



The Swallows 
India Bangladesh

Empowerment and Food Sovereignty

Addressing the rights of women, adivasis and Dalits through regaining the
lost place of millets



2010-04-29

Content

- 1. Introduction3
 - 1.1. The knowledge of Dalits and adivasis 3
 - 1.2. The neglect of millets 4
 - 1.3. Background of the programme 5
- 2. Context analysis.....5
 - 2.1. Millets – crucial to fulfil the rights of the poor 5
 - 2.2. Millets – from a health aspect 6
 - 2.3. Millets – from a socio-cultural aspect 7
 - 2.4. Millets – from an environmental aspect 7
 - 2.5. Millets – from a poverty reduction aspect 8
- 3. Target group9
- 4. Millets network of India (MINI)9
 - 4.1. Networking structure and initiatives..... 9
 - 4.2. Strengthening civil society 10
 - 4.3. DDS 10
- 5. Goals.....11
- 6. Activities.....12
 - 6.1. Millet Communities Grassroots Initiatives and Action Research 12
 - 6.2. Status Reports, Policy Analysis and Documentation..... 13
 - 6.3. Consumer Education, Value Addition and Markets 14
 - 6.4. Policy and Advocacy 14
 - 6.5. Network Building and Coordination 16
- 7. Programme management.....18
- 8. Risk analysis18
- 9. Maps.....20

1. Introduction

For centuries, the poor people of India, such as Dalits and adivasis¹, have been cultivating millets². It has been an integrated part of their culture, food system and agriculture. Millets are the crops of the poor, since they can be cultivated on dry land, with almost no water and input. They are also very nutritious and are therefore contributing to a better health for poor people. However, during the Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, rice and wheat were promoted together with a range of pesticides and fertilisers. With these methods poverty was supposed to be fought. The consequences have been decline in the soil fertility and a dependency of external inputs for poor farmers. Due to the Green Revolution the cultivation of millets declined, meaning a loss in the knowledge possessed by poor Dalit and adivasi communities all over India.

In this light and after having reached significant progress over the last 25 years in community action for revival of millet based farming and food systems, Deccan Development Society (DDS) thought that it should build a network of people working with or interested in millets across India. Thus, the Millet Network of India (MINI), was convened in October 2007, as a multisectoral alliance involving farmers, scientists, researchers, civil society, media and policy makers. That has today grown to be across 17 states with many institutions, organisations and individuals as active partners working towards regaining the lost place of millets and empowering the poor majority of India. Over the last three years, MINI has articulated that millet farming is not just about production of a narrow array of crops, but is also a concept that realises bio-diverse, ecological production systems and a means of regaining the cultural heritage and lost dignity of the indigenous communities. This has been expressed through community-led grassroots action research, regional food festivals, exhibitions, policy dialogues, sensitisation of state and national elected leaders, media work, campaigns and major regional and national level consultations across India.

The significance of this multisectoral alliance – MINI, is even greater in the current scenario of an unprecedented drought and looming climate change crisis. There is an urgent need for a paradigm shift in shaping the food and farming future of India towards organic farming. MINI believes that the main reason behind this crisis is the designed destruction of rural communities and the erosion of their rights. In this context the network is emerging as a platform for bringing about changes in envisioning the food and farming future of the country. This network is a place where millet people can put their strength together, sit down and set an agenda for themselves, look at the culture, cultivation and cuisine of millets, find out how their profile can be built, and advance the policy framework around millets.

1.1. The knowledge of Dalits and adivasis

The very foundation of this initiative has emerged from DDS's long term commitment and experience in working with marginalised communities. There are three fundamental concerns that need to be addressed and from which the strategies emerged. These are: (a) the issues of access and control; (b) the issue of acknowledging the innate ecological leadership of the Dalit and indigenous communities

¹ The indigenous people of India

² Millets are small-seeded species of cereal crops or grains. The Swedish word for millet is *hirs*, but the English word also includes sorghum.

and; (c) voicing their concerns and enabling a change in the public policy which is an articulation of the disadvantaged groups.

All these issues are very much connected with the issues of millet based farming system since they reflect the neglect that the disadvantaged groups have to face. By bringing back the access and control over farming, seeds, ecological means of production and sustainable farming practices, these communities will get a high degree of self-respect and dignity. It will also ensure that people's knowledge is acknowledged, bringing change to a stigmatic history of social, cultural, economic and ecological repression these communities have been subjected to.

The activities in the programme have been designed and planned through participatory and community-led approaches to engage and revive the millet based sustainable farming systems. This has been done through a combination of grassroots action research, revival of food culture, research and documentation of people's knowledge, consumer education and community-led markets. On the other hand, by building a strong alliance presenting the issues in the highest circles of the policy and decision making, perspectives bringing attitudinal shift are being build.

1.2. The neglect of millets

During the last decades millets have been neglected in many ways:

- (a) Hundreds of thousands of hectares dedicated to growing millets have degenerated into cultivable fallows (lands not being used), and their size currently stands at a massive 30 million hectares.
- (b) The millet acreage over the last couple of decades has shrunk from 18 million hectares to 9 million hectares, thus depriving the poor of their nutritional food, livelihood, security and control over their farming and productive resources.
- (c) The recent trend has been that the millets are moving away from the poor and falling into the hands of the rich to serve their elite needs. This trend is also ensuring that millet farming is being taken over by the corporate interests to serve elite export market.
- (d) Currently there is little governmental support and institutional incentive for rainfed farmers and indigenous people to carry forward the rich bio-diverse millet based mixed farming system.

The consequences of these neglects are currently not being recognised at the regional or national level, at the same time as there seems to be no will at these levels to listen or learn from the farmer's knowledge and the benefits of such a localised and sustainable food system. For instance, the proposed National Food Security Bill³ instilled under the purview 'Right to Food', in its current form does not include millets. It is based on providing wheat and rice through the food distribution system, rather than looking at food security at the household level and creating enabling policy

³ The National Food Security Bill, which might soon become an Act, promises to ensure food security by supplying a certain minimum quality of rice, wheat and coarse cereals to the below poverty line (BPL) population residing in rural and urban areas. Each below poverty line family would be entitled by law to get 25 kg of rice or wheat per month at Rs 3/- per kg.

environments to address the production of crops of communities' choice such as millets in addressing their right to food sovereignty.

MINI as a movement of grassroots farmers and indigenous people wishes to play the role of ensuring that people's knowledge is articulated at the public domain and brings about enabling policy changes.

1.3. Background of the programme

Except for the activities conducted by MINI all over India, there have been two National Consultations on millets and three Steering Committee meetings since the start in 2007.

In revisiting the recommendations of the first National Consultation on millets and the resultant Hyderabad Declaration on Millets (see Appendix 1), the MINII Steering Committee members deliberated for two days during their second meeting in February 2009 and chalked out a detailed five year action plan for MINI. The discussion proceeded with members stating several action points from their regional perspectives that need to be an integral part of MINI strategy and action plan. Further, these action points were debated, prioritised into long term, medium term and short term actions. Finally, as the project strategy emerged, it envisions facilitating the community actions towards empowering the marginalised and poorer sections. This should happen through a series of farming and biodiversity enhancing activities, farmer-led participatory research processes and knowledge sharing among communities across regional socio-political boundaries. These initiatives are anchored firmly at the grassroots level, thereby approaching the problems and strategy formulation from a farmer-centered perspective.

DDS has been working with millets and marginalised communities for 25 years. Also The Swallows have a long history of working with agricultural issues and marginalised communities. The partnership between The Swallows and DDS was initiated in 2008 and has since then continuously strengthened. Representatives from The Swallows have made visits to the MINI secretariat and also participated in the third MINI steering committee meeting in February 2010.

2. Context analysis

Millets – including sorghum, pearl millet, finger millet, foxtail millet, little millet, kodo millet, proso millet and barnyard millet, are not to be seen just as crops. They represent so much more, such as health, control and access over food production, valuing poor people's knowledge and a way to decrease environmental damage.

2.1. Millets – crucial to fulfil the rights of the poor

We believe that development in India should move away from the current paradigm that is top-down, hegemonic and excludes the voices of the masses, toward rooting the pathways to well-being and development in people's hands, through inclusive and democratic processes.

Therefore, when addressing public policies governing the lives and livelihoods of millions of people in India, one should have a Rights Based Approach. Environment, livelihoods and farming policies

should evolve from ecologically and culturally rooted and people-centred deliberative knowledge processes that are democratic, inclusive and based on the knowledge and skills of the poor majority of India.

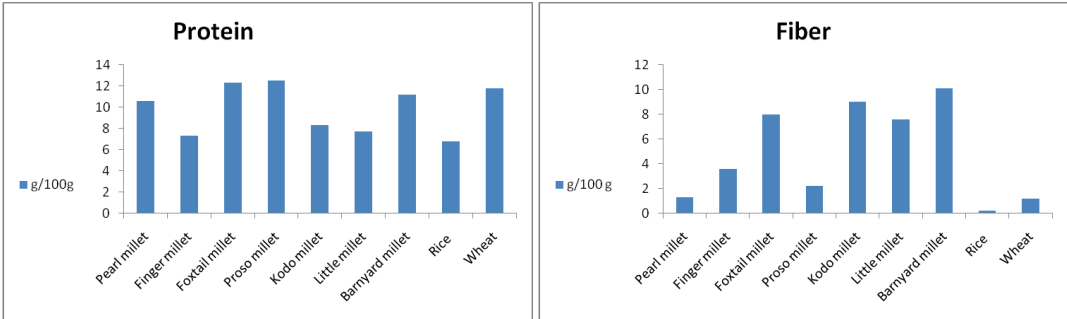
The issues concerning the historic neglect and down playing of millet farming, is not a simple matter of what to cultivate on a piece of land. It is a matter that concerns people choices and desire for a holistic development. It runs through communities’ wish for sustainable and inclusive development paradigm strongly rooted in social justice and equal opportunity. Many different rights are interlinked with the issue:

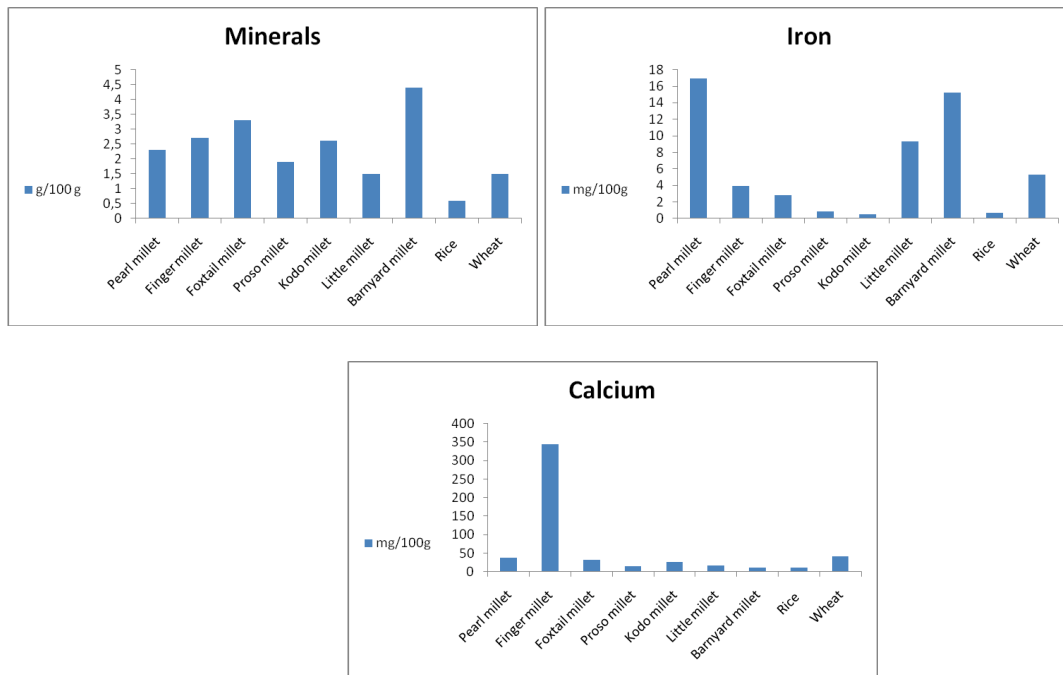
- (a) Right to life and livelihood, as for the rural communities livelihood is not just a means of earning a living but also a way to express his/her life and creativity;
- (b) Right to safe, nutrition and healthy food, as food is not just for filling hungry stomach but to eat healthy and nutritious food that enables to express his/her life to its fullest potential;
- (c) Right to land. In the current situation the poor are subjected to alienation from their resource base, the most fundamental of which being farmland;
- (d) Right to be food sovereign, not only to produce his/her choice of food, but to produce it through such means that allows her/him to retain full access and control over the input resources and thereby the choice to retain, barter or transact the produce under fair and just circumstances.
- (e) Right to be part of the decision making processes when it comes to food and agriculture.

More interesting facets of millet farming emerge in an unfamiliar fashion, when hundreds of thousands indigenous people voice their relationship with nature, farming, food habits and culture. Through peoples’ festivals, rituals and celebrations it becomes explicit that millets are not just food grains. These tiny grains are a large vital-means to reach other dimensions of human experiences and culture for indigenous people in India: thus embarking the indigenous peoples’ right to cultural heritage.

2.2. Millets – from a health aspect

Millets are veritable storehouses of health and nutrition, superior to rice and wheat many times over, as the tables below illustrate.





2.3. Millets – from a socio-cultural aspect

There is a socio-cultural aspect of why adivasi, Dalits and other poor communities in the vast rain-fed Indian agrarian landscape have nurtured millets. These communities, living under harsh climatic conditions, have developed the ingenuity to harmoniously co-exist with the natural elements. By their interest in the diverse local flora and fauna, especially in agro-biodiversity, the indigenous farming systems combine wild/uncultivated plants or trees with crops and farm animals, based on natural ecological successions. The sustainable life-style, local diet habits, rituals, tastes and textural preferences of especially the rain-fed agrarian/ tribal people, have given rise to a great diversity of crop species. The case of millets is such an example.

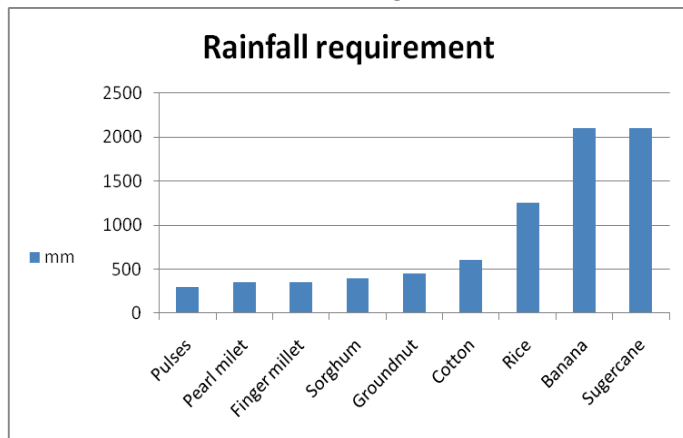
Millets represent the cultural rights of the marginalised people of dryland India which constitutes 65% of the Indian agricultural geography. These are the grains that people use in dozens of rites of worship and to celebrate births, weddings, deaths and other rituals. Furthermore, millets constitute a great tradition of knowledge-based agriculture. Women are the reservoirs of this knowledge and hence the promotion of millets is promotion of women's knowledge.

2.4. Millets – from an environmental aspect

Most of the poor in India own dry uplands and therefore need to cultivate crops that can grow on their harsh lands. Moreover, most of the agricultural areas of the poor have no irrigation facilities and the people living there cannot afford such facilities. Fortunately, millets can grow on the most marginalised soils, don't need any irrigation and use very little or sometimes no external inputs. Under dry land conditions, millets grow better in the absence of chemical fertilisers. Therefore, most millet farmers grow them using only farmyard manure. In recent years farmers have also started using bio-fertilisers such as vermicompost. In this way, millet production is not only environmental friendly, but also stays under the control of farmers.

The way rice is grown under standing water makes it a dangerous crop under climate change conditions. Methane emanating from water-drenched rice fields is a green house gas that threatens the environment. Climate change portends less rain, more heat, reduced water availability and increased malnutrition. Since millets need less water and inputs, the millet cropping system has the potential to withstand the challenges climate change brings. By promoting carbon sequestration, millets, unlike wheat and rice, do not aggravate climate crisis but become mitigating tools.

Millets are low water consuming crops. The rainfall needed for sorghum, pearl millet and finger millet is less than 25% that of sugarcane and banana, and 30% the rainfall needed for rice.



2.5. Millets – from a poverty reduction aspect

Poverty in a rural context is an issue of social, economic and cultural access and control of productive resources, which goes hand in hand with the issue of autonomy of local communities (see Appendix 2). While addressing these issues, alongside with ensuring environmental well being that results in human well-being, MINI focuses on securing the rights and well being of millet farming communities and on finding a better future for the food farming in India.

Millets represent the Right to Food of India's dryland communities constituting nearly 65% of the population, and 60% of India's poor. Thus, the importance of millets in relation to poverty reduction becomes apparent:

- 1 Millets are the crops of food security for a vast majority of Indian people.
- 2 Alongside food security, they ensure fodder security, health, nutritional security and livelihood security.
- 3 For a variety of reasons, nearly 30-40 million hectares of the drylands have been left fallow by farmers. If these can be brought under cultivation they can create a minimum of 10-15 million livelihoods in the most impoverished parts of India.
- 4 Since they demand no irrigation, in a water deficient country such as India, they are the crops that the poor can cultivate without any problem.
- 5 Since they are storehouses of nutrition, millets also ensure extraordinary nutritional security for the poor. One of the dangers of climate change as projected by experts is widespread malnutrition. Millets can effectively respond to this challenge.

- 6 Finally, due to its qualities of growing very well without external inputs such as seeds, chemical fertilisers and pesticides, millet farming systems stay within the control of the poor. Considering the fact that over the last ten years, more than 150,000 farmers in India have committed suicide, unable to bear input costs, millets offer a solution to the agrarian crisis in India.

3. Target group

MINI has two different kinds of target groups:

1. Farmers, especially poor marginalised farmers from Dalit and adivasi communities
2. Politicians, policy makers, heads of government institutions, civil society, NGOs, scientists, academicians, doctors and nutritionists

In indirect terms, the work of MINI and its positive outcomes will favourably impact millions of people, 90% of whom will be the excluded, marginalized and the poor. 60% of this population are women.

4. Millets network of India (MINI)

MINI consists of organisations and institutions working to promote millets as crops and as a concept.

4.1. Networking structure and initiatives

All the MINI network members believe in building strong communities, which can reclaim their own sovereignty. Working individually and together, such sovereign local communities can be the strongest forces in protecting the rights of the people against the globalising forces that work for homogenisation and hegemonic control.

In general the network structure at various levels is as follows:

- a) **MINI Network Partners** - are drawn from several millet growing states across diverse agro-ecological regions. This coalition of like-minded organisations and individuals has members from the Indian States of Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Punjab and Uttarakhand. Each of the partner organisations has rich experience in working with local communities in their respective regions. The partners strongly believe in achieving the MINI goal through placing millets on their organisational agenda and synergising their efforts by sharing organisational capacities to address the historical neglect of millets and millet growing communities over a greater geographical region and diverse socio-political contexts.
- b) **MINI Steering Committee** (formed in August 2008) - has already convened three times (See Appendix 3 for the profile of MINI Steering Committee members). The committee produced a detailed plan of action until 2015 to facilitate and empower the local communities in regaining the rightful place of millets in their food and farming system.
- c) **MINI Thematic Task Forces** - have been drawn from the experiences of network partner organisations in various fields. Thematic groups working on the issues highlighted in the

Hyderabad Declaration on Millets have been formed. The issues are: productivity and multiplicity of yields; documentation of farmers' knowledge; preparing the case for placing millet on the Public Distribution System⁴; land rights; millet processing and value addition.

- d) **State Level Millet Networks** - started as consultations with farmer groups, scientists, academia and civil society groups, which have led to the formation of a State Level Millet Network in Maharashtra. Similar efforts are underway in Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Tamil Nadu and it is likely that the networks will expand in five more states in the coming years.
- e) **MINI Secretariat** - convened, coordinated and hosted by DDS, has a National Coordinator to look after the overall programme. Considering the importance of reviving millet based mixed farming in Punjab and Karnataka, State level Coordinators are working towards realising the MINI vision in those states.

4.2. Strengthening civil society

MINI work involves strengthening the communities and civil society led collective actions. It also involves engage with different actors and make negotiable and well informed dialogues possible, therefore contributing to:

- (a) Democratising the debate and strengthening interrelationships of various stakeholders such as farmers, consumers, civil societies, students, media and most importantly the politicians;
- (b) An environment wherein food sovereignty will gather policy support;
- (c) A larger alliance that fills in the gaps and divides among the scientists, farmers, consumers;
- (d) The generation of significant information on the historic neglect of millets and millet farming communities and its implications on the ecology and health for wider dissemination and information sharing;
- (e) equipping the millet farming communities (more than 60 % the Indian population) to better articulate and voice their concerns;
- (f) Sensitising the government officials and political leaders to support the rights to food, livelihood and food sovereignty of the indigenous communities and other small and marginal farmers across the country.

4.3. DDS

DDS is the initiator of MINI and also hosts its secretariat. DDS is a grassroots organisation working with over 5000 Dalit women farmers from Medak district in Andhra Pradesh in women sangams (women's groups). Over the last 25 years, DDS has been addressing the problems faced by marginalised communities. By growing market and policy marginalised grains such as millets they have regained their dignity and self worth. They have also supported a non monetized vibrant wealth of agricultural knowledge and agricultural biodiversity.

⁴ PDS provides rationed amounts of basic food items (rice, wheat, sugar, edible oils) and other non food products (kerosene, coal, standard cloth) at below market prices to the poor people of India through a network of fair price shops disseminated over the country.

DDS has initiated a great number of grassroots initiatives, pioneering community autonomy over food and farming, reproductive health, natural resources, market and media. Within this overall cycle of autonomies, DDS concentrates on the autonomy of women and other marginalised sections of the society such as Dalits and adivasis within and as a part of their communities. Millets are parts of the food system of these marginalized groups and are embedded in their culture and knowledge systems. Therefore DDS believes that food sovereignty as a concept within its wider ramifications can be a viable answer to the current agricultural crisis.

5. Goals

The current mainstream development discourse is riddled with a series of insecurities that burden the farming community. We truly believe that the damage done in the name of 'farming advances' can be repaired only by handing back the leadership to farmers, women and the excluded who through their knowledge of farming and nature can bring back sanity to our development thinking. It is against this background that we must notice and endorse the role millets can play in reinvigorating the agricultural sector.

Vision: The millet-growing communities of India, who form the poorest 60% of the Indian population, have been strengthened and acknowledged. Their right to nutritious food, sustainable livelihoods, dignity, health and cultural heritage is ensured. Their marginalisation has been overcome by reclaiming millets into the farming and policy landscape of India.

Programme goal: To regain the lost place for millet crops in India.

Outputs:

1. An Increased number of poor and vulnerable communities in the rainfed regions cultivate millets and regain control over food, farming and agro-biodiversity based livelihood, social cohesion, culture and dignity.
2. Farmers' knowledge on millets is acknowledged and spread.
3. Millets are more easily available in villages and to urban consumers (part of MINI's bigger plan, but not part of MINI-The Swallows cooperation)
4. Increased policy support for inclusion of millets in community-led systems related to food and agriculture.
5. Alliances of farmers, consumers, policy makers, academicians and civil society groups are built.

6. Activities

Discussions at various levels of the network concerning the coming two years have resulted in an approach that brings out a collage of events at regional and state levels. The activities presented below emanated from the discussions held at MINI Steering Committee meetings and state level meetings, which brought in regional perspectives and key considerations from the regional and national consultations that took place over the last two years. Finally, as the programme strategy emerged, it envisions facilitating the community actions towards empowering the marginalised and poorer sections. The initiatives are anchored firmly at the grassroots level, thereby approaching the problems and strategy formulation from a farmer-centred perspective.

Several of the activities narrated here transcend these broad categories and will primarily strengthen the work in three ways: (a) Consolidation of earlier efforts and advancing a multisectoral approach; (b) Preparatory and perspective building in the region where the network is in its infancy; (c) Initiating debates in order to articulate community perspective, particularly of different disadvantaged groups in different regions. Thus, for the period of next two years i.e. 2011 and 2012 the following programme has evolved.

Only those activities funded by The Swallows during 2011 and 2012 will be described in detail below, even though all are mentioned. All the activities can be found in detail in Appendix 6.

6.1. Millet Communities Grassroots Initiatives and Action Research

Output 1. An increased number of poor and vulnerable communities in the rainfed regions cultivate millets and regain control over food, farming and agro-biodiversity based livelihood, social cohesion, culture and dignity.

The foundation of MINI work is deeply embedded in the community's perspectives and their knowledge system, especially that of Dalits, adivasis and women. Hence, bringing such groups together and increase their participation in the MINI activities is of utmost importance. To realise this objective, the following activities have been drawn up:

1.1. Focus on bringing back fallowed lands of Dalits, adivasis and people from non-pastoral nomadic (settling) millet communities (not part of the financial cooperation between The Swallows and MINI)

1.2. Integrating livestock for enhancing local livelihoods, productivity and ecological sustainability (not part of the financial cooperation between The Swallows and MINI)

1.3. Pilot/feasibility study and research for introducing millets in the Government PDS system and documenting it for policy dialogue: A number of community managed PDS systems across the country will be developed. This is essential to strengthen and argue for a paradigm shift in decentralising the Public Food Distribution System, which currently does not encourage local production and procurement of food grains. The pilot/ feasibility studies based on realistic local conditions, demonstrate the communities capacity and leadership in local production, local storage

and local distribution through village level women's collectives. Such an approach, when promoted and supported by government, will resolve several issues related to millet farming, such as the question of availability and keeping quality, the issues of minimum support price for millets and providing nutritional security to poor people along with food security.

1.4. Developing community seed banks for reviving local seed saving practices of diverse landraces (not part of the financial cooperation between The Swallows and MINI)

1.5. Farmer exchanges for sharing knowledge, experiences and seeds (not part of the financial cooperation between The Swallows and MINI)

1.6. Establish farmer-led Millet Resource Centres (not part of the financial cooperation between The Swallows and MINI)

1.7. Community Charter on millets, agrobiodiversity and climate change: Farmers' knowledge systems are diverse and dynamic, but are often considered to be unscientific and is less researched. In bringing the communities' ecological leadership to the forefront, across the millet growing regions, millet farmers will sit together and deliberate on the problems, potentials and ways of addressing these challenges locally. Through the use of a series of farmer-led methodologies such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), farmers will be encouraged to deliberate and reveal their arguments that help in build bridges between scientists and farmers. In order to enable interaction with scientists and academicians and allow farmers to confidently articulate their arguments and present their perspectives, a Community Charter on millets, agro-biodiversity and climate change will be initiated in each region.

1.8. Action Research (building perspectives and sharing experiences especially that of disadvantaged groups): In enabling the communities to revive millet based farming, food and livelihood systems, there are several challenges that need to be addressed. Through grassroots action research and experimentation, it becomes possible to explore real solutions to real problems by the community through their initiative. Several aspects of millet based farming such as nutrition, soil health, livelihood creation, climate change response etc. will be researched by the community by experience and practice. This will highlight the significance of millets at the grassroots level and sensitise a greater number of farmers, in a manner that will also create an advocacy and lobbying opportunity. These initiatives will be especially directed to build the perspectives of the disadvantaged groups and will be based on the knowledge of Dalits and adivasis from ecological, cultural and gender perspectives.

6.2. Status Reports, Policy Analysis and Documentation

Output 2. Farmers' knowledge on millets is acknowledged and spread.

The focus on research and documentation during 2011 and 2012 will be on the following:

2.1. Developing educational material (publications and films in multiple languages) for policy advocacy: Initiatives to produce suitable advocacy material on millets for policy makers, scientists,

farmers, development academia, civil society groups and school children are essential in furthering the cross-sectoral approach. Several policy briefs depicting constraints, potentials and opportunities for millets will be brought out in the form of Thematic Notes. Some of these would be on:

- a. Climate change and millets;
- b. State Schemes or legislations and policies which have marginalised millets;
- c. Intergenerational study of millet eaters to find out differences in the occurrence of diabetes and other illnesses and their relation to the consumption of millets. For instance, an intergenerational pilot study of millet consumers will be done to demonstrate nutrition and its relation in combating anaemia in women in the North East region. This since it is believed that 40% of the people in North East suffer from anaemia in spite of their predominantly meat diet.
- d. Translation of policy briefs into different languages will highlight the health, nutrition and therapeutic values of millets addressing the consumers and ecological values of millets addressing the farmers.

2.2. State/ region wise Status reports on millets: Studies about cultivation, consumption and people's perception on millets will be carried out. Questions like how and at what point of time the production of millet started to decline and the factors for such decline will also be researched in different millet growing states, to make a correct assessment of the loss of millet farming and its impact.

6.3. Consumer Education, Value Addition and Markets

Output 3. Millets are more easily available in villages and to urban consumers

Consumer education, value addition and markets assume a greater significance today, with an increase in health consciousness among people and raising demand for millets. This situation portends an unexpected danger of millets being hijacked by market forces. Therefore, MINI intends to focus on educating and sensitising the consumers on the relevance of community-led market initiatives.

3.1. Creation of millet based markets (not part of the financial cooperation between The Swallows and MINI)

3.2. Promoting millet food culture (not part of the financial cooperation between The Swallows and MINI)

3.3. Consumer education and sensitising the media (not part of the financial cooperation between The Swallows and MINI)

6.4. Policy and Advocacy

Output 4. Increased policy support for inclusion of millets in community-led systems related to food and agriculture.

The policy and advocacy work will involve sensitising different stakeholders that the issue of millet farming cuts across several key areas of human well-being, empowerment and especially to safeguard the rights of the marginalised communities.

In sensitising and carrying forward the work, MINI intends to play a major role in catalysing, facilitating and coordinating efforts and play an enabling role amongst a wide range of stakeholders. In this regard, a *Week of Millets Action* will be organised annually. While drawing attention to millets, intensive multi location events with a combination of seminars, food festivals, film shows, farmers' field days and millet marches will be organised for a week across the country. This will be a coordinated action so that the media can bring multiple stories on millets to the attention of the nation. Some of the activities envisaged are described below:

4.1. A National Advocacy Campaign to put millets in the Public Distribution System (not part of the financial cooperation between The Swallows and MINI)

4.2. Developing millet areas as Biodiversity Heritage Sites (not part of the financial cooperation between The Swallows and MINI)

4.3. Create, nurture, develop and lobby for institutional mechanisms for millets: The policy driven shift in food habits towards consumption of less nutritious rice and wheat need to be challenged. Forceful arguments must be made for the inclusion and distribution of millets in regions where it is historically a part of the local food culture. In this regard, from time to time, community members will be encouraged and facilitated to make representation to government officials, elected leaders and policy makers at the local, state, regional and national levels. This will build a strong lobby for creating and developing institutional mechanisms for millets. Suitable institutional mechanisms needs to be evolved, such as the institutional finance and insurance which today is offered generously to farmers who cultivate preferred grains such as rice and wheat.

In further, articulating the cause of millets and dryland farming, various support systems such as socio-ecological bonus for millet farmers needs to be argued for. Appropriate institutional mechanisms must be developed to assess this.

4.4. Regional/sub-regional farmer/community-led unisectoral dialogues & conventions to enable shift in research thrust and public policy: In our efforts to revive millets, there is a need to challenge the dominant paradigm on food, farming and issues of food security in order to evolve a more nuanced understanding of food sovereignty and the current farming crises. However, the issues of reviving millet based food and farming systems cuts across several dimensions and the factors such as the role of media, the political will, a strong lobby of rice and wheat farmers, institutional neglect are affecting the outcome. In this regard, the communities should assume a lead role and farmers from the millet growing regions need to engage and dialogue with all sectors.

Therefore, it is essential that strong uni-sectoral arguments are built up from scientists, academicians, doctors, nutritionists, media, politicians and farmer's organisations in favour of millets. For this purpose, regional/sub-regional level uni-sectoral conventions will be organised, where

farmers will dialogue and interact face to face with scientists, academicians, doctors, nutritionists, media and politicians.

Such interactions between farmers and agronomists, plant breeders, nutritionists and others from the scientific community will build the profile of millets and bringing policy changes. This will also enable changes in perspectives of the scientists, academicians, nutritionists and doctors, thereby shifting thrust in research and approach.

While such research from formal science is necessary, farmers' involvement must also be brought to the forefront with several people-centered and people-directed studies which are bound to offer exciting perspectives.

4.5. Organising cross-sectoral regional/ inter regional national roundtable (scientists/ media/ activists/ NGOs/ politicians/ doctors/ farmer leaders and nutritionists): While the issue of reviving millet based food and farming systems would involve several stakeholders such as farmers, scientists, nutritionists, politicians, media and policy makers there are several conflicts in perspectives among these stakeholders. Hence, multi-sectoral round table meetings will provide an opportunity for a dialogue for negotiating a pro-poor, pro-environmental and socially just system of production and consumption of millets in the future. For instance, inter regional meetings connecting nutritionists and agri-scientists from North east with nutritionists and agri-scientists from South India would enable sharing of knowledge and millet experience.

6.5. Network Building and Coordination

Output 5. Alliances of farmers, consumers, policy makers, academicians and civil society groups are built.

5.1. Strengthening the networks: In taking forward and strengthening the network, four major regional MINI networks will come to exist by the end of year 2010, to cover all parts of India. In each of these regions there are differences in geo-political, cultural and ethnic characters of the disadvantaged groups. There are also differences in the ecological contexts and the nature, character and degree of significance of millets as food crops. This requires a deeper understanding of the context and contextually specific approaches to address the revival of millets. However, the primary causes and concerns for erosion of millet based food and farming system are common. Considering these contexts, there are:

- A. MINI-NOR (North) covering the states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, and Uttrakhand;
- B. MINI-NE (North-East) covering the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and Mizoram;
- C. MINI-SOUTH covering Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala;
- D. MINI-CENTRAL covering the states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, West Bengal and Maharashtra.

Periodic interactions and exchanges of information, farmers and seeds within and between the regions will be encouraged and collective initiatives and actions will be coordinated among these regional networks.

5.2. Organise intra-regional/national level farmer's and other disadvantaged groups' meetings to articulate the larger concerns and potentials: In each of the regions mentioned above within the respective states, there are several distinct sub-regions that vary geographically and in ethnicity and culture. In view of this unique diversity in cultures, food habits and agriculture patterns, sub-regional meeting of farmers will be organised. This is a way to democratise the debate on the issue of millets and addressing the constraints at the local level. It will allow farmers to exchange ideas, share knowledge and seeds and thereby increase the number of farmers inclined to revert back to millet based biodiverse food and farming systems.

Thus, as a follow-up to the national level farmers' convention to be held in October 2010, the state and regional conventions will especially focus on ensuring that the perspectives of the Dalits and indigenous people, especially women, will be strongly articulated. For most indigenous groups millet is an issue of identity and food culture. Their ecological knowledge associated with millet based biodiverse farming is unique, which is a true representation of their natural leadership in conserving biodiversity. Further, it is important to recognise these communities as the frontline warriors against climate change and as climate compliant communities.

5.3. MINI Steering Committee meetings: The MINI Steering Committee, formed in August 2008, has already convened thrice till date and is instrumental in revisiting the recommendations of the National Consultation on Millets and continuously deliberates on the plan of action and direction for MINI. In this regard, every year the Steering Committee will convene once for review of the activities and assess the effectiveness of the policy and advocacy work.

5.4. State level workshops

5.5. Website Building: MINI currently has a website: www.milletindia.org. This website is regularly updated and information on various aspects of millet based community knowledge, policy and advocacy work, consumer actions, millet recipes and nutritional information is provided.

5.6. Participatory monitoring and evaluation: The MINI Steering Committee members, partner organisations and community members along with a team of mutually agreeable external evaluation members would meet over a period of 3-4 years with a set of criteria's for evaluation. Jointly they will use participatory methods to give substantial attention to reviewing the works in different parts of the country. Because of the decentralised approach, each partner organisation will also send in their quarterly assessment of constraints, advancements and course correction measures taken during implementation to the MINI secretariat.

7. Programme management

The planning of the programme has been carried out collectively. The implementation is based on prioritising and activity requisitions that are reviewed by a panel of members from the MINI Steering Committee. Based on the relevance, urgency and its contribution to the larger MINI goals and vision, these activity proposals are made into contractual agreements and jointly executed by the concerned state/ regional partner members. However, the responsibility of ensuring that the activities are implemented as planned and reported back to the MINI Secretariat, is entirely with DDS, as convening body.

8. Risk analysis

There are some internal and external risks when conducting this programme. The probability of each risk is estimated on a scale between 1 and 5. 1 represents a small risk and 5 represents an extensive risk. The following risks have been identified:

Risk 1: Increasing uncertainty and changes in the rainfall pattern

As some of the grassroots activities also involve farming, especially in the rainfed climate, there is a risk of unpredictable rainfall pattern.

Probability of risk: 2

Actions: The farmers plan against these risks through mixed cropping system. However, in the event of a complete and widespread metrological drought there could be higher degree of vulnerability faced by the communities. That could mean that MINI has to intensify and increase the integration of eco-livelihoods to support and encourage farmers in finding ingenious social and economic mechanisms to widening the ecological and natural resource restoration activities. This will directly lower their vulnerability and allow them to remain food, seed and fodder secure and sustain through drought like conditions.

