



Rashtriya Mahila Kisan Sammelan (National Convention of Women Farmers) *Recognising Rights of Women Farmers for Sustainable Development*

March 17th-19th 2016



Summary of the National Convention and Key Takeaways

MAKAAM¹ organised the first ever National Convention of Women Farmers in India, in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Government of Andhra Pradesh on 17, 18 and 19 March 2016, with a view to build solidarities across states and to draw attention to rights of women farmers for centre-staging their voices and concerns within agriculture and sustainable development policies and programmes. The convention brought together over 500 women farmers from 19 different states² as well as experts, researchers, activists and government functionaries from different departments to deliberate on the Rights of Women Farmers and to come up with the **Bapatla Declaration**. This Declaration lays out the vision of women farmers for sustainable livelihoods, food security and resource rights. The Declaration also establishes a roadmap for achieving sustainable development, including women's access to natural resources, their right to the use the commons, ending all forms of violence against women farmers in the fields, forests, in households and work place, and to secure and strengthen their autonomy and leadership in all spheres. The Declaration emphasises that without addressing women farmers' issues, agricultural growth, livelihood security or food security cannot be sustained. Specific demands in the Declaration pertain to public provisioning towards food security, income security, social protection; right to land, both private and commons; focus of interventions on the most marginalised; promoting women's knowledge and leadership in agricultural extension services; and protection of forests and environment for women's livelihoods. Overall, there also emerged a demand for a legal statute on rights of women farmers, more gender-responsive data for policymaking, monitoring and evaluation; sensitisation of institutions and functionaries involved in programme implementation; and the need for continuing organising efforts at the grassroots for building women farmers' voice and agency.

"The National Commission for Women (NCW) will be undertaking an ambitious project of training elected women grassroots leaders at the Panchayat on issues of good governance – planning, implementation, addressing the needs of their stakeholders. Issues women farmers face will be included in such trainings. The NCW will work closely with Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MAKAAM) to draft a plan for women farmers, which will be presented to the Government of India"

- Lalitha Kumaramangalam, Chairperson,
National Commission for Women

The sessions at the three-day convention focused on (a) Building solidarity amongst women farmers from different states; (b) Knowledge and experience sharing and; (c) Creating a platform for constructive dialogue between the women farmer leaders and respective government agencies. It brought together,

We need strong advocacy strategies, take leverage of, for example, the Panchayat Day, where government will host farmer specific events between 18th to 22nd April at the Panchayat Level. I want women farmers to use this opportunity to give voice to their own agendas and concerns.

- Sarada Muraleedharan
Joint Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj,
Government of India

for the first time, women farmers from diverse backgrounds and communities, fisher women, livestock rearers, wage labourers, forest produce collectors, single women farmers, tribal women, elected women farmers in panchayats etc. to learn about their experiences and challenges and strengthen their understanding on land laws and

¹ MAKAAM is an alliance of more than 65 organisations that work with women farmers across the country

² Details of participants from different states annexed

water use policies, climate changes, strategies for demanding their rights, social security schemes, access to institutions like farmer cooperatives and use of innovative technology to increase the scope of farming. To address the concerns of women farmers from different regions, the comprehensively designed programme covered varied issues like (i) *Distress in Rural Livelihoods and Challenges of Women Farmers*, (ii) *Women Farmers Entitlements Bill*, (iii) *Land and Water Rights of Women Farmers*, (iv) *Sustainable Farming, Health and Environment*, (v) *Wages, work conditions and social protection*, (vi) *Women farmers and commons*, (vii) *Farmer suicides and implications for women farmers*, (viii) *Access to markets and trade* and (ix) *Tools for information and technology*. Participatory Action Learning (PALS) Tools were used to engage women farmers on all of these issues³.

