

Full Proceedings Report:

Understanding Climate Change: Rural Women's Perspectives

Organised by UNDP and MAKAAAM at Wardha, 18th-19th February, 2019

Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (MAKAAAM) and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) organised a consultation at Wardha (one of many districts in Vidarbha afflicted by drought and farmer suicide) in order to understand the effect of climate change on rural women.

The two day consultation featured sessions with rural women from Vidarbha who are engaged in different livelihood activities as cultivators, labourers, forest producers, livestock rearers, fisherwomen and pastoralists.

Day 1 (February 18, 2019): Plenary session

Songs of empowering the girl child, about farming and about the rights of women (feminism, equality and themes of caste-based exploitation) were sung with gusto by the women farmers present:

1. *Lek shikel majhi, kamwal kulacha naav*

Mag kahale (sic) mi gheu va poracha naav

(My daughter will study, and make the family proud,
So why should I ask for a son?)

2. *Tak ra jara*

3. *Aata pura zhala gharat basun,*

Uth hakkansathi kambar kasun.

(Enough of sitting at home,

Get up and get ready to fight for your rights)

Pallavi Harshe (MAKAAAM, SOPPECOM) invited the panellists onto the 'vicharpeeth'. She introduced the topic of climate change in a simple, relatable manner to the women present and explained that their perspectives on this theme were essential in order to make sense of the effects of climate change on rural life and livelihoods.

After the lamp-lighting ceremony, the panellists were asked to share their technical knowledge with the women present.

Ms. Seema Kulkarni, member of the National Facilitation Team (NFT) of **MAKAAAM**, addressed the women present and emphasized the importance of women speaking out during the coming sessions. She stressed on the value of women's experiences. She introduced MAKAAAM to the women present. MAKAAAM had its inception in 2014 across the country. It was a logical extension of the tireless efforts of various activists, researchers and organisations across the country that had been

working on the issues of women farmers for years. It is a national level network that works towards securing the rights of women farmers. In Maharashtra, MAKAAAM has primarily been focusing on the issue of farmer suicides, given the kind of agrarian crisis that has emerged from the regions of Vidarbha and Marathwada. She observed that this phenomenon of farmer suicides has started to spread to other regions - such as Nashik and Northern Maharashtra - which is a cause for concern. She stated that the data from the regions of Vidarbha and Marathwada, from 1995 onwards close to 65000 deaths were farmer suicides. As many women have become widows, and the myriad questions that they face have been taken up by MAKAAAM Maharashtra for the past one and a half year. She spoke about how she can see some familiar faces who were at previous consultations of MAKAAAM in Nagpur, who went on to participate in the protest in Mumbai at Azad Maidan in November, 2018. "We have taken our fight right up to Azad Maidan!" She iterated the demands of MAKAAAM - Pension, Ration, right to land, access to various schemes. She assured the women present that MAKAAAM will continue to follow up at all levels -it is not as if MAKAAAM's efforts are limited only to organising consultations but also towards ensuring some concrete action. At the same time, MAKAAAM Maharashtra has also been working on the issues surrounding forest rights. She explained that MAKAAAM's definition of women farmers is very broad and includes women who work as agricultural labourers, involved in livestock rearing, fishery, and forests. One question that has been repeatedly cropping up is that women do most of the work, and yet are not able to access their rights on land and resources. She asked for a show of hands for the number of women who had land in their name. Out of almost 50-60 women, only 5 to 6 women raised their hands. She asked for a show of hands for the number of women who laboured/worked hard, eliciting chuckles from the women present. Establishing women's identity as farmers in their own right, and thus ensuring the recognition of the value of their labour is an integral part of MAKAAAM's agenda. She spoke about how these demands were linked not only to access to government schemes/benefits, but also to women's identity and self-respect. Thus, it is important to fight for one's rights, because people either do not observe or take for granted the labour of women. One of the major demands that MAKAAAM is currently asking for is that women be registered with the Gram Panchayat as farmers. Census data indicates that in India nearly 65% of the women are involved in agriculture. She asked the women to reflect upon how they could relate their present concerns or challenges to the larger issue of climate change, and what kind of solutions that they are coming up with to counter these challenges. She emphasized upon the fact that it would be the women themselves who would be speaking at all of the sessions.

