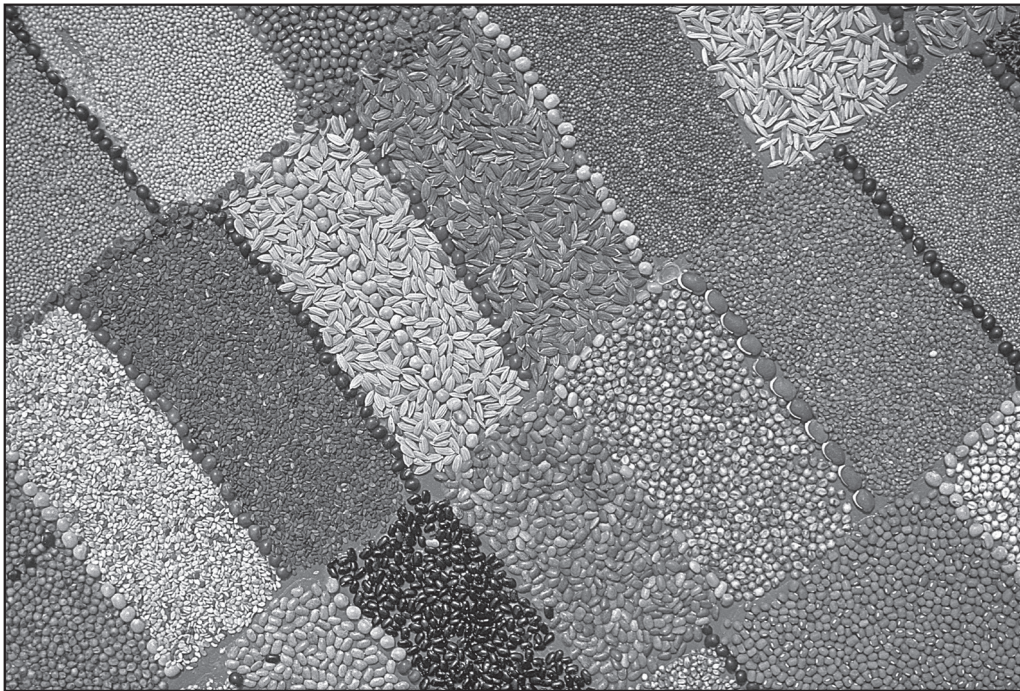


# People in Conservation

*Biodiversity Conservation and Livelihood Security*



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## Opening Words

Food, along with clothing and shelter, being one of the three fundamental needs, it is scandalous how many people have to go without it in our world. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that about 795 million people of the 7300 million people in the world, or one in nine, were suffering from chronic undernourishment in 2014-2016. Almost all the hungry people, 780 million, live in developing countries, representing 12.9 percent of the population of developing countries. Despite their so-called overall 'development', developed countries too have 11 million malnourished people (FAO 2015).

As the most populous region in the world, Asia is home to the world's undernourished people. Children are the most visible victims of under-nutrition. Globally 161 million under five-year-old children were estimated to be stunted in 2013. In 2013, about half of all stunted children lived in Asia and over one-third in Africa. Ironically, the world produces enough food to feed everyone. For the world as a whole, per capita food availability has risen from about 2220 kcal/person/day in the early 1960s to 2790 kcal/person/day in 2006-08, while developing countries even recorded a leap from 1850 kcal/person/day to over 2640 kcal/person/day. In developing countries this growth in food availability in conjunction with improved access to food helped reduce the percentage of chronically undernourished people from 34 percent in the mid 1970s to just 15 percent three decades later (FAO 2012). However, a principal problem is that many people in the world still do not have sufficient income to purchase enough food or have access to nutritious food. The FAO defines four dimensions of food security, all of which must be fulfilled simultaneously, for food security to exist. The four dimensions are: 1) physical availability of food, 2) economic and physical access to food, 3) food utilization, and 4) the stability of the aforementioned dimensions over time.

What causes hunger at such a large scale? The answer is not surprising. Poverty and conflict are two obvious candidates that cause hunger. Counter intuitively just as poverty leads to hunger, hunger also leads to poverty, which in turn leads to hunger. By causing poor health, small body size, low levels of energy, and reduction in mental functioning, hunger can lead to even greater poverty by reducing people's ability to work and learn, thus leading to even greater hunger. Other reasons that can cause hunger are population growth and agricultural policies. Finally, Climate Change, because of its potential to lead to draught and famine, is becoming a major cause of hunger.<sup>1</sup> However important these reasons may be, none of them can in all honesty be cited as the

root cause, which is the economic system of capitalism that is based on the principle of privatization of profits and socialization of losses. With the onset of neoliberal globalization, world over there has been a steady retreat in the responsibility of the nation state in ensuring that citizens have easy access to healthy, hygienic and wholesome food. The de facto control of food production and distribution has been handed to private agro-industries.

