

People in Conservation

Biodiversity Conservation and Livelihood Security

Volume 4 Issue 1 December 2011



INDEX

1. News and Analysis

- National Biodiversity Authority to prosecute Mahyco/Monsanto and collaborators promoting Bt Brinjal in violation of Biodiversity Protection Law
- BRAI bill proposes to create a new regulatory body-activists oppose BRAI Bill
- Kashmir's organic farms: 32,000 hectares and growing
- UN Report: Ecological agriculture could double production in ten years
- Soligas get Community Forest Rights (CFR) in Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Wildlife Sanctuary, Karnataka

2. Workshop and Conference

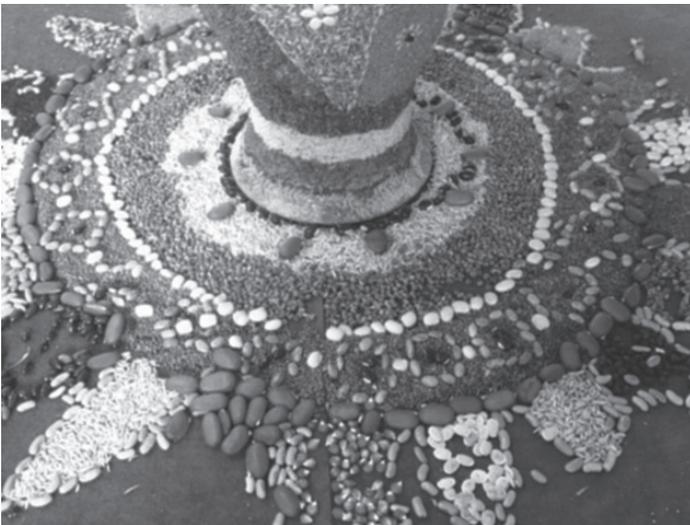
- Killer pesticide Endosulfan to be phased out globally

3. Case Studies

- Movement launched by 'Lokpanchayat' in order to protect local seeds
- Vanastree: The Malnad forest garden and seed keepers' collective

4. International News

- Indian company leases land in Gambella forest of Ethiopia



Special Issue on Agricultural Biodiversity

Editorial

October 16th was World Food Day.

Around 925 million people in the world do not have enough to eat, according to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). In the 2011 global hunger index¹ ranking released by the International Food Policy Research Institute, India is in the bracket of “**alarming**” countries, ranked 67 among 81. Nearly half of India’s children remain under-nourished, twice as many as in sub-Saharan Africa. In comparison with the other SAARC countries, India lags behind Sri Lanka (37), Myanmar (41), Nepal (55), Pakistan (59) and only slightly ahead of Bangladesh (70).

In 2008 food riots spread through many countries in the global South as people tried to grab a portion of rapidly shrinking supply of food. Some of the causes for the extraordinary spike in food prices in 2008, doubling over 2007 price were:

- Increased diversion of corn grain and soyabean to produce meat, as the world’s per capita meat consumption doubled in about forty years.
- Decreased food production associated with poor countries adopting to the neo-liberal paradigm of letting the “free market” govern food production and distribution.
- Widespread “depeasantization,” as a result of conditions caused by neo-liberal reforms and IMF-mandated “structural adjustments” that forced peasant farmers off the land and into urban slums.
- Increasing concentration of corporate ownership over all aspects of food production, from seeds, pesticides, and fertilizers to the grain elevators, processing facilities, and grocery stores.
- Diversion of large amounts of corn, soy, and palm oil into producing agro-fuels.
- Unprecedented financial speculation in world commodity markets that forced prices to much higher level than was normal.

What role has deregulation played so far in the performance of the Indian farm sector?

National Crime Records Bureau² (NCRB) data shows that the period 1995-2010³ (i.e. 4 years after India accepted

1. See <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/Lead-to-feed-is-prize-message/870372/>
2. National Crime Records Bureau ‘Accidental deaths & suicides in India’ 1995-2010
3. See <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/columns/sainath/article2577740.ece>

neo-liberal model for economic development) has been marked by **2, 56,913** farmer suicides across the country. The five States with the largest share of the quarter-of-a-million farm suicides recorded in India over the past **16** years are Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. In 1995, when the National Crime Records Bureau⁴ (NCRB) tabulated farm suicide data for the first time, these ‘Big 5’ accounted for 56.04 per cent of all farmer suicides. In 2010, despite a one-year decline, they accounted for 66.49 per cent.

Maharashtra’s story is alarming. It saw 20,066 farmers kill themselves between 1995 and 2002. That stands dwarfed by the 30,415 farmers who took their lives in the next eight years. The latter period saw an annual average increase of nearly 1,155 such deaths in the State. This was also the period when money was poured into relief ‘packages’ of the Prime Minister, through the loan waiver of 2008, and other measures. For 1995-2002, the total suicides was 1,21,157, which is alarming in itself since the total number involved in farming has also been declining significantly as can be seen from the fact that compared to the 1991 Census, the 2001 Census saw a drop of over seven million in the population of cultivators (main workers). In other words, farm suicides are rising through the period of India’s agrarian crisis, even as the number of farmers is shrinking⁵. The Union Agriculture Minister, Sharad Pawar, is from this State and has held that post for six of those ten years. And yet, in a recent interview with Indian Express (Oct 23’ 2011), when asked about the status of the National Food Security Bill (NFSB), he expressed anguish and fear about how a food subsidy of around Rs.1.15-1.20 lakh crore “*will affect the overall economy...If so much is spent on subsidies, what is left for development?*”. Coming from the Hon. Minister for Agriculture, whose prime responsibility, one would assume, is to see how to reinvigorate the crisis ridden agricultural sector, this was surprising to say the least. It seems he is not answerable to the people of this country but to the Economic Planning Commission – whose chief, Mr. Montek Singh Alhwalia, through an affidavit filed in the Supreme Court, sagaciously advised the nation recently that only those who earn less than Rs.25 and Rs.32 (rural and urban areas respectively) per day need be considered as being below poverty line. The affidavit could not have come at a worse time when food inflation is pushing poor households to the wall even as 60 million tons of grain is piling in FCI godowns, implying that the government itself is hoarding grain to increase food prices. On the other hand Ahluwalia tried

4. See http://www.thehindu.com/multimedia/archive/00820/Farm_Suicides__All__820598a.pdf
5. See <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/columns/sainath/article2577635.ece>

to disconnect poverty ratios as having any relation with subsidies (clearly the Minister of Agriculture doesn't seem to agree). Yet, all central government allocations for programmes such as PDS, pensions etc. are based on these poverty ratios.

