

Western Region Consultation on Millets

Gurajarat Vidyapith Campus, Ahmedabad
5-6 July, 2010

Millet grains like Sorghum [*Jowari*], Pearl Millet [*Bajri*], Finger Millet [*Nagli, Ragi*], Foxtail Millet [*Kang, Kakum*], Little Millet [*Gajro, Kutki, Sava*], Kodo Millet [*Kodra*], Proso Millet [*Cheno, Vari*], Barnyard Millet [*Sanwa*] and many other types of millets have been core to India's food and farming cultures; and continue to thrive in many parts of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan. In their cultivation practices, millets represent a unique biodiverse farming system. Farming communities in these state have traditionally integrated millet crops with several other oilseeds and pulses to enrich the soils and also the final produce.

But over the years, millets have seen a deep policy disregard and have been rendered as lesser and coarser grains, not to be encouraged in agriculture. But as you are rightly aware, rainfed farming systems which are home to millet based biodiverse farming and have multiple advantages in relation to climate change crisis:

- a. Millets can rescue agriculture from being water dependent. As water grows scarcer and scarcer in the years of climate change, these farming systems put us on an excellent state of readiness.
- b. Millet based agro biodiversity can contribute to the carbon capture and such other carbon sequestration processes, which allows it to become the first defence against climate change.
- c. Millet based biodiverse cropping systems liberates farming from water hungry crops such as rice and wheat that need nearly six million litres of water for one acre of cultivation and makes farming less dependent on an extremely valuable and finite resource such as water.
- d. Millet based farming systems have the potential to make agriculture non chemical based, resulting in climate change compliant systems, even while offering healthier, more nutritious food and fodder, livelihood and ecological security.
- e. A one acre millet farm supports 52 human working days in one farming season. Therefore if millet cultivation is linked to ongoing GoI programmes such NREGS, and create agrobiodiversity based employment in India.

Despite these critical advantages, India lost 44% of millet cultivation areas to other crops between 1966-2006, and we need to understand the core factors that are responsible for it. In Gujarat the total land under millet cultivation is 1143000 hectares. While total land under cultivation in the state is 12412000 hectars. This amounts to only 9.20 percent of the total land under cultivation in the state. With more and more area going under uses other than agriculture, the future of millet crops seem to be in deep danger. Moreover our current agriculture policy of the state does not promote agriculture of millets.

In the current background of agricultural crisis and growing impacts of climate change, there is an urgent need for a paradigm shift to shape the food and farming futures of our country. If we fail now, the coming decades will find us desolate for food and enervated in farming. It is in this context the Millet Network of India [MINI] has been working towards developing and discussing the possibilities of a visionary position, one that will allow us to go beyond temporary and knee jerk reactions to address the food and farming crisis and address the root causes that has today brought us to this decisive edge.

We are aware that have been an active partner or supporter of this cause. Therefore any exercise to explore the solutions outside the box of high resource input and irrigated farming systems would need your critical participation. This task might require us to challenge a three decade agricultural mindset and at the same time rekindle our conviction in the ecological agriculture that has been a heritage of Asian farming systems. It is only perhaps that we can work towards a definite policy shift from a total dependence on irrigation based farming systems to a renewal of the non irrigated rainfed indigenous farming systems which, wherever they continue to be practiced, have held the farming communities in good stead, rescuing them from hunger and suicides.

It is with this background in mind that the MINI in collaboration with Paryavaran Mitra, Gujarat Academy of Development Sciences, Maharashtra KRAPAVIS, Rajasthan is organising this two-day Western Region Forum on 'Millets' to will deal with various panel themes which include Parliament for Millets; Media for Millets; Scientists for Millets; and of course Farmers for Millets.