ALL INDIA MILLET SISTERS (AIMS) NETWORK

FIRST ALL INDIA CONVENTION 2018
A Report

ICAR-NEH, Umiam, Meghalaya
May 23-24, 2018

Co-Hosted By:

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Over 10 years ago the first millet network of this country called Millet Network of India (MINI) was initiated by Deccan Development Society. MINI had defined millets in absolutely unique terms: “Millet is not a crop but a concept”. As Deccan Development Society in our 30 years of grass roots work in dryland Telangana this truth that millets as a term could hardly be confined to a family of crops but they represented far more profound things for the dryland rural society, had dawned, we understood that they included a determined fight against marginalization of crops and lands, of peasants and of women. Therefore as we went along the Deccan Development Society discovered that a fight for millets should also be a fight against such marginalization of one of the oldest agricultural civilization not only in this country but across the southern world.

Similarly, we also gradually understood from the thousands of amazing peasant women that some of the solutions for keeping millets alive consisted of a number of dogged efforts. Principally that meant their cultivation, conservation and consumption. In all these three prompt efforts, peasant women played a huge and significant role as farmers, as seed conservers and as people who had understood multiple ways of consuming millets. As this realisation grew we also understood the limitation of a network such as the Millet Network of India which had become a typical NGO network which relying on an NGO persona which predominantly embraced conservative ways of looking at the issue of millets.

It was this painful realisation was further enhanced by the efforts that Deccan Development Society to create “Millet Sisters” (Chirudhanya Chellendlu) as an entity which not just symbolised but truly represented women, peasantry and their marginalisation. After a couple of years of working with these groups we were more and more convinced that such an entity should not be confined only to Deccan Development Society but must have an All India presence of its own. That’s how the All India Millet Sisters Network was born in 2016. Very gradually but significantly this network represented the concerns, articulation and leadership to women working at the grassroots in different part of India from the North East to Gujarat, from Uttarakhand to Tamil Nadu and in central India in the plains of Deccan.

The network was inaugurated in Delhi quite symbolically by the Union Minister for Women and Child Welfare, Ms Maneka Gandhi. AIMS launch convention held in 2016 moved away from the new middle class fad of millets for nutrition and very clearly stated the multifunctionality and multidimension of millets such as its intrinsic relationship with biodiversity, local food systems and its contribution to climate resilience. such a new articulation by women was overwhelmingly received the attention of parliamentarians, senior policy makers and the highest among the government. As a result within the first year of its birth the All India Millet Sisters Network received highest recognition of the Government of India called "Nari Shakti Puraskar" which represents the very spirit of AIMS. This award was received from the President of India by a peasant woman, a single mother and someone who lived in a remote part of the country, Ms Mogulamma. this was in the true spirit of the AIMS.

Our belief in the leadership of such women was the reason for the first convention of All India Millet Sisters at Meghalaya. The Convention was a clear go ahead for women to further enhancement, consolidate and articulate their views and concerns on millets. This report on the Meghalaya Convention tells you the complete story of what happened in Umiam where the convention took place. I hope as we move ahead as Millet Sisters the outcome of this convention lays a solid foundation for the future of the network and its concepts.

Hyderabad
November 17, 2018

Jayasri Cherukuri,
Co Director, Deccan Development Society
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Ms. Akole Tsuhah, Program Director, NEN welcomed all the participants from nine different states to the 1st Annual Millet Convention. She thanked All India Millet Sisters (AIMS) for giving NEN, the opportunity to host the convention in their region. She gave a brief overview of the North Eastern states, highlighting the wettest village in the world and for being the cleanest and one of the most culturally biodiverse regions in the country. She introduced PV Satheesh, National Convener of Millet Network of India (MINI); Narendra Prakash, Director of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) Meghalaya, and Dr. Monisha Behel, CEO of North East Network (NEN) to the audience.

Women farmers from Nagaland performed their traditional welcome song. The meaning of the song was shared by Akole: 'how beautiful it is to see different people from different parts of the country; we greet them and wish them a good life going forward and hope that we continue doing good wherever we are'. 
Mr. PV Satheesh Director of DDS, National Convener of MINI and AIMS welcomed all the participants from the North Eastern Region (NER). He talked about the 5000 year old history of millets in Nagaland and why it is important to save this iconic crop and reintroduce it to all the cultures that have forgotten it. He praised Senegal for being a wonderful country with great faith in millets and their nutrition and mentioned that Senegal is far above India in the human development index. He pointed out that the government of India has recognized AIMS for representing 'Nari Shakti/Women's power'. He remarked that millets are still surviving not only because of NEN's efforts but also because of all the women who have come here to participate in this event. He wanted women to come together and become symbols of millets and sustainable agriculture and lead the way into the future.

“When the first convention of MINI was held, we described millet not as a crop but as a concept for human safety, the safety of children, and the environment, etc. The challenges of climate change will arise but we know millets are going to be the first defense and save us from the disaster. And women are best suited to take this iconic crop forward.”
He briefly shared the details for the 2 day program; the two Keynote addresses and the different sessions of the convention. He explained the newly introduced concept called Fishbowl discussion— it will be not dominated by one or two speakers, but it’s an open platform to sit and share experiences.

He said technology is either a boon or a bane for millets. IIMR spent lakhs of Rupees trying to solve a worm problem called the Millet Sucker, but local farmers don't even consider it a problem and just weed them out. They are more concerned about how to sell the millets.

In the US, there is a huge program for growing Sorghum. Even China is joining hands with the US in a Jowar program. Only India is still lagging behind.

**Keynote -1:**

Dr. Narayan Prakash, Director of ICAR, Meghalaya began his speech with a brief overview of millets. Millets are small grained seeded grasses, widely grown around the world and can serve as both food and fodder. Millet production is high in Asian and African countries. He talked about how millets are transforming from a poor man's crop into a rich man's crop. Our forefathers cultivated millets for easy sustenance but now there is no production in all of western UP. After 30 years in the North East, he said the region has a lot of scope for millet farmers.

He extolled the nutritional values of millets. They are rich in fiber, gluten-free, and a quality resource of minerals and antioxidants. They help control blood pressure and diabetes. He stated that NEN is famous for millets because they are traditionally cultivated and consumed. Farmers are adopting millet crops because millets are very suitable for hilly agriculture and easily adapt to climate change and work with the region's Jhum cultivation practices. The government is supportive and provides good quality seeds with high yield potential. The NE area now cultivates finger, foxtail, kodo and proso millets in addition to buckwheat.

Dr. Narayan Prakash highlighted a 1986 project started by ICAR on small millets. 30 All India Agriculture Institutions and 20 voluntary organizations from all over India targeted finger millet, foxtail millet, kodo millet, proso millet and buckwheat focusing on doubling the production using indigenous cultivation techniques to achieve total food security with a proposed 0.5 million hectares dedicated only for millet cultivation. He concluded by pointing out the efforts of 6 regional institutes which are trying to introduce 3 high yield variety of millets into the NE region and appreciated the fact that most agriculture in the region is already organic, making their task easier.
Dr. Monisha Behal, CEO of North East Network (NEN) introduced herself as part of a women's organisation from Assam started in 1994. She said that they first encountered millet cultivation while working with a Nagaland village where millets were being cultivated. She recounted her experience of first eating a millet called 'Koni Dan' in Assamese as a student. She was also served millet while travelling in Nepal. She pointed out that there is enough evidence for millet cultivation in the North East. She claimed that Nagaland’s knowledge on millet cultivation has not been lost due to irresponsible agricultural policy making. She elaborated that this wasn't the case with Assam where wheat and rice are the main staple foods as propagated by the Green Revolution.

She elaborated on the way in which the political landscape in the Northeast shaped the culture of agricultural practices of the region. The conflict-prone regions face a lot of problems with the armed forces. A lot of men were detained or went missing leaving the women alone. This drastically altered the culture of men and women working the fields together, singing and dancing and sharing the work. This caused millet cultivation to become unpopular due to the labour-intensive processing methods like hand pounding.

She attributed the success of NEN to three factors: ideology, democracy and the female workforce that get things done. The tribal influence has helped bring women together and form various 'Mahila Samitis' and women's societies. She gave an example of NEN's efficiency in controlling violence against women. NEN has a comprehensive network to deal with the police, the public, the government and other international agencies. She said NEN is going to tackle millets in the same way. They will disseminate the knowledge acquired from the Millet Sisters and advocate for policy changes that will help save biodiversity and enhance the growth of millets.

She said young people have to be brought in to work with ICAR, people who are literate in the new media and can market millets effectively. As millets bring in good money on online platforms which are off-limits to an average farmer, these markets have to be made more accessible. Only then can we have a dialogue with the government and move towards policy change.
Unwrapping the Logo

Millet sisters from different regions and organizations came together and launched the All India Millet Sisters. Ms. Tejesvi announced that in about 6 months a book will be published containing stories of all the women farmers honoured for their achievements.