Kumari bai Jamkata - an adivasi woman farmer shared her experiences and struggles around forest rights. She has been associated with MAKAAAM since 2015. She mentioned that all women present work hard on the fields, but only 5 to 6 women at the session had land in their name. MAKAAAM's efforts have been at the level of both, the community as well as the government. She reminded the women present that dealing with the government and trying to bring about substantial policy change takes a lot of time, and cited her own example saying that it has taken her twenty years to reach here. "When I was not part of any *gat* (SHG), I would never speak up." She exhorted the women present to demand their rights to land and housing. "You will not get what you want, unless you raise your voice and fight for it!" The reason being that women are completely

deprived - and do not have the freedom to make their own decisions. Most of the decisions are made by either the men or elders in the family.

Kumari bai explained the situation in her district, Gadchiroli, in the context of forest rights issues. According to the Forest Rights Act, 2006, they had presented individual and collective claims for land. Although not all claims were approved, several individual and collective cases were awarded with land (*patta*). By law, in case of individual claims, the land should be in the name of both, the husband and wife. She explained that in several cases, the wife's name has been put down in the dependent's column in the form. This example shows how there is a disjunction between laws and their implementation. In the cases that we have intervened, some of the women have been able to get the land in their names, and hence were able to access various schemes. There are certain villages that have gotten *samudayik patta* which would entail village level planning. Increasing women's participation is essential to this process. She spoke about how they have been encouraging more women to participate in the gram sabhas with the aim of bringing about almost 50% women in the Gram Sabhas.

There are around 87 gram sabhas in Korchi taluka wherein the women have been involved in the sale of the tendu leaves. In each village, the proceeds from the tendu leaves auction are to the tune of 20-22 lakh rupees. But not many women are aware of the fact that it is the Gram Sabhas that are involved in the sale of tendu leaves and that they receive this kind of money. So the aim is to increase women's participation in the decision making process.

The GS is responsible for protecting *jal, jangal, jamin* (water, forest and land). In her taluka of Korchi, Kumari bai has led many protests against the *loha khanij prakalp* (iron mining project). She explained how this mining project would affect not just the health of the locals (due to contamination of water sources), but also the environment. Another issue that she spoke about was the rise in instances of harassment or violence against women by the 'company men' and factory workers. They have managed to stop this project from 2009 up to now, but she is not sure what would happen in the future. She said that they will continue to fight against it, because their lives and livelihood are dependent upon the forest. "Our culture, our traditions, our very survival is based on the forest, therefore protecting it is our responsibility." Hence, their focus is on increasing women's participation in decision making bodies such as Gram Sabhas, through various women's organisations. In Korchi, a Maha-gram Sabha has been created from 87 gram sabhas, to guide the gram sabhas.

Chhayatai Datar spoke about how everybody present has experienced the effects of climate change, but highlighted the fact that we have not yet analysed the reasons behind this. The changes are occurring at various levels and in various elements – air, water, forest and land. She attributed all of this to 'development' - particularly, the ways in which human beings have accelerated the process of 'development'. In India, the definition of development has been used by various politicians to suit their agenda, which exacerbates the situation since they are forming policies based on this agenda. Chhayatai urged the women present to begin with opposing wrong policies, and by demanding proper implementation of the laws that are good but have been conveniently ignored.

She cited various instances of climate change that we can observe right now. One such example is of Marathwada, which is a drought affected zone and is facing a major water crisis - particularly potable water. This situation has come about due to erratic rainfall. She explained how earlier there used to be a three-year cycle for the subcontinent's monsoon, where a year of good monsoon was followed by a year of average rainfall, and then a year of drought, and the cycle continued back to a year of good monsoon and so forth. Back then, farmers knew how to deal with these cycles of rain and drought. However, this cycle is now off balance.

One major reason cited by Chhaya tai was wrong cropping patterns. Why are water-intensive cash crops like sugarcane being grown in a water scarce region like Marathwada? Just this year, the government has given permission for building five to six new sugar factories in Marathwada. Decisions such as these are effectively giving farmers the incentive to grow more sugarcane even during a drought. Should the focus be on drinking water or water for growing sugarcane? Clearly, the government has not spared much thought to this, given how they have been lured by the profits. She cited stories of 1000 feet borewells being dug with the ground water levels being depleted further. She explained in simple terms the significance of groundwater, and how it is a precious resource that is a product of thousands of years of storage underground. For the ground water sources to be replenished, it would take another 500-1000 years, given that the rock in Maharashtra is basalt (not very porous). She spoke about other reasons for climate change such as Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) pollution. The indiscriminate use of coal (fossil fuels) is depleting our sources of energy.

