

IN SUPPORT OF THE FARMERS' MOVEMENT

Statement by Vikalp Sangam Core Group

5 December 2020

We, the Core Group members of the Vikalp Sangam, stand in solidarity with the ongoing farmers' protests for the repeal of the newly enacted farm laws – The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, and The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020. We are also shocked by the repressive tactics of the government to suppress farmer's protests across the country, the arbitrary imposition of false cases on farmer activists, and the brutal repression of the struggle, including tear-gassing and water cannoning the protesting farmers on the Delhi borders in the biting cold.

The massive and widespread farmers' agitations against the pro-business and anti-farmer legislations, hurriedly rammed through a truncated session of the Indian Parliament in September 2020, have been met with an insensitive and muted response from the Central Government. At the meeting called by the Union Minister of Agriculture on 1 December 2020, ostensibly to break the deadlock arising out of these mass protests, the Government defended the laws and offered to setup a panel. This was clearly a ruse to defuse and undermine the protests, and play politics of divide and rule. The Joint Action Committee, representing over 500 farmers organizations working across the states and at an all India level, has rightly rejected the proposal of the government to set up a committee presumably to 'educate' the farmers, rather than address their genuine demands.

We are of the firm opinion that these laws will lead to further land alienation (landlessness) and destitution of the peasantry because the laws permit, in thinly disguised form, the unsparing loot by the lobby of agri-businesses and corporate houses. The Government is also under pressure from the United States and other industrialised market economies in the World Trade Organization (WTO) to dismantle the subsidy regime, and the public procurement and public distribution systems in the country. While India has taken progressive positions at the WTO to withstand the pressure of developed countries so far, and argued for a 'peace clause' to defend its public stockholding of food, the passing of the new farm laws may well undermine this position domestically itself. The new laws are paving the way for a path capable of further orienting agricultural production away from the basic aim of food security and sovereignty, and a shift to grain exports and levels of commercialization.

This new path will make farming communities more exposed to the uncertainties of unregulated market (including global) prices, demand and supply. Farmers (especially small holders, that make up the vast majority of the farming population) are reeling from persistent agrarian distress and the economic impact of the measures taken by the past and present governments. This has put agriculture dependent families under severe indebtedness and have resulted in increased farmers suicides. There is also a nutritional deficiency crisis amongst, ironically, farming families, which will get worse the more the sector is placed into the hands of an unregulated market. Women and children in farming families are the worst affected.

We do consider that the present agitation by the farmers goes beyond the withdrawal of the three farm related laws. It is also about expanding the democratic space that has been consistently shrinking under the present political dispensation.

We stand in solidarity with the farmers and demand:

- The withdrawal of the new farm laws; we ask the Government to display its sincerity to meet the farmers' demands, by immediately promulgating an ordinance to stop the implementation of these laws.
- The withdrawal of all cases imposed on the agitating farmers and leaders of the farmers' organizations.
- Fixation of remunerative prices for all agricultural produce/commodities on the basis of the Swaminathan Commission report; hold consultations with farmers' organisations and concerned agencies to promulgate a separate law that guarantees this.
- Waiver of loans for farmers, including women farmers from farm suicide families and those who have taken loans from microfinance companies and SHGs.
- Monthly income support to all vulnerable families and implementation of MNREGA and of universal social security support systems, which also includes support for health care and education of the farmers.
- The government, as an immediate step, must bring in reforms in the APMCs ensuring easy access to small and marginal farmers including women farmers who trade at the local level. This could be on the lines of the initiatives taken by the governments of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana to hand over procurement at the village level and also support direct marketing initiatives.
- Universalization and expansion of PDS to include millets (nutri-cereals), pulses and oil that could be procured in a decentralized manner by guaranteeing remunerative prices. A similar reform of the various government run nutritional programmes (POSHAN Abhiyaan, supplementary nutrition and meals provided under the Integrated Child Development Services and Mid-day Meal Scheme, etc.) is also urgently called for. These measures would help to diversify crop procurement operations in a very carefully calibrated, location-specific manner, to align with local agro-ecologies as well as ensure nutritional security.

