

# First step in the farm!

## December 2017



The course on Agroecology started imparting around 80 children from a local school about the concepts of ecological agriculture and the fundamental differences between traditional and modern practices of farming. In the first class, the children were taught the importance of learning about food and its production, the significance of ecological farming and why small holder farmers should be respected and their knowledge valued. The children exhibited great enthusiasm as it was the first time for these students, from an English medium urban school, to step into the fields and learn practically about all that they have been introduced to in their text books, and about the concepts which were never taught before.

Students were taken to some of the DDS farms to show them the local variety of sugarcane which are not found anywhere else in the region. The traditional varieties of sugarcane have reached a point of extinction since the sugar factory wants another variety, that is hard and sugary, and can only be grown with chemical inputs. Furthermore, farmers raise a lot of loans from the factory, and as soon as the farmers plant the cane they thereby pledge their cane to the sugar factory and they will not be free to produce their own jaggery. In this process the rich biodiversity of sugarcane that previously obtained in the Zaheerabad region has almost been killed entirely.

DDS, being on the Expert Panel on Agrobiodiversity in the National Biodiversity Authority of India as well as the Telangana State Biodiversity Board, have taken as its moral responsibility to rejuvenate the biodiversity of sugarcane in the Zaheerabad region. The organization has therefore been planting traditional varieties of sugarcane on some fields of DDS and are also encouraging some farmers to plant them in their own fields.

Chandramma, DDS senior farmer explained to the school children about the importance of reviving the traditional variety of sugarcane and the role of such foods in their lives. The class ended by rejoicing the taste of the sugarcane and also took the pods of sugarcane back with them.