"We talk of *Vikas* (development), but what kind of development are we seeking? And at what cost?" She asked the women present to reflect on how their farming techniques have changed in the last 20 years, also the changes in cropping patterns, soil fertility, and water availability. She urged the women to share their thoughts on these points. There is an urgent need for sustainable development.

Swastik Das, UNDP expert consultant, spoke briefly about the aim of the consultation - studying the effect of climate change on poverty, inequality and human development. He said that the studies of the scientific community on climate change have been read and understood, but the effects of climate change at the ground level need to be studied and discussed. The experts have spoken, now it is time for those who are actually bearing the brunt of climate change, i.e. the women present, to speak out. He asked the women to answer only two questions –

1. What is climate change according to you?
2. How do you think the climate has changed, comparing the situation at hand with the conditions 10 years ago?

He urged the women to come forward and share their perspectives and opinions on the effects of climate change on their lives.

Pallavi Harshe quickly translated the gist of Mr. Das's speech from Hindi to Marathi for the benefit of the women.

Mr. K. C. Malhotra, climate change expert, said there is no doubt that the climate is changing. He told the women present that the aim of this consultation was getting to hear what the women thought about climate change. What kind of changes have the women seen in their environment, and how do they know that it is due to climate change?

One of the effects of climate change can be seen through rise in temperature. This will have an impact on water. No living beings can live without water on earth. If there is no water, there will be no farming, no animal rearing, no forest cover, and no fishery. Rainfall patterns will change due to climate change - even now we can see the erratic nature of rainfall. Scarcity of water is already a major challenge.

Social scientists and civil society organizations have not been included in these studies by climate change scientists. As a result, they are unable to predict the manifestations of climate change on human life.

Another effect of climate change will be on biodiversity. There are two elements that sustain biodiversity - water and land. Moreover, they are all interdependent on each other.

He shared an anecdote about his experience in Meghalaya in 2008. He was discussing climate change at the university, and they wondered about the effect of climate change at the village level and whether the locals had developed any mechanisms or strategies to overcome them. They began a study in 2009 in 21 villages in Meghalaya. They found that the locals were certainly observing the effects of climate change in various ways. The farmers told them that for generations, nobody had seen the famous khasi bananas getting infested before. There are now new kinds of insects that were never seen before. Some crop varieties had been identified as useful in combating the effects of climate change. The local farmers said that annuals (crops that grow and are harvested every year) were the most vulnerable crops, in the context of climate change. But only big trees were capable of withstanding the effects of climate change. Trees are able to adapt to the changing climatic conditions, by shedding their leaves (to conserve themselves) and getting sustenance from the air and sun. The strategy of the Khasi farmers was to look towards nature as their guide - increasing forest cover. Planting kandamula is also an effective way of combating climate change. It has been observed that even if there is no water in a place for 10 years, kandamula conserves itself and as soon as there is rain, it grows rapidly.

Mr. Malhotra suggested that all farmers must ensure that at least 40% of their land be planted with trees, and 20% should be planted with *kandamula*. Looking towards nature and applying what one observes is very important for surviving climate changing. He promised to share his experiences in Meghalaya in the last session. He expressed his desire to learn from the experiences that the women would share in the coming sessions.

Point of information from Chhayatai Datar: While mitigation of climate change is important it is equally important that we also focus on pursuing a suitable, alternative mode of development in a way that is sustainable.

Session 2: Agriculture with a focus on cotton farmers

From this session onwards, all of the sessions were open for the women. The plenary session was a kind of introduction to climate change and the concomitant issues. These sessions were all about women and how they experienced climate change in their lives and livelihoods.

This session was facilitated by Suvarna Damle, Prakriti, and Yogini Dolke, SRUJAN.

The session opened with songs by the women present:

1. *Aamhikonadarnaarnahiga*

(We won't be scared of anybody) A song about the importance of organizing and women empowerment

2. *Dongarishetmazha, mi perukiti*

(My farm is on a hill, how much do I sow?)

