

SAVE OUR RICE CAMPAIGN

REPORT FOR OCTOBER 2007 - MARCH 2008

Preface

The highlight of these six months of the Save our Rice Campaign was training and farmer field school programmes started in Kerala, Regional workshops on GM issues and consumer health in various regions in Tamilnadu and Rice seed conservation programmes started in Karnataka. Moreover, there were some major events as well. The Indian Farmers Day 2007 was celebrated in Mangalore where the local organisation Krishi Bhoomi Samrakshana Samithi was fighting the take over of agriculture lands for a Special Economic Zone (SEZ). A detailed report follows-

Meetings, Workshops

Indian Farmers Day, 2007 at Mangalore, Karnataka

The organising work for the Indian Farmers Day 2007 started in October 2007 itself. In November Usha, Sridhar and Ponnambalam met the leaders of the Krishi Bhoomi Samrakshana Samithi and the Citizens Forum of Mangalore (who were the local hosts and organisers) as well as other leaders in Mangalore to discuss the organisation of the Indian Farmers Day 2007 in December. In 2006 the first Indian Farmers Day was held in Tanjavore and this year it was felt that we must highlight the issue of the Mangalore Special Economic Zone (MSEZ) and the Petrochemical and Petroleum Industrial Region (PCPIR) being planned in Mangalore and surrounding areas. This was threatening to oust more than a lakh farmers from their highly fertile crop lands. In the first week of December we went to Mangalore and visited the areas which have been notified to be acquired for the MSEZ. These we found to be very productive and highly fertile farm lands and thousands of families were dependent on these farms. We met and charted out final plans for the Indian Farmers Day programme.

Following the discussions, we decided to raise more support for the programme, as the Save Rice Campaign funds could support only some part of the programme. Jointly with other south indian groups, we raised funds for the programme from OXFAM. The Rice Campaign supported the travel costs of farmers of the Campaign groups in Tamilnadu and Kerala, as well as the costs of Devinder Sharma who came as resource person and continued to attend a few of our programmes in Wyanad and Palakkad soon after.

The Indian Farmers Day was held on 19th December 2007. There were three major events – a Seminar, a Jatha and a Public meeting. A separate report is annexed (Annexe 1). The meetings had very good media coverage and could evince good response from the public. An exhibition of agriculture produce from the villages that was going to be acquired was also organised and many citizens came to demonstrate their solidarity with

the farmers. Karsten joined Usha and Sridhar for this meeting along with farmers from Kerala, Tamilnadu and Karnataka associated with the Rice campaign.

Meetings in Tamilnadu

The main focus of the programmes in Tamilnadu was the meetings conducted in various regions and towns to address and reach to as many people including the media, the issue of GM crops and its impact on consumer health. Meetings were also organised with students as the target group in Kanyakumari District, focussing mainly on Biodiversity conservation and food security.

On 24th November 2007 a meeting for Consumer awareness on GM issues was organised in Erode in Tamilnadu with the support of FEDCOT. In this meeting all the District Coordinators of FEDCOT along with a few consumer activists also participated. Representatives from all the 30 districts in Tamilnadu attended the workshop. A decision was taken to organise regional meetings, atleast six of them in Tamilnadu for consumer groups. An Alert was also released for the consumers and media- a copy of which is annexed here (Annexure 2). A booklet on “GM food - a violation of consumer rights” was brought out and distributed in all these workshops.

On 28th December 2007, a meeting was organised of the “Save Rice Campaign” jointly with the Nature Conservation Trust and Nagercoil Women’s Consumer Protection Centre at Nagercoil.

On 17th January 2008 farmers and activists in the Rice Campaign got together for a planning meeting at the CREATE’s Organic Farming Centre at Aadirangam (Thiruthiraipoondi). Under the chairmanship of Sri Nammalvar we had a detailed discussion on the issues of GM crops field trials, being planned by the State Agriculture Department in the rice belt of Thiruvavoor. Discussions were also done on the Rice Clubs and the situation of food security in the nation. A planning meeting followed especially for the future of this centre, which Nammalvar said must become an Ecological Farming Centre. On 18th January a competition was organised among the local women from the farmer households on “Traditional food using rice”. This was a very colourful and exciting event, with more than 50 items made of rice coming up for display. A team of judges selected the best three and awarded them with prizes. All the participants were given prizes of encouragement.

On the same day in the evening, a few Rice mandrams (Clubs) were visited and meetings organised. In the evening a meeting was organised at Thiruvavoor, by WAVES Foundation, where the deliberations were mainly on the agrarian crisis and also on GM crops and its impacts. Usha, Ponnambalam and Sridhar spoke in the occasion.

On 25th January 2008, CREATE and S.T. Hindu College, PG Department of Economics, jointly organized a seminar on “Social awareness on Food Security”, under the auspices of the Rice campaign.

CREATE also jointly organised along with various colleges in Nagercoil (Women's Christian College on 28th January, Scotts Christian College on 5th February, Holy Cross College on 7th February, MNM Christian College on 28th February) on Biodiversity Conservation, where the focus of discussions was Food security and Biodiversity Conservation with special focus on rice varieties. Resource persons were Usha, Karsten, from the Rice Campaign. Dr V S Vijayan, Chairman of the Kerala State Biodiversity Board also addressed one of the meetings.