The number of chronically starved people in India today equals the entire population of India when it gained independence! While governments will make a big show of caring for their citizens by promulgating laws with fancy titles like "Right to Food Act"<sup>2</sup>, in reality the quality of food distributed through the public distribution system is abysmal and the issue of food sovereignty is completely ignored. Industrial farming is promoted at the cost of the marginal farmer with a small land holding. Instead of organic or agro-ecological options that are safer<sup>3</sup>, government subsidies often go for pesticide-intensive farming practices<sup>4</sup> that lead to despoliation of soil and nature, endangerment of public health and causes extreme distress to the farm sector as manifest in rampant suicide by farmers<sup>5</sup> since 1991 when India opened itself to neoliberal doctrine of economic growth. Genetically modified seeds that seriously affect soil fertility are promoted while locally adapted seed varieties are phased out. Monoculture flourishes at the expense of seed diversity and food security. Agriculture is put at the service of bio-fuel production rather than food. The contradictions only pile up.

In this bleak scenario, it is heartening to know that there are individuals, communities and NGOs that are striving to create alternatives to India's food production systems and to build distribution networks that are geared towards ensuring **Good Food for All (GFFA)**. People are coming together, forming networks, creating seed banks, sharing expertise, reviving traditional knowledge systems, exchanging knowledge and resources, celebrating food folklore, establishing farmer markets, etc. In various ways the innate resilience of our ancient farming and traditional knowledge systems is making its presence felt. This issue of People in Conservation gives voice to some of these traditional knowledge systems.

- Milind Wani

1. See <http://www.worldhunger.org/2015-world-hunger-and-poverty-facts-and-statistics/>

2. The National Food Security Act, 2013 (also Right to Food Act) is an Act of the Parliament of India which aims to provide subsidized food grains to approximately two thirds of India's 1.2 billion people. It was signed into law on 12 September 2013, retroactive to 5 July 2013.

3. See <http://himalmag.com/sowing-revolution/>

4. However some governments like Sikkim are now promoting organic agriculture.

5. See: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/over-12000-farmer-suicides-per-year-centre-tells-supreme-court/articleshow/58486441.cms>



## 1. News and Information

### Midday meal menu revised to include breakfast

The Gujarat government has decided to add breakfast in the midday meal menu without any increase in the budget. The reasoning is that the food quantity prescribed for adequate calories is hard for school children to consume in one go, and hence it is being divided into two meals.

According to a new notification, children will be given chana, chaat, sukhdhi, muthiya, mixed-dal for breakfast, while for lunch they will be given thepla, suki bhaji, vegetable khichdi, dudhi-chana shak, dal-dhokali, vegetable pulav and muthiya. For children in classes I to V, the government norm is to give 180 g food with 265 calories at Rs.4.48 per student, and for classes VI to VIII the norm is to give 265 g food with 798 calories at Rs.6.32 per student.

**Source:** The Times of India, Gandhinagar, September 1, 2017 (<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/midday-meal-menu-revised-to-include-breakfast/articleshow/60315818.cms>)

### Country's First 'Nutrition Atlas' Comes Online

Hyderabad-based National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) has developed the country's first 'nutrition atlas'. This document provides information and data on the nutritional status of population groups at national and state levels, along with an overview of nutrition-related deficiencies, disorders and prevalence levels in various parts of the country. It also provides information on nutrients, nutrient-rich foods, nutritional deficiency disorders and a host of other topics. The interactive atlas is available online at <http://218.248.6.39/nutritionatlas/home.php>

**Source:** The Wire, September 8, 2017

**Author:** Dinesh C. Sharma



Rahibai in her field of native hyacinth bean that she has conserved. (Photo by MITTRA)

### Maharashtra Seed Mother Pioneers Conservation of Native Varieties

"Native crop varieties are not only drought and disease resistant, but are more nutritive and help retain the soil fertility as they do not need chemical fertilizers and excessive water," Rahibai Soma Popere tells at the village square with conviction. Her words are borne out by experience.

With single-minded devotion, Rahibai travels across Maharashtra and beyond to conserve indigenous seeds. Besides conserving them, she creates awareness about the importance of organic farming, conserving indigenous seeds, agro-biodiversity and wild food resources. Besides the advantages of native crop varieties cited, conservation of native seeds is important for preventing the exploitation of farmers who are already distressed. Native crops are likely to become extinct as large seed companies are promoting and patenting hybrid seeds. Farmers become dependent on the companies for seeds, as hybrid seeds cannot be saved by farmers in the field for the next sowing season. In this context, conservation of native seeds is essential for ensuring genetic diversity and the welfare of farmers and consumers.

**Source:** <http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/maharashtra-seed-mother-pioneers-conservation-of-native-varieties/#.WbkF8fmg-Cg>



Sainital block seed festival

### **An indigenous Seed, Food and Biodiversity Fair - 2017**

An indigenous-tradition-based three-days-long seed, food and biodiversity fair for protection of culture of indigenous community and farmers, self-rule system, knowledge related to sustainable conservation and community based management of traditional livelihood and food, and livelihood chains was held in June 2017 at village Jhinkidunguri of Sainital block (Odisha).

