traditional variety of seeds.



Sri Kunjo Bihari Das, a farmer from far North Bengal, said, “Today we are at a pitiful stage. The seeds that our fore fathers conserved are no longer in use. Farmers are being deprived and remains below the poverty line. So now we are going to protest against this. Previously ash was used as a fertilizer, which was environment friendly; but now various chemical insecticides and pesticides are being used resulting in pollution and diseases. The whole society is getting polluted. So we must start using organic manure once again.”



Sri Anil Hembrom, an organic farmer from Purulia added, “I feel proud of being a part of this programme. The market no longer has traditional seeds but is covered with hybrid variety. Both these seeds are different in nature. Traditional seeds require less amount of water for growth but the hybrid variety requires more water. I have corn, jowar, bajra, sesame seeds.”



Shayamoli Satpati, an organic farmer from Patharpratima, South 24 Pgs said “I sell some of the produce and the rest I keep it for my family use. I started organic farming after being destroyed by aila as the land became salty. I am the member of the Sarada Swanirbhar Gosthi and we all are engaged in organic farming. There are three varieties of egg plant, bitter gourd, sweet potato, beans.”

Sushoma Arohi, farmer from Dhanchebari, East Midnapur, added “I came from Dhanchybari. I have nutrition garden ad seeds bank. I have lady’s finger, egg plant.”

Smt Sumita Maiti, a IFS farmer from Basanti nurtured by Champa Mohila Society, added “I am shifted to organic farming since 2012. Before that I used to do chemical farming. I have bitter gourd, ribbed gourd, bottle gourd, beans, and ginger seeds.”

Smt Hirumoni Sardar came from a GP named Bermojur of North 24 Pgs, which is located beside Choto Klaghachiya River. She said, “Every year the salt waters from this river enter the field destroying the crops. Therefore, there is high increase of salinity. To combat with this situation, I started organic farming and prepared organic manure. I even have a nutrition garden. There is spinach, Indian spinach, water spinach, leaf amaranth, egg plant, tomato seeds.”

Seed Exhibition

A Seed exhibition was organised mainly for the purpose of seed exchange. There were numerous books, organic products and organic foods. It had more than 40 types of vegetable seeds and about 250 varieties of paddy which was arranged with the help of few farmers coming from 11 distant places like East Medinipore, Basanti, West Medinipore, Patharpratima, Hingalgunj, Perghumti, Bagnan, Bermojur, Birbhum etc. In the exhibition a food stall was set up containing food items made by the farmers themselves. The food stall had 3 types of aromatic rice payesh, pickles, coconut sweets, masala puffed rice and parched rice. Organic vegetables were also sold in the exhibition. The local people also visited to buy seeds for urban gardening, organic vegetables, and various eatables from the mela.



Conclusion

Seed festival 2014 ended with a lot of inspiration among the participants to conserve traditional variety of seeds. They even understood the importance of the traditional variety of seeds and agriculture. The overall aim of the seed festival was to create awareness among the masses about the traditional seed diversity and support the conservation of seed savers which was achieved thereby. The seed exhibition also became fruitful.