

## REPORT

### ON

## FIAN INDIA LAUNCH OF THE NUTRITION WATCH 2016-Keeping Seeds in People's Hands

14 October Goa

**The Nutrition Watch 2016** which was focusing on Keeping seeds in People's hands was launched at Goa by FIAN India in the presence of leaders and cadres of fish workers' union and other activists of Goa. Nearly 40 activists participated in this launch.

**In the opening introductory remark**, Dr Krishnamoorthy FIAN India has highlighted that

- **Agriculture in doldrums:** The status of agriculture is in very dangerous situation due to corporate, contract and commercialized farming which is sounding a death knell to small and marginal farmers. Due to this, more than 2000 farmers are leaving agriculture every day. Between 1995 and 2014, more than 3 lakh farmers committed suicides due to the crisis in agriculture. The NCRB data has provided a grim picture about farmer's suicides so far - till 2014, the averages are: 1995-2014 = 308826; Per Year = 15441; Per month = 1286; Per day = 42; Per hour = 1.7. Suicides by farmers touched a grim high in 2015. The year 2015 had recorded 2,590 suicides until October -- the higher ever since 2001 -- went on to register 610 more deaths in just two months of January and February 2016. About 52 percent of the agricultural households in the country were estimated to be indebted. Only 10 per cent of poor and small farmers have got the benefit from farming related schemes.
- **Dwindling public investment:** The budget allocation from the Central government is very poor and a paltry 3.25% of GDP only has allocated to the agricultural sector while government employees are getting increased salaries and wages manifold.
- **High Input costs:** The high cost of fertilizers, pesticides, and seeds and wages for removal of weeds and other basic agricultural operations, and there are no remunerative prices for the produces leave farmers in despair and no hope at all.
- **Climate change is a challenge:** The drop-in rainfall, severe drought, sudden floods in some parts, and lack of water for irrigation and vagaries of nature are natural challenges to the agricultural practices of small farmers.
- **Monopoly, monoculture and Big Industrial based agriculture:** The monopoly of big industries entering in to agriculture and producing only certain cash crops are indeed crushing the small farmers who are in a no position to decide their prices for their produces and lose everything in this competitive consumerist culture.
- **Shrinking Seed Sovereignty:** The destruction of agricultural biodiversity is also rising at an alarming rate: at the end of the 20th century, three quarters of the world's food was generated from only 12 plants and five animal species. The capture of seed within the agro-economy by TNCs is a big setback for local seed system and this has shifted towards commercialization and commodification of seed resources and inflicting onslaught on seed sovereignty. The farmers are being exploited without any accountability on the part of the seed companies. India has had nearly 1, 10,000 varieties of rice till 1970 and this diversity has been lost to posterity due to monoculture and hybrid crops. Now, only 6000 varieties of rice survive.
- **Seeding nutritional crisis:** The poor-quality seeds and introduction of hybrid and GMO seeds have incalculable impacts on the status of nutrition and surge of diseases due to chemical intoxicated food. Due to this 44% children are facing malnutrition, 59% of women are anemic and thus severe malnutrition is rule the roost.

- **Surging Seed market:** the Indian seed market occupies 12% in the global trade and it is worth about 5000 crore INR per annum. Thus, localized seed market has been totally vanished in the cut throat competition.

