

Thrissur Declaration

Time for a new vision on Alternative Technologies and Organisational Forms for Social Transformation

16 October 2014

Representatives from the scientific community, social movements, peasant groups, academia and civil society organisations met in Thrissur in the southern Indian state of Kerala for four days (13-16 October) to discuss varied experiences on alternative technologies and organisational forms in agriculture, energy and rural non-farm enterprises.

Participants recognised that we are in an era of systemic crisis – of economy, food, energy, climate and livelihoods. In India this is characterised by a deep agrarian crisis, declining social indicators, unemployment and underemployment, environmental degradation, lack of access to basic services and distress migration especially in rural areas. Many of the initiatives around alternative technologies presented at the workshop were started in the 1980s. Today, they face a new set of challenges arising out of the current context of market liberalisation, privatisation and neo-liberal globalisation.

Despite tremendous odds, alternative development initiatives are being developed and advanced across the country.

In the field of energy, India continues to face the challenge of providing basic energy access to huge sections of the population. In search of alternate technologies that would bridge this gap with solutions that are affordable and sustainable, activists, institutions and social movements have put forward initiatives around micro-hydel, solar lighting, biomass-based cooking and energy saving building technologies. Given the fact that these are 'disruptive' technologies that require user capability development, continuous technology improvement and local network development, it is important that peoples' groups ensure that their technologies and organisational forms counter the corporate takeover of renewable energy expansion.

Alternatives in agriculture, led by peasant organisations and peoples science movements have matured over the last decade. Agro-ecological approaches are now beginning to be considered as a viable alternative. These include experiments on bio-farming, biological pest management practices, system of rice intensification (SRI), bio-char, soil fertility management, participatory water management and bio-mass for rural industries. Further, appropriate technologies that are women friendly such as paddy transplanters, winnowers, weeders, threshers and seeders have reduced labour drudgery. New organisational forms include initiatives such as women's collectives, labour cooperatives and associations of water users that ensure rights to dalits and other marginal communities.

Input supply, processing and direct marketing to the consumers through seed centric service cooperatives are being tried out with the aim to protect the sustainable livelihoods of farm producers and to ensure the nation's food security.

In the area of fisheries, appropriate technology innovations for the upgrading of traditional crafts and creation of cooperatives allowed fishworkers to survive the onslaught of large trawlers in the 1980s. Co-management of fast depleting marine resources is a new challenge looming for which new policies and institutional arrangements are required, and trade unions and traditional fisherfolk communities are pursuing these.

In a situation of continuing rural poverty, declining employment in agriculture, increasing distress migration, and “jobless growth” in the industrial sector, groups are increasingly realizing the importance of rural non-farm enterprises for sustainable new livelihoods. These efforts are aimed at maximizing benefits for primary producers, especially small and marginal farmers, artisans, agricultural labour, women and poor rural youth by value-addition to rural produce which generate additional incomes and jobs, and strengthen the local economy.

Presentations at the workshop showed that new/improved technologies and models for viable and self-sustaining rural enterprises have been developed in many sectors such as agro-processing, processing of horticultural produce, meat and fish processing, value-addition to various wild produce and non-timber forest produce, non-edible oils, leather tanning and products, pottery, plant-based fibres and soaps and detergents. Innovative organisational forms including worker-owned and/or managed enterprises and cooperatives have been evolved to empower workers and small entrepreneurs. Rural markets have been strengthened in this process. Efforts are also underway to scale up, upgrade and adapt these technologies and enterprises to better perform in rural and urban markets that are seeing increased domination by MNCs and large domestic corporations.

Groups at this conference reiterated and renewed their commitment to ensuring every citizen’s fundamental rights, to enhance equity in national development, and to ecological sustainability. While advancing alternative technologies and organisational forms towards these goals, we recognise that scaling up efforts require continuous collaboration of social movements and other civil society groups with scientific and academic institutions to broaden the base and capacity for innovation. Engagement with state agencies is necessary in order to bring about requisite policy changes and to mainstream these pro-people innovations and integrate them with governmental development programmes.

To take this task ahead, we resolve to continue the dialogue, interaction and collaboration between mass organisations, social movements and civil society organisations to forge the maximum possible unity of all progressive forces while enhancing our own capabilities. We are of the firm opinion that the support, participation and involvement of mass organisations are a pre-requisite and essential component for scaling up and diffusing alternative technologies and organisational forms for social transformation.

Participants at the 4 day workshop on Alternative Technologies and Organisational Forms for Social Transformation (13-16 October) at Thrissur, India.

