

A Confluence of Food Alternatives!

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4 days of dialogue and activities on food alternatives: politics, culture, diversity, justice, ecology, and much else! That kind of sums up the 2nd National Food Vikalp Sangam (Alternatives Confluence) held at Bajju, near Bikaner (Rajasthan, India), at the campus of URMUL, which co-organised it with Banyan Roots and Kalpavriksh (partly sponsored by Misereor) on 6-9th October 2017. Considering where we were, quite a bit of the Sangam focused on the traditional foods and food cultures of the Rajasthan desert area, the transformations caused by the Indira Gandhi canal, commercialisation, and govt promotion of Green Revolution packages, and attempts at revival of diversity and organic production in the new context. Experiences of problems and alternatives from Nagaland, Manipur, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Ladakh, Madhya Pradesh, Goa, elsewhere in Rajasthan, were also shared. Several farmers from surrounding areas brought in a very local flavour, enhanced by visits to three rural areas that URMUL works in, and livened by some incredible local cuisine that was testimony to the magic of URMUL's kitchen staff. Adivasis / indigenous peoples from Maharashtra (Gonds in Gadchiroli), Odisha (Kondhs in Niyamgiri area), Manipur and Nagaland also recounted experience with forest foods, shifting cultivation and pastoralism (there was some great sharing between them and Rajasthan farmers, as most were unaware of each others' ecological, political and cultural contexts). Women's experience with farming and home gardens were described, including from Uttara Kannada in Karnataka. Unfortunately fishers and pastoralists (other than from Rajasthan) were missing (some dropped out last minute), though the former's experience was brought in by a participant working earlier with the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers. Interestingly people from various communities and areas brought up the problems caused by the current 'politics of the cow', including how this has significantly enhanced stray cattle numbers which are damaging crops, and caused loss of livelihoods for those dependent on livestock trade. There was also some frank sharing of the weaknesses and contradictions within the working of our own organisations.

For reports/articles on the 1st National Food Vikalp Sangam and related local Sangams, see:

First Food Vikalp Sangam, Muniguda, Sept 2016

Sarmoli (Uttarakhand) food festival, May 2017

Organic farming Sangam in Hemis Shukpachan, Ladakh, April 2016

And some images





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