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News

Agroecology in India: Is it the Right Way to Improve Women Conditions and Climate Resilience?

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Save

The 21st ecological, economical and social crises cannot be solved if we don't **improve our relation with land**; in other terms, if we don't make agricultural practices more sustainable. And yet we already have the solutions...Let's give a look at an amazing Indian experience where the use of **Agroecology** has solved many problems. **Sheelu Francis** General Coordinator of the **Womens' Collective of Tamil Nadu** in **India**, says that, thanks to the introduction of Agroecology and Natural Farming in the 1990s the life of Indian women farmers (as well as the health of their lands) has severely improved in terms of health, incomes, culture and so on.

If one uses chemicals, he can revive his soil, but if one introduces GMO seeds, there is no turning back to his traditional seeds.

Sheelu Francis

Before the Introduction of Agroecology

Before the introduction of Agroecology, most of women's income was being used for health, for medicine! Why? Simply because most of **their food intake was being produced using chemical fertilizers and pesticides**, causing **lots of health problems**. Aware of that, Sheelu Francis and her friends decided to go back to natural and traditional way of farming.

A Change in How to Produce Food

Traditional way of farming requires a very limited use of external inputs (chemicals and machineries); this is the way to best preserve the quality of soil. This meant dealing with agricultural tasks with a **'zero budgeting' in mind**, relying only on resources from the farm like manure and things like that in order to grow natural products, and increase production.

Not Only Improving Women's Life, but also Building Climate Resilience

The experience matured in the **Womens' Collective of Tamil Nadu in India** also shows how native seeds can better face climate change effects. Sheelu Francis, in a 'participatory action research' project on **the impact of climate change on farmers**, learned that women in the community were managing climate change through growing **millet**, the traditional grain of Tamil Nadu.

Millet is **nutritious** and also solves **the problem of water scarcity** and erratic rains (normal characteristics of the dry lands in Tamil Nadu), as it can grow without a lot of water and doesn't require a lot of inputs.

According to Sheelu and her community, millet is **the answer to climate change, malnutrition, water scarcity, soil enrichment, environmental safety**, and so on.

Against the Green Revolution....

The Womens' Collective of Tamil Nadu in India is totally aware that, with Agroecology, **they are totally opposing the Green Revolution**. Before the Green Revolution came with its fertilizers, there were more species of plants, the food was more delicious and nutritious, and agricultural practices made a large use of inter-cropping techniques. The Green Revolution, with its excess and its greed for money is seriously damaging the health of people and of our planet. Opposing the Green Revolution means regaining the health of both the land and the people.

...With a Multi-Level Education in Health and Farming

The Women's Collective works with families and communities to discuss the reasons why they should grow millet using traditional methods of saving seeds and agroecological farming.

People are educated on different levels, about the nutritious content of millet and about the importance of **not growing GMOs** seeds in their lands. The fact is that **when plant genetics is lost, it is hard to get it back**: If one uses chemicals, he can revive his soil, but **if one introduces GMO seeds, there is no turning back** to his traditional seeds.

Let's Regain Sovereignty: Bringing Food Security at the Household Level...

One thing that this community is trying to do is **regaining sovereignty, over their land, over their food and over their life**. Not growing GMO seeds allows farmers to be independent from the use of chemicals.

The Women's Collective of Tamil Nadu in India organizes women farmers, particularly widows that are landless, into **collective farms** where they lease land and they grow millet. The finale goal is **to bring food security at the household level**. In doing so they focus on four levels: land, traditional seeds, animals, water.