KISAN SWARAJ NEETI

FOR SAVING OUR FOOD, FARMERS & FREEDOM

Background

Starting on October 2nd 2010 (Gandhi Jayanti) at Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad, more than 220 persons from across India took up a 71-day mobilization and outreach effort to fellow citizens, mostly farmers, across 20 states of India, to draw attention to issues around our Food, Farmers, Freedom. A broad alliance of more than 400 organizations across the country called ASHA (Alliance for Sustainable & Holistic Agriculture) came together, organizing public meetings, farmer interactions, field visits and citizen forums in 100 districts as part of the Kisan Swaraj Yatra, striking a dialogue with nearly twenty five thousand people, including farmers, consumers, agriculture scientists, political parties and governments. The Yatra drew fresh attention to the continuing agrarian crisis in the country, at a time when major policy directions are being charted out for the future of farming in this country. This Kisan Swaraj Neeti is an evolving policy framework that emerged from the Kisan Swaraj Yatra and the subsequent work of ASHA in various states of India.

It is apparent that any efforts by governments around rural employment, food security and tribal development are intricately linked to the health of agriculture in rural India and Agriculture cannot be compartmentalized as one Ministry or Department. Without addressing and solving the fundamental issues of Indian agriculture, all the development and welfare efforts will be building an edifice with a crumbling foundation.

The Kisan Swaraj Yatra, in its long journey through scores of villages, towns and cities of India, found that farmers are indeed struggling to have a viable livelihood and dignified living through farming and to hold on to their resources. We found that the ecological crisis in our agriculture is real and the damage is being experienced tangibly, whether it is related to land or water or seed. We also found that seed sovereignty is no longer an ideological or theoretical concept – choices related to Seed are indeed narrowing down for farmers, with seed monopolies of big corporations growing; issues around good quality, affordable, locally suitable diverse seeds in an accountable system throw up the need to look into seed self-reliance urgently.

The Yatra also found that ecological farming based on farmer-level innovations related to soil/pest/disease management and seed-breeding is indeed being practised on a wide scale and the government is yet to pick up its pro-active spread, given the current economic, environmental and health imperatives. Nearly everyone that the Yatris interacted with had concerns about food safety and quality and implications for their health.