On 9th February 2008, a training workshop was organised at the Adhirangam Centre of CREATE for farmers and leaders on the GM crops. Farmer leaders from the three districts of Thiruvavoor, Tanjavore and Nagapattinam attended the workshop. This was to build better awareness on the issues as well as equip the farmers to take the campaign to the grass roots among fellow-farmers and other people in the society. An action plan was also charted at the end of the meeting. Dr Nammalvar, R Ponnambalam, Jayaraman and Sridhar led the workshop.

On 4th March 2008, a seminar was organised on the "Agrarian Crisis and Food Security" by CREATE, FEDCOT and P.G Department of Economics, S.T. Hindu College, Nagercoil. Dr Nammalvar was honoured on the day and he delivered the key note address. S Usha, R Ponnambalam, Sridhar R also spoke on the day from the Rice campaign. Students of the college were the main participants.

A Seminar on "Bio-diversity Conservation" with focus on Traditional varieties of Rice and its Conservation was organised jointly with Conservation of Nature Trust and CREATE at Thuvaramkaddu, Kanyakumari District on 29th March 2008. R Ponnambalam spoke about the importance of conserving traditional rice varieties vis a vis food sovereignty.

Meetings in Kerala

In Kerala, the major focus of the meeting / workshops was the protection of paddy lands and revival of paddy. There has been an effort from various corners to address the abysmal state of food production in the State, especially paddy.

On 22nd December 2007, a meeting of farmers was organised at Noolpuzha in Wyanad jointly with the Gramajyothi Farmers Club. The main focus of the meeting was to address the agrarian crisis and food security issues. This was a well attended meeting, with the local MLA inaugurating the meeting and Devinder Sharma giving the key note address.

This was followed with a field visit on 23rd December, after which Usha, Sridhar along with Devinder Sharma attended a meeting of farmer leaders on 24th December 2007 at Kalpetta organised by the Wyanad Prakrithi Samrakshana Samithi. In this meeting we discussed the agrarian crisis in Wyanad and the future of farming in Wyanad. A heated but very productive debate followed, where the highlight was the demand for the "Income Commission" for the farmers as a way for addressing the crisis.

On 27th December the campaign team addressed a meeting at Kunissery, Palakkad. Devinder Sharma was also present in the meeting. Later in the afternoon, we organised a training for the farmers on organic farming. This exposure later led to the starting of the Farmer Field School programme in Erimayur Panchayath along with the Agriculture Department.

In Wyanad, we organised two training workshops in February 2008. The first one was at Vaduvanchal on 28th February for the farmers of the Kissan Jyothi Farmers Club. Organic Farming was introduced and demonstrations were organised for production of organic soil and crop improvement inputs as well as plant protection inputs. The second meeting was on 29th February for the farmers of the Grama Jyothi Farmers Club at Noolpuzha. Both the training were led by Sri Nammalvar, Usha and Sridhar.

As a follow up of the Wyanad training on Organic farming in Rice, the farmers came together on the 10th and 11th March 2008 to prepare the organic inputs collectively. Aneesh joined these meetings. This process has triggered farmers to experiment with organic inputs as well as SRI systems of farming in rice.

Farmer Field School at Palakkad

Following the farmers meeting in Palakkad in December where Sri Kamaraj, trainer from Kudumbam had come to talk to the farmers on Organic farming, there has been a demand from the farmers of Erimayur to start a Farmer Field School. On 10th February Sridhar met Sri Perumal Ramdoss, Master Trainer of the Kudumbam (LEISA Network) at Trichi to discuss the Farmer Field School at Palakkad. A collaboration has been formed between the Krishi Bhavan at Erimayur, Kudumbam and Save Rice Campaign to start a FFS – Integrated Crop Management (ICM) for Paddy at Erimayur. The farmers who initially started the organic farming in the villages have been enlisted along with a few others for the FFS-ICM programme. Ms Sheena, the Agriculture Officer at Erimayur, Purushothaman and Premakumaran, two enthusiastic farmers have taken the lead to organise the programmes.

The first FFS-ICM initiation workshop was organised on 17th and 18th February 2008. Mr Ramdoss, the master trainer and Mr Kamaraj came from Kudumbam. Sridhar and Ajith (a young formally trained agriculturist) from Thanal joined the programme. There were about 50 farmers, a few of them who had come to listen and many to join the programme. The two day workshop was mainly an appraisal exercise followed by a training on some of the input making for organic farming.

Programmes in Karnataka

In Karnataka, Save Rice Campaign activities were coordinated by Krishna Prasad and his network team of organic farmers and organisations under the banner of Sahaja Samrudha. Some of the activities they undertook from January to March 2008 are described below.

Reviving and Characterisation of Rice varieties

Bore gowda of Shivahalli village in Mandya district was a normal farmer and used to crop hybrid varieties till his yields started coming down even after increasing fertiliser use. It was also affecting his and his families health and soon he realised that his methods have to change. His concern for their health led to him being concerned about biodiversity. Today his farm has grown into one of the largest experimental restoration plots, an individual farmer can maintain, drawing visitors from near and far off villages. Many who visit here leave with a request list and a promise from Bore gowda to send seeds to them. He maintains and has collected and sown about twenty-seven varieties of rice on his demonstration plot. Many of these varieties are those forgotten by his fellow farmers and his work is a model revival work. Now he has approached Sahaja Samrudha, an organic farmers association, for technical assistance to purify these varieties. This work we have taken up and his field is a demonstration plot.

Characterization of deep water Rice varieties

Villages that border River Varada in Shimoga and Uttara Kannada districts of Karnataka is a rice growing belt. Farmers here carefully store deepwater rice varieties that can survive when their lifeline, River Varada flows vigorously over their fields. So flood and agriculture go hand in hand in this region.