This fair, organized jointly by RCDC, Jana Kalyan Samiti, Sainital Block and Zilla Jangal Suraksya O Parichalana Forum, saw the participation of the Bolangir indigenous communities along with farmers of different blocks of Rayagada, Nuapada, Kalahandi, Koraput, Nawarngpur and Bolangir districts. The participating leaders of adivasis, forest dwellers, farmers and women's organizations of different regions exhibited their traditional food, nutritious forest food and biodiversity.

**Source:** <http://www.vikalpsangam.org/static/media/uploads/Food%20and%20water/saintalindigenouseedfair2017.pdf>

### **India urges UN to declare 2018 as 'International Year of Millets'**

India has sent a proposal to the United Nations (UN) for declaring the year 2018 as 'International Year of Millets'.

The proposal, if agreed, will raise awareness about millets among consumers, policy makers, industry and R&D sector. Millet is a common term to categorize small-seeded grasses that are often termed nutri-cereals or dry land-cereals. It includes sorghum, pearl millet, ragi, small millet, foxtail millet, proso millet, barnyard millet, kodo millet and other millets.

The country's proposal was sent to the global body recently by the Union agriculture minister Radha Mohan Singh.

"Promotion of production and consumption of millets through conscious efforts at global level is likely to contribute substantially in the fight against targeted hunger and mitigate the effect of climate change in long run. Popularizing millets would benefit future generations of farmers as well as consumers... Anemia (iron deficiency), B-complex vitamin deficiency, pellagra (niacin deficiency) can be effectively tackled with intake of less expensive but nutritionally rich food grains like millets. Millets can also help tackle health challenges such as obesity, diabetes and lifestyle problems as they are gluten free, have a low glycemic index and are high in dietary fiber and antioxidants. In times of climate change, they are often the last crop standing and, thus, are a good risk management strategy for resource-poor marginal farmers ", said an official statement, issued by the agriculture ministry. Nutritionally superior to wheat and rice due to their higher levels of protein with more balanced amino acid profile, crude fiber and minerals such as Iron, Zinc, and Phosphorous, millets can provide nutritional security and act as a shield against nutritional deficiency, especially among children and women.

Adapted to harsh environment of the semi-arid tropics, millets are considered backbone for dry land agriculture. Millets are climate resilient crops that have a low carbon and water footprint. These crops can withstand high temperatures and grow on poor soils with little or no external inputs.

**Source:** <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-proposes-the-un-to-declare-the-year-2018-as-international-year-of-millets/articleshow/61756112.cms>



## 2. Perspectives

### Food retail policy: Democracy to Disaster

The World Trade Organization's (WTO) General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) considers food retailing to be a part of distribution services. The distribution services are categorized as 'commission agent services', 'wholesale trade services', 'retailing services' and 'franchising services'. India has made commitments only in the 'commission agent services' and 'franchising services' categories, and that too not very long ago. Till date, India has not made any commitment to WTO on the 'wholesale services' and 'retailing services'. Despite this, India has autonomously liberalized its food retail policy to a great extent. Today, India allows one hundred percent foreign direct investment (FDI) in wholesale trading, business to business (B2B) electronic commerce and single brand trading. Development and production of seeds and planting material and services related to agro and allied sectors are also open to 100% FDI. FDI is also conditionally allowed in agriculture including floriculture, horticulture, apiculture and cultivation of vegetables and mushrooms. Animal husbandry, pisciculture and aquaculture can also conditionally have 100% FDI as well.

FDI in multi-brand retail is one of the few sectors still not completely open for 100% FDI. The erstwhile UPA-II government allowed FDI in multi-brand retail up to 51% of equity through government route. The present Prime Minister of India Mr. Narendra Modi, as the then Chief Minister of Gujarat, had publicly opposed opening up of FDI to multi-brand retail, saying it would "harm small shopkeepers, adversely affect the domestic manufacturing sector and create joblessness". His party won the subsequent national general election of 2014 projecting him as the prime ministerial candidate. The election manifesto of the party categorically mentioned that (if elected to power) "it would welcome FDI in all sectors except in multi-brand retail".

The UPA-II decision to allow FDI in multi-brand retail up to 51% has stipulated many conditions like:

- Fresh agricultural produce, including fruits, vegetables, flowers, grains, pulses, fresh poultry, fishery and meat products, may be unbranded;

- Minimum amount to be brought in, as FDI, by the foreign investor, would be US \$100 million;
- At least 50% of total FDI brought in the first tranche of US \$100 million, shall be invested in 'back-end infrastructure' within three years;
- At least 30% of the value of procurement of manufactured/processed products purchased shall be sourced from Indian micro, small and medium industries, which have a total investment in plant & machinery not exceeding US \$ 2.00 million;
- Retail sales outlets may be set up only in cities with a population of more than 10 lakh as per 2011 census or any other cities as per the decision of the respective State Governments, and may also cover an area of 10 km around the municipal/urban agglomeration limits of such cities and government will have the first right to procurement of agricultural products.

