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The Joy of Service...

South Asia Farmers' Conference

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2010

PROCEEDINGS

Caritas is a global movement working in solidarity for a fairer world, inspired by the example of Christian faith and Catholic Social Teaching. The 165 national Caritas members make the biggest network of Catholic charities in the world devoted to reducing poverty and campaigning for social justice.

Caritas across the world works under the following guiding principles: Uphold the human dignity everywhere and at all times; combat the de-humanizing poverty through option for the poor; strengthen the capacities of the local partners; protect the unity of the Family through formation of values and build solidarity and partners globally and locally. To achieve this, focus is on six key areas: Peace and Reconciliation, Emergencies, Economic Justice, Climate Change, HIV Aids and Women and Migration.

Caritas Asia is a regional body of Caritas Internationalis. Caritas Asia is a confederation of Caritas Associations in Asia serving 38 countries and territories. The aim of Caritas Asia is to increase co-operation between members in order to better pool resources. Natural and man-made disasters continue to dominate much of the key work, with Caritas Asia having competencies in humanitarian operations and disaster preparedness. The South and South East Asian countries have been by and large characterized by natural and human-made disasters and accompanying wide-spread poverty. Hence Caritas organizes the poor towards self-reliance and implements programmes towards that end. Caritas Asia engages in inter-faith dialogue as a way of promoting peace.

Caritas India is a network organization with 152 local counterparts who are the Diocesan Social Service Societies (DSSS) and hundreds of NGO partners. Through a process of active partnership, Caritas India strives to reach even the remotest corners of the country. Natural Resources Management is one of the major thrust areas of Caritas India with a focus on conserving, preserving and protecting the precious natural resources through promotion of Integrated Watershed Management and Sustainable Agriculture programmes.

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Preface

The "Sustainable Agriculture and Farmers' Rights" (SAFaR) programme supported by Caritas Asia started in January 2008. The programme aims at promoting sustainable agriculture to achieve the twin goals of empowering farmers in improving their quality of life and attaining environmental sustainability. It also advocates for farmers' rights over seeds, indigenous practices, and fair trade on agriculture, mostly supporting the concern of poorest farmers in Asia. In achieving its objectives, sharing and learning, collaborations on research and documentation, joint campaigns, advocacy and networking are done at various levels - international, national, regional and local levels.

One of the unique features of the programme is building capacities of farmers through exchange programmes. Fr R H Hardaputranta, SJ from the then Caritas Indonesia initiated Farmers' Conference in 1995 to re-gain the prestige of farming, farmers' profession; to protect and promote sustainable agriculture and farmers' rights. Since then, the Farmers' Conference (FC) has emerged as a platform for farmers to share their experiences, learn from each other and be united to protect their rights. The whole programme based on the concept of 'travel and learn' has been able to create many model farmers, model organic villages, good practices, and farmers' led advocacy at different levels.

The South Asia Farmers conference for the year 2010 was held in Bangalore during February 9-13, 2010. Two farmers and two staff from Caritas regions like Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh and India participated. The conference was launched on 9 February 2010 by Father Verghese, Executive Director, Caritas India. For the next three days participants travelled to places like Mysore and Wayanad. They visited the farm of Mr. Chandrashekhar in Mysore to know more about organic farming practices. Later, the participants visited Wayanad, to learn about the processing and value addition of organic products. The workshop concluded in Bangalore with participants sharing their learnings and preparing plans to implement their learnings.

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Conference Statement

We, the 8 farmers and 11 Program Officers from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Philippines, attended the South Asia Farmers' Conference, organized by Caritas Asia and hosted by Caritas India from 9-13 February at Frontier Management Centre at Bangalore in India. We discussed different techniques, technologies and benefits of organic agriculture and about farmers' rights over seeds, indigenous knowledge and practices.

We have committed ourselves to:

a) save mother earth for our society today as well as for future generations;
b) practice and promote organic agriculture in our own localities;
c) ensure marketing for organic products based on the practical experience in Wayanad;
d) avoid using all forms of chemical fertilizers and pesticides;
e) avoid using all GM and hybrid seeds and foods;
f) advocate, promote, and practice organic agriculture at local, national and Asian level;
g) campaign against the use of GM and hybrid seeds; and
h) support and initiate efforts on mitigating the effects of climate change.

Based on our discussions and field visits to Mysore (Karnataka) and Wayanad (Kerala), we strongly propose the following recommendations to our respective governments:

a) Allocate funds to promote organic agriculture and provide technical support on organic farming at grassroots level.
b) Organize trainings and seminars on organic farming for agricultural technicians, journalists, farmers, and other individuals who are involved in agriculture.
c) Strengthen the promotion and practice of organic farming by widely disseminating the benefits of organic agriculture through mass media campaigns, agricultural fairs, and other forms of promotional strategies.
d) Join national and international campaigns on climate change.
e) Allocate funds for adaptation on climate change.
f) Withdraw all forms of subsidies to chemical fertilizers and pesticides.
g) Enact laws banning all chemical fertilizers and pesticides.
h) Legislate laws that stop the use of all Genetically Modified seeds and ban all GM foods.
i) Spread awareness on the dangers of using GM foods and chemical inputs to agriculture through television, print and other electronic media.
j) Confer national awards to the best organic farmers, farmers' groups, and/or organic agriculture technicians.
k) Introduce 'organic agriculture' in the school curriculum.
l) Uphold and protect all forms of farmers' rights.

By the participants of the South Asia Farmers' Conference 2010

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Lighting the lamp during the inaugural session

The South Asia Farmers' Conference for the year 2010 was formally inaugurated on 9 February 2010 at 9:00 AM. An inter-faith invocation was led by a farmer-participant from each of the countries of Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Mr. Taibur Rahaman of Bangladesh read a passage of the holy Quran; Mr. Janak Acharya of Nepal led the Hindu prayer; and Mr. Devith Appu of Sri Lanka recited a Christian prayer.

Dr. Haridas Varikkotil, Coordinator, South Asia SAFaR Program, welcomed the guests of honour for the day - Fr. Varghese, the Executive Director of Caritas India, Fr. Frederick D' Sousa, Assistant Executive Director of Caritas India; Mr. Gabriel Baroi, Program Officer, Caritas Asia and Mr. Zar Gomez, the person in-charge of the South East Asia Sustainable Agriculture Program. He extended a warm welcome to all the participants from various countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and India. Dr. Haridas said that the concept of travel and learn approach is being used for better learning. A brief outline of the programme schedule was shared.

