

Crops of Anger

Current Concerns, Challenges and Collective Solutions for Millet Revival

October – November, 2017

Torches are lit and signs are held high when 40 sangham women from start their rally in Mogudampally village in the evening of November 6th 2017. They are on their fourth day of campaigning and the farmer's slogans about the benefits of millets and the drawbacks of cotton are echoing over the village. The aim is to sensitize cotton farmers on the importance of millets and the state to recognize Jowar as a essential food crop. The farmers raged over the recent loss that occurred to their food crops and for not being compensated equally as that of the commercial crops.



On the main street in Mogudampally the women stopped to and have a vibrant meeting together with the around 80 villagers who had gathered around them. DDS sangham supervisor Chukkamma encouraged people to join the sangham and to start grow millets so that they can ensure good food, soils and life for women.

The women have decided to hold rallies in a total of 36 villages in the Zaheerabad region in the following weeks. They are foremost trying to create awareness on the fact that many millet farmers this year have lost big parts of their yield, partly because cotton has increased a lot in the area the last few years. The millet fields at several parts of the region were surrounded by cotton fields, where birds were drawn to eat them. The yield is then lost. Unlike farmers who grows mono-cash crops, they won't be compensated for their losses by the state as they are growing millets by mixed-crop farming. In order to create awareness and put pressure on the state to compensate millet farmers for lost yields, the campaign aims to spread their message from village to village, up to state level.

To set an example, DDS has given out monetary compensation to ten millet farmers from different villages who lost their yields due to the fact that their fields are

surrounded by cash crops. The compensations were given out on the 27th of October during a meeting at Deccan Development Society's (DDS) project office in Pastapur. During the meeting they also discussed the issue of the increased cotton cultivation and its



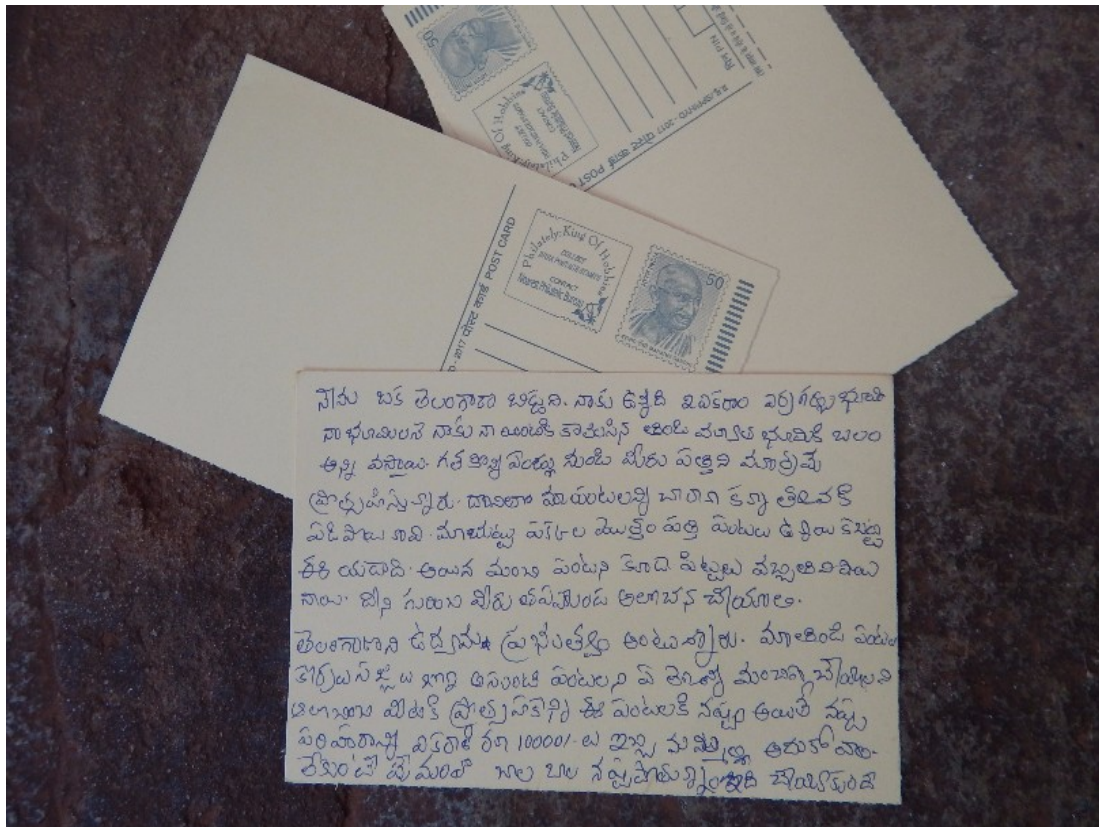
impact on millet farmers, as well as the absence of adequate compensation for the loss of food crops from the state.

Sumithra, a farmer of millets, explained in the meeting the problems of lost yields *“I have grown 30 varieties of crops in my 1 acre farm. The crops grew very well until the panicles developed. It was right before harvest within few weeks of time, they have been all eaten away. We struggled a lot but couldn't save the crops. Wild bore, birds and peacocks have eaten them all”*. Nagwar Vinoda, also a millet farmer, continued *“We are not here to fight someone but retain control over our food crops in our hands. We are here to grow good food, spread health for our families. We want to continue growing the crops even as I have suffered loss this year, because I know what their value is. We all have to fight together to find solutions for this and keep alive these crops. These are the 'crops of anger'. Let us make governments hear to our voices, if they don't let's all fight together”*. As stated by Nagwar Vinoda, even though the farmers have made big losses they do not feel sorry for themselves, instead they express a great hope and courage and asserted that they will continue to grow millets and fight together to find solutions. Sumithra ends her speech in the same spirit saying *“We feel blessed by God for being able to feed birds. And we are also blessed by god who gave us many other crops. I will continue to grow these crops”*.

The meeting was also attended by Assistant Director of Agriculture for Zaheerabad. He claimed that the state is unable to compensate millet farmers since they cannot count the value of the yield loss when farmer grow multiple crops in one field and hence should go for monocropping. DDS strongly disagreed with this statement. By subsidizing and compensating mono-cash crops, the government is adding to the problem, as these crops are harming the natural ecosystems in nature by dismissing the very concept of biodiversity. In contrast there are many reasons for why the state should

recognize millets and millet farmers. Millet farmers practice traditional organic farming and thereby avoids chemicals which damage the soil quality, they grow millets on non-irrigated land which saves water and practice mixed-crop farming which maintains and conserves the biodiversity. For these reasons, the farmers will continue campaigning so that a new system for compensation for millet farmers can take place.

Alongside conducting the rallies in all 36 villages, they also decided to raise the issue at mandal level, district level and state level. A letter will be sent from DDS sanghams to the Chief minister, Telangana. The letter states that the Telangana government, in order to continue its pro -farmer steps should declare the following: a) Water bonus for millet farmers for saving a huge a quantity of six million litres of water per acre. b) Biodiversity bonus for keeping alive the critical principle of biodiversity on their farms. c) Nutritional bonus for providing the most nutritious crops for the poorest populations who will face the crisis of malnutrition in the coming decades of climate crisis. Additionally, a postcard campaign is conducted where all the women farmers will send in a total 20 000 postcards explaining the situation in the villages to various state ministers. The aim is also to bring this issue to the notice to chief minister and other state officials so that the issue is thoroughly discussed and a policy in favoured to the farmers concerned is framed.



Deccan Development Society, Pastapur