



International Farmers Dialogue - 2014 - a Report

Theme : Farm Women Empowerment and Emerging Technologies





International Farmers Dialogue was held at Asia Plateau, Panchgani co-hosted by Punjab Rao Deshmukh Krishi Vidyapeeth, Akola and Grampari, Initiatives of Change.

Buchman, Initiator of IofC said "There is enough for everyone's need but not for everyone's greed, if we shared enough and cared enough everyone would have enough" Welcoming the delegates on behalf of Asia Plateau the director Dr.Ravindra Rao said, IofC inspires people to "Care enough and Share enough". 85 International & Indian Farmers gathered to start a dialogue on various issues faced in agriculture today. Six wicks were lit to signify 6 different issues in farming.

Eight women farmers on the dias represented the theme of the Dialogue, Farm Women Empowerment and Remunerative Technologies. Eleven speakers gave their passion, concerns and hopes for farming in today's world.

Mr.Rajendra Pawar (President of the Agricultural Development Trust, Shardanagar) and Mrs.Sunanda Pawar (Trustee of Sharadabai Pawar College of Education for Women, Shardanagar.) as chief guests, who further highlighted the role women play in farming.



Group Discussion

Six thematic groups were formed. Each group discussed one of the six themes: *(i) Declining number of Young Farmers, (ii) Unfair Prices for True Ecological Cost and Effort, (iii) Land and Environmental Degradation, (iv) Lack of Women Voice in Agricultural Decision Making, (v) Brutal Hardships Faced by Women Farmers, (vi) Commercialization and Changing Relationship with the Land.*



Each group consisted of participants from diverse backgrounds. This session enabled participants to get introduced to the different perspectives held by their group members along with their backgrounds.



Meeting with the Mother

Early morning, the participants gathered in a circle in an open ground and bowed to mother earth in order to develop a spirit of surrender and humble listening attitude towards mother earth. After a few minutes of silence, a participant reflected that doing this act improved her understanding of her own daily religious practice. For another participant, this was the first time of paying respect to the earth in a conscious way, although he had been praying and taking blessings of his deities and parents every day.





Issues Faced by Women Farmers

In order to understand the issues faced by women farmers, four women were invited to share their stories of struggle and strength in the face of many odds. Their stories also brought out the innate connections between the effect of patriarchal aggressive systems on women as well as nature, resilience of the feminine as well as her determination to rise after every fall and to nurture with compassion and strength.



Sunanda from Akola shared her heart wrenching experiences of raising her four sisters from a young age in the absence of her parents, learning farming all by herself and harassment faced in the hands of those claiming to help. All the tasks that are considered to be a man's job were carried out by Sunanda and this surprised many. She was known in the village as the lady with the bullock cart. In spite of all the difficulties faced by her along this way, she remembered her father's encouragement of facing life's adversity with faith and inner strength and got adamant to rise after every fall. In this way, she inspired many other women to access their inner strength and not give up in any situation. Although she was granted multiple awards like Jijamata Krushi Bhushan, Bharat Ratna, she has steadfastly focused only on spreading the inspiration for women live with inner strength.



Apurva, a highly educated young girl from Pune, decided to move to land and start farming in spite of growing up in a city environment. She conducts all the farm activities along with her sister without any labor. She believes that true empowerment is the ability to grow one's own food. The true joy of living is discovered for her in understanding the process of creation, nurturing and recycling that is evident when one engages in farming practices in a sustainable manner. Her simple ways and determination to live in an ecological way, inspires many city dwellers and villagers.



Anita was forced to learn farming during her teens along with her sister. She also learnt all difficult tasks like spraying pesticides, along with seeding, weeding on the farm. Her struggle did not end after her wedding instead it only got worse. Her husband left his job and became an idle drunkard which required her to continue farming and fending for the family. She tilled the land owned by her in-laws and faced their anger on seeing her ability to thrive in farming. She attended to all the work while her husband kept busy with alcohol and fights with his parents. She had bountiful produce of flowers and vegetables on the farm and the in-laws got insecure with the income it brought. She finally separated from her husband and now works in the city and looks after her children. She started a self help group to help other women to be self sufficient. She pointed out that men in India consider their wives like television programmes and demand them to work with a remote control they handle. She inspires women to raise their male and female children in a similar way and not discriminate against the girl child.



Subhash Palekar
conducting
workshop on
Zero budget
Natural Farming for
International Dialogue
participants and 100 local
farmers majority women

200 Farmers enjoying an organic lunch



Farm and Culture

Decisions

Declining Number of Young Farmers	Unfair Prices for True Ecological Cost and Effort	Land and Environmental Degradation	Lack of Women Voice in Agricultural Decision Making	Brutal Hardships Faced by Women Farmers	Commercialization and Changing Relationship with the Land
- Helping young farmers through processing, branding and marketing of products - Make our children aware of the goodness of agriculture so that they will take it forward	- Minimum appropriate prices for market - Work with farmers and help them - Buy directly from farmers and farmers market - Making farming facilities available to farmers at low prices - Creating network of farmers to reduce gap between producer and consumer to avoid exploitation - Sell produce directly in the market	- I will protect all living beings in nature - Explain the importance of organic farming to my family - Clarifying differences between organic, natural, and chemical farming	- Helping women farmers in my country to take up farming again - Addressing common issues without discrimination between male and female farmers - Empowerment through education, economic help - Teach women how to use new technology - We will begin creating change through our role as teachers - I will not consider my wife less than me	- Empowering women - Composting of menstrual pads - I will give equal and fair wages to male and female farmers - Making and promoting hand gloves and giving them away at gatherings - Farming training including male jobs for widowed women of farmers - Bring farming knowledge to women through media - We should listen and understand when a woman expresses her anger and frustration - Division of labour should be strength-based rather than gender-based	- I will not in my life let my agricultural land turn into non-agricultural land - Sensitivity to farmers

Decisions on other themes:

- Research and prevention of suicides in USA amongst farmers
- Becoming a job creator as an occupation to create jobs for farmers
- Reducing the gap between farmers, academics and corporates
- Develop a model plot of natural farming with intercropping and bees
- Helping farmers creating self-sufficient and sustaining farms that include fruits, vegetables etc. that can be marketed
 - Educating farmers about farming practices
 - Having farmers participate in decision making at policy level
- Present farmer demands to the government and begin action and sharing between all people
 - Documentation of work done by small scale farmers and made available for others
 - Share my own suicide story to the people back home in UK
- We need deeper conversations between economists, scientists, farmers and activists. – I will start a discussion group like this back home

In one of the small groups, discussion was held regarding lack of awareness and support for issues faced by women during their menstruation cycle. A design of the sanitary towel was shared where it consists of cotton wool pad and loops tied to a ribbon tied around the waist to hold the sanitary towel in place. Such used sanitary towel could be put in a paper bag and burnt or composted.



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