

Glimpses of the Food Sangam at Muniguda, Odisha

Author - Shiba Desor, Published on - 17.11.2016

(From an email by the author) Dear friends A vikalp sangam on food was organised in Muniguda, Odisha between 17th and 20th September 2016.



The sangam saw participation from a diverse range of themes and regions connected with different aspects of food. The venue was located amongst lush green forests and gentle rolling hills, including the Niyamgiri. The sangam started with a mini food festival and a public event which saw participation of people from more than 5 surrounding gram panchayats and many children from a nearby school. On the same day there was also a discussion on policy issues and vision in connection with food, facilitated by Dr. Rajeswari Raina.



On the 18th, we had a lively morning session on local knowledge systems centred around food where both locals and participants from outside shared their beliefs, experiences, memories, songs and stories. In the post-lunch session there was a presentation by Dr Debal Deb on ecological agriculture followed by a prolonged and intense discussion. On the 19th morning, some of the remaining participants shared about their initiatives including a discussion on urban food security with Janpahal from Delhi sharing about their work with street vendors and marginalised urban consumers. The morning session also included a discussion on non-economic motivations for producing and sharing good food and



protecting food cultures.

In the afternoon, a statement against GM mustard was adopted, and endorsed by many of the present participants. There were also presentations connecting food to the evolving alternatives framework of the vikalp sangam, as well as envisioning food sovereignty or anna swaraj. The discussions ended with a follow-up and feedback session.



On the 20th, the group divided into two parts, with one part visiting Dr. Debal Deb's farm while the other part went to a village Kunduguda with mixed cropping agriculture and visited Adi Kumruka's farm as well as the local village haat. Apart from all this, there was delicious food (including a meal with nine varieties of rice, many millet meals and drinks, jhangora (barnyard millet) kheer made by Vijay Jardhari ji and mahua pakodas by gadchirolli friends). There were also spaces for informal interactions because of a relatively loose structure leading to fostering of a few more personal connections than is sometimes possible in rushed meetings. At the same time, there were many aspects of food that could still not be covered in sufficient detail, eg. commons and food sovereignty, food waste, food-health, access and distribution etc. We also missed participation from many wonderful groups and people because of a number of different reasons that hindered their participation (including advocacy related to GM mustard). They were all missed a lot.



Perhaps we need a lot more of such gatherings, at different levels, and with a higher frequency to be actually able to cover the wide-reaching aspects... Others who were there can please add their thoughts to this...



Attaching here some pics (taken by Meenal Tatpati, Shrishtee Bajpai and Nishok G U)



A hearty thanks to Living Farms for their dedication and effort towards this. Thanks to everyone else as well involved both in participation and conceptualisation of this. For me, it was definitely a good learning experience. We missed those of you who couldn't make it because of other commitments...