

MINI National Campaign

Collective Campaign to implement National Food Security Act 2013 September 13- October 15 2016

Millet Network of India thanks the August Parliament of India for having passed the National Food Security Act, on this same day three years ago. MINI partners through their collective campaign and through their continuous dialogues with central government made it possible for millets; the coarse cereals of the dry land population of India to enter Public Distribution System(PDS) through a provision made for them in the Act. Several years of efforts made by the millet farmers and their demands to make space for their indigenous crops were thought to be fulfilled on this same day when the National Food Security Act was made in 2013. However all the declarations concerning millets failed to assume any importance while implementing the Act except for in the state of Karnataka. It is in this context that MINI wants to remind the honorable parliamentarians that the spirit of the Act is still not being realized because of the failure of Food Corporation of India and the State governments to procure and supply millets in PDS.

According to National Food Security Act, 2013 , Schedule 1,

Eligible households shall be entitled to food grains under section 3 at the subsidised price not exceeding rupees 3 per kg for rice, rupees 2 per kg for wheat and rupee 1 per kg for coarse grains (millets in dry land regions) for a period of three years from the date of commencement of this Act; thereafter, at such price, as may be fixed by the Central Government, from time to time, not exceeding the minimum support price for wheat and coarse grains;

It is an irrefutable fact that this has not been implemented yet and in order to make the above legislation possible and to include millets in the PDS, production of the same should be significantly increased to meet the

existing demand and need of the population whose culture and food systems are embedded in millets.

Millets as Indian culture

Millets are not just food but an integral part of the culture of thousands of communities from all over the country. Any food that is deeply integrated with the culture of communities cannot be taken away from them. Development experts argue that denying such foods to those communities is a form of political oppression. In the vast Indian millet landscape, one can find a range of culinary delights. Each region has its own variation of millet food fleet. Sorghum bread or Jowar roti is the most desired staple diet of the Deccan region in South India. In the western State of Rajasthan, Bhati and roti made of Bajra or Pearl millet rule over the rest. Saptum the main stay of Himalayan diet is made out of finger millet. Millets play a critical role in the food security of a large nation such as India.

Millets for Food Security

India cultivates a total of 143 million hectares of farm land, of this 92 million hectares is rain fed. This forms nearly 65% of all arable land in the country. The vast dry land belt stretches across the Deccan plateau, northern Karnataka, Marathwada, the desserts of Rajasthan, the tribal areas of central India and the Himalayas. This is the home of small and marginal farmers for whom millets are the main stay of agriculture, diet and cultural systems of these regions. But beauty of millets lies in the fact that they can grow on extremely marginalized lands. Many success stories have emerged from the corners of the country where millet farmers have overcome the adversities of soil and climate crises to achieve multiple securities for their families and communities. As millets grow without any irrigation, it truly makes them the miracle grains. These rainfed crops accounts for two-third of India's cultivated landscape and they support 40% of the country's population. An incredible 44% of the food grains produced in the country are contributed by millets.

Inspite of such great credentials, these miracle grains have been condemned to the status of coarse cereals and therefore marginalised in the Indian palmphlet of food grains.

Cruel marginalization of millets

Indian rice and wheat farmers grow on some of the fertile lands of the country. Their lands get irrigated by perennial rivers through highly subsidized irrigation systems. They get seeds and fertilizers at the prices discounted by the state. In addition to all these advantages, they also get a ready market through PDS procurement system. The millet farmers on the other hand grow their crops on extremely harsh soils. Their lands are by and large unirrigated. They enjoy neither support nor subsidy for their farming and finally in the market, they are completely sidelined. This cruel marginalisation of millets has taken a big toll on Indian dry land farming.

Over the last 40 years, acreage under rice and wheat cultivation has climbed steadily and at the same time the millet farming area has shrunk by an alarming 35%.

Denied any incentive to cultivate millets, the farmers have nearly left 4 million hectares go fallow. Such a fallowization of its food land in a country that has strived hard to feed its billions is nothing short for scandal.

Telangana State government in the name of **Alternative** has started to shower on us with Soya and Maize whose seeds are getting ready to be modified genetically. We severely condemn the iniquitous act Telangana State which in the name of holy Telangana is increasingly promoting industrial crops. We hereby warn the Telangana government which took birth as a result of long fought movement that it's immoral actions will lead to a precarious agricultural future of our State.