These flood resistant varieties have a significant place in the biodiversity of the area. Other than Varada basin, these varieties are found in Bangladesh, West Bengal and Basin of River Godavari and forest region of Eastern Ghats. For centuries farmers on the sides of Varada are growing varieties like *neremuluga*, *nereguli*, *karibhatta*, *sannavaalya*, *karekal dadiga* to sustain their crops during monsoon. All these varieties and many more are originated natively and are grown organically. None of the improved high yielding varieties have survived here. 'Sahaja Samruddha', documented varietal diversity of deepwater rice and farming culture associated with it. Characterization has been done for 10 deep water rice varieties. Farmers of Mogalli in Sirsi taluk and Yelkundli in Sagar taluk were involved in the characterisation programme.

Sahaja Samrudha in consultation with the rice farmers developed the following demands and sent to Govt for follow up

- To declare the paddy fields along River Varada as 'Seed Heritage Zone'
- Documenting agriculture practices associated with it
- To set up community seed banks at the rural Panchayat level and encourage seed exchange among farmers
- To make sure that Raita Samparka Kendras (Farm Information Centre) possess good quality flood resistant varieties.
- To provide value addition and market facilities to deepwater rice varieties.
- Undertake reforestation programmes. Native trees should be planted across River Varada to check soil erosion.

Mapping of Medicinal Rice diversity

The uses of rice in traditional medicine are closely interwoven with its use as a food. The main rice products used as medicines are made from a few varieties that have medicinal value. Charaka, the great master of ayurveda writes that *Raktashali* (red), *Mahashali* (large and fragrant), *Kalama* (thick stem), *Shakunharhita* (curved), *Turnaka* (quick maturity), *Deerghashuka* (long awned), *Panduka* (yellowish), *Langula* (tall), *Sugandhika* (fragrant), *Lohawal* (red), *Shariva* (pointed?), *Pramodaka* (fragrant), *Patanga* (resembling grasshopper/locust?), and *Tapaniya* (golden or maturing in hot weather) are all excellent *shali* (rices maturing in winter) rices. They have the following effects: refrigerant, tasty, causing slight flatulence, somewhat sticky, nourishing, semen augmenting, and diuretic.

Some of traditional uses are supported by scientific studies. Rice can be used to treat skin conditions, boils, sores, swellings and skin blemishes. Other herbs are sometimes added to the rice balls to increase their medicinal effects. Sticky glutinous rice is often taken to treat stomach upsets, heart-burn and indigestion. Extracts from brown rice have been used to treat breast and stomach cancer and warts. They have also been used to treat indigestion, nausea and diarrhoea.

Karnataka has a rich diversity of rice. The seed mapping was conducted using a participatory tool to identify the rich diversity of rice with medicinal properties. Identified 8 varieties having medicinal properties during seed mapping.

Paddy seed collection

Seed mapping, which was conducted in the villages helped identify many landraces. The collected varieties were distributed to farmers for multiplication on-farm. Again these were re-distributed to the farming communities at their request. The cycle of collection and distribution of local varieties is managed by the Volunteers and Sahaja samrudha staff members.

Production of Documentary film on “ Deep water Rice : gift of nature ”

Deep water Rice varieties have a significant place in the Varada river belt . For centuries farmers on the sides of Varada are growing varieties like *neremuluga*, *nereguli*, *karibhatta*, *sannavaalya*, *karekal dadiga* to sustain their crops during monsoon. Among the crops, *Nereguli* is the most preferred as it has proved to be the best deepwater variety for years. It can resist flood for 25 days.

Documentary film is being made on the theme in collaboration with Srusti media, Bangalore. Shylaja and Subhas ,Mainstream journalists are actively involved in the programme. Film shot in Yelkundliu,Talguppa,Mogalli and Yadurabailu.

Networking and Field Visits

As before, the best of our successes has been the large number of groups, who have been interacting with us and coming in to become part of our network and efforts. There has been invites from voluntary organisations, farmers, other groups and government agencies and we had been obliging them through out and providing advocacy support in many cases.

The Amritha Viswavidyalaya, a deemed university running under the auspices of the Reverered Matha Amrithanandha Mayi has been having interactions with us through its Swami's who are interested in agriculture issues. Our interactions have led them to seriously think on organic and sustainable farming as well as revival of indigenious methods. In October 2007 they asked us to prepare a concept note on an institute for the same.

The District Panchayath of Thiruvananthapuram has been promoting Rice cultivation with additional financial support for farmers. In the second week of October we visited the Nellanad Group farmers fields during the harvesting period. The farmers in this group were supported with Rs. 20,000 per hectare and this enabled them to sustain their cultivation. The Paddy farmers in Kerala have been demanding that the Government support their farming with some direct monetary benefits, and this was a good model to demonstrate that atleast this much support was needed for the Paddy farmer.

On 7th October 2007 Sri Ponnambalam participated in a Seminar held at Bangalore on “State level consulting Meeting on World Bank’s World Development Report 2008 on Agriculture” where he spoke on the Importance of food crops particularly related to Rice.

On 13th October 2007 Sridhar and Usha visited Sri E D Joseph, a prominent farmer in the Pokkali Paddy area, a salt water paddy area in Kochi. The Pokkali farms are naturally organic as they are water logged area, the only activities undertaken are sowing and harvesting. But the farmers face many difficulties and E D Joseph is an innovator who has devised his own threshing machine and is experimenting his own model of a harvester, suitable to the water logged paddy. .