The facilitators introduced themselves and went over some of the themes on which the women would be asked questions.

A panel of women farmers formed from the audience were called to the vicharpeeth and asked to share their experiences.

1. **Lakshmi Gajbhiye** – Shillori, Nagpur. She does farming on contract basis. She produces and sells cotton, Tur, and vegetables.
2. **Surekha Vitthal Chaudhari** –Kundi, Zari Jamani, Yavatmal. She has 2 acres of farm land. She grows cotton, Tur and soybean.
3. **Uttara Pande** - Hirpur, Akola. She said that she couldn't grow Tur this year. Citing an instance of climate change, she said that there has been no rainfall since August. The cotton crops were destroyed. Thereafter, there was no produce to sell. Hence, neither the labourer has work, nor does the farmer have produce to sell. Last year, the weather had become cloudy with clear indications of rain and the farmers thought they would be able to get soybean and *harbhara* (gram). But there was no rain, and the farmers had already used expensive seeds. It was very disappointing. Lately the dry weather has increased, and it has led to the *harbhara* growing before time, and the size of the *harbhara* dana is also smaller than before. Hence the production of *harbhara* has also decreased.

4. **Anita Haridas Bahekar, Kharap Dhore, Akola district** –She has two acres of land. Last year she had sowed one acre of cotton, and the other acre with moong and Tur. The cotton was destroyed by bollworm, and as for the moong, the pods did not even sprout (*shengach aalya nahi*) - all gone. The harbhara was destroyed completely by the wild boars. They keep raiding her farm. Since she is disabled, she can neither guard her farm, nor can she work in the fields. Her children have to work as daily wage labourers to make ends meet. Moreover, this year, there has been very little 'furniture' work (carpentry) available, otherwise they would get Rs. 150-200 per day.
5. **Shobha Kinake, Mangurda, Yavatmal district** - She began by saying that she is a woman farmer. She has 3 acres of land. She does contract farming. She had planted cotton, Tur, soyabean, chana and wheat on her farm. There was a lot of rain in the beginning this year, and the soil was far too wet for sowing. Not even the cotton plants remained standing, due to the rain. But then there was far too much heat starting from the month of August. This year, due to erratic rainfall, there was a decrease in the total sowing of the crops. This has led to a new variety of diseases, and she had to spend a lot on the insecticides/pesticides to combat these new insects. Ten years ago, the situation was very different - the rain was adequate. Now she says they never know when to expect rain. It never rains when we need the most.
6. **Surekha, Yavatmal** - Yavatmal district has black cotton soil. This year due to rise in temperature, the heat seeped into the soil and rendered it brittle, which led to soil erosion. The crops do not grow properly due to this. Last year, the bollworm destroyed her cotton crops. She talked about how BT cotton is very susceptible to bollworm infestation. She said there was lots of rain (10-15 days of rainfall), but it fell at the wrong time, so it was of absolutely no use. In addition, the cotton yield did not get enough rates. There is no fodder for the livestock either.

Suvarna asked the women on the panel to describe the kind of effect that climate change has had on their own health as women farmers? For instance, there were examples given by the women about the rash caused to the hands due to the BT Cotton, appearing on the hands and bodies of cotton-picking women.

Lakshmi Gajbhiye spoke about the change in the pattern of rainfall. When cloudy weather suddenly turns sunny, it upsets the calculations of farmers. She exclaims "Now we are no longer sure what to sow in which season (*kaay kontya rutut lavava kahi kalat naahi*)". She said ten years ago rain would fall on time.

Uttara Pande explained the health problems that come with BT cotton. Whenever they would pick cotton, fumes would emanate from the cotton, and they would get rashes all over their bodies. Some people still have rashes, even a year later. She explained that they can no longer work in the summers now. From April onwards, the heat gets unbearable. Earlier, they were able to work all 12 months of the year, and during summers from morning till two in the afternoon. However, now, due to climate change, they can no longer work. This has a direct impact on their income, since they are left with no work and no money to survive the summers.

Anita's husband committed suicide on February 2nd, 2008. She had an accident during sowing, and her leg slipped in the field and she became disabled. Her children have to go work in the fields now. They dropped out of school before they could even pass their matric (sic) exam. We got compensation of Rs. 95000.