Most importantly it was made crystal clear that this was just an enabling policy and the State Governments/ Union Territories would be free to take their own decisions in regard to implementation of the policy. Therefore, retail sales outlets may be set up in those States/Union Territories which have agreed to allow FDI in multi-brand retail. Only twelve states/Union Territories conveyed their agreement to the central government. These states/ Union Territories were Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Manipur, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Daman & Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli. Out of these twelve states/ Union Territories, Rajasthan and Delhi later wrote to the central government withdrawing their agreement to the central policy of allowing FDI in multi-brand retail.

Contrary to the election manifesto promises which brought BJP to power and policy direction taken by the BJP-ruled Rajasthan government, the present govt. under the leadership of Mr. Modi is further liberalizing the FDI policy of retail trading, particularly of food. During the presentation of the general budget of the country for 2016, the finance minister announced that FDI would be allowed in food retail provided the food is sourced locally and processed locally. The Govt. opened 100% FDI for marketing including through e-commerce of food if produced and processed in India. So, an FDI manufacturer can sell its locally manufactured food products including through e-commerce. The deregulation of food trading raises



serious questions on issues of livelihood, nutrition, food safety, local economies and the environment. Promotion of industrialized food with heavy processing, added preservatives, sterilized packaging and in many cases exposure to heat and radiation is highly problematic. Such foods are often nutrient-poor and may not be of any help in our fight against malnutrition. Almost half of all Indian children below 5 years of age are malnourished and we still need a long term solution to this problem. Any expectation of benefitting our farmers from such food policies are misplaced as FDI food processing plants would need to deal food products on a large scale, to be sourced and distributed across country. Small independent farmers can hardly become a part of such corporate supply chains. Instead small farmers and processors even stand to lose their local market. Further to this, it is reported that the govt. is considering allowing FDI in multi-brand retailing of certain non-food products like kitchenware and other household items as an incentive to foreign investors to open brick and mortar retail outlets to trade in food products.

Along with its commitment under the WTO and its continued process of autonomous liberalization, India is negotiating many regional and bilateral trade and investment agreements having far-reaching implications for food trade policies. Presently, India has Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreements (BIPAs) with 72 countries. In addition to these, 11 more countries have signed BIPAs with India which are yet to be enforced. The BIPA is a post-establishment investment agreement. This implies that once an investor enters the country, that investor must be treated the same as a domestic investor unless the limitations to national treatment are clearly spelt out at the pre-establishment stage. India, under bilateral investment trade agreement with Japan has made partial commitments for commission agent services, wholesale services, single brand retailing and franchise services.

It is necessary to protect the much needed policy space for states to re-regulate retail trade in case of adverse impact of rampant liberalization of food distribution on food sovereignty, security and retail democracy before Indian govt. locks in any further commitments in international trade and investment agreements at multilateral, regional or bilateral levels.

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**Organization:** Janpahal

**Website:** <http://janpahal.org.in/governance/>



### 3. Events

#### Food sangam in Bajju, Bikaner

Four days of dialogue and activities on food alternatives: the politics, culture, diversity, justice, ecology issues, and much else! That kind of sums up the 2nd National Food Vikalp Sangam (Alternatives Confluence) held at Bajju, near Bikaner (Rajasthan, India), at the campus of URMUL (<http://www.urmul.org/>), which co-organised it, together with Banyan Roots and Kalpavriksh (partly sponsored by Misereor) on 6-9th October 2017. The Sangam focused on the traditional foods and food cultures of the Rajasthan desert area, the transformations caused by the Indira Gandhi canal, commercialization, and government promotion of Green Revolution packages, and attempts at revival of diversity and organic production in the new context. Experiences of problems and alternatives from Nagaland, Manipur, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Ladakh, Madhya Pradesh, Goa, and elsewhere in Rajasthan were also shared. Several farmers from surrounding areas brought in a very local flavor, enhanced by visits to three rural areas that URMUL works in, and livened by some incredible local cuisine that was testimony to the magic of URMUL's kitchen staff. Adivasis / indigenous peoples from Maharashtra (Gonds of Gadchiroli), Odisha (Kondhs of the Niyamgiri area), Manipur and Nagaland also recounted experience with forest foods, shifting cultivation and pastoralism (there was some great sharing between them and Rajasthan farmers, as most were unaware of each others' ecological, political and cultural contexts). Women's experience with farming and home gardens were described, including tales from women of Uttara Kannada in Karnataka. Unfortunately fishers and pastoralists (other than from Rajasthan) were missing

(some dropped out last minute), though the former's experience was brought in by a participant working earlier with the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers. Interestingly people from various communities and areas recounted the problems caused by the current 'politics of the cow', including how this has significantly enhanced stray cattle numbers which are damaging crops, and causing loss of livelihoods for those dependent on livestock trade. There was also some frank sharing of the weaknesses and contradictions within the working of our own organizations.