An open letter⁶ from the steering group of the **Right to Food Campaign** (RFC) to Mr. Montek Singh Alhwalia calls the Planning Commission affidavit a "*historically significant*" document that reflects arrogance and contempt for the poor by making a "*complete mockery of the idea of food security for all*". The Right to Food Campaign— a network of concerned individuals and civil society groups in the country – has harshly criticized the draft of the **National Food Security Bill⁷ (NFSB)** that was prepared by the **Department of Food and Consumer Affairs** as it dilutes existing entitlements obtained through the Supreme Court, minimizes government's obligation & accountability and restricts people's public distribution system (PDS) entitlements (through providing a "food security allowance" in cash transfer). By further linking these entitlements to citizens below the poverty line (itself ridiculously low) it ignores the extent of hunger in the country. According to the RFC, introduction of cash transfer in place of PDS will affect not only house-hold food security, but also the production, procurement and storage systems. Those affected most will be farmers, since government will not procure grain as it will not need to run the PDS shops, and the farmers will not get the minimum support price (MSP) which is currently the greatest incentive to grow cereals. Worse, they will also be at the mercy of the market to sell their grains, which they may have to do at low prices; and the Food Corporation of India (FCI) godowns will not be required. This, according to the RFC is being done deliberately to pave the way for the entry of organized retail into the country. Though the decision on the proposal to allow 51 per cent foreign direct investment in multi-brand retail⁸ has mercifully been stalled for now, the replacement of food grains with cash needs to be seen in conjunction with the government's decision to raise the forest Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) of international capital in the food retail business. Clearly, the aim of the government seems to be "*limiting expenditure, denying responsibility and destroying existing systems*". However, the only good news at the time of this going to print is that, cutting across all the party lines, most state governments have objected to the National

Food Security Bill proposed by the Centre, which is likely to be tabled in the Winter Session of Parliament⁹.

Efforts are on for the ratification of the **Biotechnology Regulatory Authority of India** bill, 2011(BRAI) which will enable the creation of a body that will single handedly approve Genetically Modified crops (GM) in our country. What does this mean in concrete terms? GM crops created using hi-tech means of inserting foreign genes into the crop seeds, genes usually taken from alien organisms like bacteria, viruses, animals and other unrelated plants for obtaining certain new 'traits' in the crop – traits that will supposedly bring down the usage of chemical pesticides that are sprayed on the crops for pest control. What are the risks?¹⁰ This kind of mix does not happen in nature. In Nature, the genome¹¹ of any organism gets created on an evolutionary time scale and little understood scientifically as yet. Given the risk of a little understood technology, majority countries have shied away from using this technology even 15 years after its introduction for commercial cultivation in the USA. Nearly 75% of GM cultivation happens only in 3 countries (USA, Brazil and Argentina). In India, the only GM crop –Bt cotton that was allowed for commercial cultivation – on the claims of reduced insecticide usage, has actually resulted in an increase in the use of insecticides in the country. Suicides in regions like Vidarbha have not come down after the advent of Bt cotton but, in fact, increased. Though public pressure stopped the commercial release of GM Bt brinjal last year, there are 74 GM crops in various stages of research and the research needs to be stopped. Food safety is crucial to our health and that of our future generations.

At stake is the issue of **food sovereignty**. Food Sovereignty is the inalienable RIGHT of peoples, communities, and countries - to define, decide and implement their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. Rights of small producers and those of indigenous peoples for self-determination; gender justice in food and agriculture; and rights of agricultural workers are part of this struggle and are directly linked to the right to life and livelihood. Genuine agrarian and fisheries reforms are critical to poverty alleviation in the rural areas. Without this poor food producers cannot sustainably and efficiently use the land, forests

6. See <http://napm-india.org/node/470>

7. See Economic and Political Weekly, August 13,2011 VOL XLVI NO 33

8. See: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/govt-moves-a-step-closer-to-fdi-in-retail/877492/>

9. <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/cong-states-join-protests-on-food-bill/878455/>

10. See <http://www.greenpeace.org/india/Global/india/report/brai%20%20critique.pdf.m°>

11. In modern molecular biology and genetics, the genome is the entirety of an organism's hereditary information.

and resources to improve their livelihood options. Food Sovereignty also includes the right to food and to produce food sustainably with practices that protect human health, biodiversity and the environment.

Three issues that pose a great threat to food sovereignty are - **Geopiracy**, **biomass-economy** based on gene technologies and **capturing climate genes**.

Geopiracy refers to how the governments and corporations of the global North are cynically using the growing concerns about the ecological and climate crisis to propose geo-engineering 'quick fixes'. These threaten to wreak havoc on ecosystems, with disastrous impacts on the people of the global South. As calls for a 'greener' economy mount, and oil prices escalate, corporations are seeking to switch from oil-based to plant-based energy.

Biomass economy that is based on using gene technologies will re-programme living organisms to behave as microbial factories. This will facilitate the liquidation of ecosystems. It constitutes a devastating assault on the peoples and cultures of the global South, and will accelerate the wave of land grabs that has already established itself in parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The world's largest agribusiness companies, including Monsanto, BASF, Dupont and Syngenta, are pouring billions of dollars into, and claiming patents on, what are claimed to be 'climate-ready crops'. Far from helping farmers adjust to a warming world – something peasant farmers already know how to manage – these crops will allow industrial agriculture to expand plantation monocultures into lands currently cultivated by poor peasant farmers. These crops are not a solution to growing hunger; they will feed only the gluttony of corporate shareholders for profits.

With increasing hunger in the world, especially among marginalised populations in both the North and South, the current high-input, industrialized, market-driven food system is failing. It is failing to provide for the food needs of all people, failing to respect the principles of environmental sustainability, and undermining local empowerment and agrarian citizenship.

Around the world, people are resisting the environmental, social and political destruction perpetuated by the industrial agricultural system. This resistance has led to a new and radical agricultural practice – food sovereignty¹² – which puts control in the hands of those who are both

12. See Food Sovereignty -Reconnecting Food, Nature and Community, Edited by Annette Aurélie Desmarais, Nettie Wiebe, Hannah Wittman.

hungry and produce the world's food – peasants and family farmers – rather than corporate executives.

Today the advanced capitalist world, whose large-scale agriculture cannot meet its own consumption needs, angles to control the superior productive capacity of developing countries for both food and agro-fuels¹³. Monopolistic control of food distribution, increased prices of foods and farm inputs, and the diversion of land for food and agro-fuel production through transnational capital have set off a new scramble for land.

At the same time neo-liberal reforms have increased unemployment, deepened debt, led to land and livestock losses, reduced per capita food production and decreased nutritional standards. The dominant response to this agrarian crisis has been to reinforce the incorporation of the peasantry into volatile world markets and to extend land alienation, increasing import dependence.

Food sovereignty requires policies that defend the land rights of small producers. Voluntary co-operation will permit economies of scale, higher productivity and incomes, and allow the people to live their lives with dignity.

We need to dissect the causes of hunger and the food price crisis¹⁴, locating them in a political economy of capitalist industrial production, dominated by corporations and driven by the search for profits for the few instead of the welfare of the many. The picture that emerges is a political economy of global production that is failing badly in terms of feeding the world and is itself contributing to the spread of inequalities that promote hunger.

Anyone with an interest in issues related to food distribution/markets, the current global crisis and the role of capitalism and international organizations in bringing it about, needs to take a deep look at the world food crisis and its impact on the global South and under-served communities in the industrial North, since food is such an intrinsic part of our lives, society, culture and economies.