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Welcome Address

By Rev. Fr. Frederick D'Sousa
Assistant Executive Director, Caritas India

A very warm welcome to you all here in Bangalore!

Here among us are people from Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Philippines representing farmers, activists, experts, NGOs, and the government representatives. A wide variety of experiences will be shared across by farmers who are farming; activists who are passionate about the topic; NGOs who are helping promotion of sustainable agriculture in farmers fields; and the government representatives.

The objective of this event is that we, at the South Asian level, should come together, understand one another, and collectively focus on helping farmers to realise their dreams. This is what as Caritas Confederation and as Caritas family, we have something in common at the South Asian level.

Let's have a commitment to be organic all the way. Let us say no to anything that is genetically modified. Let us not use plastic which causes harm to the environment. Let us tell the government to be an example by banning the use of plastic and promote use of eco-friendly products like jute. So, let us see how we can go in an organic way. Let us internalize the concept of organic life and be committed to live such way. Let us make it as our belief and thrust that we will promote organic farming all the time and everywhere. The theme for this conference is also about organic concept - *"organic farming, the right choice for you and for me ..."* In other words, let us internalize it.

I wish you all the best, and I wish you a very organic experience and a very organic stay in Bangalore.

Thank you very much.

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Opening Remarks

By Rev. Fr. Varghese Mattamana
Executive Director of Caritas India

Dear friends, it is a pleasure for me to stand before you.

There are two major issues which we are facing all over the world, especially in Asia. One is this economic meltdown, the so called financial crisis, created by all of us and felt everywhere in the world. Another issue is the issue of climate change. Climate change besides affecting crop production, is also affecting the cultures of people. For example, in coastal areas in Philippines, fishing communities' are relocated owing to floods, forcing them to become farmers. Their livelihoods have changed and so have their culture of working during nights and resting during the day.

One more important issue affecting people in Asia is the price hike. Almost 40 to 60 percent of price hike has occurred within a span of one year. The price hike is benefiting neither the farmer nor the consumer. Most of the hike is owing to improper distribution mechanisms of the government. For example, in Delhi, while a kilogram of dal costs Rs.40 in the wholesale market, it is almost Rs.70 in the retail shop. This inefficiency in distribution mechanism is common in most of the South Asian countries. Another upcoming trend in India or in Asia is that of the genetically modified food products. This is an issue of concern, especially for the consumers.

These are the trends and issues in Asia. But there are solutions too. If farmers have to be benefited with a better price they need to add value to their products. In Philippines, for example, one of the dioceses in partnership with CRS, facilitated linking organic farmers with the food chain. In Mindanao, farmers are selling 60 metric tons of onion produced by them, directly in the market. Such examples are found everywhere. You all would be seeing such successful examples during this conference.

Wish you all the best and a happy stay.

Thank you very much.

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Special Address

by Mr. Gabriel Baroi
Program Officer, Caritas Asia

Dear Participants, our program aims to promote sustainable practices in agriculture and empower farmers and fisher folk in order to improve the quality of life and attain environmental sustainability. It aims at strengthening farmers' capacity and the capacity of participating member organisations in developing more effective, people-centered, participatory and poverty-focused programmes on sustainable agriculture. This programme also initiates processes to inform and update stakeholders and other partners on the activities and developments of the Pan-Asia Programme on Sustainable Agriculture and Farmers' Rights so that they facilitated wider dissemination.

Since the beginning, farmers' conferences have become a sharing and learning forum as well as an advocacy platform for farmers and programme officers. Farmers' conferences have produced many model farmers, model organic villages, community seeds banks in different countries, different organic pest repellant, good practices in farming (system of rice intensification, integrated crop management, intercropping) and farmers-led advocacy at different levels.

Farmers are the worst sufferers in the changing climatic and economic conditions. We - as farmers and development professionals - may not be able to solve all problems, but our contribution to address these issues at our level can be valuable. It is already proven by scientific research that organic agriculture could greatly help to reduce global warming and ensure food sovereignty. Let us follow organic farming and stand against genetically modified seeds, chemical farming and unfair and distorted trade agreements.

Our success in the past is inspiring farmers, officers and technicians involved in our programmes, to move ahead, together. Our farmers are our inspiration. We strongly believe that the farmers' conferences are of benefit to all participants, to improve the quality of life.

Thank you.

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Special Address

By Mr. Zar V. Gomez
Pan-Asia Coordinator of SAFaR Program

magandang umaga po sa inyong lahat, meaning, good morning to all of you.

South Asia Farmers' Conference is an opportunity for us to share with each other and to learn from one another. The SAFaR program regularly conducts this conference on a yearly basis. It was started in 1995 by an Indonesian Jesuit priest, Fr. Hardaputtra. The first ever farmers' conference was held in that year in Chiangmai, Thailand, and from then on, we have been continuing to bring in farmers and program officers from South East Asia and South Asia. Now, we have this Pan-Asian program, wherein we all gather together for learning and sharing.

This farmers' conference has three specific objectives. First, we are here, to learn from one another and to augment our knowledge on sustainable agriculture practices. When we come together, we really learn from the experiences of others. The second objective of this conference is also for us to learn more about farmers' rights. What are our rights as farmers and as organic agriculture practitioners? How can our rights help us in our advocacy for organic farming? The third objective is to share the policies in our country, particularly on agriculture. We share our government's own policies on agriculture and on how we, as Caritas agencies can help in advocating for the adoption of organic farming in these policies. Apart from these, we are also here to talk about issues like climate change which are affecting us. Let us see how we can make ourselves and our farmers become more resilient against the effects.

Thank you very much!

Mr. Sunil Simon, Team Leader (NRM), Caritas India, proposed the vote of thanks.

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Sharing experiences at the country level

CARITAS Asia has been promoting sustainable agriculture activities through SAFAR programme in its partner countries. The situation, the activities and the challenges have all been different, with farmers also responding differently in each country situation. The Farmers Conference was used as a platform to share these varied experiences across countries enabling cross learning among participants. Each country representative shared the country's agriculture context and the sustainable agriculture promotion carried out in the respective countries. They also shared some highlights of their programme which has made an impact on the livelihoods of the people.

Caritas Nepal

By Tej Bahadur

Low productivity in rice and vegetable crops contributes to food insecurity in small farm households in Nepal. Erratic rains and changing climatic conditions are resulting in frequent droughts. Moreover, farmers owing to lack of awareness on judicial use of external inputs and effective use of biological inputs are finding farming highly cost intensive. To empower small farmers, to improve sustainability of their farming practice and household food security, sustainable agriculture practices are being promoted which are economically viable, socially just and suitable and environment friendly.

