



MILLET NETWORK OF INDIA

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26th October 2010

Dear Members of the NAC,

It is with great interest that we have read the gist of decisions during the National Advisory Council (NAC) meeting on 23rd October 2010. As you recall, we, the members of Millet Network of India (MINI) have written to you in your individual capacities as well as members of the NAC few times before seeking your support for millet based food sovereignty in India. We do hope you have received these submissions and have had an opportunity to consider the content. For your reference we are attaching the same for your reference.

Core to our submissions have been two critical principles deeply interconnected with each other. First the need to ensure food sovereignty of the nation along with access to food. What this implies is that both farmers and consumers need to have the independence to continue to their farming cultures without external pressures and thrust. As members of the NAC, we are aware that you would be striving for India to be sovereign state, where rights and duties of the people of the country can be ensured as per the prerequisites of the Constitution of the country. We believe that the right to grow one's food or have continued and uninterrupted access to it, needs to be the central tenet of any such sovereign decision.

In our submissions we have brought to your attention, that millets like jowar, bajra, ragi and many other minor millets have within them several elements to ensure this food sovereignty. They bring with them multiple securities of food, farming, fodder, nutrition, water, ecological and also climate change. It is therefore we have argued time and again, that Public Distribution System (PDS) and other such food schemes need to centrally incorporate the revival of millets in their agenda. There are many parts of the country where millets continue to be staple food and rice or wheat based systems not part of the cultural milieu. In some other parts of the country, it is the policy disconnect that has led to its decline, but many farmers and their fellow villagers are ready to revive into their food system, with adequate government support for seed to pricing.

It is encouraging to note that the NAC does acknowledge the introduction of millets into the food distribution systems, but it clearly state that millets would need to be given preference in areas where it is the locally appropriate food. This is a clear recommendation of the NAC on the National Food Security legislation. Our experience has been that in last several decades post independence, rice and wheat based systems have been systemically promoted at the cost of millet based food system. Even in the current recommendations, there are no mechanisms to reverse this trend, and millets are being added on to the plate of grains being offered. With the world realising the importance of millets for its nutritional content, a far more vehement articulation from the NAC would certainly be a pioneering step. This can be done so along with encouraging millet based farming and awarding those farmers who have kept alive this holistic system of farming.

The NAC recommendations are also not dealing with the addressing the MSP for millets, especially

minor millets. In many states like Andhra Pradesh, while jowar and bajra are receiving a MSP, the minor millets which are far more nutritious and are locally available in people's farms are not being encouraged at all. Such a discrimination not just needs to be rectified immediately, but steps need to be taken to restore the earlier impacts. In our submissions earlier we have suggested some specific mechanisms through this could happen.

The members of the NAC are fully aware of the existing lacunae of the proposed recommendation, we might have been discussed by the members during the meeting. We are hereby attaching our comments on the earlier draft of the Food Security Bill, and request you to once again consider the amendments to the proposed law. We believe that without the significant elements of food for all along with an encouragement of local production, consumption and distribution, the efforts to ensure food security for all deserving homes will not be achieved.

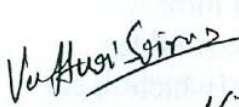
We once again urge the NAC to take a pioneering and visionary position in incorporating the principle of food sovereignty into the proposed law before it is introduced in the Parliament. Such a principle would need to have millet based farming systems to its core with wheat and rice to supplement the diet and ensure gaps of availability, till such time millets are revived to becoming an unquestioned food system in both rural and urban lives.

We once again request you to take on board our suggestions before the working group finalises the NAC recommendations, ensuring food for all, and not the gradual methodology as it currently proposed. We would be happy to make a presentation of our contention and have a detailed discussion with you, if given an opportunity.

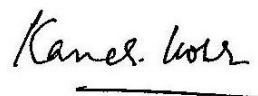
Sincerely,



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National Convenor



Vatturi Srinivas
National Coordinator



Kanchi Kohli
Campaign Advisor

CC: Members of Expert Group of Ministers on the Food Security Bill
Biraj Patnaik, Principal Advisor to Right to Food Commissioners
Abhijit Sen, Member, Planning Commission