We need to unpack the planet's environmentally and economically vulnerable food systems to reveal the root causes of the crisis. Only by tracking the political and economic evolution of the industrial agri-foods complex will we see how the steady erosion of local and national control over our food systems has made our nations dependent on a volatile global market and subject to the

13. See The Agrarian Question in the Neoliberal Era- Primitive Accumulation and the Peasantry by Sam Moyo and Utsa Patnaik.

14. See Food Rebellions! Crisis and the Hunger for Justice by Eric Holt-Giménez, Raj Patel.

short-term interests of a handful of transnational agri-food monopolies.

Why are food riots occurring around the world in a time of record harvests? What are the real impacts of agro-fuels and genetically engineered crops? Why are thousands of farmer-led 'islands of sustainability' that are flowering across the landscapes of the global South being ignored by policy-makers? What should peasant-farmer organizations, civil society organizations, and concerned researchers be doing about the crisis?

We must change the global food system — from the bottom up and from the top down. On one hand, farmers utilizing sustainable approaches to food production need to be supported, and farmer-to-farmer agro-ecological knowledge must be spread. At the same time, food and farm advocates need to work in local, national and international policy arenas to open dialogue, demand transparency and change the 'rules' currently holding back agro-ecological alternatives. Hunger and poverty can be eliminated by **democratizing** food systems and by respecting people's right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources — in short, by advancing food sovereignty.

UN Special Rapporteur Olivier De Schutter in a recent report on the right to food¹⁵ strongly argues for "*agro-ecology as a mode of agricultural development which not only shows strong conceptual connections with the right to food¹⁶, but has proven results for fast progress in the concretization of this human right for many vulnerable groups in various countries and environments. Moreover, agro-ecology delivers advantages that are complementary to better-known conventional approaches such as breeding high yielding varieties. And it strongly contributes to the broader economic development*". He warns against short-term gains that will be offset by long-term losses as these would lead to further degradation of ecosystems, threatening future ability to maintain current levels of production. However he is also optimistic about the possibility of significantly improving agricultural

15. See Report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter (<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/food/docs/A-HRC-16-49.pdf>)

16. The right to adequate food is recognized in specific instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Art. 24(2)(c) and 27(3)), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Art. 12(2)), or the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Art. 25(f) and 28(1)). But it is stated most explicitly, at a more general level, under Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by G.A. Res. 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948 and under Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted on 16 December 1966.

productivity where it has been lagging behind, and thus raising production where it needs most to be raised (i.e. in poor, food-deficit countries), while at the same time improving the livelihoods of smallholder farmers and preserving ecosystems. This would slow the trend towards urbanization in the countries concerned, a trend which is placing stress on public services of these countries. It would also contribute to rural development and preserve the ability of the succeeding generations to meet their own needs.

A UN-WHO report has described the effects of the transnational food corporations on the consumption habits and health of people of the third world, as follows:

"Massive marketing and advocacy of Western values and products including high-fat, high-sugar and low-fiber fast foods and soft drinks are carried out by multinational corporations through modern mass media..."

The effects of this penetration of the South by agricultural input, processing and retailing sector, and the introduction of large-scale industrial farming, include throwing more people off the land and promoting their migration to city slums. It is also leading to outright control of farmland by transnational corporations and foreign governments aiming to grow food to supply the "home" country, or to produce crops for export. Indian corporations are not far behind in this race, as depicted in the International News section of this newsletter.

An added dimension of this crisis is that of prospects for food production as the climate changes. Most disturbing are the short- and medium-term consequences for global agriculture. People living in the tropics and subtropics, where most of the world's subsistence farmers are located, are already experiencing a world of increasingly uncertain rainfall, persistent draughts, coastal flooding, scarcity of fresh water supplies etc. The data¹⁷ strongly points towards a worldwide drop in food crop production if global temperature rises to by 2.8 Celsius.

"Environmental scientist Lester Brown believes that large-scale crop failures are the most likely trigger of a collective awakening. They may create the necessary "social tipping point" that finally motivates us to truly address the ecological crisis. Evidently nothing less can wake us from collective narcissism... Driven by accelerating emissions from coal-fired industrialization in China and India, last year's global increase of 1.6 parts per million (ppm) was the highest ever recorded, and took us up to 395 ppm. The "safe" level of atmospheric CO₂ that characterized the last 12,000 years — the climatic period that allowed humanity

17. See www.ipcc.ch

to develop agriculture and civilization — was 350ppm. The current trend of the industrial growth society will be very difficult to stabilize even at 450ppm, the concentration would give humanity a 50% chance of limiting global warming to a “survivable” 2°C. Does anyone want to fly rough, with an airline that offers a 50% chance of arrival?¹⁸”

Around 150 years ago, Karl Marx put forth the notion of “**metabolic rift**” to designate the break in the harmonious organic unity between human beings and nature until then. According to him this rift began with the onset of the industrial revolution, when it became possible to “**incorporate the soil into capital**” - , and thus to commoditize nature. Today the seriousness of this is becoming even more obvious as terms like “food politics” and “water war” gain currency within mainstream and alternative discourses.

Clearly, to avert a humanitarian crisis of major proportions, new agri-food systems (production and access to food) are desperately needed – to ensure food security for all as well as to do so in an environmentally sound way. Continuing to rely on fossil-fuel-based mechanized industrial production is not a possibility. For mechanization also leads to “depeasantization” and migration to urban slums. From a livelihood perspective it makes more sense to promote smaller-scale units of production using as many local resources as possible. New studies have shown that high-yield crops can be grown by using ecologically sound methods - including organic farming. Instead of industrial agriculture that relies on energy derived from fossil fuel to produce pesticides and fertilizers, agro-ecological approaches rely more on building healthy soils and nurturing greater diversity in crops and domestic animals while relying on fewer inputs from off-the-farm sources. This also makes better ecological sense.

milind

18. See <http://www.ecobuddhism.org/wisdom/editorials/erbp/>

1. News and Analysis

National Biodiversity Authority to prosecute Mahyco/Monsanto and collaborators promoting Bt Brinjal in violation of Biodiversity Protection Law

In an unprecedented, though much delayed, decision, the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) of India has decided to initiate legal action against M/s Mahyco/ Monsanto and their collaborators for accessing and using local brinjal varieties in developing Bt brinjal without prior approval of the competent authorities. The official resolution giving effect to this decision was taken in the NBA's meeting of 20th June 2011, the minutes of which were released only on 11 August 2011. The decision of the NBA reads as follows:

“A background note besides legal opinion on Bt brinjal on the alleged violation by the M/s. Mahyco/M/s Monsanto, and their collaborators for accessing and using the local brinjal varieties for development of Bt brinjal without prior approval of the competent authorities was discussed and it was decided that the NBA may proceed legally against M/s. Mahyco/ M/s Monsanto, and all others concerned to take the issue to its logical conclusion.”

The “*alleged violation*” referred to by NBA is based on a complaint filed by Environment Support Group (ESG) before the Karnataka Biodiversity Board on February 15, 2010. Subsequently, the Board thoroughly and systematically investigated the matter and submitted in its letter, dated May 28, 2011, to NBA that “*six local varieties for development of Bt Brinjal*” have been accessed in Karnataka by M/s Mahyco/Monsanto and their collaborators without prior approval from State Biodiversity Board/National Biodiversity Authority.