Programmes on sustainable agriculture promotion are being carried out in Nepal from 2002 onwards. Through Farmer Field Schools, 5799 farmers are trained on IPM in rice and 3497 farmers trained on IPM in vegetables. 1966 small farmers trained in IPM practices in rice have realized 42% increase in yields in Farmer Field School trials. Similarly, in 2009, 1039 small farmers trained on IPM FFS in vegetables have realized, on an average, an yield increase of 32-80% in different vegetables crops.

Around 53 people are trained on biological control and pesticide poisoning. Following the training, IPM technicians, farmer trainers and lead farmers are now able to facilitate the village level extension training on pesticide poisoning and biological control as well as sustainable soil management.

Local networking has been strengthened. 7 district level IPM networks are formed with 119 members and 42 local networks are formed in 25 districts. Local IPM network is represented in the "District IPM Committees''. Government is in the process of forming. IPM local network cooperatives based on the advice of Caritas Nepal's members of "National IPM Committee".

Major achievements

- Farmers are cultivating rice in a naturally sustainable manner. Many of the farmers in the plains have raised dhaincha as green manure crop. They have also increased the use of farm yard manure and compost, and ensured judicial use of chemical fertilizers,
- Adoption of IPM practices has enabled farmers to improve vegetable yields, improve soil condition, maintain balance of pests and friendly insects, prevent pesticide poisoning to farm workers, and recycle farm bio resources.
- Some farmers have been able to advocate for right price for their produce. For example, farmers in Rajapur of Bardiya protested until favorable prices were approved by the District Agriculture Office.
- 100 FFS groups for IPM in vegetables and 200 FFS for IPM in rice groups have established "seed fund or seed bank". They are accessing quality vegetables and rice seeds on time.
- Some farmers organizations (groups, local networks, cooperatives) are mobilising inputs and services from District Agriculture Office, District Cooperative Office, and District Irrigation Office.
- Women leaders of farmers' groups, local networks, and cooperatives are being recognized and appreciated for their roles as change agents by local government officials.

Caritas Sri Lanka

By Jaishankar

Sustainable Agriculture and Farmers' Rights (SAFaR) Programme in Sri Lanka included two types of activities – promoting sustainable agriculture practices among farmers and facilitating farmer to farmer exchange through exchange meetings.

Farmers are now trained on the techniques of compost making, IPM practices, water management, use of sprinkler irrigation and post harvesting techniques. Farmers are familiar with the concept of organic agriculture, conserving bio dynamics (i.e., farming without disturbing the natural cycles) and techniques of preparing vermiwash, liquid fertilizers, biogas etc. Farmers are increasingly going towards mixed cropping as a means to reduce pest incidence.

Organising National Farmers Conference in June 2009, Farmer Learning and Exchange programme in August 2009 and in October 2009 (in Mannar and Vauvniya) provided ample opportunity for farmers to share their best practices with each other.

Major achievements

- Farmers' leadership skills has been developed
- Considerable number of farmers have initiated organic farming practices
- Women in Self Help Groups are taking lead role in promoting organic home gardening practices; many women farmers are involved with compost production on a commercial scale. Some have also obtained certification for the produce.
- Farmers practicing sustainable agriculture over the past few years are presently collaborating with government and other organizations.
- Farmers are able to grow healthy foods to eat.
- Overall, there is a reduction in crop production costs.
- Organic farming in agricultural fields and home gardening at the domestic level has provided extra income to the farmers

Caritas Bangladesh

By Zillur Rehman

Barind Tract in the north west part of Bangladesh is a drought prone area, with mainly rainfed agriculture, It is a single cropped land. Lower yields in rice and pest incidence in vegetables are the major problems being faced by farmers.

To address these issues, sustainable agriculture practices and diversified cropping systems were promoted in Barind Tracts. Participatory approaches and farmer led approach was followed. A total of 43 soil samples are tested at the Soil Research Development Institute (SRDI) for their organic matter content, pH level and soil nutrients like Carbon, Nitrogen, Zinc, Potash, Boron and Sulphur.

Major Achievements

- Ten vegetable growers are cultivating vegetables round the year. They have cultivated egg plant, cabbage, red amaranthas, spinach, bitter gourd, chili, papaya, radish, ash gourd, bottle gourd and sweet gourd. Total production of vegetables is 1,384 kg.

- Around 11 farmers have gone in for SRI (System of Rice Intensification) cultivation.
- Organic solution such as Amritapani, Gunabum, Tonal, tonic, Neem extract are being used in place of chemicals.
- Farmers are following better water management practices - using Magic pipe for irrigation; drip irrigation for fruit crops and mulching to control evaporation. Sex pheromone traps are being used for controlling insects in vegetable crops.
- Technical skills of Adivasi farmers in agriculture have improved.
- Habit of consuming home grown healthy vegetables has increased.

Caritas India

By Haridas Varikkotil

National Workshop on "GMO: a threat to Agriculture in India" was conducted on 22 August 2009 in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. The conference reiterated the need to say no to GM food and go for alternatives like sustainable agricultural practices through proper land management practices, improving input efficiency and reducing chemical use.

Caritas India celebrated World Environment Day with the theme on 'Your Planet Needs You - Unite to Combat Climate Change'. Fr. Frederich D`Souza presented some striking facts about climate change and urged all the participants to lead a carbon neutral life. On a symbolic pledging Fr. Varghese Mattamana, Executive Director, Caritas India lead the participants to take pledge to live a carbon neutral life by thump campaign. Many programmes are being organised by partner organisations to spread awareness among the communities on the impact of climate change.

A training programme for 25 women farmers was conducted in Mangalore on February, 15, 2010. These farmers are motivated towards various aspects of organic farming and the methods of making growth promoters, pest repellents etc., towards promoting nutrition gardens in their households.

The training programme on Natural Resource Management (February 28-29, 2010 in Banglaore) was organized for the staff of diocesan Social Service Societies of Karnataka State. 37 participants attended this training organized by Karnataka Regional Forum.

The follow up training on Sustainable Agriculture was held in Tirunelveli on 25 -26 February 2010. Around 43 participants including a few farmers participated in the programme. The positive and negative aspects of the implementation of organic farming in the villages was then shared and discussed.