Honouring Millet Sisters from different states

Women farmers are honoured with a shawl and a basket of various millet seeds. The names of honoured sisters are as follows:

1. **Ms. Ramkali** from Himachal Pradesh is known for seed keeping and grows 12 varieties of crops
2. **Ms. Neeta Varod** from Gujarat on behalf of Mariam, a single woman who has been growing millets for many years
3. **Ms. Sushila Majhi** from a tribal community in Orissa who grows 5 varieties of millets, she also started a revolution and influenced the Forest Protection Act (FPA) in her region
4. **Ms. Anita Sahu** from Orissa
5. **Ms. Betikai** from Orissa
6. **Ms. Ranama** from Telangana is fighting the corporates. She is also an amazing filmmaker,
7. **Ms. Sumalata** from Telangana
8. **Ms. Gopamma** from Telangana
9. **Ms. Palaniammal** from Chennai
10. **Ms. Jacinta** from Meghalaya
11. **Ms. Jaimala** from Karnataka on behalf of Shivamma
12. **Ms. Gopama** from Karnataka
13. **Ms. Sushila** from Andhra Pradesh
14. **Ms. Kamala Kumari** from Andhra Pradesh is from a tribal community and grows eleven varieties of crops
15. **Ms. Thuyavolu Sapu** from Nagaland,
16. **Ms. Paramati Majhi** from Orissa grows 10 to 12 varieties of millet.
SESSION II: THE CURRENT STATUS OF MILLET

Ms. Seno from NEN was the moderator of this session. She gave a brief history of connecting with the millet sisters and forming MINI. She recollected that prior to the Green Revolution, 36.90 hectares were devoted for millet cultivation; this has now shrunk to just 14.72 million hectares. She gave an example of a woman who got inspired and learnt about millet cultivation from DDS, and then started a commercially successful millet farm back home. She said this session is about many such stories of change and progress. She called upon the representatives from Sabala, Andhra Pradesh; Lok Vigyan Kendra, Himachal Pradesh and NESFAS, Meghalaya to share their experiences.
Experiences from the field

Ms. Saraswati, representing Andhra Pradesh, gave a brief history of millets in the region. She claimed that both Rayalaseema and Coastal Andhra regions of the state once had a diverse millet culture. It was an important source of food and fodder. The Public Distribution System (PDS) changed all this by promoting rice extensively over the last 30 years. Millets are no longer part of the daily meal. A few farmers still kept up the tradition alive and continued to grow millets for personal consumption, but there was no market for it. Since the last ten years however, due to growing health concerns, millets are making a come-back. And corporate companies are ready to fulfil the demand and make a profit. Ms. Saraswathi, expressed concern over how this will affect the health and food security of the Millet Sisters and their families. She said most farmers no longer eat the food that they grow, the produce goes directly from the field to the market and the link between the field and the home is weakening. Millets Sisters are working hard to maintain that link. They cannot bow down to the corporate sector and its huge influence on government agriculture policy. The Comprehensive Revival of Millets Program (CRMP), an AP government program to revive the millet cultivation has allocated lakhs of farms for the purpose. But they are encouraging monoculture such as SRI Ragi. This is very detrimental to millet bio-diversity as millets are not meant for monoculture. Focussing only on a single millet variety such as finger millet or foxtail millet for commercial purposes makes it extremely unsustainable and poses a huge risk for farmers and their livelihood. Finally, she blamed the government for not giving the same importance to millets as opposed to rice, wheat and other cash crops. The government statistics do not show any data on millet cultivation and the official reports blindly claim there is none.

Ms. Marisa, Meghalaya

Ms. Marisa expressed her thanks for being invited to the AIMS network. She said that locally produced food is good for the environment and it also enhances the well-being of the people. North East Slow Food and Agri Biodiversity Society (NESFAS) decided to take up the challenge and revive millet cultivation. Most farmers here think millets can only be cultivated through shifting cultivation. But Millets can be cultivated in hilly areas using the traditional Jhum cultivation. NESFAS is convincing people to do this. More than 30 communities are already cultivating millets for their own consumption. The general assumption is that millets do not bring in much money at the market and are much harder to sell than the regular cash crops. NESFAS is motivating the farmers to cultivate millets in their traditional way by conducting biodiverse festivals and getting farmers to participate and learn about millets and their importance. She concluded that the Nagaland Biodiversity Festival was a success and farmers in Meghalaya have started cultivating millets again.
**Mr. Nek Ram, Himachal Pradesh:**

Mr. Nek Ram appreciated the national level Millet Sisters network and said that he had been waiting for a long time to participate in a National Convention. He stated that the policymakers in the Himachal Pradesh government do not support millet cultivation. Himachal Pradesh is home to many varieties of millets which were an important part of the diet before the so called development started. With development, came monoculture. Farmers started growing apples as they were the biggest cash crop in the state. Many became rich but the heavy usage of pesticides and insecticides has destroyed the biodiversity. In 1993, foxtail millet was cultivated extensively. It helped them to survive a drought for 5 years. Since 2000, the production of buckwheat and other types of traditional millets decreased and almost vanished. After the introduction of rice in the PDS, the diet shifted to rice and kidney beans. The change in food practices caused many new health problems and the number of diabetic patients is increasing gradually. He said LVK believes that Health is Wealth, so they started spreading awareness about millets in association with the Health and Education Department. He spoke about the formation and functioning process of the Millet Panchayats in their project area. The program started with 20 villages and now involves 80 villages. The panchayats work to promote millets as organic, as highly nutritional and culturally important. After a lot of lobbying and campaigning, the agricultural department finally agreed to give some support to millet farmers. But they have no information whatsoever so, LVK works with the farmers and provides them with the necessary seeds. and trains them in traditional agricultural practices. He concluded by saying that millets are now being grown and consumed in a sustainable way. They have some problems with birds attacking the finger millet crops but they are able to produce a lot of fodder. There are now 500 Millet Sisters in the area and he hopes that they will achieve their goals.

**Ms. Kathija, Gujarat**

Ms. Kathija said that she is associated with a group of women farmers with 2000 members, out of which 600 women do organic farming. She claimed that she does not purchase chemical pesticides from the market but prepares her own biopesticides for her field and shares it with other women. They grow many varieties of crops such as maize, millet, cumin and a little bit of cotton too. While the cotton is meant for the market, the millets are meant for consumption.
Ms. Maheswari, Andhra Pradesh

Ms. Maheswari is part of the Millet Sisters Network. She stated that millet was grown by her forefathers but the cultivation of millets disappeared due to many reasons as explained by the earlier speakers. They are now cultivating 11 different crops including 6 different millets for consumption.

Seno briefly summarized the presentations and shared the key points as a push against monoculture, and a push against chemical fertilizers and pesticides. She ended the session by stating that the commitment made years back towards promoting, strengthening, and building millet, agro-based bio-diverse farming shall be continued and that awareness shall be spread from farming community to consumer to government to support an ecological culture of farming.
Science for millets:
Is the push towards Green Revolution a model for genetic engineering?

Dr. Suresh Reddy was the chairperson for this fishbowl session along with key speakers, Ms. Jayasri and Dr. Subash Babu, ICAR, Meghalaya. Dr. Reddy opened the discussion by saying that before the green revolution, agriculture was in the control of farmers. They used traditional knowledge and local resources to achieve sustainability. After the green revolution, many changes have taken place. Though the production has increased, many negative effects such as the erosion of biodiversity, erosion of genetic biodiversity, depleted soil health, polluted water, and many public health problems due to the heavy use of pesticides have arisen. Millets were part of a biodiverse farming system along with pulses and oilseeds. But, now they are cultivated in monoculture. This is not a good sign. IIMR came up with the GM Sorghum variety capable of pest resistance which is totally redundant since the farmers always had traditional pest control systems in place which are a lot more eco-friendly.
Dr. Subash Babu was of the opinion that the green revolution model destroys the genetic potential of crops. Sikkim is called the only complete organic state in India as declared by the State Government of Sikkim. He hopes that in the days to come, the whole northeast will be converted to organic farming. As per the guidelines, GM crops are not involved in organic farming. Organic cultivation should focus on the food variety of crops and acquire indigenous material, knowledge, green fertilizers and seeds. We should develop a proper economic package for organic millets. The government should also take the appropriate decision on how to address the deprived communities. In India, we are left with very few varieties of millets and we should go about in a systematic way of farming. Millet should be cultivated not as a mono-crop but should be cultivated in the traditional organic way which enhances the nutrients of the millet. If we can increase the yield of the millet in general then millet farmers can get more income. Millet can survive in poor, less fertile soil and can be supplemented with cereals, rice, wheat etc. The government should encourage farmers with a price hike for millets. He concluded by reminding us that millet is very crucial for organic cultivation.