ESG's complaint specifically charges these agencies for criminally accessing at least 10 varieties of brinjal in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu without in any manner seeking prior and informed consent from the National Biodiversity Authority, State Biodiversity Board (SBB) and applicable Local Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) as required.

Note: This is an excerpted version of an article¹⁹ by Leo Saldanha (email: leo@esgindia.org and Bhargavi S. Rao (email: bhargavi@esgindia.org) of Environment Support Group, Bengaluru, India.

19. Complete version is available at: <http://www.esgindia.org/campaigns/brinjal/press/national-biodiversity-authority-prosecut.html>

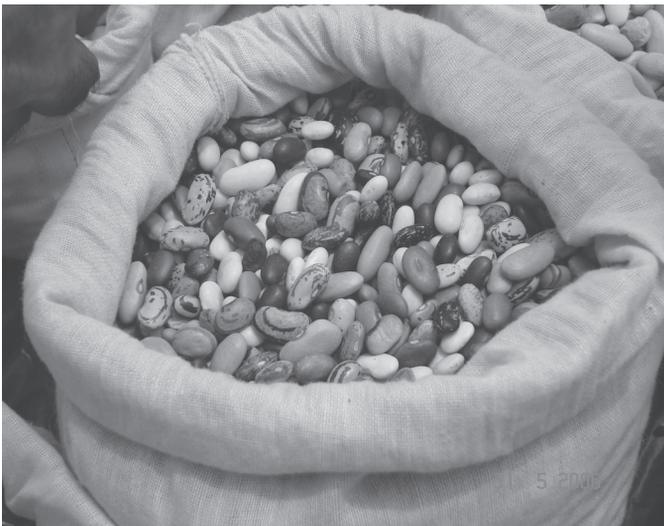
Cultivating diversity

Biodiversity – the range and variety of plant and animal life in a particular habitat and in the world as a whole - is believed to be in decline. Agricultural biodiversity, which is a sub-set of the same, is not safe either. Environmentalism sees agriculture itself – as a process involving cultivation of animals, plants, fungi and other life forms for food, fiber, and other products used to sustain life - as one of the factors of destruction of biodiversity. Even the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) expects agriculture to be the largest driver of biodiversity loss from 2010 to 2050.

As human life takes over spatially, the need for more production in agriculture can be anticipated. Conversion of hitherto 'undeveloped' bio-diverse areas into farm lands or fish farms is already happening. But who cultivates what, where, how and how much, can determine whether diversity is also being nurtured.

The last two decades have seen unprecedented expansion of agricultural corporations. These large multinational companies have not only exponentially extended their control on seeds and breeds, but also on farms and food *per se*. Another name for their kind of enterprise is **agribusiness**. **Agribusiness** is a generic term for the various businesses involved in food production including farming and contract farming, seed supply, agri-chemicals, farm machinery, wholesale and distribution, food processing, marketing, and retail sales.

While agriculture in the conventional sense has, since time immemorial, meant living in harmony with nature, the consequence of the advent



Rajma beans on display during meeting of Beej Bachao Andolan at Nagni in 2006

of agribusiness, i.e. industrial food and farm systems, has meant a constant struggle against nature. Agriculture in these times has ironically come to only mean ways of overcoming super weeds, animal diseases, water shortage, infertile soils, etc. - most of which are nature's reactions to chemical-ridden, resource-intensive, diversity-destructive practices.

A **business-as-usual** response to declining biodiversity has led to seeking solutions to the problem in **diversification**. In the financial world, diversification means reducing risk by investing in a variety of assets. In mainstream agriculture, diversification has come to mean reallocation of the farm's resources to newer activities. Farmers are spoilt for choices – not one type of hybrid or genetically engineered crop, but several! – that the market offers today. This is how governments defend their policies of agricultural diversification for rural development. The objective is to produce increased number of agricultural products for the global market and in the process, also bring more farmers into the fold of that very market. All this is done at the price of agricultural biodiversity.

On the other hand, small-farm and low-input agriculture for local consumption and subsistence use is carried out with a very different orientation. Bio-diverse farming helps to maintain the natural balance of an agro ecosystem. It is about keeping in use the many varieties of local seeds and the indigenous heterogeneous breeds. It is about respecting the knowledge, innovation and practices of local communities. Like environmentalism, it can be a social movement, bringing peoples together.

Agriculture is about cultivating. To cultivate is not simply to raise and produce, but to care for, and build a relationship of nurturing and stewardship (while growing crops). We need a **living** agriculture. We need agricultural practices that cultivate diversity. It will mean to look at farming in the role of a friend of nature.

Contributor: Shalini Bhutani (email: emailsbhutani@gmail.com) is trained in law and works on trade, agriculture and biodiversity related issues. She is based in Delhi. She has worked in several national and international NGOs in the last 15 years including the Centre for Environmental Law at WWF-India, Navdanya and GRAIN. Along with others in Kalpavriksh she initiated and has been involved in the **Campaign for Conservation and Community Control over Biodiversity** since 2004. She is also associated with the Forum Against Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) in India.

BRAI Bill proposes to create a new regulatory body-activists oppose BRAI Bill

A small group of environmental activists staged a demonstration around the Parliament against the Biotechnology Regulatory Authority of India (BRAI) Bill, 2011.

The BRAI Bill proposes to create a new regulatory body which its opponents claim would be a single window clearance system for genetically modified crops.

"The BRAI Bill is a blatant attempt to bulldoze through the public resistance and genuine concerns about genetically modified crops, and to deny state governments their constitutional authority over Agriculture and Health," according to Kavitha Kuruganti of the Coalition for a GM-Free India.

Who's afraid of Genetic Modification?

Nearly all the commercially grown GM crops fall under either of the two general types: Those that are engineered to withstand chemical herbicides (e.g. Monsanto's "Roundup Ready" varieties), and, those that produce one or more pesticide proteins, derived from the Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) bacteria. Recently released varieties combine both traits, a technology known as "gene stacking". Twenty years of claims that genetic engineering will feed the world by making crops more resilient and healthier, have proved to be false. Instead, companies like Monsanto focus their research & development (R & D) on traits that increase farmers' dependence on proprietary chemicals, while making farming more logistically convenient, hence easier to carry out over larger acreages of increasingly mechanized farms.

Several of volunteers of environmental group Greenpeace were arrested by Delhi Police as they were attempting to unfurl a banner just outside Parliament. The banner read: "Don't **Corrupt** our Food, Stop BRAI Bill".

Why is it important to engage with the BRAI bill?²⁰

- It is apparent that we need to engage with the debates around agricultural technologies, since unlike other technologies, these are going to leave a larger impact, for the simple reasons that most land is under agriculture, most people in this country have their livelihoods associated with agriculture and most importantly, all of us consume food that is derived from agriculture. Within agriculture, it is also apparent that we need to engage with a technology like **transgenics** since it is a **living** technology that is known to be imprecise, unpredictable, uncontrollable and irreversible.

