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Millet: The Miracle Grain

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Seno Tsuhah, North East Network and Liangsi Niumai John, C- Cerp

Our local millet has answers for climate change: Call for participation in the millet dream on International

Biodiversity Day, 2010

1. Millets like small millet or foxtail millet, Sorghum, represent a biodiverse farming system, which are cultivated along with several other pulses, oilseeds and spice crops.

2. Millets are C4 carbon fixing crops and are critical to tackle climate crisis.

3. Millets also have answers to control diabetes and other ailments, they are highly nutritious.

4. In the year 2007-08, in the state of Nagaland, 0.010 Lakh ha under Sorghum and 0.250 Lakh ha under Small millets such as (Foxtail millet, Little millet, Jobs tears)

5. The AREA under biodiverse millet farming is decreasing over the last 60 years in the state Nagaland lost to the tune of 1000 ha under Sorghum and 10, 000 ha under Small millets.

6. Honourable Member of Parliament, Shri C.M Chang has already endorsed his commitment for millets.

'Millet - The Miracle Grain' occupies an important place in the food culture and ritual of Nagas, sown in February/March and harvested in June/July. Foxtail millet or "Ethsübe" known in Kuzhami Chakhesang dialect, foxtail, job tears, sticky millet as known tathiu, tasipum, Gaidialiu respectively in Liangmai dialect, Foxtail millet and job tears known as Osiitho and Oshiitho respectively in Mao dialect were indigenous food grains in ancient times. Sorghum bicolor or "Tenakhru" is part of our rich crop diversity which is widely grown in the jhum fields. It is also known as poor man's crop because it is used as staple food when rice becomes scarce for marginalized families. Millet grains are used as drinks, porridge, snacks and other supplementary food. Besides its importance in the indigenous diet, cultivation of Millet occupies a significant place in the cultural calendar of Kuzhami Chakhesang community. "Ethsünye" or Millet Festival is celebrated after the Millet harvest in July. In olden days millet is cultivated in a separate plot of land. In the past before sowing the millet grains, a ritual known as 'Tathiu Linson' is performed in the month of February among the Liangmai Nagas especially in Nchangram Village. Liangmai tribes used Millet drinks during a ritual or festivals which are offered especially to the poor relatives as a special drink. Such practice has declined. Unfortunately such practice is almost forgotten. There has been a steep decline in cultivation of Millets owing to new forces of globalization and ecological imbalance.

Millet grains like sorghum, bajra, jobs tears and many other types of millets have been core to India's food and farming culture. In their cultivation practices, millets represent a unique



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biodiverse farming system. Farming communities in the state have traditionally integrated millet crops with several other oilseeds and pulses to enrich the soils and also the final produce. Such multiple cropping strengthens six critical securities: of food, fodder, health, nutrition, water and ecological. Today, millets are high on charts of nutritionists and medical practitioners for the various cures for diabetics and other ailments that the composition of grains is able to offer. Millets are our very own carbon fixing C4 crops. As the 'Climate Crisis' intensifies, it is likely that rice and wheat will become unviable as food security crops. With the projected increase of 2 degree Celsius in temperature in the near future, wheat will disappear from the farming scene. Rice varieties which need standing water for their cultivation are the most dangerous emitters of methane, a green-house gas; as such, farming rice on the present scale will be impossible in the near future! In such a scenario, millets will be the saviour or our food and farming systems.

In Nagaland the total land under millet cultivation is 0.260 lakh hectares. This amounts to only 1.67 percent of the total land under cultivation in the state. With more and more area going under uses other than agriculture, the future of millet crops seem to be in deep danger. Moreover our current agricultural policy of the state does not acknowledge the importance of millet cultivation.

In this scenario, the North East Network (NEN), Chizami village and Care-Centre for Environment and Rural Poor (C-Cerp) Dimapur has come forward to consistently work towards building a policy agenda for millets, so that more and more farmers find it viable to continue millet cultivation or revive it. In Nagaland, the lone member of Lok Sabha, Shri. C.M. Chang has endorsed his support for the revival and survival of Millet based Food and farming systems.

The work by NEN and C-Cerp is being done as part of the national level community dedicated to the cause of Millets. The Millet Network of India (MINI), is a network of 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.

This fast growing network has over the last two years taken on various policy advocacy tasks along with local farm level hands on promotion of biodiverse cultivation of millets. Dorli Village in Vidarbha which had, in sheer desperation, put itself up for sale, which Mr Rahul Gandhi had visited two years ago in his numerous healing missions across India, last year moved away from cotton and started growing millet through the initiative of MINI. MINI's efforts have also included regularly highlighted the issue of millets before the Prime Minister, Finance Minister and other Parliamentarian. MINI has also given specific suggestions on the inclusion of millets into the draft National Food Security Act before it is introduced in the Parliament. MINI members are regularly traveling 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 Biodiveristy, 2010, the Millet Network of India and all its partners raise a Call for Participation 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 security, nutrition, health and contribute to the efforts of the countless number of farmers who have been giving us millets for generations. It is only a collective that can save the future of

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