Body mapping exercise

Body mapping exercise was designed to assess the level of understanding of the Sustainable Agriculture programme by the participants. Participants were formed into two groups. One of the participants lied down on a sheet of paper. And the body outline was drawn. Then the participants articulated the 'Goals' of the programme and marked it as Head of the body, 'Objectives' as Throat, 'Activities' as Hands and 'Application of learnings' as legs. Both the groups presented their understanding to the larger group.

Major Achievements

- More than 500 farmers trained by Caritas India are into organic farming.
- 75 participants who attended the GM conference understood the negative impacts of GM food. The team which participated from Madhya Pradesh Forum organized a procession in Jaipur as a follow up.
- Action plan for the promotion of action research on Sustainable Agriculture was prepared for Tamil Nadu and Karnataka Region.

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Sharing information on current issues

While sharing knowledge on immediate issues concerning farming is important, there are also a number of issues outside the 'farmers world' which have a great impact on their lives and livelihoods. Issues of climate change or genetically modified food are just a few examples which farmers have no control on but face a lot of consequences if policy decisions are not taken based on ground reality. The farmers conference provided space to discuss such issues so as to create awareness among the farmer participants. In this Conference, the issue discussed was GM food, which was the current hot topic.

Genetically Modified (GM) Food

Dr. Haridas Varikkotil

On October 14th 2009, the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) of the Government of India have cleared Bt Brinjal, the first Genetically Modified (GM) food crop in the country and the first ever vegetable in the world with a toxin-producing gene inside it, for commercial cultivation. The Government of India is yet to decide on its commercial release after holding consultations with all stakeholders in January and February 2010. The fear is that the introduction of Bt brinjal may open the floodgates for a host of such technologically engineered vegetables and fruits that will hit market shelves and eventually our dining table. People will be left with no choice than eating GM Food. If Bt Brinjal is approved, in the absence of labeling, consumers will have no way of knowing whether the brinjal they consume is GM or not. This will be a violation of every consumer's right to know, right to safe food and right of choice. Moreover, labeling cannot be a solution for a country like India, where in the majority of consumption is in the form of unpackaged foods available in the open market and local mandis.

There are many unaddressed questions with regard to the very need of this Bt Brinjal. The National Agricultural Research System as well as many practicing farmers have enormous knowledge on successful, sustainable and economically viable pest management practices in Brinjal crop, without the use of synthetic pesticides. In the face of such alternatives, it is not clear why the GM option (with the claim that it will bring down pesticide usage) is being pushed. Further, no one can argue that Bt Brinjal would be an answer to the hunger crisis! India is the Centre of Origin of brinjal and has a vast diversity (more than

What is Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO)

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) can be defined as organisms in which the genetic material (DNA) has been altered in a way that does not occur naturally. The technology is often called "modern biotechnology" or "gene technology", sometimes also "recombinant DNA technology" or "genetic engineering". Since GM crops are created by the unnatural insertion of foreign genes into host DNA of a plant, it can lead to numerous unpredictable changes that are potentially dangerous for health.

2500 varieties). This diversity, a national heritage, is now under great threat.

Many agricultural communities around the world depend on saving seed from year to year. Seed saving is central to food security for the billions of farmers who are too poor to buy new seeds every season. When seeds are conventionally bred, breeders don't own them—anyone can use or improve the seeds. But genetic modification allows a company to claim property rights over a particular DNA blueprint and to charge heavily on the seeds (e.g., when traditional cotton seed costs Rs.30 per kilogram, Bt Cotton costs Rs.2000). Today, Monsanto and other seed companies object to seed saving, which they call "seed piracy" and which they claim deprives them of profits.

Health implications of GM Food

There is evidence from various parts of the world that the health of human beings and animals have been affected by consuming GM foods. With Bt Cotton (the only approved GM crop in India), there are several reports of adverse animal health impacts (including animal deaths) that have not been systematically investigated. Further, from various studies, GM foods are known to cause allergies, immune system changes, damage to organs like kidneys and liver, affect growth and metabolism and impact reproductive health adversely. No independent research to prove the safety of Bt Brinjal exists. All decisions have been based on the crop-developer's (i.e. Monsanto/Mahyco's) data.

Environmental Issues

Potential environmental impacts of GM crops are serious, especially given the violation of the principle of irreversibility – having been introduced they can never be withdrawn. Intensive farming and monocropping practices have serious environmental consequences. Intensive monocropping of GM crops and continuous pesticide applications constrain and reduce biodiversity, a necessity for achieving food security. Many of the so called pests that will be wiped out are essentially pollinators of food crops. For example, the production of GM maize is linked to an increase in the deaths of monarch butterflies in the US. Through cross-pollination, non-GM crops and weeds could be easily contaminated. GM crops are engineered to work with strong applications of herbicides that will wipe out a wide range of plants. The only plants that will adapt and survive will be 'super weeds' that will be even more difficult to breakdown.

It is very vital to have strict regulatory mechanism to ensure that no harm is caused to the nature due to this technology. The appropriateness of the technology for every purpose should be analysed and compared with its alternative choices. In any case, the technology which poses threat to environment should not be allowed to be practiced in this country. Sustainable agricultural practices are the best way in which we can ensure food security of our country. Our research organisations should work towards achieving better production by use of natural techniques which can help the communities to sustain the varying agro-climatic conditions. On the other hand, it is the right of each consumer in this country to know about the technology and its possible ill effects. There is an urgent need for civil societies to come together to help the government in taking suitable decision to ban the entry of GM Crops in India.

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Sharing Field Experiences

Farmers have immense knowledge of their areas, their crops and cropping practices. However, a small support in the form of ideas or knowledge can trigger the innate potential of farmers to achieve big. The regional offices of CARITAS have been playing this supportive role facilitating farmers to succeed and excel. Practical experiences were shared by farmer participants as a motivation to others.

IPM FFS group registered as Cooperative

As told by Janak Acharya
Farmer, Nepal

I come from Mayurbasti-3, Bardiya district. I have a small family consisting of my wife and two daughters. I have completed lower secondary level education. I grow vegetables like pumpkin, cucurbits, bitter gourd, bottle gourd, tomato, beans and cole crops on my farm.

In 2006, I got an opportunity to join the IPM FFS organised in my village. This training was carried out by Caritas Field Office at Bardiya. We formed a group named Milan IPM FFS in Kalika, Bardiya with 26 members including 18 women. Season long FFS in vegetables for 18 weeks was organised. I was nominated as a group leader. This was the first training that I received in agriculture.

