

Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation

**"Inclusive Theologies of Lives: From
Land: Water: Forest: Agriculture
Perspectives"**

We the participants as Women and Men farmers, Church Leaders, Theologians, Academicians and Activists met from 24 to 25 April 2016 at Leonard Theological College deliberated deeply on the issues of life and creation related to Land, Water, Forest, Agriculture, Food, Farmers' Suicide, Mining, mega projects issues; ideologically, theologically, socially and ministerially. This was facilitated by the World Council of Churches - Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, Integrated Rural Development and Weaker Sections in India, Christian Institute for Study of Religion and Society, Christian Farmers Fellowship, Raipur Churches Development and Relief Committee, Christian Service Agency and NCCI Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation.

God's creation is groaning under the pressures of greed, selfishness and endless pursuit of affluence by a miniscule minority of human race based on exploitation of nature and human resources meant to meet the basic needs of all creatures of the world. Commercialization, commodification and privatization of land, water, forest and agriculture are natural corollaries of money-market-profit syndrome under capitalism dictated by the Empire. Such a negation of the basic purpose of God's creation is to be resisted and replaced with systems and structures that guarantee equal share with dignity for all based on the principle: "To each one according to their need; and each are sharing and contributing according to their capacity". Thus, the ultimate reality of harmonious relationship between God-Human-Nature needs to be restored, reaffirmed and reconciled.

Land remains as a core and crucial source of life of farmers. Communities closely connected with land for their livelihood, culture and creativity are being denied their birth right to land in the name of so-called “development” in the garb of eminent domain. A large number of them, especially the Tribals, Adivasis, Dalits and Women have been uprooted and alienated from their land. Today, the biggest battle on this earth is for Land, and whatever therein (water, forest and fauna, mines, minerals and mountains, etc.). On one hand it is the loot and plunder of resources by the Corporate-Capitalist world, with the State playing a supportive role to it. On the other hand, we have poor people, who are resisting this loot and plunder with all their might towards "*JAN DE DENG, ZAMEEN NAHIN*"! (We'll lay down our lives, but not the land!)

Water is life - Water is Right. It's the source and resource of life! Water is yet another birth right of every living creature as a gift from God. Yet, the recent upsurge in transforming water into a profit-making commodity to be supplied through the market has resulted in vast majority of human and natural beings denied of this basic need for survival and sustenance. Privatization, commercialization, commodification and increased use of water for industrialization and urbanization has created artificial scarcity, adding to the dangerous dimensions of global warming and climate change.

Forest is an integral part of sustenance and culture of indigenous communities like tribals/ adivasis for centuries. Their communal ownership and the right to usage of forests has been traditionally recognized and protected under the law. As a result of prolonged and sustained struggles in India, the Forest Right Act 2005 has come into force, yet very little has been done to restore forests and all that therein to the adivasis/tribals and forest dwellers. Depletion of forests for fulfilling the vested interests has been going on unabated in spite of the protection of the forest under the Law.

Life-Enhancing Agriculture is being threatened by the Economic Globalization and Market Economy, wherein the agriculture policies are designed to suit the corporate profit centered mechanisms in transforming agrarian economy to corporatized agri-industry. Farmers everywhere are groaning under it. As such agrarian communities have started moving from 'agri-culture to agri-business' by paving ways for Genetically Modified (GM) technologies being applied to the cash crops, terminator seeds, mechanization for ploughing and harvesting, and chemical fertilizers and pesticides aiming at quantity rather than quality.

The States' pro-corporate stance leads to enforcing anti-agriculture and anti-farmer policies having adverse affects on the peasants, resulting mostly from agri-based debts, leading to migration and reducing their status to agri-refugees, as well as a major cause for forcing farmers to commit suicides. India is now opening up to corporate pillaging like never before. Traditional knowledge Systems and indigenous practices are being snuffed out. The poor and the marginalized who are solely dependent on agriculture as a means of livelihood have been forced to abandon their traditional sources and resources for life and livelihood, and migrate to cities. Such onslaught affects mostly the Dalits, Adivasis/Tribals, Women, children and other marginalized and excluded communities, especially the landless agricultural labourers in India.