20. See <http://www.karmayog.org/message/upload/4889/2/Our%20analysis%20of%20BRAI.pdf> for a detailed critique.

- It has to be remembered that there is a distinct possibility of our food becoming unsafe and toxic with the advent of GM crops/food – our health is closely linked to the quality of our food, and therefore, to the regulatory regime that is shaping up in India through this Bill.
- The livelihoods of millions of farmers will depend on the claims being made about GM crops and the reality of these new seeds and plants in the conditions and socio-economic milieu of our smallholders. Any degradation of the environmental resources and serious changes in crop ecology because of GM crops will have a direct impact on their livelihoods since the latter livelihoods are intrinsically linked to the state of these resources. A regulatory regime that does not pay attention to these issues, biosafety-related as well as those beyond biosafety, will only benefit the industry and fail our vast majority of poor.

Activists say that since the Science and Technology Ministry's Biotechnology Department is mandated to promote the technology; it would be a conflict of interest if it was also responsible for regulating it and ensuring biotech safety. They want the BRAI to be a monitoring body under the Ministry of Health or Environment and Forests.

Sourced from: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article2366599.ece>

Kashmir's organic farms: 32,000 hectares and growing

Farmers in J&K have since long been practicing farming without the use of chemicals on approximately 32,000 hectares of land across the state. But now with the growing demand for organic produce around the globe, the state is keen to step up the practice to a much larger scale.

The Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agriculture Sciences and Technology (SKUAST) has recently enlisted more than 200 farmers who already have organic farms. While these farmers want organic certification for their produce, the university will also help them increase the organic yield.

Vice-Chancellor, SKUAST, Dr Tej Pratap Singh says he sees Kashmir saying "No" to the chemical way of farming in the near future. "Kashmir is a natural place to go organic, the state has a vast potential in that respect."

"We already have large swathes of land in the state where farmers are growing walnuts and herbs organically. On 32,000 hectares of land, mostly in the countryside, farmers do not use chemicals at all. Many of them export walnut, saffron and almond that fetch handsome amounts. While the walnut is organic, farmers can even grow saffron organically."

Kashmir produces around 87,000 tonnes of walnut kernels annually from its 40 lakh walnut trees across the state. SKUAST has also recently launched a full-fledged organic agriculture programme.

Sourced from: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/kashmir-organic-farms-32-000-hectares-and-growing/863101/0>

UN Report: Ecological agriculture could double production in ten years

Within 10 years ecological agriculture could double food production in entire regions, while mitigating climate change, according to a UN report released recently.

Drawing up on an extensive review of the scientific literature published in the last five years, Oliver De Schutter the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food identified agro-ecology as a mode of agricultural development which not only shows strong conceptual connections with the right to food, but also has proven results for rapid progress in the concretization of this human right for many vulnerable groups in various countries and environments. Moreover, agro-ecology delivers advantages that are complementary to better known conventional approaches such as breeding high-yielding varieties. And it strongly contributes to the broader economic development.

The report argues that the scaling up of these experiences is the main challenge today. Appropriate public policies can create an enabling environment for such sustainable modes of production. These policies include prioritizing the procurement of public goods rather than solely providing input subsidies; investing in knowledge by reinvesting in agricultural research and extension services; investing in forms of social organization that encourage partnerships, including farmer field schools and farmers' movements & innovation networks; investing in agricultural research and extension systems; empowering women; and creating a macro-economic enabling environment, including connecting sustainable farms to fair markets.

"Agro-ecology mimics nature, not industrial processes. It replaces external inputs like fertilizer with knowledge of how a combination of plants, trees and animals can enhance productivity of the land," De Schutter reported, stressing that, *"Yields went up 214 per cent in 44 projects in 20 countries in sub-Saharan Africa using agro-ecological farming techniques over a period of 3 to 10 years... far more than any GM [genetically modified] crop has ever done."* Other recent scientific assessments have shown that in 57 countries small farmers, using agro-ecological techniques, obtained average yield increases of 80 per cent. Africans' average increase was 116 per cent.

Ecological agriculture also enhances soil productivity and protects crops against pests by relying on natural elements. The system of farming does not require

expensive inputs of hazardous pesticides, fertilizers and hybrid seeds. Conventional farming being propagated by agro-chemical corporations not only relies on expensive and hazardous inputs, it also degrades the environment and fuels global warming. Large-scale industrial food production contributes up to 40 per cent of the greenhouse gases today.

Ecological agriculture is based on local and indigenous knowledge and practices of the small food producers. It only requires a political will for governments to support this sustainable system of farming in order to solve problems relating to world hunger, poverty and climate change.

Sourced from: <http://www.panap.net/en/fs/post/food-sovereignty/644>

To bee or not to bee?

In 1991, domesticated and wild honeybees in South India were afflicted by the Thai Sacbrood disease causing enormous economic losses to the beekeeping industry. It is believed that the migratory beekeeping practiced in Kanyakumari District in Tamil Nadu, and the introduction of the exotic honeybee *Apis mellifera* were the main cause for the spread of this disease. Unable to repay loans, some of the worst hit beekeepers committed suicide and several others gave up beekeeping.

Migratory beekeeping involves transporting bee colonies over long distances during the flowering season. On highly intensified agricultural farms in the United States, pollination demand is met by means of migratory beekeeping; as such systems cannot support wild pollinators due to the heavy usage of pesticides. Such monocultures also have a higher pollination demand which necessitates dependence on managed pollination. Incidentally, the beekeeping industry in the US too has suffered losses due to several diseases and parasites. Some European countries which have experienced losses in bee population and consequent increase in prices for pollination services are adopting policies that encourage farmers to maintain wild patches on their fields to provide resources for wild pollinators.

In India, pollination services are largely provided by several species of wild pollinators. However, to cope with increasing demand for food, agricultural production is being increasingly intensified. Recognizing the role of pollinators in boosting the yield of certain crops, commercial and migratory beekeeping is being actively encouraged by the National Horticulture Board,

the Central & State horticulture departments and The Khadi & Village Industries Commission, with R&D support from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research. Also, several pesticides proven to be harmful to the bees are being used. In 2010, a study by the Centre for Science and Environment and a Commission inspection by the European Union independently found residues of antibiotics, pesticides and heavy metals in Indian honey. This indicates unhealthy beekeeping practices adopted by commercial beekeepers.

Legislation and policies that encourage large-scale commercial bee keeping or agricultural practices that threaten to wipe out wild pollinators from agricultural fields need to be suitably amended. It is also important to incorporate learning's from a system that has proved itself to be unsustainable. In India, a decline in wild pollinators and an increasing dependence on commercial pollinators will deprive small farmers of an ecosystem service they receive free of cost. Having learnt from the green revolution, India needs to adopt agricultural policies that not only boost production but are also sustainable and inclusive.

Contributors: Jahnvi G Pai (email: jahnvi@atree.org) and M Soubadra Devy (email: soubadra@atree.org), Fellow, Suri Sehgal Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation.

Address: Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, Bangalore, Royal Enclave, Srirampura, Jakkur Post, Bangalore 560064, Karnataka state, India.

Web-site: www.atree.org

*resource which they have been traditionally protecting and conserving for sustainable use*²².