Shobha spoke about the increasing menace of bollworm which destroys the cotton crops and consequently farmers have to face huge losses. She held climate change responsible for the suicides taking place. The burden of debts, loss of yield and the mental stress that comes along with it has a deleterious effect on health as well. She says this is true for both men and women. When the lenders come to collect their money, everybody in the family feels the pressure. Some (people) cannot deal with it and commit suicide, while some are affected mentally.

A woman (**Archana Keche**) from the audience said that the BT Cotton plant is smaller in height, as compared to the earlier cotton plant, and that puts strain on the backs of women who have to hunch to pick the cotton. This was disputed by a lot of women in the audience, who explained that the exact opposite is true.

Anita Atram, Nimbadevi, Zari Jamani, Yavatmal – When she was young, her family would grow everything they needed on their farm, and they would never buy anything from the market. Moreover, there were no chemical fertilizers at the time. Now traditional crops are no longer grown. Today, wheat, Jowar, Tur, etc. are grown. In Yavatmal, there are cotton crops everywhere. Now even her father grows cotton. Due to climate change, traditional crops that her grandmother grew like moong, udad, Bajra are no longer grown earlier even Rice used to be grown, but now that rainfall has decreased, we can no longer grow any rice. The effect of insecticides can be seen on animals (livestock) as well, for instance goats go out for grazing and ingest harmful chemicals. She explained how it is getting difficult to get nutritious food nowadays given the quality of foodgrain from the ration shops. According to her, the increasing issues that women and young girls are facing regarding lack of haemoglobin (iron deficiency). She went on to explain how there is lesser work available for labourers. The use of insecticides has led to more diseases, and thus farmers have to bear additional expenses on healthcare as well ("Amcha arthik bhurdand wadhla").

Madhuri Bhoge – Untimely rain is a major concern. She notes the proliferation of the 'congress grass' and its effects on women i.e. rashes on the body and rise in asthma. The cropping patterns of the cotton crop has also changed. The rows in which they are planted have become narrower, and women who pluck the cotton can no longer walk freely between two rows. They don't get fresh air, and feel suffocated at times. Moreover, BT Cotton plant is especially tall, taller than the women. Often, while plucking the cotton, the women come into contact with the pink bollworm, which triggers terrible rashes all over the body, and irritation in the eyes.

Hearing these accounts, one can clearly see how there has been an increase in drudgery for the women working in the fields.

Seema asked the women present whether there has been any change in the nature of their work.

Rekha Ghate, Aamhi Amchya Argogya Sathi - She marked the decrease in the work available for agricultural labourers. Those who do get work, end up with all kinds of health issues. She emphasized that labourers are going through lots of hardships now.

Surekha – She explained that when the process of nindan (weeding) is on, and there is a lot of rain, the farmers (kastakaar) get exhausted. As an alternative to this, weedicides are used extensively. This means that labourers are robbed of their work. Whatever little cotton is yielded, is plucked by the farmers themselves, so another work opportunity is lost. The harbhara and chana crops are also disrupted due to erratic rainfall.

Vijaya Wadhankar, Tivsa taluka, Amravati – She is a woman farmer from a suicide affected household. She has 7 acres of land that she tends to all by herself. She explained that farmers prefer to use machines for all of the work that used to be done before by labourers. This mechanization has led to lesser work opportunities for the labourers. Using machines brings down the input cost for the farmers.

Lakshmi Gajbhiye – She said that change in climate has resulted in untimely and insufficient rains” therefore cotton production has gone down. Earlier, there used to be decent cotton yields from April to March. Now that the cotton produce has dwindled, there isn't enough work for the labourers. She cited the lack of resources such as water as the reason why mixed cropping practices have petered out. Earlier they used to sow Jowar and cotton, so they could use Jowar for eating and there would be grass/fodder for the livestock as well. Now, due to lack of water, they can only sow cotton. When one only sows cotton, it results in a lot of weeds. Hence, weedicides are used to destroy the weeds. Using weedicides has two disadvantages - firstly, labourers lose out on weeding work due to weedicides, and secondly, weedicides destroy even those insects or microorganisms that are actually useful for the growth of the crops, whereas labourers know what to weed out.

