

Community Charter on Climate Crisis from Small and Marginal Rainfed Farmers of Deccan Region, Andhra Pradesh

We the rainfed farmers from Deccan region, Zaheerabad, Medak District, Andhra Pradesh have sat together for 7 days and used PRA methods to discuss the climate change and its effects on our agriculture and livelihoods.

Our strengths

Our farming is very unique, with 3-10 varieties of crops cultivated in our small and marginal lands. Our farming system is being practiced from centuries; having learned and passed on from one generation to another, this knowledge is our precious treasure..

Our landraces and farming practices can withstand high temperatures and erratic/low rainfall. For this reason, if our traditional farming practices are allowed to continue, we are confident to survive and withstand any climate challenges.

Through our discussion we rediscovered that:

1. On our marginal red laterite soils and black soils, for some centuries together, we have been cultivating mixed crops of Sorghum, Pearl millet, Foxtail millet, Little millet, Finger millet, Pigeonpea, Field beans, Cowpeas, Horse gram, Niger and such other similar crops which are more than 80 in their variety.
2. We know that every crop variety that we cultivate has rich nutritional qualities. These crops are a vital part of our food culture, and having been nurtured on this food for centuries, the old and the young of our community are healthy and capable of hard manual work.
3. Our food habits have enabled us to survive in times of drought and scarcities. They keep us warm in winter and cool in summer.
4. In the course of our 7 day deliberations on the impacts of climate crisis, we discussed the impending threats such as: (a) rise in temperatures; (b) erratic rainfall pattern and; (c) malnutrition. We, however, reaffirmed our faith that within our farming system there are embedded solutions to these multiple climate crises.
5. The treasure of community knowledge and the strength of our bio-diverse farming system make us confident in our hearts that we can sustain any climate crisis.

6. On not only our farmlands where the diverse crops are cultivated, but even in our village thickets, small forests and common grazing lands, we grow a wealth of shrubs, herbs and trees without much need for water. These bear a diversity of greens, plant medicines and fruits such as *seetaphal*, *chitmiti*, *balusuru*, *allanerede*, *morri*, *illantha*, *eetha*, *kaki*, *rani*, *madie*, *pulchari*, and many more treasures, available to us without costing us a penny.
7. We practice farming with organic manures, the farmyard manure is a storehouse of innumerable seeds of uncultivated plants that give us green leafy vegetables.
8. The above two practices are vital and inseparable parts of our farming system, which provides us abundant nutrition without any expense.
9. Another important component of our farming system is the livestock. These provide us not only milk and curds for our household use, but help us to plough, and to manure the lands. Our local livestock, apart from being very vital for our agriculture also makes the system resilient in times of scarcity and drought.
10. There is no use of chemical fertilizers or pesticides in our farming. Where these chemicals are used, we are aware that they harm the environment. Contrary to this, our farming system nurtures and allows the ecosystem to flourish.
11. As we have said earlier, in our farming system a range of mixed cropping patterns are in use, our soils are fertilized with farm yard manure, green manure and vermicompost. In this manner, we are told by others who visit us that our practices add a lot of carbon to the soil and thereby we play an important role in combating the climate change,
12. Ignoring a dynamic and ecologically sound farming system such as ours and to succumbing to the propaganda that GM crops will combat climate crisis, we are in for big trouble and we want to draw your attention to this.

Our demands

Having identified the strengths and opportunities of our farming system detailed above, the following are our demands to the Government of Andhra Pradesh, the Government of India and the international community.

1. Consider our farming as a ‘holistic system’ in recognition of its potential in combating the climate challenges. There needs to be a rethinking by the governments looking at agriculture as a mere profit-making system.

2. In taking forward our sustainable farming system the responsibilities lie not only with us but with the government as well. There are lakhs of crores in rupees provided as subsidies to farmers who use chemical fertilizers, pesticides and canal water. It is the ethical and moral obligation of the government to stop supporting farming that is ecologically detrimental and to encourage a farming system such as ours.
3. By our farming system, we save water resources, provide nutritious food, make the environment clean and healthy, produce quality fodder for livestock, bind carbon into the soils and plants. In recognition of these qualities of our farming system, we demand that ecological farmers like us be given an honorarium of Rs 2000/- per acre every cropping season This will preserve and encourage our unique farming system.
4. We want to draw your attention to the fact that our farming does not use a single drop of water. In comparison to canal irrigated paddy farmers, we save millions of liters of water. We hope this is recognized!.

In view of the qualities of our farming system discussed above, we are confident that we can face the effects of climate crisis. Across the country, just like us, there are several farming communities practicing sustainable farming; all of us together are confident that we will effectively face the climate crisis and sustain.

5. Our food system, as said earlier, consists not only of crops, but fruits, greens and vegetables obtained from the farmlands and commons; do not privatize these common resources as commodities for profit but ensure the access and control of these resources to the community.

The following are the action points to achieve the above:

- a. The fruit trees growing on the grazing lands, village commons and along the roads should not be given away to private contractors to harvest and sell the fruit in the market; instead, these should be in our communities' control with people free to access and enjoy the fruits. There should be support and encouragement for raising a variety of such trees along the farm bunds and village commons.
- b. The government afforestation and plantation works in the villages, which are presently given to private contractors and companies, should be handed over to the community instead. We should be supported to raise a diverse variety of trees useful as food, fuel and fodder for consumption by the community rather than growing profit making monocultural plantations.

- c. In promoting horticultural gardens, the government is currently encouraging the varieties which demand intensive irrigation and use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides; instead, promote local fruit tree varieties which thrive better in the local environment.

Rather than protecting and promoting a wide range of local tree varieties on the commons and forests, the government is going for massive plantations of *Jatropha*. This attempt to produce Biofuels for cars in lieu of producing food for humans is an act of betrayal against the poor communities and the environment.

- d. Rather than encouraging the exotic breeds of livestock which are not tolerant to the local weather conditions, we demand the identification, breeding and promoting of local breeds that are capable of thriving well in the local conditions, requiring comparatively less fodder and water than the exotic breeds promoted by the government animal husbandry programmes.

The way we have trust and confidence in our farmlands, crops, trees and livestock, in the same manner we expect the government to have an undeterred confidence and trust in our knowledge and capabilities, so that we can together combat the climate crisis.

We hope and trust that the governments and global communities will have the wisdom to see the virtues of our farming and knowledge system, and tap into its strengths in fending off the climate crisis, instead of sucking up to the pathologies of power practiced by the profit-oriented agencies the world over.

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