

ADARSA

Alliance for Democratising Agricultural Research in South Asia

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PRESS RELEASE

India's agricultural crisis is staring us really hard in our face. The increase in farmer suicides, agri-sector debts, massive acquisition of farming land for industrial purposes, and threats related to new technologies have been central to the shape and dimension of the problem. What is equally true is the change in the way the sector as a whole is being viewed. Policy makers of the country are trying to evolve solutions in the form of consolidation of small and marginal farms, introduction of contract farming, and intensified role of the market.

"If you control the oil you control the country; if you control food, you control the population.

" Henry Kissinger, USA Secretary of State in 1970s prior to the Green Revolution

These solutions are worse than the crisis itself and clearly reflect the policy-farming disconnect. This is evidenced by the failure of "packages" to stem farmer suicides. Much of it has led to the shifting of control over farming decisions from the farmers to the governments and increasingly to the seed and agri-business corporations.

A major contributor to the crisis is the focus of agricultural research which is gradually moving away from farmer's concerns and is embracing agribusiness as *the* solution.

"Application of frontier sciences like bio-technology, remote sensing technologies, pre and post-harvest technologies, energy saving technologies, technology for environmental protection through national research system as well as proprietary research will be encouraged.

" National Agriculture Policy, 2000

This appears to be the direct result of the era of globalization since the early 1990s that has changed the agenda of public good and allowed for a systematic engagement of large corporates into the core of agricultural research.

As a result of all this, we can clearly see the morphing of the critical thrust of agricultural research from public good to private profit. This includes areas such as **genetic modification, biofuels, contract based horticulture, hybridization and strengthening market linkages**. The needs of medium, small and marginal farmers as well as support to their agricultural practices find little reflection in the current evidence available.

While there is a demand for democratic governance and the need for "stakeholder" involvement in decision making in all other fields, somehow this question is singularly absent in agricultural research. This is particularly disconcerting when the determination of agricultural research has a critical bearing on the controls operating in the entire farming cycle.

This was the context in which history was made in Karnataka this week when - for the first time in the world - a farmers' jury, **RAITA TEERPU**, quizzed a number of agricultural scientists, social science researchers, civil society activists, farmers and farmer leaders, pastoralists and consumer activists on the theme of ***Democratisation of Agricultural Research***. The Jury took place at the *Fireflies* Ashram on Kanakapura Road, 21 km from Bangalore, from December 1st till 3rd.

The entire process was coordinated by four organizations: Deccan Development Society – Hyderabad; Institute for Cultural Research and Action [ICRA] and *Hittala Gida* – Bangalore; Centre for Agricultural Media -Dharwad and *Appiko* - Sirsi.

The jury, selected through a lengthy participatory and open process, was composed of thirty farmers - 15 men and 15 women - 60% of whom are from the marginalized sections of Adivasis and Dalits. This was consciously done to fulfill the mandate of **Raita Teerpu** viz., **Voice to the Voiceless**. There was a 70% representation of dry land farmers in tune with the agricultural demographics of Karnataka. [See **THE JURY** for details]

Twelve Specialist Witnesses consisting of six agricultural scientists, researchers and research administrators both from the public and private sector, one farmer leader, one pastoralist leader, two social scientists, one civil society activist and one consumer activist deposed before the jury. **[Please see the Schedule of Jury attached for details]**

The evidence given by these Specialist Witnesses was on the contents, agenda and processes of agricultural research. The jury heard and later cross examined them. On December 4th the Jury reflected on what they heard and came to an independent conclusion and through a lengthy, participatory discussion formulated their ***Raita Teerpu. Farmers Verdict***.

The Verdict is separately attached with this Press Release

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