**Ms Suman, Convener, FIAN India**, in her inaugural address, highlights that

- the protection of biological and cultural diversity and right to save and share seeds in the current context of biological and ecological destruction, is extremely important. At present, indigenous, peasant seed systems-storing, preserving and local using- face severe threats of accelerated destruction of agricultural biodiversity due to the appropriation of nature, excessive exploitation of commons by industrial agriculture and big corporations, thus seed sovereignty is at put at severe risk. A staggering 70% of the food we consume worldwide is produced by smallholders, peasant and indigenous communities, who produce a great deal of this food, have been developing and saving seeds for generations – across breadth and width of Indian States and rural terrains. They have native, collective and traditional wisdom that accumulated over practicing agriculture for generations after generations. They have indigenous know-how, traditional knowledge and practices to identify quality seeds from their produces, preserve it for posterity and ability to use for quality and quantity grain produces.
- Indian farmers use all parts of plants judiciously- grains for consumption of communities, stems/ leaves for animals as fodder, leave roots for acclimatizing soil. Moreover, they detect with intuition to select quality seeds from the produces and store in localized ways and means.
- Seed and agrochemical transnational corporations seek to privatize, monopolize and control seeds; they are patenting every traditional species- neem, turmeric, basmati rice, and herbal plants and commodifying and commercializing the very source of life. Current business patterns pursued by corporations are aiming for a tighter grip on genetic resources/ intellectual property rights of communities an indigenous people to reap even larger profits. It is now high time that the spotlight is turned on how the corporate capture of seeds and other natural resources is impacting the way in which the food we eat is produced across countries and continents.
- The Right to Food and Nutrition Watch 2016— “Keeping Seeds in Peoples’ Hands”—explores ways for closing this gap and promoting a stronger agenda to advance the interconnected struggles. Seeds and agricultural biodiversity have been at the heart of social movements' struggles for decades. Nonetheless, and despite manifold interlinkages, efforts towards the realization of the human right to adequate food and nutrition have thus far paid insufficient attention to them. It explores the articulation of seeds, land and other natural resources, assertion of peasant’s communities with the focus on human right to adequate food and nutrition. Over the last few decades, the privatization and commoditization of nature has resulted in a multiplication of local struggles using human rights against the appropriation of agricultural biodiversity, land and water resources by corporations and states. It is important to look at how are peasant movements, indigenous peoples, and other local communities resisting—and what are the alternatives they have and present?
- She also touches up on that, this meeting is rightfully organized here in the run up to the upcoming BRICS summit (15th- 16th October) and World Food Day (16th October).
- This issue was first released on 13 October by FIAN International along with 24 civil society organizations at FAO Headquarters in Rome, Italy. Despite feeding the world and providing resilience to natural disasters, peasant seed systems face severe threats of accelerated destruction of agricultural biodiversity due to the appropriation of nature by industrial agriculture and corporations. Increasingly, seed and agrochemical business seeks to privatize, monopolize and control seeds by patenting and commodifying this very source of life. Meanwhile, peasant and indigenous communities who have been the developers and guardians of seeds for millennia, are finding their rights to save, use, exchange and sell seeds

overshadowed by a corporate agenda that prioritizes profit over human rights and the sustainable maintenance of nature. Indian peasants and women farmers have been playing as custodians of indigenous seeds and they have contributed to the biodiversity of seed species, protecting patents and plants constructively through their traditional wisdom and knowledge repositories. Nearly 50 percent of rural female workers are classified as agricultural labourers and 37% as cultivators in India is a testimony to this.

- Further, the FIAN leaders also raised pertinent concerns related to falling nutritional status in the country. 19 crores people go hungry every day; 30 per cent of children under five are underweight; 58 per cent of children stunted before they turn two; one in four children malnourished; 3,000 children in India die every day from poor diet-related illness; twenty-four per cent of under-five deaths in India. The one among many systemic root causes for this silent emergency of perpetuating malnutrition among women and children is that production of poor-quality seeds with overdose of pesticides and fertilizers.
- She also said that “As women are custodian of traditional seeds, appropriate measures to protect seeds and prevent and ban GMO specifically mustard seeds with a strong political will is need of the hour. Food distribution shall also be looked at critically and access to productive resources such as land and water should be created for communities to save seeds and produce crops. Yet, in the absence of definitive seed policy, the farmers are being exploited without any accountability on the part of the seed companies.”

**Mr Narendra Patil, Founder Member of World Fish Workers Forum**, while launching, said that traditional fish workers are facing the challenges and struggling for livelihood same as farmers.

**Ms Renuka Khad, FIAN Maharashtra** said that then issues of women fish workers who collect fish from seashore and sell in the market needs to be looked at from the perspectives of food security.

A woman leader from World Fish Workers Forum has also highlighted the plight of women fish vendors and their poor wages, hazardous working environment, and lack of social security and there is no focus on these women fish vendors in the policy and plans.

**Mr Suresh Shelke, Co-Convener, FIAN India** criticized that the capture of seed within the agro-economy by TNCs is a big setback for local seed system and this has shifted towards commercialization and commodification of seed resources and onslaught on seed sovereignty.

Finally, FIAN India and along with leaders of National Fish Workers Forum raised their voices in unison by urging the authorities both at local and national levels to consider their demands. Some of their demands included restoration and protection of traditional varieties of seeds, alternatives to seed banks, cutting across the politics of patenting of seeds like Cotton, Mustard, Basmati rice, stop all experiments of GM seeds in various parts of the country and mostly importantly inclusion of people's genuine aspiration as against trade policies and profit motives.