Ms. Jayasri Cherukuri, Joint director of DDS shared some of the concerns from SAGE. In May 2017 IIMR developed a GM Sorghum which is pest-resistant (Shoot fly). When we had discussions with the millet farmers, they said they don't use any pesticides for the millet cultivation. Through simple ingenious methods they have overcome this pest attack. She wondered as to why such an institute is spending its precious time and resources in developing GM seed varieties of millets when the farmers do not use any pesticides nor have come up with pest attack issues in millet cultivation. Is it because of lobbying by the corporate and the vested interests in the government? GM technology has become a big problem. The Policies, and the International National Food Security Act have made it possible for the US to invest millions of dollars in South Asia. While Europe and other Latin American countries are resisting the widespread use of GM technology, India is embracing it. If GM is allowed in the region, it will be a great problem for bio-diverse millet cultivation in India. We should promote the nutritional values of the products and urge the government to increase the price of these wonder crops, so that farmers may finally benefit. Even though the production of millet is low when compared to rice and wheat, we have to ask the government to consider its nutritional values while fixing the minimum support price. This will help the farmers and encourage them to grow more varieties of millets in their fields. There is no need for GM varieties of millets as there is a danger of losing many indigenous varieties of millets. GM cotton has eradicated many indigenous varieties of cotton. We have to educate farmers on why GM is not needed and the consequences of using GM crops.
Mr. Tushar Pancholi began his address by stating that Injustice is being done to millet in comparison with rice. Rice and wheat are irrigated crops. The quantity of water required is more for these when compared to millets. He complained that there is no system to fix the price of millets that takes the ecosystem values into consideration. He explained how organic farming is being hijacked by the rich farmers. He claimed that, when it comes to millets. The Millet Sisters are the real scientists as they acquired the knowledge from their culture and tradition. He said that it’s traditional, uncertified science as opposed to government certified GM high yield varieties. He finished his speech on the sad note that in Gujarat, the farmers are not yet ready to take up high yield variety of millets.

Mr. Shiba Prasad, from Ahinsa Club, Odisha, wanted to know why GM is introduced in millet areas. Who benefits from it? ”Is it for farmers? Is it for food? Is it good for the environment? Do GM Seeds cost less? Does GM produce sell for more? Will it be possible to conserve the GM seeds? If we cannot keep the seed for the next season then why is the government encouraging it?” He answered his own question by stating that these GM varieties are beneficial only to the seed companies. He asked if we should lose our bio-diverse farming and ecological balance just for the sake of corporate seed companies. He made a plea to the government to support millet farmers by doubling the price of millets. GM will only increase the cost of seed four times while destroying indigenous seeds, farming land and culture.

Mr. Prabudas, KRRS from Karnataka explained that in the Karnataka plains, they cultivate millets in a natural way; they don’t use any pesticides. They have urged the government not to encourage GM for food crops, particularly in millet fields, as they do not need any chemical fertilizers and pesticides. He observed that these GM varieties may lead to health complications. He asserted that millets are more nutritional as against rice and wheat.

Mr. Yadaiah, PJRDS from Karnataka insisted that the introduction of GM and other technology to Millet cultivation will increase the cost of farming. Millet farmers just have to wait after planting, and they can use part of the produce as seed for use by other farmers and even for the next planting season. The GM seeds germinate in one season but become useless for the next season. He expressed confidence that the dryland farmers of Karnataka will not accept GM varieties from research institutions.
Dr. Subash suggested that we have ample scope to increase the productivity of millets, so we should focus on adding agro-economic values to the production. There is no difference between organic and non-organic millets as millets do not need any chemical inputs. So there is no difference in yield either. We have sufficient organic matter in the soil in our North East region. In this region, there is no difference between organic or inorganic as there is heavy rainfall and any additions will be washed away. He insisted that we should use only the indigenous variety of seeds in millet cultivation.

Ms. Trisha from AGRAGAMEE, Odisha, raised the issue of Monsanto. World politics is still promoting GM and Monsanto even after all the information about the negative impact of GM crops. Monsanto now has got EPA approval after joining forces with the US government. They are fooling the world by claiming that its main objective is to provide food to the world. She was afraid that it would use its clout to manipulate governments.

Ms. Jayasri from DDS highlighted the role of the different big players in trying to grab opportunities to influence the agricultural scenario. She explained that an organization like DDS has to support the farmers and inform them of the harmful effects of GM crops and the need for biodiverse millet farming. She wanted a debate on BT cotton and an action plan on how to fight Monsanto.

Ms. Akole from NEN, Nagaland reiterated that corporations are getting stronger. He said that resistance against GM should be cultivated in the villages and alternate solutions have to be explored. He wanted to strengthen millet sisters, strengthen the farming community and make important decisions like the use of a traditional variety of millets, traditional seeds, and improved local seed banks.

Ms. Sheelu, from Women’s Collective, Tamilnadu, recalled the lessons learnt in the case of BT cotton when Tamilnadu farmers fought against it and Andhra Pradesh embraced it. She said that they fought very hard and put in a lot of effort to make panchayats pass a resolution that they would not allow BT or GM crops in their villages. She stated that the entire seed industry is about international corporate companies like Monsanto and Bayers achieving global control. But it is much harder to do so in India as we have a lot of small farmers as opposed to much larger farmers towards whom this market is oriented. She explained that the Women’s Collective works with small farmers who cultivate for existence and focus on food security at a household level and not for the market. She reiterated that fighting against Monsanto and Bayers should be on our agenda. How are we going to make the policy change? We need to identify some prominent farmers in our area who can use their strategic position to influence government policies.
 SESSION III: CURRENT CONCERNS OF MILLET

Sarkari Millets:

Will the Government Comprehensive Millet Development Programmes kill biodiversity?

The session was chaired by Mr. PV Satheesh National Convenor, MINI and Mr. Joginaidu, SVDS, Andhra Pradesh and Ms. Trisha, AGRAGAMEE, Odisha

Mr PV Satheesh explained the term 'Sarkari Millets' by drawing comparison to the sarkari sadhus from Indira Gandhi’s Emergency period. He elaborated that people, civilizations and everyone come together to craft a solution, then the government grabs it and makes it look as if they are offering a solution, thus making it a SARKARI solution. He expressed two disturbing concerns.

1. Why doesn't this government come to the aid of farmers and support millet cultivation like they do to the rice growers? The Government just offers lip-service by describing millets as sovereign crops. Because, over the years, all other crops have been lavished with the support of government while treating millets as a step-child. Rice today, if it is sold in the market on the basis of economic terms, must sell for at least Rs. 3000/- per kilo. He complained that the government subsidizes such an expensive crop and sells it for Rs. 2/- per kilo or Rs. 1/- per kilo or even gives it for free. He called out the Telangana government as corrupt and criticised it for supporting cotton, especially when the unsustainable crop was responsible for thousands of farmer suicides He questioned the government for unfair treatment of millets and said that millets have a right to be supported.
2. He criticized the government’s efforts to promote millets via CRMP by calling it a ‘Kadamba Bahu’, a sanskrit idiom meaning death's embrace. He claimed that whenever the government embraces something, it dies. This is especially true in the case of millets. The AP government, wanting to fulfil the growing demand for millets, started the Comprehensive Revival of Millets Program to be able produce 10% of the country’s demand. He lamented that these programs kill the soul of millets and do not respect the ideals of lakhs of farmers and the Millet Network of India. He recollected the first National Convention on Millets when he spoke about millet being a concept and symbol for biodiversity and self-sustainability. He spoke fondly of millets and called them the friendliest crops in this world; no millet wants to live alone. Amazing farmers who work with millets grow 20 – 25 varieties of crops anchored by millets. In a Sorgham field there won’t be only sorghum, there are also pulses and other millets along with a few varieties of oil seeds. He mentioned a jowar variety called ‘Kaki Muttani Jonna’, a crop whose seed even birds like the crow cannot break. The farmer especially chose this millet to overcome bird attacks. He said that this kind of holistic solution cannot be attained by science. Millets are too complicated a system for science to understand. The government is very stupid and hence comes up with programs where the diversity of millet is not recognised; instead, just one crop for commercial purposes is encouraged. He again compared the government initiative to the 'Bhasmasura' touch—a touch that destroys everything and ignores centuries of tested, traditional and ecological knowledge. He reiterated Ms. Monisha’s words in the previous session and said that ideology-based networks need to be strengthened. He said if an NGO fails to stand for an ideology and only work for survival, then the goals of the NGO will keep changing around money. He affirmed that the Millet Sisters Network will add more rational thinking, more civilization and more common sense to the existing network and also give the ability to think with the heart rather than just the mind. And only then, can we rescue millets.

Ms. Trisha from AGRAGAMEE, Odisha, started her discussion with the concept of ‘what is development’ in our country and how that is affecting government policies; how it leads to mono cropping and destroys biodiversity. She quoted a popular saying “It is said that a country is deemed a developed one when only 10 percent of its people are farmers.” She then stated that in India, 77 percent of the population is into farming directly or indirectly. She spoke of her experiences in Odisha, where the government is keeping the tribals away from natural farming and pushing them into unfriendly farming practices and service sectors such as trading forest produce. She shared information of a study conducted on the plight of some farmers from Orissa, who had to starve for a whole year and live only on a daily meal of finger millet (Raagi) just so they could procure seeds for the next season. The government is more concerned about money and food than the harmful practices of mono cropping and its effects on ethnic culture. She explained that the government takes advantage of these farmers and forces them to grow a particular variety of crops like cashew or mango. The farmers are more than happy to do so. Even the few farmers who still grow millets have no way to sell
them in the market as there are no buyers. Instead they use millet as currency in a barter system and exchange them for other goods like dried fish. She expressed her concern that there is no way to convince them toward biodiverse agriculture when they are struggling to get food in their stomachs. She explained that the tribals no longer want to be tribal anymore. They want to go out and work in the city; the younger people are moving to Kerala and Andhra Pradesh to work as labourers for 6-7 months. They return to Orissa for the rest of the year, but do not want to work as farmers.

