

Seminar on
**Advancing Conservation, Cultivation and
Consumption of Small Millets for
Ensuring Food Security**

September 16, 2011



Madurai Symposium 2011

September 14-18, 2011

Background

India has the largest number of undernourished persons in the world (Ziegler 2006); the majority of them are among scheduled caste and tribes living in rainfed regions that are weakly integrated with public infrastructure and markets (Farrington and Saxena 2002). Cereals provide the cheapest source of calories in people's diet, but unfortunately the Indian green revolution focused only on two major cereals namely wheat and rice. Not only research, but also the support for production and consumption through Public Distribution System (PDS) were biased towards these two major food crops. While as a nation, we were able to achieve food security of large proportion of the population, over emphasis on these crops has resulted in intake of imbalanced diet by large portion of the population, leading to nutritional deficiencies and health issues like Anemia.

More importantly, it has resulted in neglect of significant number of small rainfed farmers engaged in cultivation of various small millets and associated pulse and oilseed crops, mainly belonging to scheduled and tribal communities, by the State. This has led to reduction in conservation, cultivation and consumption of these crops. The total cultivated area for small millets has declined by more than 40 per cent as compared to the area allocated at the beginning of the green revolution in 1967. The overall consumption of these coarse grains has declined to almost half in last 50 years. Along with decline in small millet based cropping systems, rich biodiversity of these rainfed regions are also declining very fast, in terms of crop and varietal diversity, thereby endangering the future food security. Even in regions where there is significant area under cultivation of small millets, their consumption has come down drastically and the cultivation-consumption link has broken



down. Major reasons cited are difficulties in processing and distribution of rice through PDS, either free or at very low price.

Several studies have highlighted the excellent medicinal and nutritional qualities of these small millets and associated crops in terms of minerals, crude fibre and iron. So advancing conservation and cultivation of these crops in the regions where they are cultivated and the advancing consumption across the country can be an important part of the solutions for enhancing the dietary diversity and for addressing the current nutritional issues plaguing the country. Given the fact that these crops are highly resilient to impact of climate change is an added advantage. In this juncture, a seminar is organised as part of Madurai Symposium 2011, on advancing conservation, cultivation and consumption of small millets and associated crops.

Objective

To showcase the promising initiatives taken by various development actors for advancing conservation, cultivation and consumption of small millets and associated crops.

Participants

Around fifty people from NGOs, research and academic institutions, Government departments, farmers and other stakeholders like entrepreneurs involved in millet processing and marketing will participate in the seminar.

Indicative Program schedule

10.00AM:	Prayer and welcome
10.15AM:	Purpose and background of the seminar
10.30AM:	Lead paper presentation
11.00AM:	Tea break
11.15AM:	Paper presentations on advances in conservation and improvement of small millet varieties
12.15PM:	Paper presentations on advances in cultivation of small millets
01.30- 2.30 PM:	Lunch break
03.00PM:	Paper presentations on advances in consumption of small millets
04.00PM:	Experience sharing and discussion
05.00PM:	Concluding remarks

Place: Thamukkam Grounds, Madurai, Tamil Nadu.

Date: 16.09.2011, Friday

Expected Outcomes

- Appreciation of the role of small millets in addressing food and nutrition security
- Appreciation of promising initiatives for advancing conservation, cultivation and consumption of small millets and associated crops.
- Identification of strategies and modalities for up-scaling and for creating conducive environment for the identified initiatives.



About Rainfed Farming Development Program

The 'Rainfed Farming Development' theme, initiated by DHAN Foundation in 2002, graduated into a program in 2010. In the experimentation phase, various initiatives were taken up in two locations falling in different soil and agro-climatic conditions namely, black soil based Tirumangalam of Madurai district receiving major part of its rainfall in North East Monsoon and red soil based Nattarampalli of Vellore district receiving bimodal rainfall both in South West and North East Monsoons. The learning of the first five years was consolidated to evolve a program framework for rainfed farming development. The Rainfed Farming Development Program (RFDP) works with the shared vision of “making rainfed farming as a viable livelihood” and with specific goals of Food and Nutrition security, Income security and Ecological security. The broad strategy of RFDP is “enhancing viability of rainfed farming livelihoods through integrated and critical demand based interventions, depending on the context”. As on today, RFDP is working in six states namely Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa and Jharkhand with 13,000 farming families.

“Revalorizing small millets in Rainfed Regions of South Asia (RESMISA)”, an exclusive project focused on advancing conservation, cultivation and consumption of small millets and associated crops is being implemented by RFDP in collaboration with Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, All India Co-ordinated Small Millet Improvement Project of ICAR, WASSAN of Hyderabad, LIBIRD of Nepal, Arthacharya Foundation of Sri Lanka and four Canadian universities namely Canadian Mennonite University, University of Manitoba, McGill University and University of Guelph with the funding support of IDRC and CIDA.



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