On 15th October 2007, a group of farmers and organisation leaders from Chattisgarh visited us and had a detailed interaction on the Rice campaign. They have evinced keen interest in taking up the campaign in Chattisgarh. The team was led by INAG and INFACT.

This years World Food Day was celebrated on the 16th of October 2007 by CREATE at Nagercoil by organising a meeting focusing on “Save Rice” at the HEAL Centre, Nagercoil.

In the third week of October, Usha and Sridhar visited Kasaragod, to the Endosulfan affected areas . They also met farmers organisations in Kumbbla, a primarily vegetable area with some farmers doing traditional rice variety cultivation as well. We also

attended a meeting with farmers under the auspices of the Centre for Development Studies (CDS). A joint programme for organic farming is thought about in the area, and a proposal was made for the same.

On 31st October 2007 a meeting was called by the Head of the Rice Research Station of the Kerala Agriculture University at Pattambi, Dr P V Balachandran. This was to develop a proposal for organic rice production and marketing. Sridhar attended the meeting and provided some inputs on the marketing aspects of organic rice.

In November, the Social Action Forum from Kanyakumari District requested that we publish a campaign poster in their souvenir. We issued a poster design for the same on “GM Free Tamilnadu” which was published, and distributed to 1000 member organisations. Dr Yesudian of the SAF coordinated the souvenir.

In the last week of November 2007, we visited Wyanad, especially to talk to farmers in Noolpuzha and Vaduvanchal, where we are planning to start field level activities – Organic farming and seed banks.

On 10th December 2007, Sri Ponnambalam delivered a lecture on “Food Security and Human Rights” at Ramapuram village organized by Indian Human Rights Protection Council.

On 14th December 2007 Sri Ponnambalam participated in the training camp organized by Nehru Yuva Kendra held at Kanyakumari. Representatives from Southern District participated in the training camp. He delivered a lecture on “Consumer Rights and food security”.

On December 17th 2007, Usha made a presentation on “Gender and Biodiversity” Issues and Concerns at the Kerala Agriculture University – Vellayani Campus, Trivandrum.

On 21st December 2007 Sri Ponnambalam presented a paper on “Alternative Marketing System in the changing economic policy of India” organized by India Society of Agricultural Marketing” at Madurai. His experience in setting up the Farmers Market, the regulated market system and the present APPTA model (a very innovative model – a collaboration of producers and traders) in Nagercoil was shared in the meeting.

On December 25th 2007, the Rice campaign team joined Devinder Sharma in a meeting of students of the National Service Scheme in Kozhikode. This was organised by Prof Sobhindran, a well known environmental activist.

In the first week of January 2008, both Usha and Sridhar were at Wyanad attending a meeting of Anthra – which was part of training for farmers in Wyanad on “Health management of traditional cattle breeds”. After the interactions and field visits to a traditional rice field where traditional cattle were being used by farmers, on 5th January, a training was organised for the paddy land farmers who has come together as a paddy land

collective in Noolpuzha panchayath. Krishnaprasad of Sahaja Samrudha was the main resource person.

In the last week of January 2008 starting 28th to 31st, both Usha and Sridhar were at Palakkad as resource persons in meetings organised at Kottuvapadam, Alakanalloor, Karakurishy, Kanjirapuzha and Kuzhalmannam. These were meetings organised by the local Krishi Bhavans (Agriculture Department offices) as part of the Farmers counselling programme. These were meetings where number of farmers turned up and we discussed the agrarian issues along with paddy cultivation and the need for food security and farmers rights and welfare issues. In all these places farmers were seen to have lost hope but the efforts of the agriculture officers in a few places were bringing hope back to the farmers.

Usha was invited as a key note speaker to the State Agriculture Festival on 21st February 2008 organised by the State Agriculture Department. This programme in Kochi was attended by a large number of farmers and the topic was on GM crops and threats. A good discussion followed and at the end we had a number of farmers wanting to know more and this started a series of requests and many joining the campaign in Kerala.

From 17th to 22nd March 2008 Usha travelled to West Bengal to attend a few meetings. During her visit she had interactions with Ardhendu Chatterjee, a leader in the organic farming movement in the country. She also participated in meetings at Shanthinikethan and also had discussions with SEVA, who was earlier a partner in the Save Rice Campaign.

Networking continued through out the period with the Pesticide Action Network – Asia and the Pacific (PANAP) and the Asia Pacific Women Law and Development (APWLD) Network. In the first week of November, Usha travelled to Bangkok, Thailand to attend the Conveners meeting of the APWLD. She is the Convener of the Women and Environment task force.

Rice Advisory Meeting, Penang

Sridhar attended the the Rice Advisory Meeting organised by PANAP at Penang on October 26th and 27th 2007. The two day meeting reviewed the Rice Campaign in various countries in Asia and also formed common plans. The Save our Rice Campaign activities in India was shared with all participants. The immediate threat of Genetically Modified Rice was the highlight of the discussions. The Week of Rice Action (WORA)-2007 was reviewed and this year it would have GM Rice threat in Asia as the main campaign theme.

The Rice Journalist Award for the year instituted by PANAP, went to Sri P M Basheer, a Journalist working in the Hindu, an Indian Daily. The award was given at New Delhi, at an event of the UNDP. Jayakumar, Director of Thanal went to deliver the award

representing PANAP. Basheer's article on the Pokkali Rice Fields in Kerala won him the award.