The Convention hosted a diverse set of panellists, with well thought out dialogue exchange with the representatives from the National and State Commissions for Women, Department of Agriculture, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Department of Women and Child Development and Ministry of Panchayati Raj. Some concrete points of action that emerged are as follows:

- Empower more women and facilitate easy access to livelihoods and employment, we need to effectively link the Gram Panchayat Development Plan with the MGNREGA scheme and NRLM groups.
- Expand the Joint Liability Groups programme, as initiated in Kerala, which emphasises on the identity of women as farmers, and their livelihoods and market linkage.
- Strengthen Monitoring & Vigilance Committees in every village to share information on employment schemes, credit schemes and innovative agricultural technology and strategies at the community level. Mahila Mahiti Kendra (Women's Information/Resource Centres) at every block and district level can serve as one such platform.
- Implement existing laws for women's land rights; specifically, design schemes and programmes where women's participation and involvement is planned for, in this regard.

³ Participatory Action Learning Systems (PALS) and tools use interactive methodologies of guided facilitation for critical reflection and lateral learning.

Annexure 1 - Details of participants from different states

Sl. No	State Name	No. of Participants
1	Andhra Pradesh	138
2	Assam	1
3	Bihar	7
4	Chhattisgarh	39
5	Delhi	10
6	Gujarat	33
7	Himachal Pradesh	4
8	Karnataka	12
9	Kerala	3
10	Madhya Pradesh	40
11	Maharashtra	32
12	Nagaland	4
13	Odisha	22
14	Punjab	4
15	Rajasthan	20
16	Tamil Nadu	27
17	Telangana	103
18	Uttar Pradesh	6
19	Uttarakhand	3
	Total	508

Annexure 2 – Charter of Demands

Themes	Demands
Land Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's names to be included in land titles in both natal and marital agricultural property. • Women to have equal rights to natal and marital land. • Homestead and housing land for single women (especially widows of farmers who committed suicide). • Joint titling of land. • Cease land acquisition of agricultural land for "public purposes".
Tenancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiating and fixing rent for land leasing and sharecropping. • Land leasing by women and their collectives for cultivation. • Review and implementation of current tenancy laws and agreements in every state.
Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fair and adequate market practices and facilities for women both as consumers and producers. • Women's participation and agendas to be prioritized in farmer's and market cooperatives, Forest and Market Committees. • Women fish workers to be given fair access to markets. (These markets are monopolized by commercial traders and merchants.)
Forest Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remunerative pricing for non-timber forest produce. • Land titles under the Forest Rights Act to be given in women's names. • Cooperative of forest workers should be formed to sell forest produce. • Remuneration for tendu patta to be given directly to women in their own bank accounts, not in their husbands' names.
Identity as Women Farmers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of women as workers and farmers. • Enhancing and validating knowledge and Information through training and capacity building of all women farmers. • Agriculture should be looked as a skilled work. This will impact social and occupational identity of women. • Sustainable agriculture training should be given to widows of farmers who have committed suicide. They

	<p>should be supported financially for a minimum of three years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition and redressal of the violence women face as farmers and workers.
Water Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irrigation facilities for all cultivators: It is not enough to only demand land and credit. Water is needed to make land cultivable and viable for livelihoods. • Building and accessing water resources (such as ponds and check dams) through NREGA.
Resource Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kisaan Credit Cards to be issued in women's names irrespective of whose name is on the land title (taking into consideration the definition of 'farmer' in the National Policy of Farmers) • Credit facilities for all farmers regardless of size of landholdings.

Annexure 3 – Bapatla Declaration

Declaration of MAKAAAM's National Convention of Women Farmers

19 March 2016

*In this National Convention of Women Farmers held in Bapatla, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, women farmers from 18 states of India do hereby adopt and declare the following to **Recognise, Empower and Support** women farmers:*

Recognizing that in India, a majority of female workforce is concentrated in agriculture and more women-days go into every acre of land cultivated than man-days, across crops and regions;

We resolve to collectively produce sufficient grains and pulses for our own needs first and address demands and within our households and communities and create and secure sustainable livelihoods. We resolve to resist development that is based on unsustainable use of natural resources and denies us the right to secure livelihoods and access to our natural resources. We reaffirm our right to the use of commons

We resolve to challenge and resist violence of all forms against women farmers in the fields, forests, in households and work place, and to secure and strengthen our autonomy in all spheres.

