Farmers' Convention on

Advancing Governance of Seed Systems

M adurai Symposium 2013

Fostering Development Knowledge

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Seed is the most important input in sustainable crop production. It encapsulates the genetic yield potential of the variety. The main role of other inputs is to create conditions that allow achieving yields as close to the genetic potential of the seed as possible, in other words, maximizing genetic yield potential of the variety or closing the yield gap. It is estimated that the direct contribution of quality seed alone to the total production is about 15 to 20 per cent depending upon the crop and it can be further raised up to 45 per cent with efficient management of other inputs.

Seed supply systems

A seed supply system is a combination of components, processes and their organization, as well as the interactions and support involved in the production and marketing of seeds. It encompasses distinct steps in the entire chain: breeding, multiplication, processing, quality control, certification, storage and distribution.

Two broad types are recognized: formal seed systems and local or informal seed systems (Louise Sperling and H. David Cooper). The formal seed system is "a deliberately constructed system, which includes a chain of activities leading to clear products: certified seeds of verified varieties. The central premise of the formal systems is there is a clear distinction between 'seed' and 'grain.' This distinction is less clear in the local, farmer seed system. A local seed system is basically what the formal seed system is not. Activities tend to be integrated and locally organized, and the local system embraces most of the other ways in which farmers themselves produce, disseminate, and

access seed: directly from their own harvest; through exchange and barter among friends, neighbors and relatives; and through local grain markets.

Evolution of the Seed industry in India

The developments in the seed industry in India, particularly in the last 30 years, are very significant. A major re-structuring of the seed industry by Government of India through the National Seed Project Phase-I (1977-78), Phase-II (1978-79) and Phase-III (1990-1991), was carried out, which strengthened the seed infrastructure that was most needed and relevant around those times. Today seed industry in India encompasses over 500 private seed companies, 24 of them with links to multinational seed companies, and many of them with their own breeding programmes.

Farmers 'control over seeds and governance of seed systems

The process of modernization of agriculture has deskilled the farmers making them passive

consumers of industrial products including seeds. Earlier farmers used seeds saved from their own produce. They have gradually become dependent of seed initially supplied by Government agencies, and later sold by companies. Farmers who were traditional seed keepers and developed agriculture over centuries, had lost the habit of selection and saving seed even in self pollinated crops. This has not only resulted in increased economic and ecological costs but also made farmers lose their control over their resources. This process has led to a monoculture of crops and varieties, production practices and food habits which had seriously affected the resource poor farmers. India which had over 2.0 lakh varieties of rice and had separate lines for cultivation in every ecosystem now gets 85 per cent of its paddy production from varieties with just 10 different backgrounds. Seed was 'community resource' carefully bred, conserved and evolved over thousands of years. Today the technological advances, market manipulations and the changing policies and legal systems have made it a 'commercial proprietary resource'.

Today seed is not adequately available both in quantity and quality. All the public sector institutions, seed corporations and private companies put together do not supply more than 18 per cent of the total seed requirement. In general, the agricultural department has taken the responsibility producing and supplying seeds. Seed Replacement Ratio (SRR) varies from crop to crop; for rice SRR is 17 per cent and for oil seeds, it is per cent. In most of the years seeds are not supplied in time to the farmers. Sometimes, the quality of the seeds also seems to be poor. The private players use this opportunity. The truthful labeling clause under the Seed Act permits companies to sell any seed without certification by the seed certification agency. Fly-by-night seed companies have mushroomed in several parts of the country, taking advantage of seed shortage, and are packing whatever seed they can collect from threshing mills, market yard floors, etc. Most often, seed is supplied by the same dealer who supplies pesticide and fertilizer. The dealer is both the money-lender and buyer of the produce. Farmers who take everything on credit have neither the option of choosing brands or asking for the bill, which is essential in order to claim compensation in case of failure of crop expression.

Several NGOs have already created successful experiences in the area of seed banks in crops cereals, minor millets, oilseeds and pulses at village level. However, such efforts remained smaller for want of support from the governments and lack of response from the farmers at large.

In this back ground, a Farmers' Convention on "Advancing Governance of Seed Systems" is proposed to be organized by the Rainfed Farming

Development Program of DHAN Foundation on 11th September, 2013 in the Madurai Symposium event at Thamukkam Ground, Madurai.

Objectives

- Creating awareness on farmers' rights and roles related to seeds
- Creating awareness on support structures related to seed systems and their roles
- Show casing various ways in which farmers and farmers' organizations can play active role in seed systems
- Identifying and appreciating significant contributors to 'Farmers Governance on Seed Systems'
- Planning for seed systems through farmers' organisations.

Expected Outcome

- Better understanding of the seed systems, various actors involved and their roles.
- Better awareness on how as individual farmers and farmers' organizations can play significant role in governance of seed systems.
- Action plan for seed production and distribution through farmers' organisations.

Participants

Around 200 persons including farmers from different districts of Tamil Nadu, representatives of farmers' federations, scientists from agricultural universities, technical officers from agricultural and horticultural departments, national and international development practitioners, custodian farmers and private seed players are expected to participate in the farmers' convention.

Place: Thamukkam Ground, Madurai

Date: 11th September 2013

Rainfed Farming Development Programme(RFDP)

The 'Rainfed Farming Development Theme', initiated by DHAN Foundation in 2002, has been graduated into a program in 2009-10. 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 July 2013, RFDP works across different agro ecological conditions of six states namely Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa and Jharkhand with 15,650 farming families. RFDP has been implementing various projects like Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP), Convergence of Agricultural Interventions in Maharastra (CAIM), Revalorising Small Millets in Rainfed Regions of South Asia (RESMISA) in collaboration with various mainstream departments, agricultural universities and with development organizations.

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