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### Dalit women's memo to CM on biodiversity

Hyderabad: On the occasion of the International Women's Day on Thursday, over 5,000 Dalit women of the Deccan Development Society submitted a memorandum to the State Government urging it to recognize the work of thousands of women who have been saving the Earth and its inhabitants.

In a statement, Jayasuri Cherukuri said that in traditional agriculture women have a great control over food and seed systems. This must be recognised as the proof of their enormous intellectual wealth.

"Instead of doing so our government is doing untold injustice to such women by allowing corporates and multinational companies to introduce new life in the form of genetic engineering. We demand a complete ban on all genetic engineering in agriculture which snatches away women's control over their farming and seeds," she said.

She said: "We have been nurturing biodiversity in farming as our cultural heritage. Without depending on much of water and on very poor soils we are raising 50-60 crop varieties. When the state is suffering from severe drought and all crops have withered away, we have kept alive a vibrant farming.

Anchored around biodiverse farming system, our crops provide healthy and nutritious food to our communities. But the government has failed to promote or respect our agriculture. Instead, they are busy honouring those farmers who grow monocultures using tonnes of chemicals. All the Sankranti and Ugadi Awards are also given away to such farmers.

It is time that the government recognizes our farming systems as women lead agriculture and accords us prime position while deciding on the State Agricultural Awards.

"This year a prestigious international event called Conference of Parties of the International Convention on Biological Diversity is going to be held in Hyderabad.

In view of this major conference, we demand that the government offer us a special honour for the live biodiversity we have conserved in our agriculture. "Besides conserving biodiversity, this agriculture also saves nearly 6 million litres of water per acre of land where this is grown.

Without using a speck of chemical fertiliser or pesticide we are growing healthiest and highly nutritious food for the country through this agriculture and saving the country from falling into the nadir of malnutrition.

Through this farming we are also ensuring that we fearlessly face the coming decades of climate crisis. Keeping all these in view, the government must declare a bonus of Rs10,000 per acre as Biodiversity Bonus and Water Saving Bonus for every woman who is engaged in millet-anchored biodiverse agriculture."

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