Recognising that without addressing women farmers' issues, agricultural growth, livelihood security or food security cannot be sustained; we call upon the State

- 1) To restructure its policies around basic livelihood resources and their use to ensure that rural women's livelihoods are comprehensively ensured so that food security, income security, social protection (including healthcare, insurance, childcare services and pension) as well as bodily integrity are all protected
- 2) State should prioritise rain-fed agriculture, where small and marginal women farmers are involved, to promote food crops to ensure food security and climate change mitigation and adaptation
- 3) State should prioritise land rights for Dalit landless, single, tribal, and differently-abled women in the distribution of public lands
- 4) Recognising that joint titles do not necessarily empower women, state should promote independent land rights for women
- 5) Recognising that fragmentation of land is cited as an excuse to deny independent right to women, women should be given fair share in the income from such land to secure their rights
- 6) We recognize that women are the primary users and protectors of the common lands, and demand that their rights and entitlements therein should be protected
- 7) State should ensure that in land distribution policies, the parcel of land distributed is viable in terms of size, type of land as well as land development investments for women farmers
- 8) Recognize and record women farmers who are tenants and sharecroppers, and ensure access to various entitlements as cultivators; and also ensure rehabilitation in the case of state displacement of tenant/share cropper farmers
- 9) Recognize single women farmers as a significant category that should receive priority attention for access to knowledge, schemes and support services

- 10) Women farmers whose husbands have committed suicides should be supported to take up sustainable agriculture practices and for their children's education. Their inheritance rights should be secured.
- 11) State should ensure and improve access to schemes, programmes and entitlements for all women farmers.
- 12) Promote and support diversity-based ecological agriculture based on women's traditional knowledge and post-modern technologies, since it allows more autonomy for women in farming, is sustainable, addresses food and nutrition security, protects the environment from adverse effects of chemical farming, and also reduces risks related to climate change.
- 13) Include modules on women farmers and women's land rights in the training of agriculture officers and extension personnel and revenue officials respectively
- 14) Appoint women extension officers /Mahila Kisan Mitra within the agriculture extension system, who can promote kitchen gardens and herbal/traditional medicines along with other services for farm women.
- 15) Ensure representation of women in equal numbers in councils and committees at village/block and district levels for implementation of schemes such as ATMA and for implementation of FRA, commons governance, etc.
- 16) Review customary laws and ensure gender justice in their implementation
- 17) We demand that the government enact a women farmers' entitlement statute to legally protect the rights of women farmers
- 18) Data systems need to be strengthened, including cultivation records to reflect women as cultivators and producers
- 19) Policymakers, planners and programme implementers should be informed of the need for specific focus on the issues of vulnerable women groups such as single women farmers and women farmers in fragile hill terrains in semi-arid and dryland regions, and women farmers with disabilities
- 20) The state must sensitise administration and functionaries to promote ecological agriculture and women's land and livelihood rights.
- 21) State should develop a commons policy framework with gender and equity focus
- 22) State should implement the Forest Right Act (FRA) and the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act before any change or diversion in the status of commons. Any diversion of lands from commons should be considered only after livelihood needs of commons-dependent groups are taken into account.
- 23) Companies should be charged with the task of ensuring that environmental damage is not caused by their activities, and they should be penalised for contamination of commons, including water commons.
- 24) Recognizing ambiguities about departmental jurisdictions when nomadic pastoralists cross borders and closure or blockade of their grazing lands and travel routes without their knowledge, we demand that nomadic pastoralists and other traditional grazers, especially women, should not be prevented or obstructed from such grazing practices and departments concerned should take all steps to ensure the same.
- 25) Collectivize small and marginal farmers and support their institutional development for marketing to realise better prices
- 26) Strengthen land literacy, marketing and value addition training for women farmers

27) Enhance access to credit and working capital for women farmers and their collectives; provide infrastructure support, water, electricity, Kisan Credit Card, etc.to make farming viable.

28) We demand the universalization and effective implementation of maternity entitlements for all women farmers, the provision of six months' wage compensation and assurance of access to free and quality public health care

We, as MAKKAM, will extend our outreach to increased numbers of women farmers to strengthen our voices to achieve our rights.

We will focus to organise informal sector rural women workers, farmers and commons-dependent communities to access resources to improve our livelihoods.

We will build our grassroots organizations to support each other and strengthen Gram Sabhas to access our entitlements.