From the presentation, Mr. Satheesh drew attention to two relevant questions:

1. Why is that tribals do not want to be tribal anymore?

**Mr. Satheesh** said that a woman is a woman irrespective of her respect for womanhood. One's culture cannot be denied just because of a perceived inferiority complex.

2. Why cashew and mango are seen everywhere?

**Mr. Satheesh** said that it is not just the case with cashew and mango; we have seen it happen wherever traditional crops are undermined. The farmers are lured into growing cash crops which ultimately will lead them to bankruptcy and despair. They lose faith in agriculture, so they move on to other professions. It is sad that farmers cease to be themselves—free and self-sufficient. They don't want to be farmers as they don't get any respect.

**Mr. Joginaidu**, from SVDS, Andhra Pradesh started his presentation by appreciating MINI for their support of food security, for conducting food festivals, and for championing the millet initiatives. He then appreciated DDS for their support towards sustaining millets in the region. He said because of their unflagging work and lobbying, the government came forward to support millets under the National Food Security Mission (NFSM). Recently, the Andhra Pradesh government introduced CRMP in 7 districts and 44 mandals with the help of 43 NGOs. He explained that the main agenda of the program is to increase both the production and local consumption. Processing machine for women entrepreneurs are important as millet processing is a tedious job to do by hand. Unfortunately, our government is supporting the usage of chemical fertilizers. In farmer exchange visits to Karnataka, they learnt about the SRI Ragi method. He claimed that in 2000 acres, this method is implemented just in 7 acres. He said that while he agrees that millets have to be grown using traditional bio-diverse methods, money proves to be a big challenge. The government sanctioned 20 lakh rupees under CRMP, but so far they have released only 2 lakhs. He said we have to figure out a way to enhance the farmer's income without disturbing the soil or tribal culture. He clarified that the CRMP concept is similar to MINI and they share the same objective. The only difference is that the implementing agency is WASSAN which insists only on Ragi, SRI Ragi in particular. He ended by reiterating PV’s idea that Millet sisters have to be respected and their access to the market made much easier.
Ms. Saraswati shared her experience in CRMP implementation. She introduced her agency as responsible for giving directions and for monitoring this program. They encourage farmers to grow millets using biodiverse farming methods. The SRI ragi cultivation is limited to a small percentage of land and the rest of the land is cultivated by tribals using their own traditional practices. In AP this millet mission is monitored by the Agriculture department. She complained that this department does not show any interest in millets, does not visit the fields and also does not release the funds under CRMP. She concluded by saying that this is enabling corporates to capture the millet production from the tribal farmers.

Dr. Suresh Reddy complained that whenever any government tries to take over an NGO initiated program, it gets corrupted. He said that when they started SHGs in the early 90s, many NGOs were formed in support of the group members and trading was not their main objective. He complained that when the government started SHGs, the DWCRA groups got corrupted and they only talk about money now. It even happened with NPM programs; agriculture officers assume that NPM means using neem oil spray or other organic pesticides instead of chemical pesticides. They don't even try to understand the concept of the system.

Ms. Sheelu agreed with the previous speaker and said that it is true that when the government takes up a program, NGOs easily get trapped in looking out for funds. She reasoned that, with limited funding, they have to keep up their structure and staff, so they run into problems. However, she claimed to have a different experience in Tamil Nadu. M S Swaminathan Foundation, after all their work in the Green Revolution are way ahead in millet cultivation, particularly in tribal areas and, have developed millet processing machines. They have contributed a lot to what is happening in Tamil Nadu today. Another organisation, Kalanjai Vasumalai Foundation also works with tribals. She explained that different millet based food security machines run by the government are not working. She praised the millet sisters for spreading their knowledge on millet based mixed cropping systems and millet recipes.

Ms. Samhita shared her first-hand experience based on some recent research. She recounted that she went to the District Agriculture Office where NEN is doing a lot of work and is struggling hard to talk about organic millet farming, seed sharing and custodian farmers. She admitted that initially NEN was critical about inviting government officials to their programs such as biodiversity festivals, but she realised how important it is to engage with government officials to effect policy change. She said that the Nagaland State Livelihoods and Agriculture officials say very proudly that they have contributed immensely to millets but it was mostly NEN which gave training to the SHGs. She criticised the government for promoting bad practices in Nagaland like keeping crop stalks on the field. She also blamed the government for promoting chemicals and pesticides in certain districts. She talked about cabbage villages and tomato villages where mono-culture is very prominent as it increases livelihood.
She stated that the irony is that men are going for cash crops and women are promoting organic crops. She urged the AIMS network women to stand on their own strengths and not depend on government support. She said, "We have to address these struggles by bringing together the traditional knowledge and scientific techniques because they never get a chance to interact with each other."

Ms. Tejaswi shared her experience with NFSM in DDS. When it was introduced, DDS was asked to cultivate the millets with the government seeds. DDS farmers did not agree to use outside seeds and protested against this, to this finally officials agreed to DDS women using their own seeds. But this year the local administrators have not allowed DDS farmers to use their own seeds and own manures from their backyard and hence DDS women have refuse to access support of NFSM. However, this did not cause any extreme consequences as DDS sort to alternative sources including consumers for supporting farmers.
Corporate capture of millet:

How do we wake up and fight this problem

Ms. Latha Jishnu: Opened this discussion with a question: how many of you eat millets regularly? She got mostly a positive reply from the crowd. And when she asked about the source of the millet, the overwhelming response was that they consume whatever they grow. She said that when she was young, her mother in law used to eat millets, but millets went out of her memory for 30 years because they were never available in the general stores. If the farmers are able to eat millets from their farm that is great, but a huge middle class population also wants to eat millets.

She mentioned that DDS is the organization which buys millets from the farmers at 10% more than the market price. She explained that on the internet there are a number of online shops /retailers with various millet products but the price is beyond the average person's reach. In PDS, they provide lots of varieties of rice but in case of millets, they provide only Ragi (finger millet) and Bajra (Pearl Millet).

She questioned the source of all the millet products that we see in online shops. She claims that soon the internet will be the best marketplace for millets. She said the government should encourage farmers to grow millets through comprehensive programs, procure
the grains from them and supply it through PDS, anganwadis and for free lunch at schools so that the children below 13-14 will get nutritional food. Odisha is already distributing millets via PDS in a few districts.

Mr. Tushar Pancholi, from PVK (Gujarat), said that Gujarat has some of the biggest industries like Amul Dairy; Gujratis are always on the lookout for business opportunities and they are very much interested in millets. However, he warned that these are very powerful corporations and they have a lot of money. They buy cheap and sell high. And protesting has no effect as farmers are ready to sell for cheap. They double the prices by using an organic label. As the demand for millet grows, and its nutritional properties are talked about everywhere from social media to traditional media, it is transformed from a poor man's saviour to a rich man's latest fashion. He said that we have to find a way to bridge the gap between farmers and the average middle class consumer and make the grains available to them at reasonable prices.

Ms. Latha Jishnu said that the issues we have to focus must centre on the environment in which all the farmers work. Minimum Support Price for the major grains such as rice is taken for granted. Will a raise of MSP for millets help the farmers; is it going to work? The central question is, should farmers worry about who is buying their product? They are working hard for their own livelihood. Other issues can be addressed only after basic security is achieved.

Ms. Samhita Boroah presented a PPT on Corporate Compulsion. Millets indeed are a sustenance concept, she said; a concept that has defined food security, using Millet based ecology. Millets are connected to ecology, environment, people and culture. In the North East we have wild millets. She mentioned a number of changes happening in ecology: forest to fence, peripheral to primary, ecological to economic, fluid to rigid, diverse to divided, solidarity to profitability, localized to globalised, and medicinal to medicated. She stated that this kind of development only leads to issues of inequality. Is this the sort of development we are into? It raises issues of inequality. She reported that, in Assam all the plain fields are covered with other crops and there is no space for millets anymore. She asked if corporate compulsions are creating a threat to the collective ecological rights. How do we break these corporate compulsions? How can we turn the terms set by the corporations? We need concrete steps to address these issues. She remarked that we need a digital India, we need a skilled India. We are moving from diverse to divided. We are moving from solidarity to comfortability. We are moving from exchange to export. Corporate farming has to be profitable. Land acquisition by the corporations such as Patanjali has grievous hidden costs to the diversity, health security, gender equality, ecological diversity and personal freedom. She said that the public needs to be aware of such a cost. It is a kind of threat to collective ecological rights. When we are looking for some solutions, we need to invoke connections on collective ecological rights. She praised DDS for showing how inclusiveness can be practiced.