Large sections of Indian populace is facing critical questions of food sovereignty, food security and food safety since the corporates plunder of land, water and other natural resources continue unabated. Initiatives of low external inputs and sustainable agriculture experiments are mostly limited to the land-owning farmers, whereas such initiatives are not supported to Dalits, Tribals/Adivasis who are small and marginal farmers.

In the midst of death and destruction unleashed by the skewed developmental policies and economy of the Empire, we recognize that the ecumenical movement has initiated to reaffirm and strengthen the pilgrimage of justice and peace with the vision of an alternative path of development and theology of life.

The NCCI's 28th Quadrennial Assembly that is scheduled to meet and deliberate on the theme 'Towards Just and Inclusive Communities' is an opportunity for the Churches in India and the ecumenical movement to review and re-examine its present mission paradigm in order to make the Gospel relevant by interpreting it in response to the signs of our times, and to deliberate upon the need, relevance and diaconal engagement of the churches and ecumenical organizations in our contemporary context.

Theologies of lives is a profoundly theological affirmation. It re-imagines *koinonia* as the flourishing of the holistic development of life. Our participation in the blossoming of the life is nothing but the translation of our baptismal vows to denounce the powers and principalities of our times and to affirm the lordship of Jesus, the Christ. Theology of life is based on the alternative moral visions of the communities at the margins, and it requires from us the commitment to renew our baptismal vows through new baptismal experiences of immersion in the struggles of the subaltern communities Adivasis, Tribals, Dalits, differently abled and Transgender depending on Land, Water, Forest and Agriculture.

Theology of life is an interfaith and inter ideological initiative where we recognize that the universal reality of divine is manifested through diverse mediations, and our spiritual journey is a journey of pleasant surprises as we meet the divine in the most unexpected places and times as we engage in the flourishing of the theology of life with people irrespective of creed and color. Ultimately, theology of life is the affirmation of our faith in the promise of God that God will transform the face of the earth. It is our commitment to participate in God's pilgrimage to flourish life through transformative power.

We the participants therefore call upon the Indian Churches and, more so, the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI):

- To bring to the centre the rural Dalit, Tribal and Adivasi Churches which are predominantly agrarian and who constitute about eighty to eighty-five percents of our congregations but have been pushed to the margins for generations;
- To re-read the Bible through the eyes of the marginal farmers and evolve liturgies that reflect agricultural motifs, seasons and festivals.

- We suggest NCCI to facilitate its member Churches to develop policy on land.
- To recommend to Indian Churches to entrust its vast tracts of land in their fold with local congregations to promoting local congregation based Life Enhancing Agriculture.
- To lobby with the Government to implement radical land reforms and sustainable agriculture which is inclusive in nature ensuring entitlement of land to women or in some cases joint ownership in the society-at-large.
- To motivate Churches in India to campaign for Food Sovereignty and negotiate with their respective States to ensure the just and fair public distribution system, and draw up schemes to eradicate hunger, malnutrition, and hunger deaths.
- The Churches should explore the information sharing to empower the congregations and communities on the issues confronted by them and share alternatives that are good practices.

- To organize Indian Churches for alliance building, networking with other faith communities to lobby for just and pro-farmer Land Legislations, and also reject all governmental efforts to support multi-national industries and corporate houses which take away the fundamental rights of farmers.
- To promote solidarity with the Southern countries so that churches and farmers' movements learn from each other through exposures, joint consultations and best practices in Life Enhancing Agriculture.
- To address the issues of migration of younger generation, and explore the possibilities of employment in rural and urban areas.
- To explore collective action between rural and urban churches and between diverse ecclesial and interfaith confessions in promoting Life Enhancing Agriculture.
- To suggest the Indian theological fraternities to develop curriculum integrating Life Enchasing Agriculture.

We call the Indian Church, Ecumenical Movements, Civil Society and Inter-faith Movements for a deeper commitment and concerted efforts from all people in upholding the economy of life through our solidarity.

Let us join hands for a common follow-up action to save land, water, forest and agriculture!