Farmers grow cotton due to better capital gains

A counter point was offered by **Ms. Niranjana Maru**. She agreed with Vijaya regarding her assertion that mechanization was responsible for the loss of work for labourers. She asked whether crop failure could be blamed squarely on climate change or are there other factors at play. The Jowar of kharif season started to get lesser prices, while the prices of cash crops such as cotton and soybean continued to increase. Nowadays, Jowar is not being sown due to the menace of birds destroying the Jowar crops. This has more to do with the destruction of forests than climate change. She invited the women to share their views on these points.

Chhaya tai added another question for the women regarding whether NREGA/MNREGA work is still available.

Suvarna replied that Chhaya tai's question would be taken up in the session.

Archana addressed Ms. Maru's point, saying that the loss of work for labourers could be directly linked to climate change, particularly for this year. During the first season, there was a lot of rainfall, but it was soon followed by a sudden spell of cold that was so severe that all of the flowers and

leaves were shed completely, and there wasn't another spell of rain after that. She firmly believed that this could be attributed to climate change.

Suvarna spoke about how earlier, in Vidarbha, foodgrains such as Jowar, til, jawas, etc. used to be grown predominantly, thus ensuring food security for farmers. This is gradually diminishing, while production of cotton and soybean has increased. She asked the women present to give their opinions as to why this might have occurred.

Shobha spoke about how around 10-15 years ago, her family would sow pulses like moong, udad, barbati, etc. along with Jowar and cotton. She says they have recently tried planting Jowar, but it never rains on time, and water is essential for Jowar to grow. Now due to erratic rainfall, as well as bird attacks, they have to buy Jowar from the market. As a result, there is no kadba (stover/fodder) for the livestock. She notes that their grandparents are still strong, but they are already weaker since they're not able to eat chemical-free/organic food.

Uttara Pande, Murtizapur – Very few people in her taluka grow Jowar, because boars raid the fields if they plant Jowar. Otherwise, seven or eight years ago, if it rained, she would get seven sacks of Jowar.

Dr. Soma KP noted that the representatives from the state of Uttarakhand (Malati and Prema) are also dealing with the same issues of wild boars and birds raiding crops. However, she remarked that there were wild boars and birds raiding crops before as well. What is the reason that the menace of animal attacks has increased? Is this an effect on climate change? Or is it due to the kind of crops that they are growing? Or is the government policy prohibiting killing animals behind the increase in attacks.

A woman from the audience (blue sari) replied that the animals' homes i.e. forests are being destroyed. Hence, they are left with nothing to eat. They have to roam around in search of water and have turned towards villages because they can eat from the fields and can drink water from various ponds.

Pramod Walde, CORO, Mumbai - He said hails from a village from Bhandara district. He noted that the biodiversity that used to be present before in forests is no longer there. The *kandamula* (roots) that used to be eaten by wild boars earlier, is no longer available in the forest. This is due to the government policy that allows for cultivation of cash crops (cotton) on forest land, which offers nothing to eat for the animals. He reminisced about the various kinds of fruit-laden trees that used to be seen in forests during his childhood that are now almost nearly gone. These fruits were the source of food for birds, and now that they're gone, birds have been forced to turn towards raiding crops. Similarly, the monkey menace has also increased.

Ashwini Shende, Kamalnayan Bajaj Foundation – One of the effects of climate change can be seen on the grass eating animals in the forest. They don't have enough to eat within the forest, moreover, the number of tigers has decreased and hence the number of herbivorous animals is growing unchecked. In her area, wild boars and rohi have become a menace.

Yogini asked the women present whether the government policy of imposing fines on those who kill wild animals has been a reason why farmers are unable to curb animal attacks.

Everybody in the audience clearly responded in the affirmative to her question.

Lakshmi affirmed that farmers are afraid to kill animals for this very reason.

Prof. Nootan Malvi, Wardha – She cited change in temperature as an important outcome of climate change. There was an increase in cold during the winter in her district. It was cold and windy as well, from morning to evening. In the villages, there were hail storms that destroyed the crops. There has been a very strange change in the weather. Now that the summers are here, she said there is a drastic increase in the heat.

Suvarna noted that most of the women spoke about how animal attacks have increased due to lack of fodder/food available in the forest. She asked how they dealt with this challenge. Have they changed their cropping patterns or timings of sowing, or perhaps made alternative arrangements for water?

