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SOUTH ASIA

NEWS

Indian farmers call for local crop focus

Papri Sri Raman

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[BANGALORE] An Indian farmers' jury has called for greater research focus on resilient local crops and animals that could help farmers cope with the impacts of climate change

The jury, a group of 30 male and female farmers, was held in Bangalore last month (1–5 December) as part of the International Institute for Environment Development's (IIED) efforts to democratise the governance of food systems in Asian countries including India, Indonesia, Iran, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

The meeting called for less preoccupation with expensive hybrid seeds and concluded that farmers' traditional knowledge could be used in climate change adaptation.

"We don't want research in hybrid crops which require repeated purchase of expensive seeds, chemical fertilisers and pesticides. We demand research on local landraces [domesticated plants and animals adapted to their natural environment] that are adaptable to their ecosystems, drought-resistant, provide quality and tasty food and fodder, and can be produced by the farmer without outside intervention," the jury said.

Michel Pimbert, an IIED principal researcher and former scientist with the International Crop Research Institute for Semi Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) in India, said: "With seed-selling a big business, many agricultural universities have uncritically accepted that the best way to achieve high yields is for research to promote large-scale, uniform, input-intensive farming systems".

A major contributor to the current food crisis is the shift in focus of agricultural research from farmers' concerns towards those of agribusiness, said P. V. Satheesh, director of the Hyderabad-based civil society organization Deccan Development Society.

One reason for this shift is the greater involvement of large corporations in Indian crop research after the country's liberalisation of economic policies in the early 1990s, said Satheesh.

Satheesh said local small farmers prefer to use resilient varieties that can grow under high temperatures and do not need much irrigation or fertiliser.

"Their crops are five times superior in nutrition content than hybrid rice and wheat. The diversity on their farms and the combination of legumes with millets fixes a huge amount of organic carbon into the soil and thus, it is a tool of carbon sequestration."



The farmers' jury, held at a Bangalore farm
Papri Sri Raman

The jury also called for setting up local seedbanks; mobile laboratories for testing water and soil; and government recognition of and reward for farmers' innovations.

<http://www.scidev.net/en/south-asia/news/indian-farmers-call-for-local-crop-focus.html>

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