1. Alex Yoshinori Kawakami - Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST), Brazil
2. Ambili - Centre of Science and Technology for Rural Development (COSTFORD)
3. Anil Babu - COSTFORD
4. Anitha -COSTFORD
5. Anoop Kishore - Peringandur Service Co-Operative Bank, Athani
6. Aribandi Prasad Rao -Telegana Rythu Sangham
7. Azad SR - Madhya Pradesh Vigyan Sabha
8. Barbara Smith - British Ecological Society
9. Benny Kuruvilla - South Solidarity initiative-ActionAid India
10. Bhaskaran KK - COSTFORD

11. Bijesh AS - COSTFORD
12. Bindu P Verghese - Kudumbasree – Kerala State Poverty Eradication Mission
13. Byomkesh K Lal - Land and Livelihoods Hub, ActionAid India
14. CE Karunakaran – Tamil Nadu Science Forum (TNSF)
15. Chacko IA – Integrated Rural Technology Centre (IRTC)
16. Chandra Babu C- MNREGA
17. Chandra Dutt - COSTFORD
18. Chandran K. A - COSTFORD
19. Chithra - COSTFORD
20. Damodaran VK - Centre for Environment and Development, Thiruvananthapuram
21. Devapriyan KG - COSTFORD
22. Dimpi Divakaran- Panampilly Memorial Government College, Chalakudy
23. Dinesh Abrol – Delhi Science Forum
24. Ganesh KN – Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP)
25. Geethakutty PS - Kerala Agricultural University
26. Gopinathan VG - Integrated Rural Technology Centre (IRTC)
27. Haridas VR - CARITAS India
28. Jacob Devassy - COSTFORD
29. Jayan AD - Association of IT Employees
30. Joginder Wala - Society For Technology and Development
31. Joseph PV – IRTC and KSSP
32. Joseph Mathai- Books for Change
33. Joy KJ -Society For Promotional Participation Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM)
34. Kannan KP – Centre for Development Studies (CDS), Thiruvanthapuram
35. Krishanaprasad P – All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS)
36. Laura M Valencia – La Via Campesina
37. Manu Thejaswi -Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha(KRRS)
38. Meera Mohan- COSTFORD
39. Mini - COSTFORD
40. Mohan PV - COSTFORD
41. Mrudula - COSTFORD
42. Najmul Hussain - COSTFORD
43. Narayanan CP – KSSP and Member of Parliament
44. Narayanan EC – Centre for Ecology and Rural Development (CERD), Puducherry
45. Narayanan NC – Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay
46. Padmarajan EC- Palakkad Small Hydro Company (PSHC)
47. Paramewaran MP - KSSP
48. Prasad RM –Kerala Agricultural University
49. Parthib Basu- Calcutta University
50. Prema A - Kerala Agricultural University
51. Raghunandan D - Delhi Science Forum and All India Peoples Science Network (AIPSN)
52. Raghunath TP – CERD - Puducherry
53. Rajeev Choudhury - Centre For Technology and Development (CTD)
54. Rajeev PP - COSTFORD
55. Rajesh K - IRTC, Palakkad
56. Ravi Kamal - Centre for Integrated Rural and Tribal Development (CIRTD), Odisha
57. Reghu Rama Das- MITRANIKETAN
58. Rohini Kumar Baishya -Lotus Progressive Centre, Assam
59. Sabina Yasmin – Bangladesh Krishok Federation
60. Sajini - COSTFORD
61. Sajith Sukumaran -IRTC
62. Sankaranarayanan C- Vikas Trust Thalikulam
63. Santhosh - The Hindu
64. Santhosh Kumar P - International Co-operative Alliance (Asia and Pacific)
65. Saritha PB -COSTFORD

66. Sasthrasarman ER -COSTFORD
67. Sehjo Singh -Action Aid India
68. Shaija Vinoj -COSTFORD
69. Shaija PC -COSTFORD
70. Sharafudeen VK - COSTFORD
71. Sheeja - COSTFORD
72. Shini - COSTFORD
73. Skanthakumar TK - COSTFORD
74. Smisha -COSTFORD
75. Sreekumar P - COSTFORD
76. Sreenivasan PK
77. Suchithra -COSTFORD
78. Sudhakaran VV - COSTFORD
79. Sudhakaran MN - C. Achutha
80. Sudhir N -COSTFORD Menon Centre
81. Susmitha - Mathrubhoomi
82. Svati Bhogle - Technology Informatics Design Endeavour (TIDE), Bangalore
83. Swapna PJ -COSTFORD
84. TK Santhilal - COSTFORD
85. Tarini Manchanda -Independent Filmmaker
86. Umashankar Sharma -Madhya Pradesh Vigyan Sabha
87. Unnikrishnan Kizhekkepurakkal -COSTFORD
88. Urvashi Sarkar-South Solidarity Initiative, ActionAid India
89. Usha EA - COSTFORD
90. VM Radhakrishnan - Deshabhimani
91. Vanaja CV -COSTFORD
92. Venugopal Rao N - Jana Vignana Vedika, Andhra Pradesh
93. Vijayalakshmi - COSTFORD
94. Vijayan VS - Salim Ali Foundation
95. Vijoo Krishnan - All India Kisan Sabha
96. Vinayak Pawar – ActionAid India
97. Vishnu – John Mathai Centre
98. Vivekanandan V – South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS)
99. Zakir Hussain – Centre for Sustainable Agriculture (CSA), Hyderabad