Schedule III in the NFS Act has provisions for advancing food security :

(1) Revitalisation of Agriculture—(a) agrarian reforms through measures for securing interests of small and marginal farmers;

(c) ensuring livelihood security to farmers by way of remunerative prices, access to inputs, credit, irrigation, power, crop insurance, etc.;

Interests of small and marginal farmers according to the Act will be secured only when the state government will promote millets and extend support for their cultivation.

In the view of acute water crisis that stares Indian agriculture in the face, MINI demands that **state** governments should **declare water bonus for millet farmers** who use no irrigated water at all to grow their crops. Millet farmers also help save enormous amounts of power. As frequently pointed out, agriculture is one of the biggest drains on power and by not using power, millet farmers save the nation a huge amount of power. **Therefore they must get a power bonus.**

A consequence of ignoring these demands and the great injustice is the Indian government's Public Distribution System(PDS) which has completely ignored millets until NFS Act was made in 2013 . Yet, PDS still engages with only two grains; rice and wheat for its procurement and distribution and millets are not on its map.

However given a change, the humble millets can herald the food sovereignty of the most impoverished communities.

Schedule III in the Act also makes provision for Procurement, Storage and Movement related interventions—

(a) incentivising decentralised procurement including procurement of coarsegrains;

(b) geographical diversification of procurement operations;

(c) augmentation of adequate decentralised modern and scientific storage;

The food sovereignty initiative of the dalit women of the DDS is the finest example of this possibility. Since 1996 the women from a semi arid region of Medak district of Telangana have reclaimed more than 5000 acres of farm land which they had left fallow but on which they have now started

growing millets. In this process, they produce nearly 2 million kilos of extra grains every year. A part of the grains goes to the community grain bank which is used to run alternative public distribution system based on millets. This alternative PDS feeds 50,000 families every year. Through their success stories, women of DDS have showed how millets can become a powerful tool for a new vigorous community controlled food sovereignty in India.

Juxtapose this with the current fallows in India which add upto about 15 million hectares, if brought back under cultivation, they have the capacity to produce 15 million tones of extra food for the country. This can wipe out whatever food deficit we dread to envision for the next 50 years.

Seed, Food and Farming sovereignty is essential and small and marginal farmers that constitute the majority of the farmers population should be able and allowed to cultivate and eat whatever she/he wants to.

Millets for Nutrition Security

Most millet fields are inherently biodiverse. This is the tradition of millet farming in the country. Six to twenty crops are planted on the same space at the same time. The famous 'Baranaaja' cropping systems in the Himalayas are a testimony to this. In this millet led system are embedded 12 different crop varieties. 'Saathdaan' in Rajasthan also is a host to large variety of millets. The 'Panendupantalu' system of the south grow millets in combination with pulses and oil seeds thus making it a holistic farming system. In subsistence, millet system doesn't only address the food security but also translates the fodder, health and nutritional securities.

Schedule II in the Act says

"The nutritional standards for children in the age group of 6 months to 3 years, age group of 3 to 6 years and pregnant women and lactating mothers required to be met by providing "Take Home Rations" or nutritious hot cooked meal in accordance with the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme and nutritional standards for children in lower and upper primary classes under the Mid Day Meal Scheme with protein ranging from 12 to 25 grams.

Since much of the rainfed farming system tends to be ecological , it also gives rise to a unique phenomenon called uncultivated foods. In every cultivated millet landscape, each seed sown nurtures tens of voluntary plants. This means 30% of the yield is voluntary. In other words they are not intentionally cultivated by the farmer. Most of these uncultivated foods form a wide variety of greens that offer food and nutrition to the poor.