Week of Rice Action 2008

This year we are celebrating the Week of Rice Action initiated by PANAP with a State-level workshop on GM crops at Kochi, Kerala. This programme has been planned for April 8th 2008. The preparatory work for this continued in the month of March. Eight campaign banners have been prepared. Pamphlets, reading materials on LL Rice, Golden Rice etc were made and translated to Malayalam. The film by Centre for Sustainable Agriculture on the Bt-Cotton debacle, titled "So shall you Reap" has been translated to Malayalam. Aneesh David worked on the translation and production. A poster exhibition on Genetic Engineering has been prepared by Karsten and the design was done with the help of Christine.

Advocacy

Paddy Programmes in Kerala

The Planning Board of Kerala set up a Paddy Committee to develop a handbook for the Paddy Flagship programme. The Committee had various sub-committees for various aspects related to paddy. Usha S coordinated the subcommittee looking into future activities in Paddy and Sridhar R was a member of the group entrusted with the task of overall coordination. This exercise started a detailed discussion on the issue, which eventually helped in the better understanding of the paddy revival programme for Kerala as well as bringing many concerned people from farming, government and scientific bodies together. This process went on through out the 6 months. On November 14th 2007, following a meeting at the Planning Board, the Paddy Committee met at Thrissur with the Kole land farmers on 18th November 2007. This was to integrate the Kole Paddy land farming initiatives. Many farmer organisations attended the meeting along with the Department of Agriculture. This meeting mainly helped revive paddy cultivation in the area and address the various practical problems on the ground as reported by the farmers.

In October 2007, the report of the Prof. M S Swaminathan Committee on Kuttanad Revival Package came out. Kuttanad is one of the vast paddy lands in Kerala, which is interspersed with the Vembanad Lake and the backwaters that are fed by five large rivers in Kerala. In the last two decades intensive chemical farming and labour issues has destroyed the paddy cultivation in the area. We had discussions with groups in Kuttanad. Many of the recommendations of the Committee were seen to be quite contrary to local needs and demands. Nevertheless, the need for a revival for Kuttanad is much necessary.

At the rate at which Kerala is losing its paddy land to development and construction as well as mining needs, we will very soon be a state completely devoid of rice and water. Kerala Government realising this had mooted a Paddy and Wetland Protection Bill 2007,

which is to ban all reclamation/conversion of paddy lands and wetlands in the State. This Bill's copy was released for discussion.

In Kerala, many groups and farmers across the State are on a struggle against lobbies that are filling up paddy lands or mining clay / sand out of paddy lands. This is a threat to not just food security but water availability and also causes environmental issues. While the struggle at Muriyad by a local group of farmers called Karshaka munnettam had been well noticed by the State Government, another area near Thrissur where a few farmers and activists came out in struggle to continue cropping in their area is the Erayamkudi paddy lands.

Meanwhile, we sent the draft bill copy to many groups working with us and we have started an advocacy campaign among the groups and farmers to implement this Bill. There is a huge lobby working against the introduction of the Bill, especially those that are into mining sand and clay as well as constructions on wetlands and paddy lands. We have demanded that the Bill be implemented but the Paddy farmer be supported with a steady income.

Sridhar attended two of the consultations at Thrissur and Trivandrum. At Thrissur he presented the Save our Rice Campaigns position on the Bill.

On 19th January 2008, a meeting was called by the local groups at Eryamkudi and Save Rice campaign declared solidarity on the issue. Seeds were collected for sowing and with much festivities cultivation started even amidst protests and threats from the sand mining lobby.

On 20th January 2008, we visited the Muriyad farmers area and saw the problems first hand. A need for a broader coming together of such groups as well as strengthening the struggle for legislating the comprehensive Paddy protection Bill was also discussed.

Organic Farming Policy in Kerala

The draft Organic Farming Policy of the State which was worked by the Kerala State Biodiversity Board and released by the Kerala Government, was debated in detail by various sections of the stake holders. The draft policy also underwent many corrections during the process.

In October the regional consultations with farmers on the draft Organic Farming policy started. The Campaign team helped in the organising of this and also facilitate the participation of many farmers and organisations in the consultations.

On 15th March 2008, Sridhar and Usha on invitation of the State Biodiversity Board helped develop a road map for the Organic Farming Policy, Strategy and Action Plan. We sat on a consultation with a few agriculture officers and Joint Director of Agriculture at

Palakkad to develop this road map. This was a precursor to the final discussion called by the Chief Minister for ironing out a road map for the same.

Organic Farming in Tamilnadu

In Tamilnadu, the movement on Organic farming is spreading at a fast pace, with more and more farmers joining Dr Nammalvar in his efforts. He has been relentlessly taking up training and spreading awareness. Jayaraman, our field organiser has been supporting his activities whenever possible. Jayaraman also has responsibility as one of the organisers in the Tamilnadu Organic Agriculturist Movement (TOAM). He has been helping in the training programmes of Nammalvar through out this period, as well as participating in the advocacy campaigns and regional meetings against GM crops as well.

WTO and Trade related issue s

In October 2007 the discussions on WTO and our responses to it continued. In the second week we organised a letter campaign to the Prime Minister signed by prominent Keralites and also organisations demanding that the WTO negotiations not be taken forward, as we as a State and Nation has nothing to benefit from it.

Since, our efforts compounded with lots of efforts from many corners of the State, especially from sensitive officers in the State, Kerala put up a strong response to the draft modalities at the WTO. Probably Kerala was the only state that took such a well-studied position on the issue.