This is the result of a sustained effort since 2008 by Soliga adivasis and their organization, the Zilla Budakattu Gririjana Abhivruddhi Sangha.

The Karnataka Forest Department was conspicuously absent from the event at which the District Commissioner, Mr. Amar Narayan and the MLA, Mr. C. Puttarangashetty distributed the CFRs.

Contributor: Nitin Rai, PhD (email: nitinrai@atree.org), Fellow Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE).

Address: Royal Enclave, Srirampura Jakkur, Post Bengaluru 560064, India.

Web-site: www.atree.org

2. Workshop and Conference

Killer pesticide Endosulfan to be phased out globally

Gathered in Geneva for the Fifth Conference of the Parties in April 2011, the nations of the world agreed to add endosulfan, an antiquated persistent insecticide, to the Stockholm Convention's list of banned substances. Environmental health and justice organizations from around the world, who have been working towards the ban, welcomed the decision.

The use of endosulfan has severely impacted the people of Kerala, India, where its use on cashew plantations has left thousands suffering from birth defects, mental retardation, and cancer. "This is the moment we have been dreaming of," says Jayan Chelaton from Thanal, a public interest research group based in Kerala. "*The tears of the mothers of endosulfan victims cannot be remedied, but it will be a relief to them that there will not be any more people exposed to this toxic insecticide. . . We are happy to note that this is also a victory for poor farmers, as it proves people united from all over the world can get what they demand.*"

Because of its persistence, bioaccumulation, and mobility, endosulfan — like DDT — rides on winds and ocean currents to reach even the remote Arctic region, where it contaminates the environment and traditional foods of the local communities.

For most users the ban will take effect in a year's time, but its use on a short list of crop-pest combinations will be phased out only over a six-year period. "*With a plethora of alternatives already available, we'd have preferred to see no exemptions included in the decision. But we were successful in restricting exemptions to*

Soligas get Community Forest Rights²¹ (CFR) in Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Wildlife Sanctuary, Karnataka

The Soliga adivasis have been struggling for Land and Community Rights for the past 31 years.

On Gandhi Jayanthi Day (2nd October 2011) Community Forest Rights under the Forest Rights Act were distributed to 25 Gram sabhas of Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Wildlife Sanctuary, Karnataka and adjoining areas in Chamarajanagara, Karnataka.

The CFR include sections 3(1) (c), (d), (k) and (i) of the Forest Rights Act. These guarantee the "*right to protect, regenerate or conserve or manage any community forest*

21. These are covered under the provisions of Section 3 of the Act The Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Rights), 2006 (also referred to as the Forest Rights Act the FRA).

22. Ibid.

specific combinations of crops and pests. This means that during the phase-out it can only be used in very specific situations," said Karl Tupper, a staff scientist from Pesticide Action Network, North America, who attended the deliberations.

Because endosulfan, a DDT-era pesticide, is one of the most toxic pesticides still in use today, momentum for a global ban has been building up for many years. It is especially a tribute to the thousands in the state of Kerala, India, whose health has suffered terribly from endosulfan, to the inspirational leadership of Kerala Chief Minister VS Achuthanandan, and to the many other people there who have all fought for their rights and for a global ban on endosulfan.

Sourced from: Excerpted from a press release by PAN International, ACAT, IITC and IPEN, 29 April 2011 (<http://www.panap.net/en/p/post/pesticides/691>).

Permanent People's Tribunal Session on Agrochemical Transnational Corporations

On December 3, 2011, a Permanent People's Tribunal (PPT) was convened to indict agrochemical Transnational Companies (TNCs) for gross violations of human rights. An international opinion tribunal, the PPT gave a call to farmers, agricultural workers, Indigenous Peoples, fisherfolk, women, children, scientists, consumers, and activists from all over the world to bear witness to the crimes of the six largest agrochemical TNCs. Throughout the years, these TNCs have caused the death and illnesses of innocents, irreversible environmental damage, willful destruction of livelihoods, and increasing loss of people's control over food and agriculture. The PPT is a valiant endeavor to stop the impunity with which agrochemical TNCs commit crimes against the people, and to create an effective system of corporate accountability.

The PPT on Agrochemical TNCs was organized by Pesticide Action Network International, a global network of more than 600 organizations in over 90 countries which has been working to eliminate the use of pesticides and other hazardous technologies.

The People's Call for Justice

In India, around 200 people gathered in Bangalore, India for the first day of the Permanent People's Tribunal (PPT) Session on Agrochemical Transnational Corporations (TNCs). The PPT coincides with the 27th anniversary of the Bhopal Tragedy, which most clearly illustrates the lack of accountability of agrochemical TNCs.

Farmers and farm workers, families of victims, environmental and health advocates, scientists,

and lawyers have all their hopes pinned high on the outcome of the PPT, an international opinion tribunal that aims to indict the "Big Six" of the pesticide industry for human rights violations.

Monsanto, Syngenta, Bayer, Dupont, Dow Chemical, and BASF are being indicted for violations related to the manufacture and sale of hazardous pesticides and technologies that have disastrous impacts on human life, the environment, and livelihoods.

Witnesses from around the world presented cases of human rights violations by the Big Six before a distinguished international panel of jurors. Jurors for the PPT include the Indian legal scholar Upendra Baxi, British scientist Dr. Ricarda Steinbrecher, African environmental lawyer Ibrahima Ly, Japanese professor Masayoshi Tarui, German economist Elmar Altvater, Italian professor Paolo Ramazzotti, and PPT Secretary General Dr. Gianni Togoni.

These cases include Bayer's endosulfan poisoning in Kasargod village, Syngenta's paraquat poisoning of Malaysian palm oil plantation workers, and child labour and pesticide poisoning in Indian cotton plantations. Doctors and a victim from Kasargod, a Malaysian plantation worker, and an Indian child laborer, environmental lawyers, testified.

"Today, people from all corners of the world have come together to indict these agrochemical TNCs, which have caused massive harm to people and the environment by trampling on the most basic human rights to life, health, and livelihood. This Tribunal highlights the need to have mechanisms to hold agrochemical corporations accountable," said Javier Souza, chair of PAN International and coordinator for PAN Latin America.

The PPT, founded in 1979 in Italy, looks into complaints of human rights violations submitted by communities. Born out of the tribunals on the Vietnam War and Latin American dictatorships, the PPT has held 35 sessions so far using the rigorous conventional court format. While its verdicts are not legally binding, these can set precedent for future legal actions against defendants, which in this case are agrochemical TNCs. Defendants in this Tribunal also include the governments of the companies' home states (U.S., Switzerland, and Germany), and the International Monetary Fund-World Bank and World Trade Organization.

"This Tribunal is a recourse to justice for those who have found none under the current legal mechanisms at the national and international level. We hope that the result of this PPT will serve as a reminder to governments and institutions of their responsibility to safeguard the rights of the people against

corporate aggression and impunity. Human rights will continue to be violated as long as companies are allowed to get away with it. As long as agriculture, the heart of the world's food system, is controlled by companies that value profit over life, more tragedies such as Bhopal are bound to happen," said Sarojeni Rengam, executive director of PAN AP.

