

Jharkhand Farmers' Dialogue. 18-19/2/06

GRAM-MILAN SAMMELAN (Village-Assembly Gathering.)

Shailendra Mahato became convinced to hold a Farmers' Dialogue in the Indian State of Jharkhand after he attended the Farmers' Dialogue in Chiang Mai, Thailand in February 2004. Shailendra wanted to explore the 'Contribution that Small Farmers could make to the Growth of Jharkhand.'

Jharkhand became a state in the Indian Union in November 2000 and has over forty percent of India's mineral resources. TATA Steel, a highly respected Indian Company, uses Iron Ore, a major resource of this region, to manufacture steel for making motor vehicles and industrial machinery.

Shailendra invited **Klaus Prinz**, a retired agricultural advisor to the McKean Rehabilitation Centre for Leprosy Sufferers (MRC) in Chiang Mai, and **Phil Jefferys**, a retired farmer from Australia working with Farmers' Dialogue, to visit Jharkhand. They met rice farmers and vegetable growers in the region near the city of Jamshedpur and assisted with the running of the Farmers' Dialogue at Dorkasai Village on 18th and 19th February 2006. Shailendra, his wife Sushila, son Biblab and daughter Julie hosted Klaus and Phil in their farmhouse on his rice farm in Dorkasai Village.

Many of the people living in villages around the industrial city of Jamshedpur are 'Adivasi', a term used to describe tribal people and these are among some of the poorer people in India. Rice is the main sustenance crop, cultivated only during the monsoon rains from mid June to mid October. The transplantation of paddy is usually finished by 15th of August. Possible drought conditions as occurred in July 2002, may delay the transplantation of paddy by a month causing a drop in production or a failed crop resulting in food shortages in the coming months.

There is no irrigation available to cultivate rice during the 'dry' season' which is from November until June. Thus the rice farmers have only one chance a year at growing a crop of rice. Some farmers have access to river water and others can use 'grey' water or wastewater which although unsuitable for drinking, is usable for irrigating a wide range of vegetables and fruit crops. Farmers with no access to a river and 'grey' water depend on the 'rainy' season for their water. This limits their food production to one rice crop and to small gardens using water carried from ponds in buckets.



For the farmers meeting a colourful marquee with rugs on the ground was set up in the grounds of the Dorkasai Village School. A group of Desai Tribal Dancers from Bhutka Village gave a rousing welcome to the participants on the first day of the dialogue. This was followed by the presentation of garlands to the visitors and a Hindu ceremony of lighting the lamp. Over 300 men, women and children from Dorkasai and villages up to 60 kilometres away attended the first day of the dialogue. **Fr.E.A.Augustine S.J.** of Xavier Labour Relations Institute in Jamshedpur gave the opening address. (See appendix 1.)



Shailendra informed the villagers of the generosity of **Mr. Ranivar Shinha**, the Managing Director of TELCON, a TATA subsidiary company. He provided an excavator free of charge to dig fifty water ponds in villages around the city of Jamshedpur. Diesel fuel was the only expense incurred in running the excavator. These ponds of approximately 100 feet by 100 feet by 10 feet deep are excavated to catch water during the 'rainy' season. This gives farmers the option to grow other cash crops, vegetables, fruit trees and to breed fresh water fish.

Phil spoke of the vital need to produce food for the millions of people throughout India and the world. Farmers have a lot of wisdom gained by generations of working the soil. Farmers are at the basis of life but about 3/4 of the world's poorest people are farmers and he asked the question why is there so much poverty in an occupation the world relies on?

Klaus commented on practices of importance for the future. He mentioned that, with regard to the efforts to promote vegetable growing, people should focus on principles of organic production. This means in particular to practice ECOLOGICAL SOIL MANAGEMENT (feed the soil, but not the crop).

He pointed out that *Jatropha* (***Jatropha curcas***) is a suitable plant as a live fence around garden plots to keep off cattle, which do not browse on this plant. *Jatropha* is also being promoted in northern India including Jharkhand, as a cash crop; the ripe seed (Nuts) are processed and the oil is used for production of Bio-Diesel. It can be established easily from cuttings.

Furthermore he encouraged farmers to grow more **bean crops/pulses** for their own consumption and sale of any surplus. There are several varieties of local beans, which can be eaten as young pods or collected over a longer period. Farmers in Shailendra's local network should make use of local vegetable varieties as much as possible. With the increased use of hybrids people might easily become indebted because these require higher external inputs. He pointed out that in India various types of Lablab beans (pole types and bush types) are available. Farmers who like to experiment could do test plots with various varieties. Trial packets of seed can be requested from the seed bank of ECHO Network in Florida.



He suggested farmers and community workers consider applying **SRI methods** (System of Rice Intensification), which would be of great benefit, in particular under drought conditions when monsoon rains fail. With possible higher yields, some part of paddy fields then can be used for cultivation of vegetable & fruit. This is practiced in Cambodia and called MPF (Multiple Purpose Field). (See attached paper for more information.)

More than 200 hundred people, the majority of them being women, attended the dialogue on the second day. **Kishore Kumar** spoke of the 'quiet time' and 'sharing' as tools used in the search to do what is right within the family, your daily life and for the nation. The meeting broke into five groups discussing what they wanted to see happen in their area and for Jharkhand in the next five years. The five group leaders then presented the opinions of their group.

The strength of rural women working in other villages and seventeen self-help groups has been formed to develop the women and empower them in village society. Mrs. Bandana and Julie Mahato shared that they would help educate rural women and 'drop out' children for no cost.