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**Website:** [www.kalpavriksh.org](http://www.kalpavriksh.org); [www.vikalpsangam.org](http://www.vikalpsangam.org)

### Popular education workshop for Community Activists of the Food Sovereignty Alliance

Food Sovereignty Alliance, India and Kūdali Intergenerational Learning Centre (<https://www.facebook.com/kudali.centre/>) successfully completed "Molaka" – a Popular education workshop for Community Activists of the Food Sovereignty Alliance, India on 'Food Sovereignty, Social Justice and Buen Vivir: Reflecting on our Praxis' at Kūdali Intergenerational Learning Centre. Twenty-five community leaders from Telangana and Andhra Pradesh participated in the workshop organised from April 13th-25th 2017. Various creative transformative and emancipatory methods such as *visualization in participation*, *art in transformation*, *media for action*, and *forum theatre based on 'Theatre of the Oppressed'*, were used to deepen reflection for advancing actions.

**Source:** <https://foodsovereigntyalliance.wordpress.com>



## 4. Musings

### Remembering Punjabi food idioms

The English language is littered with idioms that use eating/ food related idioms to describe situations which are not exactly food-related! To cite a few: Eat your words, eat crow, eat dirt, eat my hat, bite the dust, bite the bullet, bite one's tongue, bite off more than one can chew, apple of discord, chomp at the bit, chew the fat, couch potato, cut the mustard, take the cake ('especially good'), take the biscuit ('especially bad'), spill the beans, cry over spilled milk, and so on. And to be your companion, literally, I must share bread with you (com means together, panis - bread).

But of course, it is not just the English language. Eating is natural, and no matter what language it may be we tend to measure up other situations using food and eating as a point of reference. Punjabi, my regional language, is no exception. It also has many food-and-eating-related idioms. In general, most Punjabi idioms that I know are a little sarcastic or mean (I don't know whether polite ones exist at all!). I am listing some because, maybe, just maybe, someone else might also find them interesting.

Punjabi idiom	English translation	Typically used
Kheer khaandia wi kise da ponhcha utar da hai?	Whose arm gets hurt while eating kheer (a pudding)?	When someone is being asked to do some work that would actually be enjoyable for them
Chhaji taan bole, chhaanani vi bole	Not just the Chhaji (a large sieve for cleaning grains) but even the Chhaanani (a small sieve with holes, for cleaning grains) is making noise.	When a person who doesn't have much to boast about, does also boast.
Billi de saraane dudh nahi jamda	Curd won't set while placed next to the cat.	When a task needs waiting, but there is someone very impatient (or in case of food, greedy) around.
Gallan vich chaul ade ne	Rice stuck in your cheeks.	When one is making a lot of fuss about something.
Gilla peend	Wet dough.	When someone makes a mess out of a situation.

Kar lo ghee nu paanda	Ready the vessel for ghee (clarified butter).	When something too eagerly awaited doesn't happen. Said in exclamation.
Gadhe nu dita si noon oh kehnda mere kan panh te	Gave salt to a donkey, he said 'you ruined my ears'	When doing something for someone unworthy of help.
Chaa kandde di, te ladai halle di	Tea should be strong, and fights should be noisy.	(Same as translation)
Aah muhn te masraan di daal?	This face and you want Masoor daal?	When someone wants something they are unworthy of
Dudh da jalya lassi nu bhi phoonk phoonk ke peenda ey	The one scalded by milk would blow air over buttermilk to cool it before drinking.	'Once bitten, twice shy'
Oonth de muh vich jeera	Jeera (cumin) in a camel's mouth	When something is exceedingly insufficient
Pet na payian rotian,sabhe gallan khottian	No roti in stomach makes all talk worthless.	Same as translation.

Why do I find these interesting? It is hard to explain. It is simply that they tell me some stories beyond their direct meanings – Stories of what was considered relevant, or important, or similar to that situation in which the idiom is used at one time. In that way they preserve a bit of the past.

And if you can remember local food-related phrases and idioms, I would love to know, so please do share.

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Lo, the pious in gardens and delight,  
Enjoying what their Lord hath bestowed upon  
Them, and their Lord hath protected them  
From the punishment of the Hot Place  
Eat and drink with relish, for what ye have been doing.

..Quran



## 5. Signs of Hope

### Towards a "fair" rural urban food exchange

Do poor people have a right to food? Do they have a right to safe, nutritious, clean, affordable and fresh food? Do poor people living in urban areas have a right to this kind of food? "Of course!" is what most of you reading this article would say. However, in many cases the politics around food swings disproportionately against the poor, making "good food" a distant dream.

In an attempt to change this, some groups in Maharashtra have come together in an ambitious project to work on a viable rural urban food exchange. One might wonder what is new or unique about this. Very simply put, we are hopeful that the rural poor can collect, cultivate, harvest and process foods which are needed by the urban poor and make them easily available at affordable prices.