Access-Benefit Sharing and IPR issues

Planet Diversity meet – a parallel event is being organised by various voluntary organisations collaboratively at Bonn during the Conference of Parties (COP) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in May 2008. We have decided that a workshop will be organised and a paper presented on an issue that we have serious concerns on. This is about the Access and Benefit Sharing. The Kani-TBGRI deal has been hyped as a model in this matter, and we know first hand that it is not so. The planning discussions and research for the same was done during these months. A number of concerned people were interveiwed and field visits done. Much literature survey was done especially with Karsten taking most of this work. The writing of the paper was divided between Karsten, Usha, Sridhar and Santhi (a scientist and someone who has been understanding the adivasi life and customs, especially in the Kani area).

GM Issues

In September 2007, the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) through a notification allowed sale of packaged food that contains produce which are Genetically Modified. In October, after discussions we started a letter campaign on the issue and in

the three States, more than 100 organisations sent their protests against it to the GEAC. Subsequently, this notification was challenged in the Supreme Court by a group of petitioners who are fighting the issue and a stay has been granted till end of this year, 2008. The campaign has now been intensified with more outreach among the consumer groups.

An Alert was prepared on the GM Food issue, which was passed on to the consumer organisations. (Copy of this is attached). A Booklet on GM for the consumers in Tamil was printed. This has been used in various meetings in Tamilnadu.

On 25th and 26th February 2008 Ponnambalam and Usha participated in the “Towards GE – FREE India” National Workshop held at Hyderabad by the Centre for Sustainable Agriculture. The Save our Rice Campaign has been a very active participant in the Coalition for GM Free India.

The campaign took the GM issue to consumer groups in Tamilnadu by organising one State level workshop in Erode followed by regional workshops. Two such Regional workshops- “GM Food and Consumer Health” were organised in Madurai, Trichi and Coimbatore on the 23rd February, 1st and 8th of March 2008 respectively. In each of these meeting Dr Nammalvar, Prof Duraisingam, the Chairman of the Consumer Coordination Council of India and FEDCOT participated apart from the Save Rice campaign team members and other experts. After the meeting the Alert on GM was released to the consumers and media.

In the third week of January, the National Biodiversity Authority Chairman Dr Kannaiyyan, in a couple of meetings in Tamilnadu stated that GM crops were the only answer to the Food security of the nation. These statements coming from someone with a mandate to protect biodiversity was widely seen as unwarranted and irresponsible, leave alone unjustifiable. The Save Rice campaign got together with the GM Free Coalition and sent a letter of protest and demanded his resignation. This campaign took serious turns with farmers in Tamilnadu coming out in groups to question him during his meetings.

The Kerala Government has already declared its intent to keep Kerala GM Free by not allowing GM field trials. Following this there has been discussions among farmers and environmentalists and the State Biodiversity Board has decided to have a National Workshop on the GM crops with focus on its impact on Biodiversity. We also helped them in the background with the concept and organising it, especially in bringing the Resource persons etc. The planning for these meetings continued through out March, and the programme is being planned for April.

Media Outreach

In the first week of October, Usha S published an article on GM issues and also wrote a letter to the editor on the Paddy Land Conversion issue in a prominent Malayalam Daily, Mathrubhumi.

Usha prepared a note on Mattu Gulla, a special Brinjal variety, which are all under threat from the impending introduction of Bt-Brinjal. This note was used for the campaign on the GM issue. She also wrote articles for the Keraleeyam, Prakruthi and Soochimukki, all alternate magazines in Kerala.

On October 15th the local press – Malayalam Manorama Channel did a news item on this issue where Usha spoke.

Almost all the programmes – regional workshops, Indian Farmers Day, training workshops etc were well covered in the media.

Field Support for Seed Banks

In these months, a Seed saving and propagation programme has been started in CREATE's Centre at Adhirangam. Five varieties of rice seeds were sown. This after harvest will be distributed to other farmers in our Rice mandrams. A training programme has been planned for the farmers on Seed bank and Seed purification using traditional methods.

Research Support

Dr Narasimha Reddy from Andhra Pradesh who attended the National Convention on Save Rice in 2006 requested us for a support to document the Rice and Pesticides in Andhra. We requested that he do a status of pesticide use in Andhra pradesh with special focus on Rice. Consequently, a small research fund was given to him to do the same. The report has been delayed and is expected in the mid of this year.

Sri Debjit Sarangi is also developing a status report on pesticides in rice. His report is also expected. The research work on Rice Mills is yet to be completed, and needs to be expedited.

Campaign Materials/ Documentation

The talk given by Devinder Sharma at the workshop organised by the Kerala State Biodiversity Board is being transcribed and translated to Malayalam. Ms Sajini, with experience in media work worked on the transcription. This was then edited by Devinder and then translated to Malayalam by Usha S. The DTP work and layout is pending.

A Booklet on GM for the Consumers was produced in Tamil in November 2007. The text was made by Sri Ponnambalam. This booklet has been widely distributed in Tamilnadu especially among the Consumer groups.

The GM Free India Posters and the Save our Rice Campaign posters were re-printed (1000 numbers each). The Save our Rice Campaign poster was also translated to Malayalam and printed 1000 copies.

Two banners were printed for the Indian Farmers Day 2007. In the first week of January, we prepared a note on the campaign goals in Malayalam for use in the meetings with farmers in Kerala. This has not been printed yet, and has been duplicated and distributed whenever necessary.

8 campaign banners were prepared as part of the WORA. This is to be used further in the campaign.