Land leased in for vegetable group farming

Group members learnt practices such as seed selection, nursery preparation techniques, compost preparation, botanical pesticide preparation, urine use, fertilizer application techniques, water and weed management, staking method, disease and pest identification and management techniques.

In 2007, all FFS members followed IPM practices in vegetables, which we learnt in the previous year. Group members decided to organise group meetings with saving activity on a regular basis. In each meeting, we discussed about the crop management particularly the major pest and disease problems and reported adoption at the house hold level. This group is still actively taking part on IPM practice adoption in vegetables and rice crops.

Practices followed by me are vermiculture, urine mixture use, compost use, botanical pesticide, staking, weeding and irrigation. We planted crops on a wider spacing of 150 *100 m for cucumber, we applied compost @15 ton per ha, staking, irrigation as per water requirement critical stage, micro nutrient top dress 2 times etc. I earned NRs 35000 in last year from vegetable crops.

The FFS group members registered the group Milan IPM FFS under cooperative as Milan Agriculture Multipurpose Cooperative. Mr. Jang Bhadur Chaudhari is actively working as the President. Initially, we mobilized savings for meeting the costs of inputs. Later, Caritas Nepal, supported Rs 60000. Five members initially started group farming in 2008. This increased to 12 members in 2nd year and 20 members in third year and all are growing vegetables commercially.

This is a good example of self motivated community initiating income generation activities. As a group leader, I played a vital role to drive the group towards achieving this success.

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Experience on organic farming of vegetables

As told by Ms. Beli Kumari Chaudhari,
Farmer, Nepal

I am an inhabitant of Saudiyar-5 Rajpur, Dang. There are 5 members in my family. I am from Chetri(KC) caste but I got married to a person from the ethnic group. I completed my study up to intermediate level. I am supporting my husband for his further studies.

Beli Kumari working on her farm

Therefore, I am doing vegetable farming to earn money. I have only 1 bigha of land (0.66 ha) for farming agricultural crops like paddy, mustard, wheat, lentil, corn and vegetables (cauliflower. cabbage, potato, and tomato).

I got an opportunity to participate in IPM FFS training in vegetables and rice in 2008. I learnt nursery raising, land preparation, composting, urine collection, staking vegetable crops, adopting wider spacing, providing irrigation as per crop need or considering critical stages of growth.

I planted vegetables like Cauliflower and Cabbage in 2 kathas of land applying IPM practices that I learned in the IPM FFS vegetable training. I sprayed urine mixture @1:4 on vegetable crop at 7 days interval. Disease and pests were managed by using botanical pesticides. I earned NRs 15000 by selling vegetables. Now my family members are happy with the income and have expressed interest to support me in expanding the vegetable cultivation on a larger area.

I planted rice in 3 kathas of land by applying practices like 20*20 cm in spacing, 3 seedlings per hill, applying compost @15 ton per ha 15 days prior to planting. Rice production increased by 50% compared to my previous method of cultivation.

In future, I will expand the area under rice and vegetables adopting IPM practices. I am trying my best to farm using organic methods. But I need to be further confident to pursue organic farming.

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Learning on the Field

As the old adage goes, one picture is equal to thousand words, so is the impact of field visits when learning is the central objective. Experiencing the field reality and listening to the experiences of farmers themselves is the highest motivating factor for influencing other farmers. Visits to an organic farm in Mysore and a processing Unit in Wayanad were facilitated as the crux of the Conference was travel and learn approach.

Visit to Indraprastha Farm

February 10, 2010

Caritas India has been involving organic farmers like Mr. Chandrashekhar and Mr. Narayana Reddy in some of its programmes. Mr. Chandrashekhar, was part of the national implementation of APHD Sustainable Agriculture Programme. He also participated in the SAFaR farmer's conference in the past. Mr. Chandrasekhar's case study was also published in the book prepared by APHD.

Participants interacted with Mr. Chandrashekhar on his farm, where he shared his philosophy on life, his views, his concerns and his way of life. He provided an opportunity for participants to see the various processes and activities on his farm, facilitated discussions resulting in deeper understanding. Some of the excerpts from his talk, as told by him, is presented below.

Views on plants and life forms

I come from an agricultural family. My forefathers were farmers but I studied engineering. But I did not like the idea of living in a city and left the profession within 10 months after getting the job. I decided to stick to this profession of agriculture. I found this piece of land and decided to start agriculture.

Initially, I thought that like human beings, plants also need food and we need to feed them. But, within six months I understood that plants are totally independent. While humans need to be fed, plants are capable of preparing their own food through photosynthesis.

Every life form can survive and has survived by itself without human interventions. But human life couldn't have been possible without the support of all other life forms. Life forms other than humans (eg., plants

Indraprastha Farm: Some highlights

- Farm with rich diversity of crops and plants
- Integration of animal husbandry
- Optimum utilization of all available resources with less external inputs
- Need based and environment friendly farming practices followed
- Value added organic farm produces
- Linkage with market outlets

and animals) are totally independent and have more potential than human beings. For eg. we can't fly as birds, we can`t run as fast as horse. In the evolution or the civilisation process, humans understood this and tried to train all those animals and utilise in their life. That is the organic thing. Organic means, use of organs of nature in every level of our life. For instance, animals and plants are like organs for human beings. As we utilise a set of organs, our life and also our energy requirements become simpler. On the other hand, for chemical farming, in order to acquire energy, we have to install chemical industry, where there is no life and there is no growth. When required, these industries use energy from the nature and that energy gets depleted from the nature.

Food is our major requirement. But air and water are much more important than food. In the process of producing food, we have lost the precious air and water. Further, we need to understand that the food has become poisonous with chemical use. This has necessitated dependence, more on medicines than food.

Philosophy of Panchabhuta

In nature, resources are available in the form of panchabhutas. In Sanskrit, we call it prithvi, aap, teja, vayu and aakasha (earth, water, heat, air and space/scope). Our resources and life is limited. Our average life is of about 70-80 years. Without thinking this limitation, we have built this civilisation or modern developments for 1000 years. All our buildings and development is based on a long term thinking which is of about 1000 years. Though we know the fact, we are ignorant about the fact that the life will end very quickly. We have buildings having 120 or 150 floors. In order to make such a building a lot of resources are required which we have to extract from the nature. These kind of activities are the reason for global warming and resource depletion. When the new generation comes, they will have a different taste and will build again demolishing what is existing.