The project began in August 2016 and at present is a collaboration between Anthra, Award, SSP and Yuva. While Anthra, Award and SSP work with farmers' groups in rural areas, YUVA works with the urban poor. The project began with mapping foods which are cultivated or collected from the wild in the districts of Ratnagiri, Raigad, Latur and Osmanabad in Maharashtra. (Ratnagiri and Raigad are adjacent districts on the western coast and Latur and Osmanabad are adjacent districts in the drier rain fed areas of south-east Maharashtra.) Following this, we identified a few items which could be processed and made available in the urban areas. So we have adivasi women from Karjat processing local millets, medicinal herbs, wild flowers and fruits; small peasant groups in Ratnagiri and Osmanabad growing local vegetables, millets and pulses, and processing them into products which can be transported easily to Mumbai and be made available at affordable prices.

The project has enabled exchanges and visits between representatives of the communities of these different areas, opening up discussions and debates on what "good food" means, where one can source "good food" and how we can enhance nutrition levels in the foods we prepare every day. The exchange led to the sharing of recipes and processing methods. Cooking lessons and competitions celebrate the diversity of food materials and ideas. These include recipes for pickles,



papads, dried fruits and preserves. Demonstrations on urban gardening have also been organised, where rural representatives train the youth in urban slums on gardening. Such demonstrations have taken place in schools too. We are also trying to link small rural producers to urban street vendors and school mid-day meal programmes.

Since the process is largely led by the representative communities it has its own rhythm and cycle. Reports trickle in, often not in written form. There are other challenges too, such as matching demand and supply effectively, the pricing of products and efficiently connecting producers and consumers. We believe that if more groups join this initiative these problems could be addressed better. Do join us if interested.

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**Organization:** Anthra

**Website:** <http://www.anthra.org>

### Finding bright spots in a darkening ocean

Natural systems, terrestrial or marine, are fundamentally similar in terms of the overarching principles that govern them. When a natural system is subjected to food production for human consumption, care must be taken to not exceed the limits of that system. Unfortunately, most food production systems today are based on industrial models that enhance efficiency in the short term but are often in direct conflict with ecological principles and therefore not very sustainable in the long run. While agricultural systems are faced with challenges such as the effects of intensive monoculture, rampant use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides and potential threats from the introduction of Genetically Modified crops, oceans and fisheries are largely plagued by unsustainable models of exploitation, destructive practices, overfishing and consequent declines in fish stocks.

Fish is one of the best and cheapest sources of animal protein for human consumption and accounts for about 17% of global animal protein intake. With the world's population expected to hit 9.7 billion by the year 2050,

oceans that have always provided food security and livelihoods for humans, are under tremendous stress as we are trying to meet the demands of an increasing population. The need for newer, decentralized and more holistic models of food production is stronger than ever before. However, this requires a paradigm shift in the way we perceive natural systems, resources and the rights of humans to access them and how we understand the concept of 'development' itself. While such a systemic change might seem overambitious at this stage, small steps to identify and preserve practices that are environmentally sustainable and socially just, can and must be taken.

One such practice is the live-bait pole-and-line tuna fishery of Lakshadweep. The Lakshadweep Islands, India's only coral atolls<sup>6</sup> are home to about 65,000 people. The pole-and-line fishery<sup>7</sup> first came here from the Maldives, about 200 years ago. This technique is found in very few places in the world and is considered highly sustainable as it targets the resilient skipjack tuna through harvest methods that do not damage the marine habitat and cause very little by-catch of other species. An offshore fishery, it keeps fishing pressure off the sensitive coral reefs that constitute these islands. Additionally, being labor-intensive, it provides employment to many islanders.

Typically, large scale fisheries are intensive, often destructive practices, that supply to large export markets and can cause on-the-ground distributional inequities, whereas small-scale fisheries are less intensive, first ensure food and livelihood security for the producers and cater almost exclusively to local demand. While Lakshadweep's pole-and-line fishery may be small-scale in terms of quantities harvested, it is not a subsistence fishery. A majority of the tuna caught through this fishery is converted to Lakshadweep's indigenous, dried tuna product called *masmin* and is exported to Sri Lanka, making it a commercial, export-based fishery. Despite this, it has sustained for all these years – due to the inherent merits of the technique and the fact that the export trade leaves enough fresh tuna behind to ensure

6. A coral atoll is a ring-shaped coral reef including a coral rim that encircles a lagoon partially or completely. There may be coral islands/cays on the rim. The coral of the atoll often sits atop the rim of an extinct seamount or volcano which has eroded or subsided partially beneath the water.

7. See <http://fishcount.org.uk/fish-welfare-in-commercial-fishing/capture/pole-and-line-fishing>

an ample supply for local distribution. While other oceanic and reef fish are also consumed, tuna forms the major part of the diet of these islanders. *Masmin* acts as a substitute for fresh tuna during the monsoon when it is difficult to go out to sea. Generally, every household consumes fish on a daily basis, often in every meal of the day. Thus, we have here, a rare example of a commercial food production system that ensures food and livelihood security for its producers and others, without adversely affecting the environment.

