

Seeding Youth for Sustainable Agriculture  
Wayanad Community Seed Fest 2024, 1-2 March 2024  
Community Agrobiodiversity Centre - M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation  
(CAbC-MSSRF) Puthoorrvayal, Wayanad, Kerala, India



Habi Sherin participated in the Wayanad Community Seed Fest organised by [MSSRF](#) in March 2024 and she shares her experiences here.

## CONTEXT

The Wayanad Community Seed Festival is a celebration of tradition, innovation, as well as a shared commitment to preserve our agricultural heritage. In its 8th edition, held on March 1 and 2, the festival echoed with the tagline 'Healthy Seeds for Healthy Agriculture, Seeding the Youth for Sustainable Agriculture', which encapsulated its mission to foster agrobiodiversity conservation. This event, organized by [the Community Agrobiodiversity Centre \(CAbC\)](#) of the [M S Swaminathan Research Foundation \(MSSRF\)](#), was meant to serve as a common platform to facilitate exchange of traditional and scientific knowledge between the farming and scientific community for use in agrobiodiversity conservation activities. MSSRF organized this year's seed fest in collaboration with the [Wayanad District Tribal Development Action Council \(WDTDAC\)](#), and Seed Care.



Dignitaries inaugurating Seed Fest 2024

## BIO-HAPPINESS: A Synchrony with Nature

The concept of 'Bio-Happiness' introduced by Dr Soumya Swaminathan, Chairperson, MSSRF, presents a profound insight into the intrinsic connection between human well-being and our environment. In a world where metrics, such as the UN's Happiness Index, often overlook this vital relationship, 'Bio-Happiness' emerges as a poignant reminder of the profound joy that can be derived from harmonizing with nature. This concept resonates deeply with the ethos of fostering agrobiodiversity conservation and sustainable agricultural practices. Indeed, the priceless happiness that arises from this harmony underscores the importance of prioritizing ecological balance in our pursuit of societal well-being.

## PRESERVING AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

The Seed Fest's mission of nurturing Wayanad's agricultural legacy in the hearts of youth embodies a profound commitment to preserving our cultural roots while embracing sustainable practices.

### Box 1: Wayanad Seed Festival

Seed Fest, an ongoing process started in Wayanad in 2015, aims to network with farmers, LSGs and scientists to create democratic spaces and structures to conserve agro-biodiversity. Traditional seed varieties are exhibited, exchanged, and propagated through the seed fest, and policymakers are familiarized with the current status and information on seed conservation in India. The annual seed festival is also the venue that distributes the regional Genome Savior Awards instituted by [the Wayanad District Tribal Development Action Council](#) to honor custodian farmers.

Source: MSSRF

Within this vision lies the potential for farm tourism to not only diversify farmers' income streams but also to serve as a conduit for cultural exchange and appreciation. However, as this sector grows, it's imperative to strike a delicate balance between economic prosperity and environmental stewardship. While the lure of lucrative ventures may be enticing, it's essential to tread carefully, ensuring that farm tourism initiatives do not inadvertently exploit or degrade the very landscapes and ecosystems they seek to showcase. By implementing responsible practices and prioritizing conservation efforts alongside economic gains, we can harness the transformative power of farm tourism while safeguarding our agricultural heritage for generations to come.

## COMBATING CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGH TRADITIONAL WISDOM

The pressing need to address climate change through the utilization of traditional seed varieties aligns convincingly with the principles of sustainable agriculture. These seeds cultivated – over generations – embody invaluable wisdom passed down through communities. Flood-tolerant rice strains, such as Adukkann, Veliyan, and Chenthadi, alongside drought-resistant varieties such as Kalladiaran, Veliyan, and Thondi, offer tangible solutions to the challenges of a changing climate. By strategically integrating these traditional seeds into agricultural practices, we can not only bolster crop resilience but also safeguard the rich tapestry of traditional wisdom inherent in their cultivation. It is crucial to recognize that the extinction of a seed signifies the loss of associated traditional knowledge. In honoring the recipients of the Plant Genome Savior Awards at the Seed Fest, we celebrate their relentless dedication to conservation efforts, irrespective of profitability. Their contributions serve as a beacon of inspiration, highlighting the invaluable role of individuals in preserving our agricultural heritage for generations to come.



Honoring Plant Genome Saviour Award winners

### ADVOCACY FOR FARMERS: Nurturing Those Who Nourish Us

The impassioned advocacy by Padmashree Cheruvayal Raman, on behalf of farmers, underscores the urgent need to recognize farming as a 'government occupation' and provide essential support to agricultural communities. With farmers facing numerous challenges, including instances of tragic suicides, the call for governmental intervention to ensure their well-being and livelihood security grows ever more urgent. As the backbone of our society, farmers play a vital role in nourishing our communities. It is essential to prioritize initiatives such as providing health insurance coverage for farming families, and acknowledging that safeguarding biodiversity begins with protecting those who steward the land. It is necessary that we pay attention to this call to action, recognizing the invaluable contributions of our farmers and working collectively to improve their quality of life. Only then can we truly honor their tireless efforts and secure a sustainable future for all.