Mr. Satheesh elaborated that the reason for corporate capture as an issue for discussion is because millets are nutritional crops whereby its cultivation and consumption are ways to food security. Some people describe millets as food sovereignty crops which symbolize how farmers can achieve
food sovereignty by millet cultivation. Even the poorest farmer working in the most challenging economic conditions can also cultivate millets very profitably. He recollected that 5 or 6 years ago ITC bought 50,000 acres of farmland in central India where they are only cultivating Jowar. The US sees these as the grains of the future and wants to capture the market. Our institutions are doing a lot of research on Jowar and Sorghum. Reliance and ITC and other corporations have already made contracts with farmers to cultivate certain kind of millets. Farmers may get economic profits for 10 years, but lose drastically on ecological benefits. He gave the example of UK based organic farmers who lost their freedom due to this kind of contract farming. The internet causes many trends to form some of which are not helpful to the situation. He gave the example of people choosing quinoa over foxtail millet which is 17 times cheaper and just as nutritious. Sometimes people ask for brown top millets which are not indigenous to the area just because of a trend. He remarked that corporations will buy the minds of consumers and that small NGOs should become warriors against corporatism just like small farmers who once stood against urbanisation.

Mr. Jogi Naidu further elaborated that the corporate sector can be seen in every sphere of life including the education system. In AP, two corporate colleges rule the education system. Students are committing suicides due to the stress. He said that to face the corporate sector we need to create a market and show money for millet farmers. We need to install processing units at the community level which will lead to increase in production. We need to use our local cooperatives to fight the corporates who have taken over our traditional food systems.

Mr. Tushar added that the farmers are losing a lot of land to corporates who only want to grow cash crops and have no use for millets.

Dr. Aman Singh said that Bajra (pearl millet) is the most cultivated crop in their area. It provides food and fodder. When they started using the corporate-provided seeds, they found that the crop grows really fast but the height of the plants was only half the height of the desi variety. So, even though the farmers made money early, they had to suffer in the winter when they had to buy fodder for the cattle instead of using the tall straw from the desi variety.

Ms. Latha Jishnu asked if collective farming is the answer to the onslaught of corporate capture? She also wanted to know if seeds are the key element under collective farming?
Mr. Satheesh replied by saying that it's an uphill task. We have to swim against the current. The North East is full of possibilities. In DDS, before globalization and economization of the mind, we started collective farming. He stated that the North East is the beacon of millet cultivation to other regions in the mainland.

Ms. Samhita added that millets are grown in Jhum lands but coverage has dwindled. Agriculture practices such as Jhum or shifting cultivation give access to women with their crop diversity but there is no recognition by the government. She said that many communities don't have land rights. And without land rights, how can you have the freedom to pursue biodiverse agriculture. She insisted that this issue should be raised in the next parliament.

Ms. Sheelu seconded Samhita by agreeing that the dealing of land rights is a very serious issue. We have to be capable of ensuring the land rights of the farmers as it is very critical.
Ms. Saraswati, the anchor of this session, started by stating that the biggest challenge for Millet Sisters is to market the millets without damaging its soul. She said that the millet sisters are facing challenges in marketing. She clarified that they are more concerned about food sovereignty and nutrition but Millet cultivation is part of their life and marketing is inevitable. Earlier the barter system had a lead role in marketing. Now money is playing a crucial part in the market. Money can completely control the market. This is leading to increase in disease due to introduction of new food systems and lifestyles. She concluded by saying that they need a strong lobby to effect policy change in the government. Millet sisters are fighting to protect their crops, seeds, land and traditional millet food.

Key Voices:

Mr. Siba Prasad said that his work on millets started after attending a convention hosted by DDS. DDS organizes food exhibitions and melas where different items of millets are served. He said that he got inspired and sold a local ragi based recipe in Orissa. The response was very good and they were encouraged by the district officials to promote millets better. At one event they sold one lakh worth
of millet and made a profit of ten thousand rupees. He was surprised that none of the government officials who came to his stall could recognise the millets. He said that the Ahinsa Club's approach is not to target big market outlets but to make the consumption of millet much easier in the community. They are trying to address Orissa's malnutrition problem by introducing millets in ICDS hostels and anganwadis. Though the government officials encourage cultivation of a single high yielding variety of Ragi, Ahinsa Club has a different perspective, and grows 27 varieties of ragi and many other millets. He finished by saying that protecting our indigenous varieties of millets is most important.

**Ms. Mamata**, Market Manager, DDS gave a brief history of the DDS starting a market 20 years ago with a very limited market area with only one shop in Zaheerabad. Now they have expanded to Hyderabad and cover the whole city and nearby suburbs in a mobile van. She said that they pay their farmers 10% more than the market value. The crop is meant for the farmer to consume and only the surplus is sold. Now they have their own brand called Sangam Organics. The turnover went from Rs. 40,000 to Rs. 4,00,0000 per month. Other than millets, DDS also provides safflower oil and organic jaggery, both of which are in high demand due to the trust DDS has developed among the consumers for its authentic organic production.

**Ms. Trisha** asked if profit is really a problem? She answered her own question by saying that profits are very important for farmers to get economically independent. Farmers should not be the only ones paying for the sake of ecological balance. She said that biodiversity and profits should go together. She explained that farmers are more interested in climbing up the social ladder and making a stable living rather than being purely profit minded. Farmers want to learn how to use the internet and advertising and reach the consumers directly and not be dependent on corporate economics.

**Dr. T N Prakash** observed that in most cases, it is the producer who decides the prices of commodities, and has to get the share of this price, but sadly in agriculture farmers always pay the price and have no control. He said we have to make sure that the farmer, who is the soul of the market should get paid appropriately. Another solution he offered was collective marketing which is similar to collective farming.

**Mr. Jogi Naidu** agreed that farmers have to decide the price and talked about a solution to collective marketing via FPOs. They have started a marketing cooperative to help farmers sell under a common brand.

**Ms. Trisha** said that honest advertising might get a good reaction from the consumers. It could be done with the help of some responsible media persons.
Ms. Tejasvi added that in order to beat the corporates, we have to advertise not just millets, but the soul of millets, i.e, its biodiversity, as it is something that the corporates will never advertise. So we should use social media to promote the varieties of Sorghum.

Ms. Sheelu disagreed with the consensus and said that consumption at the community level is more important than profitability.

Ms. Saraswathi concluded the session saying there cannot be any easy and simple solution for any problem. We have to fight and find out ways to address the issues and with practice we may get a few more solutions. Millet Sisters are now able to fix the price for their produce and reject the market decided MSP.
Dr. T N Prakash, Chairperson started the session by saying that he was very much impressed with the fishbowl discussion. He talked about Karnataka being the first state to do justice to NFSM, by asserting that NFSM was not to be dominated by paddy, but rather by millets. It was also the 1st state in India to include millet in the PDS. He said people like PV Sateesh and other NGOs really fight for the place for millets in PDS. Karnataka is the state which started distributing two varieties of millets (Finger Millet and Sorghum) in PDS. 5 Kgs of Ragi in north Karnataka and 5 kgs Jowar in south Karnataka. We procured almost 20 lakh quintals of ragi from farmers, at an average of Rs.75,000/- as direct benefit into their account. But the same thing couldn't happen with Jowar. They procured a variety called Margandy Jowar; its procurement price is less than the market price. PDS is a government intervention. Millets are organic so far. He further said that they are proposing an organic agriculture department and making it part of the manifesto in coming elections. We cannot consider millets as market commodities; instead, millets should be a movement. The soul of millets is its resiliency. Millets are environmentally friendly and they even grow in drought. The resiliency component is the core element in the millet
movement. He was sure that the cultural/traditional food will sustain for a long time. The nutritional dimension is taken care of by millets. There is no doubt about it. The only requirement is to make sure that millets are made available to the poor through PDS. He concluded by wishing the millet movement to be a global brand like Amul which has a women based cooperative like Anand behind it.

Mr. Prakash, KRRS from Karnataka lamented that they lost their traditional seeds when they started using government issued hybrid seeds. He was thankful to DDS for providing them with desi seeds and appreciated the NGO for preserving their seed bank and refusing to use hybrid seeds. He said that KRRS fights for farmer's rights. They fight for a high MSP for their crops. They successfully achieved a good price for Ragi. He concluded by saying that our best strength is our health and thanks to millets, we are all fit enough to fight for farmers' rights.

Mr. Narayan Barik, NIRMAN from Odisha explained that he is working in a hilly area where the farmers cannot cultivate paddy. They mostly cultivate millets due to lack of water. He reminded us that in the past, millets were widely consumed. After implementation of PDS by government, millet consumption gradually decreased because millet processing is difficult and time consuming. He feels sorry that the younger generation prefer to eat rice and wheat and that they consider millet to be a poor man's food. He said that awareness of millet's nutritional and cultural values has to be built up before they become common at the household level. This will be followed by inclusion in the PDS.
Fishbowl discussion:

Ms. Sheelu said there is a huge demand for millet consumption in Tamil Nadu.

Dr. TN Prakash said that to distribute millets through PDS, we need 20 lakh quintals of Ragi and 20 lakh quintals of Jowar. There is a supply and procurement mismatch. This is a major problem and we don't have any data on millets, unlike with paddy, where we have plenty of data as well as the supply.