In all fairness, the continued practice of this fishery in these islands has been circumstantial and can, at least partially, be attributed to the lack of other expansion and diversification opportunities. At the same time, being an isolated island system, it has been guarded from destructive global trends for many decades. Now however, the influence of larger external factors is increasingly being felt. Declining baitfish stocks (used to catch tuna), infrastructural limitations and stagnating prices for *Masmin* are posing operational challenges to the pole-and-line fishery. Meanwhile, an export-based coral reef fishery is also steadily emerging, the proliferation of which could be detrimental to the health of this coral archipelago. Active efforts must be taken to buffer potentially unsustainable transitions and strengthen existing models through proper management. Towards this objective, Dakshin Foundation has been running a community-based fisheries monitoring programme in Lakshadweep since 2014 involving local fishers in a voluntary monitoring of their fishery. This approach helps large-scale generation of important data that can feed into sustainable management plans. But more importantly, it decentralizes knowledge generation and enables fishers to see patterns in their fishery over time, thereby reducing their reliance on external agencies. It seeks to empower fishers with the knowledge that can help them engage in a meaningful dialogue with policy makers and other stakeholders.

In spite of difficulties, the Lakshadweep Islands present a refreshingly different picture, at a time when stories of overfishing and fisheries-collapse are becoming increasingly common. It is true that the Lakshadweep model has been possible due to its unique socio-ecological setting, making it an outlier, a bright spot in a darkening ocean. So is it to be left at that? Is it just a positive story to celebrate

and feel good about? The Lakshadweep story is one example. But bright spots do exist, in marine as well as terrestrial realms. It is the need of the hour to find more such examples from other parts of the world; to acknowledge and encourage them. But we also need to take a step further and try to understand what makes these models successful; to learn from the outliers and draw context-specific parallels that can be applied in other places. In some cases it could be a sustainable technique that does not put pressure on the stocks or ecosystems; in some others it could be the will of local communities to utilize their resources well. Wherever possible, initiatives that empower local communities through participatory monitoring and management should be tried out. Systems with potential should be supported to overcome their challenges, remain viable and become an example. We need to enable more success stories, bring newer narratives to the fore and build a stronger case for sustainable and equitable food production models. Only a combination of such actions can help us ensure healthy ecosystems, livelihoods and most importantly, good food for all!

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## 6. Special feature: Food and learning

### Nai Talim in an urban Bengaluru school

When we started thinking about exploring teaching and learning around the theme of food early this year, little did we know that it was going to be a truly intensive process involving the 3 H of Gandhian pedagogy- the Head, the Heart, and the Hand.

In April 2017, when the teachers of Poorna Learning Centre, an alternative school located in Bangalore<sup>8</sup> decided to think of food as an option for theme-based learning, there was a unanimous decision that we had to DO something. Apart from describing, reflecting and synthesizing our knowledge around food, we wanted a hands-on activity. The school already had a kitchen garden where they grew vegetables, had a compost pit for their food waste, and a bustling kitchen that came alive every week when one class (in turns) cooked delicious healthy meals for the entire school. So what *else* and what *more* could we do which had not already been tried before and was in the context of 'Learning by Doing'?

"Let's farm", said one of the teachers at the very first meeting. What should we grow? This question was couched in a larger understanding of changing food habits and a growing awareness of the wonders of millets in our diets. In that framework, what could be a better - and culturally more appropriate - millet than our humble Ragi which many of us have embraced slowly or enthusiastically in our urban diets?

And so our journey began. To enthuse urban Bengaluru children to explore connections between soil, society, and their environment, we set up a bunch of activities in the first month. This included exploring and learning crafts and arts involving Ragi; folktales and folk grind-mill songs; discovering and singing a version of the Carnatic Music that Kriti called Ragi Tandira. In addition, teachers initiated conversations with children around why or why don't we eat Ragi at home and if we do, then in what form?

Subsequently, we worked on the farm, weeding, marking three plots out of half an acre of land, preparing the farm, and conducting a soil test. Farming activities around sowing, preparing a nursery, weeding, setting up a drip irrigation system, making compost,

8. The word Bengaluru and Bangalore have been used interchangeably.

transplanting, and multi-cropping were also explored further in classroom lessons. We also visited a farm where natural farming is practiced to learn the lessons of ecological farming from nature. It has been three months since we first sowed Ragi on the farm as well as in our hearts and minds. So what have we learnt so far?

In *Science* classes, the children learnt about plant growth – exploring the way plants grow from seeds and different germination rates and ways plants grow. They discovered the role of insects and bugs in an ecosystem and the crucial role played by earthworms. They learnt about soil nutrition and the science behind composting. At the farm and in the classrooms the children learnt the skills to observe, record, and reflect.

In *Maths*, the children learnt how to measure a plot of land and distance between rows using non-standardized methods. They learnt how to do a survey of food choices and tabulate data. They will go on to learn ratio and proportions when they make liquid compost (*Jeevamrutam*).

