



National Conference & Exhibition on **‘Uncultivated Foods’** **12-13 Dec, 2014**

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We warmly invite you to a 2 day national conference and exhibition of **‘Uncultivated Forest Foods’** on the **12th, and 13th of December, 2014 at Aurobindo Ashram , New Delhi**, focusing on “Forests as Food Producing Habitats”. This is to initiate a policy discourse around food and nutrition security and sovereignty of Adivasi and other forest dwelling communities, as well as their ethos and worldviews linked to these.

Mr. Jual Oram, the Minister of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, has kindly consented to be the Chief Guest of this conference, where Adivasi and other forest dwelling communities from more than ten states will participate and exhibit more than 1,000 local foods.

These events are being organized as a much-needed initiative to recognize the significance of uncultivated foods in contributing to the wellbeing of Adivasi and other forest dwelling communities. In a study done by **Living Farms** on forest foods, in Rayagada, data shows that uncultivated foods provide a critical supplement to the diets of these communities. In bio-diverse forests that have not been overtaken by commercial monoculture, there is year-long supply of a variety of foods, ensuring diversity and much-needed nutrition in local diets.

In stark contrast, our present food and agriculture paradigm is pushing urban (and even many rural) people away from traditional diets based on locally produced foods to highly processed and energy-intensive foods and drinks, which lead to a different kind of hunger, known as ‘hidden hunger’, indicating malnourishment, lacking in wholesome and balanced nutrition.

The mainstream paradigm of food security does not recognize the value of diverse, culturally and ecologically appropriate, safe and nutritious, traditionally consumed foods by Adivasi and other forest dwelling communities, as being vital in addressing the alarming level of hunger and malnutrition in the country¹.

Thus an issue of concern is not only *how much* food is required to achieve food security, but *what kind* of food. This qualitative aspect is equally important as quantitative targets of food production, access and availability.

While the consumption of uncultivated foods is often seen as a sign of backwardness and poverty, the Adivasis and other forest dwelling communities themselves emphasize the health enhancing value and the sense of dignity that their traditional foods allow them, contrary to the mistaken impressions of the urban elite. Yet, official policy discourse on several aspects related to the Adivasis -- whether regarding food and nutrition security, or forests (forestry approaches, ownership, management and governance debates) – has failed to acknowledge this, much less to incorporate it in their plans, ostensibly meant for tribal welfare.

The current land use or forestry use policies, or even food security policies, fail to appreciate the reality and significance of traditionally consumed forest foods, which are in fact safe, diverse and nutritious. They are indeed far superior – ecologically and nutritionally – to the food grown by chemical intensive agriculture, an outmoded and unsustainable paradigm still ruling in India. No external fossil energy, farm inputs or irrigation is required in the nurturing of uncultivated forest foods, in contrast to the high input inefficiencies of the conventional paradigm.

□ ¹ India ‘contributes’ 42% of underweight children under 5 years of age in the world.

□ 43% of children (under 5 years) in the country are underweight. The figure is much higher than the global average of 25%, and also higher than the sub-Saharan Africa’s figure of 28%. (Ref. ‘State of Food Insecurity in Rural India’ -WFP’s 2010 Report)

In the context of continuing hunger and malnutrition, mounting economic distress of farmers, and the rapid degradation and depletion of environmental resources, severely jeopardizing farm livelihoods, it has become imperative to re-examine our understanding of food and nutrition security, and consequently, our ways of addressing the issue, especially for the forested regions of India with a very high percentage of indigenous communities dependent on forest and rain fed agriculture.

A holistic approach requires defending the integrity and health of forests and fields that generate uncultivated food and nutrition, as critical to addressing food and nutrition insecurity; and in recognizing and restoring the customary rights of the forest/rural communities over their forests and other commons. In this context, the proposed National Conference will cover the following themes:

1. Food and Nutritional Security:

- the diversity and quantity of consumption of uncultivated foods
- the nutritional value of uncultivated foods

2. Adivasi *Jeevan* and Uncultivated Foods:

- the socio-cultural linkages between Adivasi *jeevan* and uncultivated foods
- traditional knowledge
- forest foods in the context of climate change

3. Policies and Programmes impinging on Uncultivated Foods:

- Food policies, laws and schemes
- Agricultural policies, approaches and schemes
- Forestry policies and approaches – people's rights to and control over forest resources; the spread of commercial plantations and monocultures, etc.

4. The Way Forward: Research Agenda, Advocacy, and Grassroots Programmes with Adivasi and other forest dwelling communities.

We will share the detailed agenda with you once it is ready.

Kind Regards,

Debjeet Sarangi

Managing Trustee