Mr. PV Satheesh suggested that the government should encourage a decentralized PDS run by local farmers to overcome this problem of supply and procurement.

Ms. Jacinta Ranee, NESFAS from Meghalaya, agreed that millet was once a traditional food, but this has currently dwindled, and we are left with only a few households who grow it and consume it themselves. She claimed that with NESFAS intervention, millet cultivation and consumption has increased. And she was happy to report that innovative recipes are finding their way in the local market.
SESSION VI: IN CONCLUSION

Current Status of AIMS
A state wise presentation & our journey so far

Ms. Sheelu felt it was an opportune moment to recollect the salient features of the last Delhi Declaration -2016, such as:

- Implement National Food Security Act
- Enhancement of millet area
- To decentralize the procurement and distribution of food
- Millets as a bulwark against climate change and a deterrent against the threat of farmer suicides.
- To safeguard heritage and indigenous knowledge structure
- Millets as a critical focus for shaping the country’s farm policy.
Ms. Mogulamma who received the Nari Shakti Puraskar on behalf of AIMS shared her experience at Delhi with millet sisters. She said that she was very happy about receiving the award on behalf of all millet sisters and she was proud of their organisation's work in the field of millets. Sharing her grief, she said that she lost her husband the previous year and yet she is growing 20-30 varieties of crops in her 1.5 acre piece of land with knowledge imparted to her by her in laws and parents. She said she is able to successfully run her family now. She encouraged her fellow farmers to embrace millets as they will never fail us.

NEN representative- Ms. Seno shared the status of NEN. She informed the audience that they have reached out to 2500 women while working with local communities in Nagaland. They have used the participatory video programmes to sensitize the communities. “Over the past 1 year, 7 organizations have visited the NEN Resource Centre to learn about NEN work on sustainable agriculture and our millet promotional work. To get the younger generation interested in agriculture, NEN started Summer Farm Schools for urban young children. Over the past 4 years, we have been to Meghalaya, Manipur, Assam to promote millet cultivation and consumption.” She reminisced that earlier they used to take their farmers to DDS to show them biodiverse farms but for the last few years they have developed biodiverse farms and many organizations are now visiting them. They have started community seed banks in 8 villages.

Ms. Ramkali, Himachal Pradesh, introduced herself as working in Himachal Pradesh with 20 mahila mandals (millet sister groups) with each group consisting of at least 30-40 women members. For the last 10 years they have been growing 20 types of millets “Our land holding is very small, yet we grow millets using the 12 grains cultivation system, including not only millet but also oil seeds which are valued in every household. We mix Ragi in our food and use it in summer season. We consume different millets in different seasons.” They now conduct awareness programs for other women collectives. They are known for their desi seeds and seed banks which helped them to get recognised by the government.
Odisha representative, Ms. Anita Sahu, said that she has been part of this millet sisters' network since 2004. She has formed various millet sister groups and they work together on how to select and preserve millet seeds for the next season. Their major work is to educate the youth to promote millets. The Millet Sisters also take part in exhibitions across the state by cooking various millet recipes and make money that goes into a collective fund. They conduct various competitions in schools to disseminate nutritional information about millets and recipes.

Ms. Paramiti Mahji, Odisha lamented that in their area they had lost all of their millet seed and they were not able to cultivate millets. After NIRMAN's introduction of millets in their area, they have been cultivating millet in their fields again. They cultivate through land planting to prevent the uprooting of millets. Every year they gather for a festival called Burlang Yatra where the women exchange various traditional millet seeds with each other as a symbol of reviving traditional millet crops.

Ms. Khatija, from PVK, Gujarat, represents a group of 2000 millet sisters. Since 2017, they have been working in the organic sector, specializing in marginalized areas. They have been working on issues of women, malnutrition, and have started some special education centres for children where they distribute eggs along with fruits and millets. They display their produce at various events to promote millets and reduce malnutrition. Their work has been recognized and awarded by district agriculture department for developing traditional millet cultivation.

Ms. Gopamma, from Karnataka extolled some of the virtues of millet, and spoke about how healthy they are when consumed regularly. She said millets provide enough energy for farmers to work on their farm. She asked people to eat millet instead of rice to be fit and healthy.
Ms. Sushila, SABALA representing Andhra Pradesh, a prominent worker of village level millet sisters, and a farmer herself, proudly said that they cultivate and consume their own millets. She agreed that millets had gone out of our memory in recent years and only after the intervention of SABALA, they are being revived and there are already 2000 millet sisters coming together to celebrate millets. They organize campaigns toward inclusion of millets into anganwadis and PDS. They are supplying 2 tonnes of ragi flour per month to ITDA hostels. Marketing their own products to local communities, they have established rural outlets and started their own marketing infrastructure. 400 millet sisters train people on traditional and innovative millet recipes. They are lobbying for a chance to supply packaged millets to ration shops and ICDS hostels.

Ms. General Narasamma, DDS from Telangana said that she has been working with various millet groups called Sanghams after returning from Delhi for the last convention. She recounted the story of millets being pushed back in favour of cotton, maize and soya due to the government raising the MSP. They have taken the step of compensating millet farmers for their crop loss to discourage them from taking up commercial crop farming. They have also started a community production centre which tries to promote their products among urban consumers. She concluded by congratulating her colleague Ms. Anjamma for winning three awards.

Mr. Masru, from Telangana introduced himself as a Banjara tribe leader whose forefathers used to cultivate millets a long time ago. He has been trying to bring back that culture over the last three years. They are now cultivating 10 to 12 crops in 1 acre. The young women of the tribe are relearning traditional millet recipes and opening up shops. Since their area is plagued by wild boars and peacocks, the government pays them Rs. 8000 per acre.

Ms. Sumalata, from Telangana, said she is from a banjara community and is representing her millet sister network of 100 women from her village. They all learnt how to make millet recipes and have taught 200 more women in 5 different villages and have organized a biodiversity festival.
Palani Ammal, from Tamil Nadu shared her personal farming experience of convincing her family to cultivate and consume millets through biodiverse farming methods and successfully cultivating 25 types of crops including millets. Earlier, she said, people used to consume millets but somewhere along, they gave up on them; she has a keen interest in reviving millets. She convinced her family to cultivate millets in biodiverse farming. She explained that the whole problem with introducing millet into the PDS is that it is not dependable enough. They are running millet canteens in schools on a small scale to introduce children to millet. They also hope the children will bring in the parents as consumers. She concluded by informing the gathering that they run a program about millet cultivation and consumption on Makkai TV from 6 to 6.30 PM every Sunday.

Ms. Jayamala, from Karnataka represented a group of 200 millet sisters, who run 2 seed banks, and supply Sorghum and Ragi for PDS and cultivate 9 types of millets, 4 oil seeds and several types of pulses in 400 acres. She said that her millet sisters are in need of millet dehusking machines that will improve productivity.

Conclusion: Ms Sheelu wrapped up the session by summarising the experiences of the Millet sisters from 9 states. She was glad that they have taken up the millet revival challenge.
**Future steps:**

**Telangana- DDS** has 2 challenges to tackle

1. The government is giving cash support of Rs. 8000/- per acre to the farmers. This definitely assures that they have the support, but there should be guidelines on how to use the money to promote a diverse kind of farming.

2. The government has to promote the ideas behind the awards and not just blindly give out cash.

**Masru** has 2 challenges to tackle

1. The Government should encourage marginal farmers on par with big farmers.

2. The Government should raise the MSP for millets

**Andhra Pradesh:** The Government is encouraging cash crops but not millets. There is no compensation for millet crop damage. To promote millet cultivation at every level, millet should be included in PDS and ICDS in all the districts. Millet farmers are facing many challenges and are working in a collective way to address them. “We are mobilizing 2 local banks to provide financial support and crop loans to millet farmers. Our government is supporting big farmers and not marginal farmers.”

**Orissa:** Sumani Jhodia from AGRAGAMEE, a network of 1000 women from 87 SHG. said that in the past, people cultivated millets, but now they are cultivating rice which was introduced by the agricultural department. Now, due to the use of pesticides and the impact of climate change, people are suffering from different health problems. She said that cultivation of millets protects soils and our climate. She mentioned that she also got 5 awards from the President and the state Chief Minister.

**Tamil Nadu:** As the neighbours are not cultivating millets and the fields are surrounded by cash crops, the birds are attacking millet crops for their food. The Government is not extending any support to the millet farmers. They are looking for some support for irrigation like boreswells so that they can cultivate vegetables along with millets.

**Himachal Pradesh:** The biggest challenge is of the birds eating up the millets. The other big challenge is the lack of government support for millet cultivation and help in expanding vegetable cultivation.
Meghalaya: Youth groups known as cooperative societies were formed to promote millet cultivation, where they make millet cakes and biscuits which are sold in local markets.

Nagaland: Faulty processing machines are not being fixed, making millet processing very hard. Millet festivals have to be revived and millet-based knowledge should be passed on. The Government subsidies and recognition for millets should be on par with other cash crops. Bird attacks are also a challenge.

Ms. Michella G. Momin from West Garo Hills Meghalaya said the biggest problem is climate change. Too much rainfall destroys the crops.