In *Social Science*, the children explored the change in diet patterns within their own families with respect to local millets. They learnt how to draw a map of the farm and learnt about scale. They learnt about festivals/songs/ folklore that celebrates nature and its connection with the food we eat today. They learnt about various preparations of Ragi in different cultures. They learnt about the role of the scarecrow in a field and about the importance of a seasonal calendar in a farmer's life.

In *Language*, the children reflected upon their experiences. They learnt to observe and express the nature, texture, color and feel of the soil, seeds and plants. The farm and their experiences came alive as they used their senses to write. They wrote down Ragi recipes and illustrated them.

In *Skills*, they learnt to sow, water, fix a drip, loosen soil, observe insects like an entomologist, transplant saplings, prepare nursery beds, and de-weed<sup>9</sup>.

9. The word "Weed" as a noun is "any wild plant that grows in an unwanted place, especially in a garden or field where it prevents the cultivated plants from growing freely". The prefix "de", can create a new word opposite in meaning to the word the prefix is attached to. For e.g. dethrone means "to remove a king or queen from their position of power". Taking up this logic, de-weed would mean "to eliminate weeds from a location". On the other hand, the word "Weed" as a verb in the English language has the meaning "to remove wild plants from a place where they are not wanted: for e.g. I've been weeding (the vegetable garden)."



Overall, we all learnt to live the life of a small farmer every week. We prayed for rain and worried about having an erratic irrigation system. We worried for our little saplings when the rain wouldn't stop. We invoked blessings when things didn't look very successful. We worried about the health of our soil and rejoiced when we saw earthworms. We felt ashamed about wasting food after toiling on the field growing food. We squealed in delight to see "our farm" shaping up bit by bit. We learnt to work together and share the workload. We learnt to take off our shoes and feel the soil on the soles of our feet. We learnt to walk carefully around our plants and to stop and look. Above all, we learnt patience and the humility to surrender to nature.

This is an ongoing project and we have only completed a quarter of it. But as I reflect while writing this piece, I think of Marjorie Sykes's quote on education. In her book, *The Story of Nai Talim*, Sykes recalls teachers telling her that they pick cotton bolls only when they are fully ripe, for then 'a gentle touch is all that is needed, they come away easily. If they don't, they are not yet ready for picking. We should wait another few days. We should not be impatient or greedy.' Sykes reflects: "That was education too, education in how to handle other living things, plants and animals, with respect for the natural cycle of their own lives – education in one aspect of non-violence" (Sykes 1988).

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**Organization:** Azim Premji University, Bengaluru.

**Website:** <http://www.azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in>



## International

### **We Eat Responsibly: An educational initiative in Europe for responsible food consumption**

The 'We Eat Responsibly' project is built on a vision that in a world that is facing major global challenges we need to ask: What kind of learning do we need to impart to young people in order to equip them with knowledge, skills and values relevant for a sustainable future? The project was initiated by Glopolis, a Prague-based think tank, in February 2015 and will end in January 2018. It was built as an explorative project bringing together a long-established Eco-school network (that has been operating for over 25 years) and an experimental innovative methodology with systemic global scope of thinking.

Taking into account that as humans we already live well beyond the planetary boundaries and in the near future our planet will need to feed 10 billion people, we believe that reflection of our lifestyle and its impacts on people and ecosystems of the world is a crucial step towards a future that can work for everyone.

We focused our work on the global dimension of responsible food consumption and sustainable food systems. Problematic management of global food systems is a root cause of key global challenges. Hunger, poverty and human rights violations, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, exploitation and pollution of natural resources altogether stem from the way our food is produced, shipped and consumed. Not only do these problems contribute to climate change in major way, but they also cause many social and political conflicts. Our project enables children, pupils, students, teachers and members of local communities to explore the context and various aspects of food production and empowers them to look for responsible changes that are achievable in their local context.

In 2017, after two years of implementation, the project has succeeded in involving 494 unique schools, training 2950 teachers and involving more than 262,300 students in 9 project countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia). There are all kinds of school involved in the project – secondary schools,

elementary schools and even kindergartens. Responsible food consumption has proved to be an important and acceptable topic for public actors such as municipalities, local governments, etc. For example, thanks to students and teachers in Burgas, Bulgaria that were involved in the 'We Eat Responsibly' project in 2016, the local municipality of Burgas launched a campaign (along with a funding scheme): **Eat responsibly, live healthy** for addressing responsible food consumption in all the schools and kindergartens in Burgas.

The potential to influence public policy by **We Eat Responsibly** project stems mainly from the public actions that were usually lead by local youth involving entire communities. We trust that the changes happening around schools, the deeper understanding among pupils and students of the global interconnectedness, and the greater confidence of actors involved in the change that is possible, are at the core of the discourse on public policy changes.

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**Website:** <https://www.eatresponsibly.eu>

**Facebook international:** <https://www.facebook.com/weeatresponsibly/>



**Bhimashankar SHG women with forest-based produce**





**Amaranthus (red), Jardhargaon**



**Lakshamma (Deccan Development Society) with millet diversity**



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