As an urgent shift in the model of agricultural development, and with a target of reaching all farmers within the next decade, we also call upon the government to create the necessary physical and social/institutional infrastructure and policy instruments (including re-assigning the massive subsidy to chemical fertilisers) to help farmers break out of the vicious cycle of the High External Input Unsustainable Agriculture paradigm (in the form of mono-cultural cropping systems, hybrid seeds, chemical fertilisers, pesticides and other agronomical practices, and the linked loans and indebtedness); instead moving to a more sustainable, regenerative and diverse agricultural system (like Agro-ecological Farming Systems, Community Based Natural Farming, Non-Pesticide Managed Agriculture, Organic Farming, Regenerative Agriculture, Conservation Agriculture, Low External Input Sustainable Agriculture etc) that can ensure nutritional security, better livelihoods and incomes,

conserve resources like water, enhance the primary productivity of the ecosystem and also liberate the peasantry from the clutches of moneylenders and corporates. Particular focus must be on women in farming situations, recognizing their knowledge, rights to land, decision-making, and all other aspects of agriculture. There are thousands of successful examples of such approaches already, across all agroecological regions, that can be used to spread them; several state governments are already supporting them, and it could feasibly become a national programme. This would also help significantly in meeting India's obligations under various global environmental (biodiversity, climate, etc) and human rights agreements.

Once again, we the Core Group members of the Vikalp Sangam, pledge our support to and solidarity with the farmers' movement in their just and democratic struggle for a life with dignity.

Core Group, Vikalp Sangam (consisting of the groups below)

1. ACCORD (Tamil Nadu)
2. Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (national)
3. Alternative Law Forum (Bengaluru)
4. Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (Bengaluru)
5. BHASHA (Gujarat)
6. Bhoomi College (Bengaluru)
7. Blue Ribbon Movement (Mumbai)
8. Centre for Education and Documentation (Mumbai)
9. Centre for Environment Education (Gujarat)
10. Centre for Equity Studies (Delhi)
11. CGNetSwara (Chhattisgarh)
12. Chalakudypuzha Samrakshana Samithi / River Research Centre (Kerala)
13. ComMutiny: The Youth Collective (Delhi)
14. Deccan Development Society (Telangana)
15. Deer Park (Himachal Pradesh)
16. Development Alternatives (Delhi)
17. Dharamitra (Maharashtra)
18. Ekta Parishad (several states)
19. Ektha (Chennai)
20. EQUATIONS (Bengaluru)
21. Extinction Rebellion India (national)
22. Gene Campaign (Delhi)
23. Goonj (Delhi)
24. Greenpeace India (Bengaluru)
25. Health Swaraaj Samvaad (national)
26. Ideosync (Delhi)
27. Jagori Rural (Himachal Pradesh)
28. Kalpavriksh (Maharashtra)
29. Knowledge in Civil Society (national)
30. Kriti Team (Delhi)
31. Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation (Ladakh)
32. Local Futures (Ladakh)
33. Maadhyam (Delhi)
34. Maati (Uttarakhand)
35. Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (national)
36. Mahalir Association for Literacy, Awareness and Rights (MALAR)

37. Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (Rajasthan) Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture Network (national)
38. National Alliance of Peoples' Movements (national)
39. National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (national)
40. Nirangal (Tamil Nadu)
41. North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society (Meghalaya)
42. People's Resource Centre (Delhi)
43. Peoples' Science Institute (Uttarakhand)
44. reStore (Chennai)
45. Sahjeevan (Kachchh)
46. Sambhaavnaa (Himachal Pradesh)
47. Samvedana (Maharashtra)
48. Sangama (Bengaluru)
49. Sangat (Delhi)
50. School for Democracy (Rajasthan)
51. School for Rural Development and Environment (Kashmir)
52. Shikshantar (Rajasthan) Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust (Ladakh)
53. Sikkim Indigenous Lepcha Women's Association
54. Social Entrepreneurship Association (Tamil Nadu)
55. SOPPECOM (Maharashtra)
56. South Asian Dialogue on Ecological Democracy (Delhi)
57. Students' Environmental and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (Ladakh)
58. Thanal (Kerala)
59. Timbaktu Collective (Andhra Pradesh)
60. Titli Trust (Uttarakhand)
61. Tribal Health Initiative (Tamil Nadu)
62. URMUL (Rajasthan)
63. Vrikshamitra (Maharashtra)
64. Watershed Support Services and Activities Network (Andhra Pradesh/Telangana)
65. Youth Alliance (Delhi)
66. Yugma Network (national)
67. Dinesh Abrol
68. Sushma Iyengar

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