Panchabhutas are responsible for every life form on the earth. Food we take is from the earth. All the flesh and bone we call it as earth as it is made up of earth. The fluid is water. Energy from the Sun is photosynthesised in a plant and transformed into food. When this food is consumed, we get energy to do the activities.

In a civilized society, we throw more garbage than we consume. All that is thrown out flows and floats in nature and pollutes the Panchabhutas. Owing to this over exploitation, Panchabutas by themselves become deformed. What we consume is the deformed Panchabhutas in the form of water, food and air. So, our body also gets deformed and we call this state as a disease. Again to cure these diseases, we consume medicines. By this process, instead of making a positive cycle, we are making a negative cycle.

Panchabhutas and organic farming

Organic farming is a necessity as it has the basics of life. Only plants are capable of converting the panchabhutas into life. Every day, there will be a new bud, new leaf, new life and new growth. If these weeds, this sugarcane crop and these trees are not there on this farm, every day sun light will fall on the land and it will be lost in the soil. The energy will be with the soil but it cannot produce life and we cannot utilise it. But plants under the sun take the energy from the sun and convert the energy into food.

Our ancestors thoroughly understood all these processes. They guided us to use a bullock plough which can plough only 2-3 inches deep. By doing this, we will be destroying the panchabhutas at a minimum level. They have also understood minute things like which season we should plough, which tree should be used for making the plough etc., much earlier from the nature.

Before shifting to organic farming, first, we should convince ourselves that the organic farming is the

"We are here because of plants but plants are not here because of us".

necessity of the nature. If we are not able to convince ourselves on this, it is very difficult to go further on organic farming. Once we get the answer for WHY then the question of HOW comes.

We need to understand the necessities of our everyday life. We have to identify and grow them on our field. It is the first step to organic farming. Every person has a different taste. If I like food prepared in coconut oil, I have the right to grow coconut. If I like ground nut oil, I should not grow coconut and should start growing ground nut. But in reality, if one crop gets better value during a year, every farmer starts growing that crop and by the third year the value of that crop gets reduced. We need to plan everything from the beginning. The option with us is that, we plant a number of crops according to the available area and individual requirements. If a farmer owns 10 acres of land, he should be growing 20-30 crops in that area. By doing this, the crop production and price will be balanced.

When we talk about Panchanga or set of five among plants, it consists of big trees, small trees, creepers for every tree (bigger and smaller tree), tubers under the tree and unknown weeds or medicinal plants. Sunlight will be harvested first by the biggest trees, then smaller ones and finally reach the weeds, again from higher to the lower level. The last ray of the sunlight also will be absorbed by the small weeds and almost all the solar energy will be converted into biomass on our land. The land will become richer and richer and there will be minimum requirement of water and manure. At some stage everything will become automatic. There will not be any need for irrigation, manuring and other operations. We plough so that the soil can become loose and water and air can enter into the land easily. If every land is incorporated with varieties of tubers, they do the ploughing naturally without extra energy or power tiller and tractor. Your land will get ploughed free. You can enjoy sweet potato and also feed the livestock. When livestock is fed with these tubers, the amount of feed bought from the market will be reduced.

Philosophy can't go without science and science should not go without philosophy.

In our farm, we grow vegetables as an intercrop. We do not depend on market for vegetables. Health and ill health are like day and night. I am conversant with homeopathy. I even treat my cows with homeopathy medicines for major diseases like foot and mouth disease. I do prepare some of the medicines and products which can be observed during the visit to the farm.

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Unique features of plants and trees on the farm

- A mango tree having 5 varieties in a single tree.
- Cactus which gives fruits. There were many cactus varieties ranging from thorny to non-thorny varieties. There was also a non thorny cactus variety which could be eaten. It could be consumed raw, can be cooked and made into a drink. The cactus has a shelf-life of six months.
- Traditional cotton variety and less vulnerable to diseases.
- Alfalfa plant which is a vegetable and has medicinal value.
- Odomos plant, a good mosquito repellent. It is not edible.
- A smaller variety of chickoo. Oil can be extracted from the seeds and could be used for making vanaspati or soap. It can be used as a base for grafting chickoo.
- Simarooba, a good source of oil useful for various purposes. Wood can be used as fuel.
- Garlic Creeper: The flower and leaves are the imitation of garlic and it can be used for cooking. It taste and smells like garlic.
- Chewing Gum Fruit, used for preparing natural colour.

Visit to the farm

All the participants were taken to the farm to see various practices and plant species. Participants saw a number of medicinal plants. They also saw and discussed about the plants like pomegranate, smallest variety of brinjal, lemon grass, gandaprasadi, mulberry, dragon fruit, aloe vera etc. Participants saw hundreds of other varieties on the farm.

Participants discussing on the Indraprastha farm

The visit was followed by a country wise discussion with participants on their experience and learning from the visit. While some felt that the availability of facilities and resources to Mr. Chandrashekhar is different than what the small farmers have in their country, most of the farmer participants shared that the visit was very useful and they will be able to replicate and include these learnings into their agriculture practice. Participants also got a chance to visit the marketing facility he has developed to sell the organic produce of his farm.

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Visit to Wayanad

February 11, 2010

Wayanad Social Service Society

Partcipants visited Wayanad Social Service Society (WSSS) – a Diocesan Social Service Organization. WSSS is also an implementing partner of the FARM (Facilitating Agricultural Regeneration Measures) project in Wayanad, supported by Caritas India. Fr. Romance Antony, Director, Kerala Social Service Forum, Fr. John Choorapuzha, Director WSSS and E.J.Jose, farmer delegate from Caritas India welcomed all the guests.

WSSS is a registered charitable society and a secular voluntary organization established in the year 1974 as the official social service organization of the Catholic Diocese of Manathavady. It aims at the socio-economic empowerment of the vulnerable groups like tribals, women, and small and marginal farmers through participatory development interventions. It works in the districts of Wayanad, Kannur and Malappuram in Kerala and Gudallur Taluk in Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu.

WSSS is a pioneer organization in the state of Kerala in the promotion of organic farming. At present, its reach is 2000 farmers covering 2800 acres under small holder certification program. Out of 2000 farmers, 506 have obtained organic status. Certification has been obtained both under European Union Regulation and USDA. WSSS is the only accredited agency in the state, with a status of Service Provider for organic farming under National Center for Organic Farming of the Government of India. It is also sup-

WSSS – Some highlights

- Organic production and certification
- Procurement of produces of small and marginal farmers
- Providing 40 to 100% premium price to the farmers
- Value addition of farmer's produces by service provider NGO on behalf of farmers (White pepper preparation, Ginger processing, coffee powder making and its packaging)
- Marketing of processed goods in an organized manner on behalf of small farmers by service provider.