The Permanent People's Tribunal Session on Agrochemical TNCs is organized by **Pesticide Action Network International**, a global network of more than 600 organizations in over 90 countries which has been working to eliminate the use of pesticides and other hazardous technologies.

Contributor: Shalini Bhutani
(email: emailsbhutani@gmail.com).

For more information write to inquiry@agricorporateaccountability.net and media@agricorporateaccountability.net

Website: <http://www.agricorporateaccountability.net>

3. Case Studies

Movement launched by 'Lokpanchayat' in order to protect local seeds

In 1993, Lokpanchayat, a non-government organization, took up work in eight drought-prone villages of Sangamner taluka of Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra, India, to realize a vision of equitable and sustainable rural development. With a view to creating a model village, watershed development work was undertaken on the initiative of villagers. A variety of issues ranging from family matters to village level conflicts came to light as work progressed. In the course of watershed development work, conservation of water, land and forests was given special attention. At the outset, workers hoped that, once water became available, all issues relating to agriculture would be resolved. However, where water became available, a spate of agriculture-related issues arose. Villagers still depended on merchants for meeting their requirement for seeds, fertilizers and pesticides. At times, seeds or fertilizers of good quality were not available; at others times, the available seeds were of a hybrid variety, which was not part of the local staple diet. Farmers and customers were caught up in a vicious circle of 'hybrid grains – polluted grains'. In order to resolve this problem, Lokpanchayat launched a high-priority programme for sustainable agriculture.

Establishment of the Krishak Panchayat

To popularize nature-friendly low-cost agriculture in Sangamner taluka, a village-to-village *yatra* for dialogue

on agricultural issues, involving lectures and street-plays, was conducted. Farmers themselves developed solutions, like developing a programme for home-based production of seeds and fertilizer. Older, traditional, locale-specific seeds were being replaced by 'improved' hybridized ones. But some, especially the elderly women-farmers, still remembered and related the importance of a large variety of traditional seeds. Some of them had even conserved these varieties for their own consumption and for sale of any surplus.

Conversations with these farmers revealed that they had traditional knowledge about a large variety of traditional agricultural crops including 'devthan' *bajra*, black rice and dark *jowar*, besides many other lesser-known crops like 'batu'. All this information has since been systematically documented. An Indigenous **Seed Bank** has been established to conserve these special varieties and to grow them organically. A programme for sustainable agriculture - '**Krishak Panchayat**' (**agricultural council**) – was initiated in ten villages with the objective of conservation of agricultural biodiversity. Since many of these local varieties are well adapted to the microclimate of the area, *in situ* conservation is achieved by farmers participating in the programme.

The 'devthan' variety of *bajra* was found to have become nearly extinct. For eight years, farmers worked hard to rejuvenate it. An extensive programme for the conservation of black rice has also been underway since four years, in the Adivasi villages of Akole taluka. 75 farmers are actively involved in these two conservation initiatives. 121 varieties of 95 crops are being conserved with the help of the Indigenous Seed Bank.

Conservation of 'Irwad' and 'Maleev' agriculture systems

'Irwad' and 'Maleev' are the names of traditional mixed crop systems of agriculture, which help conserve agro-biodiversity, and are practiced in Sangamner taluka. 'Irwad' incorporates planting of jowar, tuar, groundnut, mung and other varieties like 'kurasani' (total of the 19 kinds of seeds) along with the main crop of bajra. With agricultural reforms, this system was nearly forgotten. The 'Maleev' system of cultivation of vegetable crops also suffered likewise. More than 22 traditional vegetable varieties used to be cultivated simultaneously over an area of 4 to 5 'guntha's (one guntha is about one-fortieth of an acre) near farmers' houses. Both these systems used to conserve agro-biodiversity. Now they are being rejuvenated in villages practicing rain-fed agriculture in Sangamner and Akole talukas.

Establishment of 'Baliraja Krishak Utpadan company' for the distribution of traditional seeds

Work was underway for the conservation of over 120 seed varieties as a part of the process of conservation of **agro-biodiversity**. After considering the prevalent conditions and market demand for local seed varieties, 18 of them were selected for organic cultivation for commercial purposes.

Two years ago, several groups of farmers associated with the Krishak Panchayat launched / established a self-owned company – the **Baliraja Krishak Utpadan Company**. The number of shareholder-farmers has now grown to 215. Traditional varieties of bajra, jowar, rice, groundnut, etc. jointly cultivated by various farmers' groups, are now being marketed under the brand name 'Baliraja'.

Certification for these organic seeds is carried out under a Participatory Guarantee System, by groups belonging to three villages. Efforts are underway to obtain Geographical Indicator (i.e. legal) rights for the farmers who have conserved these traditional varieties.

Thus, Lokpanchayat is working for farmers' livelihoods based on the principles of sustainability through conservation of agro-biodiversity.

Contributor: Vijay Prahlad Sambare (email: lokpanchayatsnr@gmail.com) (Translated by Anuradha Arjunwadkar).

Address: 8, Tulsi Complex, Kuran Road, Sangamner Block-Sangamner District- Ahmednagar Pin code- 422 605
Phone: 02425 227134, 227234, Fax No: 02425 - 227134.

Website: <http://www.lokpanchayat.org/>

Vanastree: The Malnad forest garden and seed keepers' collective

About Vanastree

Vanastree - The Malnad Forest Garden and Seed Keepers' Collective - is a small collective dedicated to promoting **forest garden biodiversity** and **food security** through the conservation of traditional seeds. Vanastree's office is located in Sirsi town (Karnataka), but the collective has members scattered across the *Malenadu* (hilly region of the Western Ghats) as well as in the narrow coastal belt and on the eastern fringes of the Ghats. The collective was born in 2001 as a network of seed exchange groups focused on celebrating and endorsing biodiversity. From 2003, the collective began promoting sustainable livelihoods through conservation-oriented enterprises. The seed collective was officially registered as a trust in 2008. Its main objectives are:

1. To promote cultivated and wild biodiversity on farms and in forest home gardens;
2. To encourage seed saving and conservation of traditional crop varieties;

3. To provide networking, training and extension services.

Vanastree's objectives arose out of concerns for the economic stability of the region and the danger of losing its small-scale, traditional food production system to the forces of globalization. It recognizes the importance of forest home gardens as refuges for biodiversity, providers of nutritional food, extra sources of income, and educational tools.

Vanastree, which translates as "*Women of the Forest*" in Kannada, also emphasizes the traditional role of women in conservation. Vanastree believes that any biodiversity conservation plan aimed at arresting genetic erosion must recognize the role of women as gardeners, seed savers, and sources of knowledge.

What is a forest home garden?

Forest home gardens vary in size and structure; from a tiny patch of vegetables outside a house to an acre or more of mixed crops. In any form, they are characterized by a great diversity of plants in addition to domesticated and wild tree species as available space might allow. Vegetables grown include varieties of amaranth, spinach, cucumbers, gourds and pumpkins, lady's finger, brinjal, tubers, beans, chilies.