**Drafting AIMS declaration**

Ms. Tejaswi shared concerns from across the state. The biggest challenge is mono-culture with cotton in Telangana being a perfect example of the horrors of unsustainable agriculture. A few years ago, cotton in Vikarabad was planted in 308 acres and jowar in 4359. In 2017, cotton has come down to 200 and Jowar/millets to 80 acres and both have gone down due to industries. But in other regions, cotton has completely ousted jowar cultivation. DDS organized a programme to compensate the farmers but realized that that was not the solution and invited the government officials from the agriculture department to understand the situation. Unfortunately, they never understood the situation and encouraged the women farmers to grow millet in monoculture. Farmers said the solution could be through convincing cotton growers to raise millets in a collective way. It was indeed challenging because the government is aggressively promoting cotton with all sorts of incentives, and the cotton companies are coming into the villages and introducing harvesting machines. However, the millet farmers are fighting and conducting awareness campaigns in the valleys and are trying to influence the cotton farmers, explaining the economics behind their initiatives, and are campaigning with the consumers who have responded positively to millet cultivation.

Ms. Akole, from Nagaland, is a millet farmer who was engaged in millet cultivation in the late 1970s with her parents. During those days, half of the year they depended on rice and for the other half, they depended on millet. But in the 1980s things changed and millet cultivation decreased due to a variety of reasons: one being the introduction of a rice mill in the villages providing the communities with an easy processing method. In the 1990s, millet cultivation completely disappeared and the revival only happened after facing the effects of climate change. She believes that collective farming of millets in a bio-diverse fashion is the solution, and she is happy that whole villages are now doing collective farming. She is concerned that the younger generation is not interested in agriculture.
1st Annual Convention of All India Millet Sisters (AIMS) Network

May 23 – 24, 2018

Venue:
ICAR-NEH, Umain, Shillong, Meghalaya

In association with:
Millet Network of India
North East Network
ICAR-NEH, Meghalaya

Programme Schedule

Day 1 – May 23, 2018

09.00 – 10.00  Registration
All sessions compered
by Tejaswi Dantuluri, Communication officer

10.00 – 10.05  Greetings from North East and North East Network
Ms Wekowen Tsuhah (Akole), North East Network, Nagaland

10.05 – 12.30  Session I  Inaugural session

10.05 – 10.10  Song on Millets
Women farmers from Nagaland

10.10 – 10.15  Welcome
Krishnaveni, Convenor, AIMS-Network

10.15 – 10.25  Inauguration by Lighting the Lamp
Millet sisters from different states along with guests

10.25 – 10.35  Introduction to the Convention
PV Satheesh, National Convener, Millet Network of India

10.35 – 10.50  Keynote -1
Millet in North East - Food & Agriculture
Dr. Narendra Prakash, Director, ICAR- NEH, Meghalaya
10.50 – 11.05  
Keynote - 2
North East, Millets & Women
Dr Monisha Behal, CEO, North East Network

11.05 – 11.30  
Launch of AIMS Logo
Shri. P.S Kumar, IAS, Commissioner & Secretary (Agriculture),
Government of Meghalaya along with Millet Sisters from various
sisters in India

11.30 – 12.00  
Honouring Millet Sisters from different states

12.00 – 13.00  
Millet Lunch

13.00 – 15.00  
Session II - Millets: The Current status

13.00 – 14.00  
Experiences from the field
A fish bowl discussion anchored by :
Ms Seno Tsuhah, North East Network

Key Voices:
SABALA, Andhra Pradesh
Lok Vigyan Kendra, Himachal Pradesh
NESFAS, Meghalaya

Other Participants, AIMS Partners and women farmers from
various states

14.00 – 15.00  
Science for millets
Is the push towards Green Revolution model and genetic
engineering?
A fish bowl discussion anchored by : Dr B Suresh Reddy, Associate
Professor, Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Hyderabad

Key voices:
Dr Subhash Babu, Scientist Agronomy, ICAR, Meghalaya
Jayasri Cherukuri, Joint Director, Deccan Development Society

15.00 – 17.00  
Session III - Millets: current concerns
15.00 – 16.00  Sarkari Millets
Will Government Comprehensive Millet Development Programmes kill biodiversity and monoculture millets
A fish bowl discussion anchored by: PV Satheesh, National Convenor, Millet Network of India

Key voices:
SVDS, Andhra Pradesh
Agragaame, Odisha
Dr Jayanta Layak, Scientist, ICAR

16.00 – 17.00  Corporate Capture of Millets
How do we wake up and fight this problem?
A fish bowl discussion anchored by: Ms Latha Jishnu, Senior Journalist, New Delhi

Key voices:
Women’s Collective, Tamil Nadu
Paryavaraniya Vikas Kendra, Gujarat
Ms Samhita Barooah, Freelance Feminist, Guwahati

Day 2: May 24, 2018
09.30 – 09.45 Welcome songs by Millet sisters

09.45 – 10.45 Session IV - Millets: current challenges
Marketing Millets

How do we market millets without damaging its soul?
Fishbowl discussion chaired by K Saraswati, SABALA, Andhra Pradesh

Key voices:
Ahimsa Club, Odisha
Women’s Collective, Tamil Nadu
Deccan Development Society, Telangana

10.45 – 11.00 Millet break
11.00 – 12.00  
**Session V - Some Silver linings**

*Putting Millets into PDS; New winds of change*
Fishbowl discussion chaired by Dr T N Prakash, 
*Chair of Agricultural Prices Commission, Karnataka*

Key voices:
KRRS, Bidar
NIRMAN, Odisha
SVDS, Andhra Pradesh

12.00 - 13.00  
**Millet Lunch**

13.00 – 17.00  
**Session VI - In Conclusion**
*Chair: Sheelu Francis, Womens Collective, Tamil Nadu*

13.00 – 14.00  
**Current Status of AIMS – a state wise report**
SABALA, Andhra Pradesh; Paryavaraninya Vikas Kendra, Gujarat; Lok Vigyan Kendra, Himachal Pradesh; Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha & PJRDS, Karnataka; North East Network, Nagaland; Women's Collective, Tamil Nadu; AGRAGAMEE, Ahinsa Club, Lok shakti & NIRMAN, Odisha; Deccan Development Society, PEACE & PILUPU, Telangana

14.00 – 15.00  
**Our journey so far; what have we accomplished?**

*The Declaration 2016 & After*
Nari Sakti Puraskar by Mogulamma
Our role in realising International Year of Millets

15.00 – 15.15  
**Millet break**

15.15 – 16.15  
**Future steps**
*Where do want to go and how?*
Millet Sisters from all the states

16.15 – 16.55  
**What do we want to say**
*Drafting an AIMS declaration by all participants*
Chair: Seno Tsuah, North East Network

16.55 – 17.00  
**The last words, Jayasri, Joint Director, DDS**
UMIAM DECLARATION OF MILLET SISTERS

from
1st Annual Convention of All India Millet Sisters (AIMS) Network
May 23-24, 2018
Dr D N Borthakur Conference Hall, ICAR-NEH, Umiam,
Shillong, Meghalaya

In association with:
Millet Network of India
North East Network
ICAR-NEH, Meghalaya

Having met at the ICAR-NEH, Umiam, Meghalaya on May 23-24, 2018, along with civil society groups, scientists, activists and environmentalists from 12 states -- Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, & West Bengal and having had an elaborate discussion on MILLETS: Current Concerns and Challenges we the members of the All India Millet Sisters Network have arrived at the following Umiam Declaration of Millet Sisters

1. We demand that the government acknowledge that millets are our heritage crops. Multifaceted in their extraordinary value for providing food, nutrition, fodder, livelihood and ecological security in these climate-stressed times, millets truly stand as a symbol of our resilient agriculture.

2. We insist that the government must offer priority support to millet-based biodiverse agriculture practised by millions of small women farmers who are custodians of India's rich lore of millet farming practices.

PDS must mean millets

3. It is imperative that millets should be the centrepiece of the Government's Public Distribution System (PDS) so that India can escape the ignominy of occupying the 172nd rank among the most malnourished countries in the world.

4. Given the shocking burden of malnutrition among children in India, which is the highest in the world, we urge that the government should give primacy to the use of millet foods in the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS)and Mid-Day-Meal Scheme. This would ensure a healthy new generation.

Multiple support for millet women

5. To support women millet farmers, the government should:
   a) Help women's collectives to set up affordable processing units to reduce the drudgery of millet processing;
   b) Ensure procurement of millets at the MSP fixed by the government.
c) Set up community-based procurement centres that are easily accessed and controlled by women farmers.

d) Include millet farming as a guaranteed MGNREGS work to support employment of women in millet farming.

Just price, insurance and compensation

6. The National Commission on Agricultural Cost and Prices should make a special valuation of millets taking into consideration their nutritional and ecological values and fix the price for these wonder grains.

7. Crop insurance and compensation schemes for crop damage in India have traditionally bypassed millets which is not just an oversight but a serious shortcoming of our policies. Therefore we demand that crop insurance and compensation in the event of crop damage must include all varieties of millets at par with other crops.