Women farmers handling ginger harvest

ported by the Spices Board, State Horticulture Mission and APEDA.

WSSS has initiated awareness generation on the importance of bio-diversity and organic farming covering farmers in 31 villages in Wayanad district. Among the many other areas of focus of WSSS are community-based people's organization; human resource development; promotion of micro-credit and finance; human and institution development; organic farming, certification, and marketing; rural energy development; tribal development; revitalization of health traditions and medicinal plants conservation; income generation program and micro enterprises; low cost housing; welfare activities; watershed development; water conservation and sanitation.

WSSS shared their rich experience in the field of Organic Farming and the whole value chain beginning from production till marketing. The process involved dissemination of organic concepts and practices, organizing small farmers on cluster basis, arranging group certification procurement of certified farm produces, processing value addition, marketing and profit sharing. Participants raised several questions on community participation and the government linkages.

Fr. John, Director, WSSS, elaborated their field interventions which included building capacities of small farmers and developing linkages with various governmental agencies, research institutions etc.

Value Added Products

- Pepper : White pepper, DGP, Cracked Pepper, Black pepper powder, White pepper powder
- Coffee : Parchment Coffee, hulled coffee, Graded coffee, Coffee powder
- Fruits : Jack Fruit, Cashew Apple
- Other Products : Lemon Grass oils, Eucalyptus oils, Lemon grass cuts.

Vanamoolika – Some highlights

- 200 medicinal plants in Kerala extinct now.
- Rare endangered and threatened species of medicinal plants (around 700) are conserved and propagated.
- Herbal medicines are being prepared and marketed using these rare medicinal plants
- Vegetables are cultivated under controlled conditions in the greenhouse.

He mentioned that poverty is not highlighted by the government therefore the problems in agriculture are also not highlighted. Farmers are suffering from fluctuation in prices. The need for promotion of Organic Agriculture is further relevant considering the high level incidents of killer diseases like cancer owing to excessive use of chemicals in farming operations.

Now farmers are slowly accepting the need for organic farming. Farmers are recognizing a good margin for their organic products. In some areas, natural habitat is coming back after introducing the organic cultivation. Various government agencies including Kerala State Horticulture Mission and Spices Board are extending their support. These programmes are also being extended to the tribal communites. About 10% of tribal communities are involved in the programme. Now they are storing and selling organic products by themselves based on the demand.

Spices Processing Unit

The group visited Spices Processing Unit at Dwaraka run by the Wayanad Social Service Society. Mr. E.J.Jose, Programme Manager of FARM project, explained the process to the group. Procurement of certified Organic Products - like black pepper, cardamom, turmeric, ginger, coffee etc - its grading, processing, packaging and exporting as organic certified products are being done at this centre. The group witnessed the process of white pepper preparation which has got high price in the international market. The processing unit is mainly focusing on exporting to other countries.

A documentary on white pepper preparation process was shown after the session. It showed how value addition can render a good profit to the farmers with the support of proven technologies supported by the linkage and collaboration with Research Institutions.

Boys Town – Some highlights

- The role of consortium of 8 partner NGOs in the implementation of FARM programme of Caritas India was highlighted.
- Exhibition of organic produce, collection of seeds and grains by partner NGOs
- Farm women facilitators demonstrated the preparation of bio inputs like Amrithapani, E.M. solution, Panchagavya and R.K. Bacterial solution

Vanamoolika

The group visited Vanamoolika, an NGO working for the promotion of herbal medicines. Mr. Chackochan, the Executive Director, introduced his organization. He mentioned the fact that about 200 medicinal plants used for Ayurvedic medicine preparation in Kerala were extinct now. Participants saw the preparation of various herbal medicines, cosmetics and neutraceuticals. Vanamoolika has patented products in cosmetics and neutraceuticals. They are also preserving about 700 species of plants used in Ayurvedic medicines.

Participants visited Poly house where temperature and moisture are controlled for the optimum growth of organic vegetables. Groups were familiarized with various medicinal trees and shrubs used for the herbal medicine during their visit to the medicinal garden. They also saw *Anona Muricata*, a plant famous for its curative power for cancer. It is considered to be ten thousand times better than the chemotherapy which kills the cancer cells along with healthy cells.

WSS Training Center, Boys Town

Field visit was followed by a concluding session in WSSS training centre at Boys town. Fr. Romance Antony emphasized the need for organic farming in the era of free trade and ASIAN agreement. Dr. Haridas, Caritas India remembered that when FARM project first started in Wayanad, there were lots of financial problems for the farmers. About 1690 farmers committed suicide. Now the families of these farmers got together through organic farming and thereby promoting eco-friendly measures. The success of the project has led Caritas India to initiate an action research on the issue. He also appreciated the partner NGOs of the FARM project and pointed out FARM project as a good example of networking of NGOs and

Understanding the process of value addition

remembered the words of Hon. Agriculture Minister who appreciated the Consortium.

An exhibition of various certified / value added organic products, bio-inputs and indigenous seeds were also arranged by the partner Organizations of FARM Wayanad. An exhibition of various organic products was also arranged to familiarize with the products. The day ended with a Cultural night with traditional, classical dances and folk songs.

Model Resource Centre of WSSS

February 12, 2010

During the next day, the team visited the Model Resource Centre of WSSS. They saw the Medicinal Plants Conservation Park and vermicompost units. A team of women farmers from FARM Wayanad Project demonstrated the preparation of bio-Inputs like Amrithapani, R.K.Solution, E.M Solution and Panchagavya.

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Reflections

February 12, 2010

Participants reflected on the four days sessions and field visits and presented their observations and learnings. They also identified tasks which they would take forward in their respective working areas. Some of them also made suggestions for better learning with respect to the organization of such events.