Work thus far

- ❖ 120 varieties of vegetable and 60 varieties of flower varieties documented;
- ❖ 6000 packets of organic, open-pollinated seeds distributed;
- ❖ 13 biodiversity *melas*/festivals and exhibitions held since 2001;
- ❖ women from various communities, religions and economic classes being reached out to through seed exchange groups;
- ❖ creation of a Garden of Hope with workers of a power laundry in Vasco, Goa.

Other activities

- ❖ Forming a decentralized regional seed bank;
- ❖ Supporting members of the collective members to run a variety of home-based conservation enterprises and services.

Accomplishments

Vanastree's efforts have been focused chiefly on seed exchange groups and documentation, but have also provided services like training, networking and help in establishing conservation-oriented enterprises.

Contributor: Sunita Rao (email: vanastree@gmail.com).

Address: 80/1 "Asare", Vishal Nagar, Marathi Koppa, SIRSI: 581402, Karnataka, India.
Phone: 08384-233293.

Web-site: www.vanastree.org

4. International News

Indian company leases land in Gambella forest of Ethiopia

While food sources become scarcer and food prices spiral higher and become more volatile all over the world, many countries try to expand their food production outside their borders. India is one of many, from regions including besides Europe and the Middle East. **Karuturi Global** is India's largest company to lease land in Africa. In Ethiopia for instance, where about 6.2 million people are threatened by famine, the company has leased 1,00,000 ha in the first phase and 2,00,000 in the second, to grow palms, rice and pulses; at an annual rate of 20 birr/ha (about 1.4 USD) for 50 years, a "throw-away-price" as seen not only by Ethiopians, but by Karuturi as well, which led to the company leasing even more land than they had initially intended or that they actually needed.

Other companies like Ruchi Soya, Sannati Agro Farm Enterprises, and S&P solutions, Whitefield Cotton Farm, BHO Bio and CLC Industries have leased areas between 10,000 to 50,000 ha in the same country. For instance, in Gambella forest, Karuturi and Verdanta Plantations have established offices in the Gambella National Park, one of the hot spots of Ethiopian biodiversity. Locals have started referring to Gambella forest as 'Katuristan' (see graphic).

The land leased by the companies used to be considered as "unused" land and an "unproductive agriculture reserve" by the companies and governmental officials alike. However, this view was by no means shared by local people, whose livelihoods depend on the customary

use of the forestland for hunting, beekeeping, collection of water and fuel wood, and small-scale agriculture activities, which have been historically embedded into traditional forms of natural protection. Also, from an ecological point of view, the land cannot be considered to be as "unused", since it is a global source of water, biodiversity, climate protection and spiritual purposes. However, accepting the notion of reserve agricultural land necessarily consigns existing local land-based social relations and practices that are diverse and distinct to being vestiges of the past — to be acknowledged, but in the end, not worthy of being taken seriously enough to protect and advance into the future. They simply do not "fit" the economic development grid envisioned....they are not the beneficiaries of the envisioned "responsible agricultural investment.

While the leasing out of large-scale plantations does not only concentrate wealth and power in the hands of a few, it also requires the eviction of indigenous peoples like Mazenger and Anuak and Nuer from their land, and its broader uses, who have been the stewards of biological and cultural diversity for centuries. The price paid also included the eviction of indigenous knowledge. However, indigenous control of knowledge is increasingly important for the ability of a community to control and protect its land and territory. For instance, people from the Mazenger communities expressed their concerns to Verdanta, that the deforestation of their area could have serious and potentially irreversible effects on the people, habitat, wildlife and water. Even the Ethiopian President sent a letter to the Prime Minister warning that the headwaters of the region could be seriously affected by Verdanta's cotton plantations. All warnings were ignored



and Verdanta signed the leasing contract. Gambella itself has been reeling under the impact of heavy floods since the 90s due to increasing deforestation in the highlands, and the establishment of plantations has obviously further decreased the resilience of the ecosystem. As a consequence, Karuturi lost 30,000 acres of maize harvest this season, when the Baro and Alwero rivers overflowed their banks and overwhelmed Karuturi's 80 km long system of protective dikes, leaving behind a number of evicted indigenous people and a land which has probably lost its original productivity to a significant degree. Sai Ramakrishna Karuturi said his company took a \$15 million "hit" from the floods. He was manifestly puzzled by the intensity of the calamity: *"This kind of flooding we haven't seen before. This is a crazy amount of water."*

Contributor: Dr. Ingrid Hartmann (email: ingridethio@yahoo.com). Researcher and Consultant with over 20 years' work experience in Germany and the Horn of Africa. She has worked with Amoud University Somaliland in the past and is presently attached to Desertnet International.

Web-site: <http://www.european-desertnet.eu/>

Obituary

Padma Shree Dr. Ramdayal Munda, Rajya Sabha member and educationist, expired in Ranchi on 30 September 2011. A key figure in the creation of Jharkhand and an expert on tribal issues, the 72-year old Munda has been internationally acclaimed for his anthropological research work on Indian tribals.

Musician, linguist, writer, scholar, institution-builder and tribal activist, he was dedicated to the development of Adivasis, and worked for the promotion of tribal cultures and music. He was actively involved in the national level efforts to unite the diverse tribal communities from across the country, for them to gain a voice in Delhi, as a starting point to controlling their own destinies. He participated in active policymaking at the U.N. Working Group on Indigenous People, in Geneva, and at the U.N. Forum of Indigenous Issues in New York, as a senior official of the Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ICITP), an all India tribal-led movement. He had been a member of the Bhuria Committee which recommended the Panchayati Extension to Scheduled Areas, popularly known as PESA. He was a member of the National Advisory Council (NAC) headed by AICC President Sonia Gandhi.

Note to the reader:

In case you want to receive People In Conservation at a different address, please send us your new address at kvoutreach@gmail.com, else send it to us by post at the following address:

Kalpavriksh
Documentation and Outreach Centre
Apt.5, Shree Dutta Krupa,
908, Deccan Gymkhana,
Pune, Maharashtra,
India.
Web-site: www.kalpavriksh.org



Millet Mounds on display by local farmers from across Karnataka (from organic farmer group Sahaja Samruddha).

People In Conservation - Biodiversity Conservation and Livelihood Security
Volume 4 Issue 1 December 2011

Compilation and Editing: Milind Wani

Advisor and Editorial help: Neema Pathak

Editorial Assistance: Anuradha Arjunwadkar, Sharmila Deo, Pankaj Sekhsaria, Seema Bhat

Photograph: Shalini Bhutani, Kanchi Kohli

Cover Photographs:

Photo1: Farmers staging anti-GM protests in Delhi in May 2008.

Photo2: Seeds on display by local farmers from across Karnataka
(from organic farmers group Sahaja Samruddha).

Illustrations: Madhuvanti Anantharajan, Ram Chandran

Published By: Kalpavriksh, Apt. 5 Shree Dutta Krupa, 908 Deccan Gymkhana, Pune 411004

Phone: 91-20-25675450, Tel/Fax: 91-20-25654239

Email: kvoutreach@gmail.com

Website:www.kalpavriksh.org

Funded By: MISEREOR, Aachen, Germany

For Private Circulation
Printed Matter
To: