

Celebrating the Day of Rice Action

Following the Asian Week of Rice Action (28rd March – 4th April 2007), CIS celebrated a **Day of Rice Action** at *Basudha*. The venue was chosen on account of its largest collection of indigenous rice landraces.

The day opened with a welcome address by Mr. Debashis Chatterjee, who retraced the history of CIS and its commitment and role in conservation of indigenous biodiversity and culture. He explained that the object of the Day of Rice Action was to celebrate the folk rice diversity, which promises food security for all. He encouraged all farmers to share their experiences and start a strong movement toward a sustainable future. CIS is committed to help farmers in resisting such anti-people Bills as the Seeds Bill of 2004, which seeks to undermine the interests of the farmers and agro-biodiversity.



An introductory speech by agricultural scientist Mr.

Anupam Paul highlighted the importance of saving the seeds of folk crop varieties. Mr. Paul said that despite various government programs to reduce pesticide use, the use of highly toxic agrochemicals is increasing in the country, with severe



consequences for biodiversity and human health. He cited the *Basudha* farm as a live demonstration of zero-chemical, environment-friendly food production. He mentioned that although the rice was the focus of the celebration, monoculture of rice is not sustainable; a multitude of crops need to be integrated into rice cultivation regime.

The event enlisted 140 farmers from 6 districts, who exchanged information and opinion with each other, and with scientists.

There was an exhibition of posters, books and periodicals on GE-free sustainable agriculture.

Dr. D Deb spoke on the need of conserving local landraces, and gave illustrative examples of the value of different varieties in the local food cultures and nutritional security of the farmer household. He descried how the global agri-business is geared to erode folk crop genetic diversity in the global South to ensure profits for monopoly capital, and how poor farmers are trapped into dependence on a handful of multinational corporations. He also noted that farmers need to know the details of different national policies and legislations, like the Food Safety Act of 2006 and the Seeds Bill of 2004, that undermine the interests of small farmers and the food security of the country. He went on to give a detailed analysis of the Seeds Bill and urged the farmers to



galvanize local resistance to such laws.

Hundreds of rice varieties, accessed from *Vrihi* collection, were displayed in *Basudha*. The varieties were accessed from different districts of West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Orissa, Tripura, Uttaranchal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Thailand and Italy. At lunch, everyone tasted a mix of 150 rice local rice varieties, in addition to 5 aromatic and 6 special rice varieties



of a wide range of colour, shape and size, cooked separately. Each bowl of special rice variety was displayed with its panicle, to inform the consumer about the looks of the raw grains as well as the cooked product.



and mung bean, and a horse gram dessert). However, many preferred only spoons of the 11 rice varieties: their special flavours needed no accompaniment.

There were 6 different preparations of pulses (boiled Bengal gram, lentil soup, vegetable dishes with pigeon pea, cowpea

After the lunch, farmers, school teachers, science workers and social activists sat in groups to discuss effective ground



strategies to protect local crop seeds and resist the advances of proprietary seed business. Each group presented its views and opinions on the immediate action programs in their respective locality. The presentations indicated that farmers would henceforth become active in conserving their heirloom crop varieties, would stop applying any synthetic agrochemicals, and try to conserve farm ecosystems - soil, water and organisms. Farmers also felt that a set of protest letters be



presently mailed to State Agricultural Commission, and State and Union ministries of Agriculture. Farmers pledged that they would sign in a mass petition denouncing the Seeds Bill, which CIS would draft on behalf of farmers, and mail to the appropriate authorities.



The program ended with poet-singer Karuna Prasad De and poet Debabrata Sinha reciting their poems and songs that depicted farmers' sovereignty over crop genetic resources. However, heated discussions continued into the evening even after the program was formally over.