8. In the blitz of propaganda enjoyed by favoured crops such as rice and wheat, millets have been systematically sidelined and today occupy the lowest levels of awareness in the minds of our population. It is the duty of the Government to use its public media network to promote awareness of the enormous nutritional value of millets among consumers specially since this is the National Year of Millets. This awareness campaign must include popular programmes on millet recipes.

IIMR, shun GE research

9. We demand support for public research that throws light on the scientific values of our traditional knowledge on millet cultivation particularly held by women.

10. We demand that the Indian Institute of Millet Research should not waste its time and public money by hobnobbing with research on genetic modification of millet crops and instead focus on the enormous wealth of women's knowledge on millet ecology which is a great national asset.

11. We call upon all agricultural research institutions to work on the economic valuation of millet ecology in their academic and research programmes.

Go beyond awards

12. We greatly appreciate the fact that the government has recognised the signal contribution of peasant women farmers and has been bestowing honours on them in recent years. We would be more honoured if the government does not stoop just at these awards and instead implements our demands listed here to ensure a more secure future for us and the nation at large.

Endorsements from:

1. Ms Saraswati, SABALA, Vizianagaram District, Andhra Pradesh
2. Ms Suseela, Millet Sister, Mamidipalem, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh
3. Ms K. Narayanamma, Millet Sister, Kothavalasa, Vizianagaram, Andhra Pradesh
4. Ms I. Maheswari, Millet Sister, Pedabayalu, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh
5. Ms T. Kamala Kumari, Millet Sister, Vepada, Vizianagaram, Andhra Pradesh
6. Mr Jogi Naidu, SVDS, Anakapally, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh
7. Dr Monisha Behal, North East Network, Guwahati, Assam
8. Ms Moon Bora, North East Network, Assam
9. Ms Usha Lakra, North East Network, Assam
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization/Role</th>
<th>District/State</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Ms Anurita Pathak</td>
<td>North East Network, Assam</td>
<td>Assam</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Mr Ritupon Gogoi</td>
<td>FST, Guwahati, Assam</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Mr Tushar Pancholi</td>
<td>Paryavaran Vikas Kendra, Gujarat</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Mr Anil Barot</td>
<td>Millet Sister Rajkot, Gujarat</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Ms Nita Boart</td>
<td>Millet Sister, Rajkot, Gujarat</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Ms Khatija Akbar</td>
<td>Millet Sister, Rajkot, Gujarat</td>
<td>Rajkot, Gujarat</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>Mr Nekram</td>
<td>LVK, Nanj Teh, Kassag, Himachal Pradesh</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>Ms Ramkali</td>
<td>Millet Sister, Nanj Teh, Kassag, Himachal Pradesh</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Ms Shivamma</td>
<td>Millet Sister, Yadgir district, Karnataka</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>Ms Jayamala</td>
<td>Millet Sister, Yadgir district, Karnataka</td>
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<td>Mr Yadaiah</td>
<td>PRAG JOTHI, Yadgir district, Karnataka</td>
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<td>21.</td>
<td>Ms Mary</td>
<td>Millet Sister, KRRS, Bidar, Karnataka</td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>Ms Gopamma</td>
<td>Millet Sister KRRS, Bidar, Karnataka</td>
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<td>23.</td>
<td>Mr Prabudas</td>
<td>KRRS, Bidar, Karnataka</td>
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<td>Mr Prakash</td>
<td>KRRS, Bidar, Karnataka</td>
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<td>25.</td>
<td>Dr T N Prakash</td>
<td>Chair, Agriculture Price Commission</td>
<td>Bangalore, Karnataka</td>
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<td>26.</td>
<td>Ms Sheelu Francis</td>
<td>Women's Collective, Chennai, Tamil Nadu</td>
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<td>27.</td>
<td>Ms Palaniammal</td>
<td>Millet Sister, Koltapatti, Tutucoran, Tamil Nadu</td>
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<td>28.</td>
<td>Dr Suresh Reddy</td>
<td>Associate Professor, Centre for Economics &amp; Social Studies, Hyderabad, Telangana</td>
<td>Karnataka</td>
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<td>29.</td>
<td>Ms Mogulamma</td>
<td>Millet Sister, Potpalli Village, Sangareddy District, Telangana</td>
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<td>30.</td>
<td>Ms Krishna Veni</td>
<td>All India Millet Sisters Network</td>
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<td>31.</td>
<td>Ms Rojamma</td>
<td>Deccan Development Society</td>
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<td>32.</td>
<td>Ms Mamatha</td>
<td>Sangham Organics, Pastapur</td>
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<td>Ms Tejasvi</td>
<td>Deccan Development Society</td>
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<td>34.</td>
<td>Ms Reenamma</td>
<td>Millet Sister &amp; Community Film Maker</td>
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<td>Ms Ranamma</td>
<td>Millet Sister &amp; Community Film Maker</td>
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<td>36.</td>
<td>Ms Genaral Narasamma</td>
<td>Sangham Radio, Machnoor</td>
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<td>37.</td>
<td>Ms Jayasri</td>
<td>Deccan Development Society</td>
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<td>38.</td>
<td>Mr PV Satheesh</td>
<td>National Convenor, Millet Network of India, Hyderabad, Telangana</td>
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<td>39.</td>
<td>Ms Chinna Narasamma</td>
<td>Millet Sister, Community Media Trust</td>
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<td>Ms Mayuri</td>
<td>Film Maker, Pastapur</td>
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<td>Mr Janardhan</td>
<td>PILUPU, Bhongir, Telangana</td>
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<td>Ms Gopamma</td>
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<td>Ms Masru</td>
<td>Millet Sister, Bhongir</td>
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<td>Ms Sumalatha</td>
<td>Millet Sister, KK Thanda, Bhongir</td>
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<td>Mr Nimmaiah</td>
<td>PEACE, Bhongir, Telangana</td>
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<td>Mr Shiba Prasad</td>
<td>Ahinsa Club, Odisha</td>
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<td>47.</td>
<td>Ms Anitha Sahu</td>
<td>Millet Sister, Ahinsa Club</td>
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<td>Ms Betikhai Bariha</td>
<td>Millet Sister, Ahinsa Club</td>
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<td>49.</td>
<td>Ms Trisha Paladhi</td>
<td>AGRAGAMEE, Odisha</td>
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<td>Ms Sumani Jhodia</td>
<td>Millet Sister, Odisha</td>
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51. Ms Sushila Majhi, Millet Sister, Odisha
52. Mr Narayan Barik, NIRMAN, Odisha
53. Ms Paramiti Mahji, Millet Sister, Community Leader, Kandhamal, Odisha
54. Ms Sramyuli Mallick, Community Leader, Kandhamal, Odisha
55. Mr Aman Singh, KRAPAVIS, Rajasthan
56. Ms Latha Jishnu, Senior Freelance Journalist, New Delhi
57. Ms Gina Phanbuh, North East Network, Meghalaya
58. Dr L Devarani, Asst Prof., Central Agricultural University, Meghalaya
59. Dr Bijoya Bhattacharjee, HOD, Center for Biotech.
60. Dr Subhash Babu, Scientist(Agro), ICAR – NEH, Umiam, Meghalaya
61. Dr Bagish Kumar, Scientist -social science, ICAR- NEH, Umiam, Meghalaya
62. Mr Habandajop Lyngdoh, SURE, Jowai
63. Mr Raj Parsah, SURE, Jowai
64. Mr Dharmen G. Momin, Community leader, Sasatgre, West Garohills, Meghalaya
65. Ms Amlin G. Momin, Farmer, Sasatgre, West Garohills, Meghalaya
66. Ms Mitjilima G. Momin, Farmer, Sasatgre, West Garohills, Meghalaya
67. Dr Vishram Ram, Professor, CPGS, Central Agriculture university, Umiam, Meghalaya
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69. Mr Jankpreeet, NESFAS Meghalaya
70. Ms Binasi Mary, Farmer, East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya
71. Ms Jesenta Rani, Farmer, East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya
72. Ms Mesilhi-u, Millet Sister, Nagaland
73. Ms Neipelhi-u, Millet Sister, Nagaland
74. Ms Dikhwetso-u, Millet Sister, Nagaland
75. Ms Songulo-u, Millet Sister, Nagaland
76. Ms Ghaluta, Millet Sister, Nagaland
77. Ms Lupisii, Millet Sister, Nagaland
78. Ms Vepralu Sapu, Millet Sister, Nagaland
79. Ms Thuyevolusapu, Millet Sister, Nagaland
80. Mr Stephen, North East Network, Nagaland
81. Ms BK Chettri, KKKS, Kalimpong, West Bengal
82. Ms Pavitra Sherpa, Farmer, Kalimpong, West Bengal
83. Ms Manjari Subba, Farmer, Kalimpong, West Bengal
84. Ms Samhita Barooah, Freelance Journalist, Guwahati
85. Ms Dolly Wotsa, North East Network, Nagaland
86. Ms Neitshopeu Thopi, North East Network, Nagaland
87. Ms Wekoweu Tsubah, North East Network, Nagaland
88. Ms Seno Tsubah, North East Network, Nagaland