Personnel

Usha continued to Coordinate the Save our Rice Campaign. Sri Ponnambalam, the Managing Trustee of CREATE has been active as a honorary coordinator in the Campaign and has been defacto in-charge of the campaign in Tamilnadu. Sri Krishnaprasad of Sahaja Samrudha who recently joined as a partner in the campaign has also been lending his honorary support and has been in-charge of the Karnataka activities. Sri Jayaraman, one of the Directors of CREATE is presently officiating as the Field Organiser in Tamilnadu. In Kerala, Aneesh David is the Field Organiser. He joined in December 2007. Rajasree V V is officiating as Field organiser in the campaign and has been specifically looking at the Rice and Pesticides work. Sridhar R has been volunteering as a campaign supporter since January 2008, with financial support received with the help of Ms. Sreedevi Lakshmikutty, an Association for India Development (AID) volunteer, enthusiast and activist in the agriculture field.

Administration / Secretarial Work

The one year plan of CREATE in Tamilnadu and Nagarika Seva Trust in Karnataka as well as Thanal in Kerala and overall coordination was finalised by October end after detailed discussions with both groups.

Later in December Nagarika Seva Trust (Sri Somanath Naik, its President) informed us that NST does not wish to be partner of the Save Rice Campaign, but would like to continue to be associated with the various campaigns. This they said was part of the decision to be dedicated on their programmes and be less dependent on external funded programmes. This we accepted and from December the field organiser support for Mr Shetty has been stopped.

From December 2007 Aneesh David joined the Rice Campaign as its Field Organiser. From January 2008 Jayaraman R of CREATE joined the Rice Campaign as its Field Organiser instead of Sri Nagaraj, who left to take a new job.

Photos from the Campaign

Indian Farmers Day, Mangalore, December 2007



Regional Workshops in Tamilnadu - Consumer Health and GM food



Traditional Rice Food Competition, Adhirangam, Thiruthiraipondi, Tamilnadu



Organic Farming Training, Wyanad, Kerala



Organic Farming / FFS in Palakkad, Kerala



Farmer leaders interactions / workshops in Kerala and Tamilnadu



Field Visit – Pokkali Paddy lands in Kerala – Harvest in Water



Bore Gowda – and his Farm, Karnataka



Banks of the Vardha River – Deep water Rice



Shooting for the “Deep water Rice – Gift of nature”



Annexe 1

Indian Farmers' day, 19th December , 2007, Mangalore

The Indian Farmers Day was organized in 2007 on December 19th at Mangalore. This year the organizing team which mainly consisted of organizations working on the agrarian issues in South India (Thanal from Kerala, CREATE from Tamilnadu along with other groups in various S.I states) decided to conduct the Day at Mangalore because we wanted to highlight and demonstrate the strength and solidarity of the Farmers and Civil society organizations on one of the most critical issues of today. That is the Land, Livelihood of the farming population and the threat of the Special Economic Zones and other such industrial development programmes.

December 19th, was great event in the history of the Mangalore district. Around 2000 farmers and other city based social and environmental groups assembled at Bharat Scouts and Guides Bhavan, Mangalore to celebrate the day and discuss the problems of farmers and agriculture in the country. The focus of the event was land and agriculture. More than 50 organizations across the country declared their solidarity and many of them also participated in the meeting, rally and the public meeting.

At 10. A.M. – Inauguration of Exhibition cum sale of farm products was done by Rev. Fr. Edwin Pinto, Mr. Devinder Sharma and Dr. D C Chouta by pouring paddy into a vessel. Inaugural address was given by Rev. Fr. Edwin Pinto, a pioneer in organic farming, He reiterated that the regions like Dakshina Kannada and Udupi should retain its original agricultural base since they are ecologically sensitive. No SEZs or industries should be allowed and all development should revolve around agriculture, with out any displacement of farmers and agriculture workers.

After the inauguration, the symposium on Agriculture- Farmer, Land and Environment-started. Mr. Devinder Sharma stated that by 2015, 400 million farmers will be displaced from agriculture if the trend of neglecting agriculture and farmer continues . And that will be the biggest displacement which the country witness in her history. Direct income support is what is needed for farmers and the country should be ready to provide this to the farmers. We all want farmers service and hence they should be protected. Shri Vijay Javandhiya, farmer leader from Vidharbha stated that in Mahathma Ghandhi's nation his policies are being killed. Japan levies 1000% tax for import of rice. But our govt. bans export of rice when prices rise in international market. It was concluded that the Farmers should be included in 6th pay commission. Prof S Duraisingam from FEDCOT, Tamilnadu, the largest consumer federation in the country said that food security will be a major problem if agriculture land is converted for other economic activities. Consumer forums in the country should support conservation of land and water. He also said that traditional food production will be affected by uncontrolled imports. A fair price of production cost and a mark up of 50% given to the formers. All the leaders supported the cause of farmers in opposing SEZs. Dr. Nammalwar, Organic Farming scientist and farmer movement leader stated that our farming systems are of superior quality.

Currently we are exporting more than seven commodities European Union, including food items. After 60 years of Independence the whole country is in crisis and danger. Farmers welfare is ignored; suicide of farmers has increased. Indiscriminate use of pesticides are polluting river water and drinking water also. Mr. R. Ponnambalam, Mr. Shivaprasad- Kerala-, Mr. V. Ramadas, Mr Nammalwer explained the strategies for organic and sustainable farming. It was suggested that we should keep away from genetically modified (G.M.) crops (cotton) which is more dangerous than the nuclear Bomb. Mr. B K Parameswara Rao on behalf of Nagarika Seva Trust Guruvayanakere expressed full support for the people in fighting to save their land (against SEZ). Guests were honored by the local farmers with tender coconuts and fruits. Dr. D. Chandrashekar Chowta presided over the seminar, gave a brief translated summary of the guest speakers to the local farmers in the local language, and also showing solidarity with the farmers struggle to save their land. Urbanites, under the auspices of the Citizens Forum and the employees of various Banks and their associations gave support by purchasing the farm produce, that were exhibited from the nearby villages, mainly villages that were notified for the Mangalore SEZ. Around 400 people attended the morning session, followed by lunch.