Mrs. Bandana presented songs on the topic of gender issues. She spoke of the vitally important roles that women played in the life of a village, care of the family, work on the farms etc. She mentioned projects to grow mushrooms, a weaving centre and sewing centre. On hearing of these initiatives and contribution by the women, officials and NGO's were ready to help these women and this gave hope for the future involvement in village life. It was decided that a village information centre was most essential in informing people

Appendices:

1. Talk by Fr. E. A. Augustine S.J.
2. Orientation on SRI concept & methods.

1. Address by Fr E A Augustine SJ, Administrator and Professor at XLRI, Jamshedpur.

Chief Guest, at the Inauguration of the International Farmers' Convention at Dorkasai, Jharkhand.

Distinguished Guests on the dais, the organizers of this great farmers convention, all farmer friends, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me immense joy and happiness to be amidst you all this afternoon. And I would like to congratulate Mr. Shailendra Mahato, the Chief Organizer of this international movement, and thank him and all his coordinators for inviting me to grace the occasion as Chief Guest.

Though currently an educationalist and working in an institute of higher learning, in the heart of heart I am a farmer's man. Being born in a peasant family in the south of India I have my roots among the agriculturalists. Hence I do not feel out of place here in your midst.

I have had the privilege of visiting Dorkasai on numerous occasions while I was associated with the state's universalisation of elementary education programme. Mr P P Kumbhkar of this very village was part of my team. More recently three batches of XLRI students came to Dorkasai and spent three weekends staying at Shailendra's house and experienced rural life and culture. Besides, we had a chance to make a small contribution in last November when XLRI sponsored two young farmers of our district to participate in the international farmers meet at Panchgani. I have also been associated with MRA in the past and still reminisce the memory of my old MRA friends led by Dr Amit Mukherjee.

I am particularly delighted to welcome all our friends from different parts of the globe, the farmer's representatives from Australia, Germany, Canada and other countries as well as the Action for Life Youth, also from different countries of Asia and Europe. Your presence and participation in the convention will certainly add glamour, colour and a new impetus to the movement here.

It is said, "**India lives in its villages**". Even today, 59 years after independence, India is still primarily an agricultural country and our state of Jharkhand depends heavily on agriculture. The present Chief Secretary of the State is giving special attention to agriculture. Agriculture happens to be the lifeline of the people of this area. Hence, the convention should deliberate on modern ways of farming and ways and means of improving agricultural production and thus exit from the circle of poverty.



Modern methods of cultivation call for some special skills. Our farmers must acquire some of these skills and techniques. To achieve this, farmer community would require more and better education.

Having been an ambassador of literacy mission and education I earnestly appeal to the entire farming community to take literacy and education seriously. Education, besides giving you knowledge and power, will definitely enable you in your pursuit for improved agriculture productivity. Education will help you to use modern technologies and draw benefit from them.



Being a propagator of teamwork I would like to see the farming community here and all those who participate in the convention forming a **farmers' cooperative**. It is my firm belief that such a move, as proved successful by Mr. V Kurien, the father of the White Revolution in Anand in Gujarat, will be a boon and augur well for the community.

You all must come together with a purpose, with a commitment, with a sense of direction and plan for the future. Do have a common interest and a shared purpose. Take collective action. Keep an open communication. Deal with community



problems. Strive for peace and harmony in the village. Make your village a self-reliant and self-sustainable one. Your ultimate aim and effort should be not just development of agriculture but development of agriculturists who are human persons.

India boasts of "green revolution" But can we boast of a moral revolution? In order to make our country a great nation and our farmers' community a great people our green revolution should be coupled with moral revolution. That is what MRA can do. That is what Action for Life Members can do. Thus I have tremendous hope and expectations from this convention. It is also said "many drops form an ocean" I firmly believe that even a minuscule gathering

like this will have a rippling effect and spread waves across the globe especially in the countries you all have come from.

These are a few thoughts I am sharing with you. Needless to say much more and better ideas will merge from your interactions. I shall be happy to hear about the outcome of the convention and be in touch with you all.

My sincere thanks to all the organizers, especially to Dr. Amit Mukherjee and Mr. Shailendra Mahato. And my best wishes to all the delegates, particularly to all the international guests. May God bless you all. And may your efforts bear rich dividend.

2. Orientation on System of Rice Intensification (SRI).

This alternative way of growing rice was developed in the early 1980's by Fr. Henri de Laulanié who went from France to Madagascar in 1961 and for 34 years worked with Malagasy farmers improving their agricultural output.

Fr. de Laulanié assisted rural youth to gain an education that was relevant to their vocations and family needs. Though SRI was "discovered" in 1983, it took some years for farmers to gain confidence that these methods could consistently raise production so substantially. SRI gives farmers higher yields with lower inputs: no fertilizers or insecticides are used, and traditional rice varieties flourish.

SRI increases rice production and raises the productivity of land, labor, water and capital through different practices for managing:

- * Rice Seedlings are transplanted very young -- usually just 8-12 days old; carefully and quickly to have minimum trauma to the roots; singly, only one per hill instead of 3-4 together to avoid root competition; widely spaced to encourage greater root and canopy growth; in a square grid pattern, 25x25 cm or wider -- 30x30 cm or 40x40 cm, even up to 50x50 cm with the best quality soil.
- * Soil - This is kept moist but well drained and aerated, with good structure and enough organic matter to support increased biological activity.
- * Water - Only a minimum of water is applied during the vegetative growth period, and then only a thin layer of water is maintained on the field during the flowering and grain filling stage.
- * Nutrients - Soil nutrient supplies should be augmented, preferably with compost, made from any available biomass. Better quality compost such as with manure can give additional yield advantages.
- * Weeds - Since weeds become a problem in fields that are not kept flooded, weeding is necessary at least once or twice, starting 10-12 days after transplanting, and preferably 3 or 4 times before the canopy closes.

(For technical details and other information see at <http://ciifad.cornell.edu/sri/>)