Lessons from the Farmers Conference

- Value chain development activities for organic products leads to higher profits. Improved technologies on processing adds to quality production. Branding and packaging are also important in earning higher return.
- The technology used to produce white pepper from black pepper is unique. If this technique can be replicated, farmers can earn higher return.
- Available natural resources can be fully utilized by practicing ecological farming. Multi-tier system of cultivation captures maximum sunlight, uses different strata and gives better yield.
- Usage of low external inputs for sustainable production.
- Managing temperature and other environmental conditions is crucial in producing vegetables and in seed production.
- Programme provided directions to learn more about medicinal plants and their medicinal value.
- Scientific process of producing herbal medicines at Vanamoolika is a new experience.
- Organic fertilizer/ pest repellent solutions (vermicompost, vermiwash, amrithpani, EM, Panchagavya etc.) can be prepared using the available local resources.
- Changed the mind sets after understanding the concept and philosophy of organic farming.

General Feedback

- Slogan of this year (''organic farming: the right choice for nature .....you and me.'') and the choice of field sites for the exposure visit was closely interrelated and resulted in good learning.
- Good selection of farmers who shared their ideas, feelings as well as their experiences.
- Different types of places visited (forest jungle and wild animals, tea garden, dry land, green land, stone hill, palace) created an energetic learning environment.
- Good coordination and hospitality by Caritas India.

Recommendations

- More focus on small holders required.
- Fields where farmers have undertaken trials and action research need to be visited to see the exact result or impact or change.
- Visit to fields with vegetable and cereals crops would have resulted in better understanding of pest, disease and other problems.
- More field based interaction with farmers is necessary.
- Small farmers need to be involved in farmers conference.
- Supporting documents and leaflets on specific technologies need to be shared.
- Lot of time was spent on learning the concept of Ecological Farming. A simple cost benefit analysis would have served the purpose.
- The programme need to be organized in a place close to the field visits to save on travel time.
- Field visit to one place will help save time in travel resulting in better learning.

Concluding Session

13 February 2010.

The closing session was marked by the closing remarks by Fr. Frederick D'Souza and Mr. Gabriel Baroi. Both speakers rendered their appreciation to all the participants, including those who were directly involved in the preparation of the conference.Shri Narayana Reddy, the organic farmer was the guest of honour and shared his views on organic farming. Participants were given certificates.

The South Asia Farmers' Conference formally concluded at 11:00AM. ⌘

List of Participants

- Mr. Augustin Baroi, Programme Officer, Caritas Bangladesh
- Mr. Bowatthe Gedara Dawith Appu, Farmer, Caritas Sri Lanka
- Mr. Basnayake, Manager, Caritas Sri Lanka
- Ms. Beli Kumari KC, Farmer, Caritas Nepal
- Mr. Gabriel Baroi, Programme Officer, Caritas Asia
- Mr. Gomez Eleazar Villanueva, Head, Programme Desk, Caritas Philippines
- Dr. Haridas V.R, Manager (NRM), Caritas India
- Mr. Janak Acharya, Farmer, Caritas Nepal
- Mr. Jayasundara MMPW, Farmer, Caritas Sri Lanka
- Mr. E.J Jose, Farmer, Caritas India
- Ms. Niranjani Roy, Farmer, Caritas Bangladesh
- Mr. Profulla Kumar Karmaker, Farmer, Caritas Bangladesh
- Mr. Rabindra Hansdah, Officer (NRM), Caritas India
- Mr. Sunny D'Souza, Farmer, Caritas India
- Mr. Sunil Simon, Team Leader (NRM), Caritas India
- Mr. Taibur Rahaman , Field Supervisor, Caritas Bangladesh
- Mr. Tej Basnet, IPM Program Coordinator, Caritas Nepal
- Mr. Thneswar Gautam, IPM technician, Caritas Nepal
- Mr. Zillur Rahaman, Programme Officer, Caritas Bangladesh

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Field Application

Each country representative presented what learnings they would apply back home.

Srilanka

- Sharing the knowledge with farmer organizations by conducting trainings for fellow members. Each farmer will conduct 10 trainings at their respective farmer organizations. They will be sharing the methods of preparation of organic fertilizer solutions such as “Amurtham” and preparation of vermicompost and vermiwash.
- Home gardens at farmer organization level will be done. There will be 10 demonstrations established at each farmer organization.
- Production of compost for market with the collective of farmers in Anuradhapura will be done.
- Exhibition outlets on organic agriculture will be included in the annual trade fairs at diocesan level.
- Sharing sessions on organic agriculture will be included in the school programmes conducted by Caritas Sri Lanka.

India

- Will document the process for dissemination (Farmers manual).
- Will include the promotion of organic farming in all the programmes supported by Caritas Agencies.
- Will facilitate exchange visits to the areas for mutual learning.
- Will campaign against GM foods and promotion of seed banks and grain banks.
- Application and propagation of learning through capacity building.
- Will organise a national level conference with an exhibition of organic produces.
- Develop market linkages of organic produces and herbal preparations.

Bangladesh

- 65 vermi compost pits will be established by June 2010.
- Will establish one regional garden at regional office (Rajshahi).
- Will establish three multistoried gardens starting from July 2010
- Introduce foliar spray in tree/plants.
- Will share ideas on Panchabhuta with 105 farmers and 125 staff members of Caritas in two regions, starting from March 2010.

Nepal

- Will promote the preparation and use of bio-inputs like vermiwash, Panchgavya, Amritpani and EM.
- Will practice the method of Vegetable post.
- Will share about herbal plants identification, preparation methods, their uses.

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South Asia Farmers' Conference

2010 PROCEEDINGS

9-13 February 2010 Bangalore, India

South Asia Farmers' Conference is one of the major components of Sustainable Agriculture and Farmers' Rights (SAFaR) program of Caritas Asia. The objective is to facili¬tate learning and sharing among farmers of the South Asian region. Participants include farmers and Programme Officers from Asian countries where Caritas is actively involved –Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Cambodia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Hongkong, Indonesia, Mongolia and Thailand. This programme is supported by CAFOD, Caritas Corea and Caritas Australia.

Since 1995, the SAFaR programmes have contributed towards strengthening farmers networks for the promotion of sustainable agriculture techniques that are both economically viable and socially just. It also provides a venue where farmers can share their learning and voice out concerns on subjects like preservation of farmers' rights over seeds, livelihoods, culture, indigenous knowledge, fair agricultural trade and climate change concerns.

This year's conference, hosted by Caritas India was held during 9-13 February in Bangalore. Intensive discussions, sharing of experiences along with field visits enabled knowledge exchange among the participants.

This document highlights the learning and field application aspects of the proceedings.

For detailed information on farmers' conference, please contact Mr. Gabriel Baroi (sgbaroi@gmail.com); Mr. Zar.V.Gomez (zargomez@hotmail.com) and Dr. Haridas (haridas@caritasindia.net)

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