

Organic Farmers and Farms in Chattisgarh

RUPANTAR

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Rupantar began around 1992 with small developmental and awareness raising activities.

In the early years, most of the activities were carried out on a voluntary basis. With the gradual realisation of the scope for fundamental work in the social sector, the range and depth of work expanded. All its work is with communities of people who have been marginalised in the process of development.

Since 1994, Rupantar has been working to develop modules of chemical free organic agriculture and has diversified into areas of watershed management, medicinal plant cultivation and sustainable agricultural practices.

Founded by Dr. Iina Sen and Dr. Binayak Sen, Rupantar with sister health and human rights groups across the country have worked consistently for the past two decades to highlight the connection between health and human rights and alleviate the plight of marginalised people through grass root interventions.

Dr. Binayak Sen was imprisoned in May 2007 on charges of involvement with naxalites. The charge was strongly condemned by respected citizens across the country and by international bodies. He was awarded the 2008 Dr. Jonathan Mann award for Global Health and Human Rights. Government of India refused him permission to travel overseas to accept the award. His daughters and Iina Sen received it on his behalf.

In her acceptance speech during the award ceremony, Iina Sen said: 'This is the first time that this award has been given to a south Asian – a region that is home to more than a quarter of humankind, and to some of the world's poorest communities.

'In India, nutrition surveys of the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau have shown that over 33 % of the population has a Body Mass Index (BMI) of less than 18.5, considered to be the minimum level for less than starvation standards. Translated to demography, this means that over 400 million people are exposed to near starvation conditions.

'To add to this catastrophic situation, we are confronted now with a new set of crises. Between 1990 and 2005, the daily per capita availability of foodgrains has fallen from 510 grams to 438. World food prices have risen, and the concentration of land ownership in a few hands has intensified. These poverty stricken communities are not mere statistical data sets for us.

'For the last quarter of a century, it has been our privilege to work with, and share the lives of many such communities in a part of Central India called Chhattisgarh. Our experience with these communities tells us that in the kind of situation we have been describing, it is the communities' access to common property resources - grazing lands, water, forest resources, biodiversity- that mitigate to some extent the baleful effects of an alienated economy.

'Unfortunately in the recent past, the pressures of "development" have seen to it that these resources have become increasingly sequestered in private and corporate hands.

'...Rupantar and other groups have attempted to uphold a more convivial model of development, but in the face of contradictory tendencies that are much larger, it becomes very hard to preserve even small islands of common good.'

Dr. Binayak Sen was finally released from prison in May 2009.

(Reference: www.unifem.org.in and www.globalhealth.org, CMC NEWSLINE, June 9,2008)

THE CHHATTISGARH SEED SATYAGRAH (CSS)

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The Chhattisgarh Seed Satyagrah (CSS) is a struggle by the farmers of Chhattisgarh to assert their rights over 22,972 varieties of paddy which were evolved through generations of selected farming by their forefathers. These seeds are now with the Indira Gandhi Krishi Vishwa Vidyalay based at Raipur. The movement has seen the coming together of several grass root organisations, activists, NGOs, women's groups, farmers, children and the general public.

It started in 2002, with an intensity that stopped Syngenta, the Swiss multinational corporation from signing a memorandum with IGKV to take over all the paddy varieties in the custody of the university for so called 'research'. Not trusting the government, the university, nor the intentions of Syngenta and other MNCs to not initiate the process again, CSS has now moved to demanding the seeds back for regenerating the indigenous variety of germplasm, for keeping the seed sovereignty with the people and for sustainable agriculture.

Their questions are simple: 'Why do 7-10 lakh farmers migrate each year outside the state and why do farmers' suicides continue? This, in spite of Chhattisgarh (at one time known as the rice bowl of India), presently producing over 60 lakh tones of paddy each year!' They demand farmer friendly polices be put in place by national and state governments.

The story goes back to Dr. R. H. Richharia who in 1971 won over the confidence of the farmers of Chhattisgarh and embarked on what came to be called “adaptive rice research” to evaluate and document all local rice varieties. This led to the collection of close to 23,000 rice varieties of which 19,000 are local to Chhattisgarh. The varieties included those with varying harvesting periods from 60-150 days; varieties with marked qualitative distinctions like largest (dokra-dokri), the longest and shortest and those that grow submerged under 3 metres of water (Naatrgoidi), many with high protein content, medicinal properties, scented varieties etc. The implicit agreement was that the farmer would hand over the varieties and their traditional cultivation knowledge to Dr. Richharia who would, with the consent of the farmers improve upon them to better suit local prevailing conditions and return them back to the farmers.

Sadly this project did not go beyond the collection phase. Dr. Richharia was sacked under World Bank pressure and today is no more. But this collection remains with IGKV. It is no longer cultivated and some (or most) of it may not be productive any more. The farmers demand that these be returned to them for gene pool comparison, so that they may continue keeping these varieties alive through on farming conservation methods rather than be left as dormant gene banks. Akshay Sail of Chhattisgarh Labour Institute, a prominent leader of the movement along with Jacob Nellithanam of the Richharia Campaign have been at the forefront of the struggle.
(Source: Communication with OIP and www.flonnet.com)

MAHANADI HORTICULTURE AUTONOMOUS CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY LTD.

Regd. Off: Sanchit Krushi Farm, Kurud Tehsil, Dhamtari Zilla, Chattisgarh. Ph: 07705 223016

Mahanadi Horticulture Autonomous Co-op Ltd (MHA) was formed in order to ensure that farmers get better prices for their products.

MHA organises meetings, seminars, workshops, field visits, farmers’ conferences etc. It runs agro service centers from where expensive machinery can be hired at reasonable rates and also shops for displaying and selling fertilisers, seeds etc. Members who have gaushalas are encouraged to collect cow urine and set up gobar gas plants. It provides the know how on mushroom farming, bee keeping, vermicomposting etc.

MHA plans to start collective farming by setting up fruit parks and herbal gardens.

(Source: World Wide Web)

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