



**MILLET NETWORK OF INDIA**

**DECCAN DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY**

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## PRESS RELEASE

May 22, 2010

On a day when the entire world celebrates the **International Biodiversity Day**, Andhra Pradesh will lead India through a cluster of local communities from Medak District who are staking their claim to be India's **Agro Biodiversity Heritage Sites [BHS]**, the **firstever** such claim anywhere in the country. These communities from the Zaheerabad region of Medak, lead by the Deccan Development Society, will thereby be demanding state recognition of a fantastic biodiversity conservation that they have been engaged in for generations.

The Andhra Pradesh State Biodiversity Board which has a significant role to play in the declaration of the BHS, has responded very positively for this application. Once their procedures are completed with the State Government, a positive decision is likely to come out within a few months.

The declaration of the BHS is a significant recognition for the women and men farmers of Deccan Andhra for their untiring belief in the conservation of biodiversity of their farms and food cultures. BHS can go a long way in restricting any activities that would come in the way of continuing this phenomenal practice. This could be in the form of restricting destructive industrialisation or agricultural interventions that stand antithetical to agrobiodiverse farming. The notification can also recognise the leading role that communities can play in the decision making and management of the BHS in the future.

Biodiversity is the most important of the global strategy to save the planet from being destroyed by the callous environmental devastation that the **development** process has brought in. Through their farming the communities such as the DDS groups in Zaheerabad have not only helped retain the environmental balance but also have given us safe food, nutrition and ecological security. Their contribution on the farm front is no less than that of India's defence forces on our national frontiers. Both of them offer us safety without which our lives and our environment would stand in great danger.

There are three types of biodiversity: Forest diversity, animal diversity, marine diversity and agricultural diversity. While forest, animal and marine diversity are mainly the creations of nature, agro biodiversity has been mainly nurtured by humans. It is in this context that the work of the Deccan Development Society and the communities that it is partnering have got international acclaim as one of the most exceptional global efforts at in situ conservation of agrobiodiversity.

When most farming in India has been monocultured [growing a single crop] and chemilised [use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides] the farmers of the Zaheerabad region, particular very small farmers, dalits and women have kept away from this dangerous trend. They grow crops ranging from six crops per acre to an amazing 25 crops per acre. Thousands of women have been saving and using between 15 and 80 different varieties of seeds in their personal and community seed banks. There are hardly such living examples of the preservation and dynamic use of diversity.

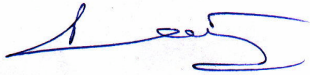
The major elements in the agrobiodiversity of these communities are composed of millet based cropping system. The crops they grow include a range of millets such as sorghum [jowar, jonna], pearl millet [bajra, sajjja], foxtail millet [kangni, korra], little millet [kutki, sama], proso millet [cheena, varagu], barnyard millet [sanwa, kodisama]; many pulses including redgram [kandulu], green gram [pesari], blackgram [minumu], bengal gram [chanagalu]; many oilseeds such as sesame [nuvvulu], niger [gaddinuvvulu], hibiscus [gongura or pundlu]. Besides their way of farming generates hundreds of varieties of **uncultivated foods**, highly nutritious greens that generate on their own, without even having to plant them. This amazing diversity on their fields and the multiple securities [food security, fodder security, health security, nutritional security, livelihood security and ecological security] that they have been able to generate through their farming has given rise to the **Millet Concept**, a concept that recognizes that millets are not just a cropping system but a profound agricultural concept.

That this concept has been given birth to and nurtured by the very small and marginal farmers, mainly dalits and women who live and work in some of the harshest agroclimatic environments in the country, is another absorbing dimension that will not escape our attention. It proves that our food and farming futures need not lie with high tech, expensive agricultural science but in the profound understanding of nature and its biodiversity that has been the heritage of our dryland farmers.

Upholding and celebrating this concept is the **Millet Network of India [MINI]**, a national network of which the DDS is the initiator and convener. MINI is spread over 17 states spread over India with the active participation of 145 institutions and individuals, composed of farmers, scientists, nutritionists, grassroots activists and environmentalists working with an explicit goal to address both the food and farming issues which are inextricably linked with each other. MINI is currently engaged in an intense nationwide campaign for the recognition and endorsement of the vision and knowledge behind this Millet Concept as it heralds an inbuilt ecological advantage in the food and farming lives of the DDS communities. Growing millet crops and integrating it with diverse oilseeds, pulses etc has allowed the farmers to cultivate with less water, without chemicals, and make their farming more resistant to the vagaries of climate change. Thus their farming has become a **New Age answer to a New Age crisis called climate change**.

MINI's efforts have also included regularly highlighted the issue of millets before the Prime Minister, Finance Minister and other Parliamentarians. With thousands of endorsements for their campaign from the members of Indian Parliament, state legislatures, scientists, nutritionists, farmers, consumers and environmentalists. MINI has offered specific suggestions on the inclusion of millets into the National Food Security Act before it is introduced in the Parliament. MINI now has branches in South Indian states, in Orissa, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and North East. MINI members are regularly travelling across the country to organise state, regional and local meetings to push forward the importance of millets to all sectors of society and in every given avenue.

On the International Day of Biodiversity, 2010, DDS Women Sanghams along with the members of Millet Network of India have raised a Call for Participation in the MILLET CONCEPT. This call goes out to children and adults; farmers and consumers; writers and readers; government and the entire civil society to take a visionary step towards securing our own future. By bringing millets into our lives we can address our goals of food, nutrition, health, ecological and climate securities and contribute to the efforts of the countless number of farmers who have been giving us the safety of millets for generations. It is only a collective that can save the future of millets in India and in the world. Through this effort we will also be saving the future of India and the world. At the same time it can keep biodiversity alive on our farms and food in our lives.



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