Afternoon 3 p.m: A rally – led by Farmers started from Bharath scout and guide Bhavan to Urva market ground with about 2,000 people, shouting slogans to save their farm lands. Public Meeting was held at 4.p.m. at Urva market Maidan. The Meeting was presided over by Mr. Madhukar Amin (President, Krishi Bhoomi Samrakshana Samithi) Speakers were Sri Eesha Vittala Swamiji (of Shri Kshetra Kemaru) and Sri Kodihalli, Chandrashekara (Karnataka Rajya Raith Sangha-KRRS) Shri Kemaru Swamiji:- We should live in harmony with nature and not destructing by Hazardous industries such as thermal power plants. Let us do our little to save our land and farmers. God will not forgive those who are harming others. Sri Kodihalli Chandrashekar speaking on the occasion stated that our land is our right who dares touch our farm land that has sustained us for generations? Corrupt politician and bureaucrats are playing dirty politics for their own selfish interest. United we can fight them and succeed in saving our land. The Presidential address was given by Madhukar Amin. The resolutions were read by Mr. Mohamad Kunhi-. The following were the main points in the resolution – That farmers will under no circumstance leave their farm land for industrial activities, An immediate de-notification of the MSEZ, Ban G.M. crops and conserve traditional farming.

A number of farmers from Kerala and Tamilnadu also joined in the rally and meetings.

The event was widely covered in the media, and in fact sent jitters through the proponents of the MSEZ. Even on that day, they sent their people to distribute pamphlets offering money for the lands, and also stuck posters and banners deriding the organizers, as well as prominent speakers like Devinder Sharma.

In fact, after this event, the solidarity among the members of the various groups fighting the event has been strengthened, and this was the first time they came together to demand "Immediate denotification" of the land notified for MSEZ. The solidarity of the dwellers in the city of Mangalore towards this issue was also evident, as hundreds came to express

it, and buy products from these farmers. Each of them carried back an understanding that their food is also at stake if the SEZ is allowed.

The event also brought back to focus the need for farmers to come together from all States for each of these local struggles and strengthen it. The more the voice, the clearer and focused the demands and the less we compromise or negotiate the better are the prospects for farmers to retail their most valuable possession – land.

Now the struggle has taken a renewed strength and dimension and much more needs to be done in terms of mobilization. Also the groups that organized it conceded s that it was the first time they were all organizing such a big and powerful event. But eventually they showed their real strength.

Annexe 2

Advisory to Consumers

Suspected Genetically Modified (GM) Ingredients in Processed and Packaged Food items sold in Supermarkets.

Consumers are requested to exercise caution while buying products with Soya / Corn / Cotton seed Oil / Canola ingredients.

The Federation of Consumer Organisations of Tamilnadu and Pondicherry (FEDCOT) in its Annual State Executive Committee Meeting held at Erode on the 24th November 2007, deliberated in detail the following matter -

Genetically Modified (GM) Food and Food products have not been allowed to be sold in India, considering the problems to health and environmental safety. A few GM crops are being allowed to be field trialled in the various Agriculture Universities and Research Stations and some of these field trials have been illegally allowed into farmer fields. This caused serious apprehension among the farmers and in Tamilnadu and other places in India, farmers organisations even burnt and destroyed such field trials.

In solidarity with the concerns of the farmers, and with the intention of protecting the “Safe Food” rights of consumers, FEDCOT has been demanding the banning of GM food in India.

There is ever-growing evidence on the negative health impacts of GM foods from across the world, including allergenic reactions, and disorders of the digestive tract, liver, pancreas and other health disorders and as far as consumers are concerned, their right to safe food and the right to informed decision-making is being violated through this large scale entry of GM foods into the Indian food chain.

Of late FEDCOT has come to understand that food products containing GM ingredients, processed and packaged especially from USA and Canada, have been imported into the country and are available widely in the supermarkets and shops, with no warning to consumers.

Moreover the Government of India, especially the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare is planning to enforce labelling for such products, with the intention of protecting consumer rights and ensuring safe food. But there seems to be a very great delay in bringing out the legislation.

Meanwhile, in an unprecedented move, putting all public health and consumer rights to danger, the Genetical Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) under the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), through a notification in September 2007, have

allowed unregulated entry and sale of GM food crops in the country. This has been challenged in the Supreme Court.

At this point FEDCOT realises that, it is important to warn the consumers on this serious matter. Hence consumers are asked to

- 1. Be cautious and read the label carefully before buying products that contain any soya or soya derivatives such as oil, paste, milk, Corn and Corn derivatives, Canola, Cotton Seed Oil.**
- 2. Avoid buying these products, if they are not labelled specifically as Free of genetically modified organisms or crops.**
- 3. Avoid buying these products, if their country of origin / manufacture / packaging is the USA, Canada, Argentina or Brazil, as these are the major producers of the GM Food crops.**

This advisory is brought out on the best of intentions to protect consumer rights to Safe Food, till the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare promulgates comprehensive legislations for the same and takes action against the entry of any food containing GM ingredients.

Passed at the State Executive Committee Meeting, 24th November 2007 at Erode.

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