**Padmashree Cheruvayal Raman sharing wisdom and sparking curiosity in young minds**

### **WALKING THE TALK: Leading by Example**

The stark contrast between policy making in comfortable, air-conditioned rooms and the reality of carbon-intensive practices, such as frequent use of private jets for short distances, exposes a glaring hypocrisy in the fight against climate change. While the wealthiest individuals and organizations may preach about reducing greenhouse gas emissions, their actions often speak louder than words. It is alarming to note that the world's richest individuals emit a staggering 1000 times more greenhouse gases than those at the bottom of the economic ladder. In this context, Padmashree Cheruvayal Raman's appreciation of CAbC-MSSRF's commitment to climate action, particularly their decision to abstain from air conditioning, serves as a commendable example of 'walking the talk'. This tangible demonstration of environmental responsibility underscores the urgency for individuals and institutions alike to align their actions with their stated values. Walking the talk is not just a moral imperative; it is essential to inspire and catalyze meaningful change on a global scale.

### **MAN-ANIMAL CONFLICT: A Call to Action**

The pressing issue of man-animal conflict in Wayanad, underscores the urgent need for proactive measures to mitigate its severity. The escalating conflict between wildlife and humans is fueled by the cumulative impact of various factors, including the exploitation of forest resources, inconsiderate human incursion into wildlife realms, and the adverse effects of climate change. In particular, rising temperatures pose significant risks to animals such as elephants, which lack sweat glands to regulate their body temperature. Moreover, the invasive Senna plant exacerbates the situation by depleting water resources and encroaching upon the Wayanadan sanctuary. While Karnataka finds utility in this plant for paper production, Kerala must prioritize its removal and recycling efforts. Implementing periodic removal

initiatives, coupled with active engagement from local communities, presents a viable strategy for impactful eradication and sustainable conservation. However, in the long term, the restoration of natural forests through reforestation efforts emerges as the most viable solution to restore ecological balance and alleviate the root causes of man-animal conflict.

### **OPEN FORUM FOR WOMEN**

The Women's Forum – attended by Kudumbashree workers, ASHA workers, homemakers, and young women – served as a vital platform for discussing gender mainstreaming programs in India and their role in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 - Gender Equality. Recognizing the diverse social and economic backgrounds of women, the forum emphasized the necessity of positive discrimination to ensure inclusivity and equal opportunities. Enforcing gendered value chains is crucial to orient the market around minority groups and promote economic empowerment. It was underscored that enhancing opportunities for women is paramount in fostering economic independence and reducing vulnerability, particularly as women are often considered one of the climate-vulnerable groups. Therefore, the forum stressed the importance of educating women and enhancing their adaptive capacity to effectively address the challenges posed by climate change and empowering them to thrive in diverse socio-economic contexts.



**Open forum for women**

### **DIVERSE AGRICULTURAL SHOWCASES: A Look into Innovation**

The Agrobiodiversity Exhibition showcased an impressive array of agricultural products, demonstrating the richness and diversity of the agricultural sector. The stalls presented a wide array of offerings from high-quality planting materials to aromatic rice varieties and innovative value-added products along with cutting edge technologies. The exhibition featured participation from local farmers, as well as national and international institutions, highlighting collaborative efforts to promote agricultural diversity and sustainability.



**Agrobiodiversity Exhibition**

Among them a standout exhibit was 'Jaivorg', a pioneering food forest farming program initiated by Shri Reji Joseph from Palakkad. This visionary venture represents a holistic approach to creating custom food forests, offering a sustainable alternative to conventional farming methods. Jaivorg's innovative model has the potential to revolutionize the agricultural landscape, providing a blueprint for cultivating diverse and resilient ecosystems while enhancing food security and environmental sustainability.



**Agrobiodiversity Exhibition**

### **END NOTE: My personal reflections**

My participation in the Seed Fest has been truly transformative, offering profound insights into the pivotal role of agriculture in shaping our collective future. Each concept, discussion, and initiative shared during the festival serves as a powerful catalyst for action, igniting a passion within me to contribute to a more sustainable and harmonious world. Seed Fest exemplifies the invaluable nature of platforms for

knowledge exchange, collaboration, and advocacy. So, I ardently advocate for the encouragement and replication of such initiatives on a global scale. Engaging and empowering youth is paramount, as they are the future stewards of our agricultural heritage. By involving them in the agricultural sector, we instill a renewed sense of responsibility and appreciation for those who sustain us.

As stewards of our planet, it is upon us to heed the lessons learned and translate them into tangible steps that lead to positive change. Whether advocating for farmer rights, championing gender equality, or embracing sustainable agricultural practices, each of us holds a crucial role in nurturing the seeds of progress. Let us embrace this responsibility sincerely, knowing that our actions today will shape the life of tomorrow. Together, let us sow the seeds of hope, resilience, and prosperity, cultivating a world where harmony with nature and each other prevails. The time for action is now, and the power to bring about change lies within each of us.

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