Risk 2: Displacement

Probability of risk: 1

Action: If the participant communities are displaced from their lands for development projects the nature of the struggle will completely change and the programme will be reoriented to the communities concerns. Nevertheless, in the regions where such contextual challenges exist, we are working with partner organisations which are already adept in addressing these constrains and have been mobilising people and articulating these concerns. In fact, this work on bringing recognition to millet communities especially from the disadvantages groups will strengthen the communities and enables us to address the larger social injustice and disempowerment being brought about in several places on socially and economically marginalised Dalit and adavasis people.

Risk 3: Government is not cooperating

For the programme to succeed it is important that the government shows a high level of leadership and sensitivity towards making the poor self-reliant. There is a risk that they will not listen to the voices of the actors in MINI and neglect the voices of the poor.

Probability of risk: 3

Action: By working at different levels, MINI is not putting all hope in one person or institution. MINI network partners are building relations with government and politicians in all regions and at different levels.

Risk 4: Not enough interest from network partners or farmers

For MINI to reach its goals it is needed that many farmers and civil society groups who work for the rainfed farmers are willing to positively influence other actors (such as academicians, scientists, doctors, media, politicians etc.) and put consistent efforts to gather momentum to influence the policy makers.

The mindsets of the academicians, scientists, doctors and media people (mostly urban based, belonging to upper middle class or upper class and often of ethnic groups considered as higher castes) can many times be prejudiced and difficult to change. Their visions are not necessarily pro-poor and about addressing rural empowerment and community-led initiatives, but more inclined to privatising and market based solutions. To bring change in the mindsets of such people, consistent and substantial efforts in terms of time, energies and resources will be required from the network partners. In such a situation, there is a risk that farmers might loose hope and interest in consistently making efforts to change the mindset of other actors. There is also a risk that network partners find themselves constrained and are unable to concentrate enough effort into this programme as other critical social, economic and geo-political struggles might take precedence.

Probability of risk: 3

Action: By involving network partners and farmers in the planning and conducting of activities they will have a sense of ownership, which will motivate them.

Risk 5: Difference of opinions in setting priority activities for the network

When working together in a network, especially in a context with wide range of issues that are defined by the specific diversity in ethnicity, ecological habitat and culture, there are bound to be differences of opinion in setting-up and deciding the priority activities for a given region (such as North/North-East/ Central etc.). There are risks of disagreements and conflicts which could happen as a consequence of different strategies or perspectives.

Probability of risk: 2

Action: MINI is very selective and keen in working with organisations with proven experience in working with the marginalised communities, with strong commitment and sensitivity to the issues concerned. DDS, with its prior experience in network building, are in constant touch with its partner organisations to make regular updates on the activities and encourages organisations to take lead initiatives and from time to time provides necessary conceptual, intellectual, procedural and

methodological leadership. Further, while planning and strategising, the focus is to address contextual constraints and by having a range of intervention options, different regions can set their own list of priorities and work towards common goals.

Risk 6: Difficulties in coordinating the network

MINI is a big network, working all over India. The strength of the network is in the alliance of partner organisations that pools together and collectively contributes to the vast developmental experience, organisational strengths and set of skills. Coordinating all partners and activities is not an easy task and there is a risk that partners facing contextual constraints are unable to conducting the work they are suppose to, or do not report or monitor their work in time.

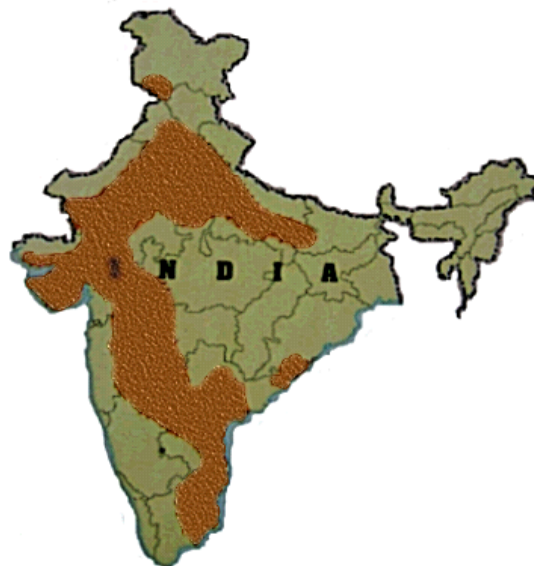
Probability of risk: 1

Action: MINI secretariat is responsible for coordinating the network. They have regular contact with partners to make sure that the responsibilities are clear.

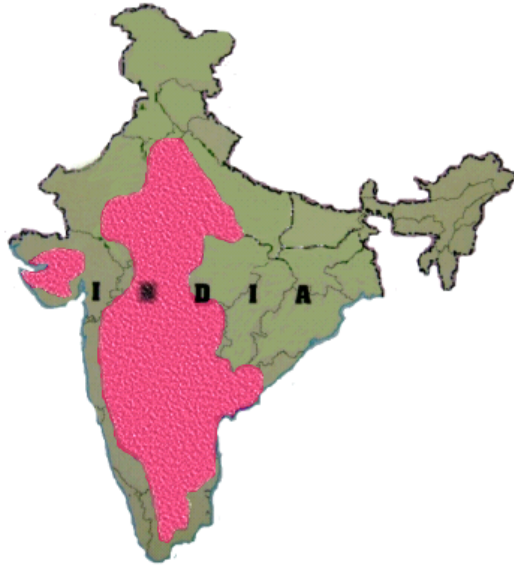
9. Maps



Areas where finger millet is cultivated.



Areas where pear millet is cultivated.



Areas where sorghum is cultivated.