Why Indian policy makers have not discovered the only answer to the malnutrition that plagues the Indian poor is a big surprise. Malnutrition levels in India are worse than that of sub Saharan region. This is purely due to the fact that the poor in the country are subjected to the rice diet through the PDS. Rice is full of carbohydrate and cannot provide good nutrition to the poor. On the other hand millets are the store houses of nutrition. By any nutritional parameter, millets are miles ahead of rice and wheat. In terms of their mineral content millets dwarf rice and wheat. Each one of them more fibre than rice and wheat. Some has sometimes 50 times than that of rice. Finger millet has 30 times more calcium than rice while every other millet has atleast twice the amount of calcium compared to rice. In their iron content, foxtail and little millet are so rich that rice is no where in the race. While most of us seek micro nutrients, Beta Carotene in pharmaceutical pills and capsules, millets offer it in abundant quantities. The much privileged rice ironically has zero quantity of this precious micronutrient. In this fashion, nutrient to nutrient every single millet is extraordinarily superior to rice and wheat and therefore the solution for the malnutrition that affects the vast majority of the Indian population. Telangana State has been actively promoting to distribute fine rice ignoring the fact that millets have a higher concentration of proteins, fiber, iron, minerals and calcium compared to rice and wheat. A provision should be made for introducing millet diet in government hostels so as to help growing children.

Keeping in view of the nutritional benefit millets offer the nation, MINI demands an *active state support for millets through a **nutrition based price for them.***

A Provision to millet farmers of **bonus for nutrition, biodiversity and environmental benefits** that they provide by growing millets on their farms.

In the decades of climate change, malnutrition will be one of the biggest problems India will face. By promoting millets which offer affordable nutrition for millions of poor Indians, **millet farmers must be offered a nutritional bonus.**

Taking cue from the Government of Karnataka, millet farmers must get a bonus of Rs.5000/- per acre for every acre of millets that they cultivate.

In doing so, State governments can make ways for the millets to enter PDS and make it possible for all other declarations made in the NFS Act concerning millets to take a life form.

Millets for Fodder security

Most millets are also a solution to the fodder crises that haunts India so very often. On every acre they are cultivated, Sorghum and Pearl millet produce nearly one ton of fodder. This can fulfill the annual fodder needs of two heads of cattle. A village that has 500 acres of millet cultivation can support nearly 1000 cattle. Thus millet farming can also offer fodder security to the livestock. This is a huge contribution to the animal wealth of a community.

Millets for Livelihood security

Another capacity of millet farming which is not often spoken about is the livelihood security it offers. There are calculations that each hectare of millet farm supports about 50 person days of employment. In ploughing, weeding and harvesting. Even if 50% of 92 million hectares of rainfed landscape of India is devoted to millet farming, it can support a minimum of 450 million person days of livelihoods per season.

It is strange that this vital potential of millet farming has been completely overlooked by the Indian policy makers.

Millets offer freedom from water

Another critical aspect of millet farming that is overlooked by Indian policy makers is its capacity to grow without irrigation. Compare this to rice cultivation which the Indian planners constantly promote. Estimates tell us that to grow one kilogram of rice, 3000 litres of water is needed. If true, this means that every acre of rice farming demands nearly 6 million litres of water . In other words, every acre of millet farming saves 6 million litres of water to the nation. For a water scarce country like India, millets are an awesome boon. Over the last few decades we have seen water wars all over the country including the current one between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Neighboring communities have fought between each other for water. States such as Karnataka have perennially in water fight with Tamil Nadu. Legislatures from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have marched to neighboring Karnataka on the issue of water. India as a nation has water disputes with everyone of its neighbors, Bangladesh, Nepal, China and Pakistan. Therefore India should gratefully grace any farming system that spares with the use of water. This prevents the country from hurdling towards the nightmarish water crisis.

MINI in its National convention held in 2015 reiterated all the above mentioned significant characteristics of the millets through a declaration made by the millet farmers from across the country. MINI partners have been thriving to convince the state governments the potential of millets in helping communities achieve multiple securities in the event of malnutrition, climate crises and water disputes.

However, state governments negligence and unwilling behavior has compelled MINI to envisage a full throttled campaign to reiterate the demands made earlier with a new vigor and character.

A month long collective campaign will start on September 13 2016, marking the significance of the day when the National Food Security Act was made and concludes on October 15 , the World Food Day. The National campaign will be conducted at village, block, state and national level to create a mass awareness and momentum from the communities in fighting for the cause of millets and welfare of the poor communities and

with a motto to pressurize the state governments across the countries in realizing their failure in implementing the clause concerning to millets made in the NFS Act.