Lakshmi explained that farmers have begun sowing corn. It is useful for eating, good for the soil. Eg. Earlier sowing fenugreek (methi) gave quicker yields and the produce could be sold within fifteen days of sowing. Now the same process takes a month. Farmers are dependent entirely on their income from farming. Hence, they turn towards certain chemicals that accelerate the growth of the fenugreek (methi). She argues that this is an effect of climate change. Had the methi grown quickly and naturally, farmers would not have had to resort to using chemicals.

Surekha – She spoke about how some farmers are growing wheat and gram as it supplements their nutrition, along with providing fodder for the livestock.

Uttara Pande – They have stopped sowing Jowar because they had to go to the field at night in order to stand guard. Wild boar attacks do not allow the kanis (corn ears) to grow.

A woman (in the blue sari) said that there was a meeting held by the agriculture department. They advised the farmers to spray neem extract on the crops, to avoid the bollworm. They tried this method on a farm land of 1 acre, and found this method to be useful.

Vijaya Wadhankar – She used to grow Tur, soyabean, gram and cotton earlier. Now she has started turmeric farming. For the past 6 years, she has increased turmeric farming and has reported a good yield. For 1 acre, she gets around 1500 quintals of turmeric. But this year, the yield has not been as good, because of the erratic rainfall. Moreover, turmeric requires a lot of water.

Anita Jagdishrao Kolhe works as a KrushiSakhi under UMED. She spoke about the importance of organic farming. She explained how to make 'beejamrut or jivamrut' for spraying on the crops.

Suvarna remarked that they have seen an increase in tomato farming lately, which seems to be another strategy that farmers are coming up with.

Vijaya said that she used to cultivate flowers and tomatoes. But due to this weather, and the lack of moisture in the soil, along with the lack of proper market rate she gave up on it.

Suvarna spoke about how most of the women present had discussed lack of water as an issue. She asked the women present what strategies they had adopted in that regard, or whether they had started planting a different kind of crop to overcome this.

Vijaya - Started using drip irrigation. However, the overall availability of water has decreased. The groundwater level has also decreased.

Lata Vike, Gadhchiroli, Stri Shakti Bahuddeshiya Sanstha – She said they have started practicing SRT (Saguna Rice Technique) method for growing foodgrains. She thinks there is a need to try different cropping patterns.

Shalu Kolhe, Nimgaon, Bhandara – She opined that borewells are also responsible for the depleting ground water level. Almost every farmer has a borewell in his field, and they have started digging at least 300-400 feet deep. Women have to fetch water from a long distance and that has an effect on their health.

Dr. Soma KP wanted to add onto the points. She recounted her interaction with women from Nagaland and Odisha who explained that they have started collecting traditional seeds like their grandmothers used to, and have created seed banks. They are using their traditional knowledge to combat climate change, by sowing particular varieties that are known to be resistant to certain weather conditions. She asked whether the women present have made changes regarding seeds.

Lakshmi said that she hasn't done anything like this, but she has seen 2 or 3 farmers who have started a seed bank/collection of bajra, Tur, brinjal or tomatoes.

Sonali from the **Bajaj foundation** explained how they are creating a seedbank. They have rediscovered an old variety of wheat by the name of 'bansi'. It is a hardy variety that can withstand climate change. There used to be a lot of Tur varieties, and at least 2 or 3 types of some varieties have been forgotten. They need to be brought back.

Soma spoke about a practice in Uttarakhand where 12 varieties of foodgrain are sown. It is a natural crop insurance, wherein at least 4 types of foodgrains are sown through mixed cropping. They practice scatter agriculture, and at least one variety gives a decent yield. They use traditional manure in order to increase the humus content of the soil. She asked whether such a practice was prevalent in Maharashtra.

Deepak Margade, CORO – He admitted that such a practice was prevalent in Vidarbha in earlier times using traditional seeds. The advent of MNCs (multinational companies) brought with it the practice of patenting of seeds. He agreed with Soma's suggestion that the traditional mixed cropping pattern should be brought back.

Yogini added to the information shared by Soma. Around 10-15 years ago in Vidarbha, many varieties of millets and pulses were grown, as a kind of fallback mechanism. This practice has become extinct in the bigger villages, but if one goes to remote areas or villages that have not yet been touched by technology, one can still find these practices alive. She stressed that we need to

bring back this practice. She thanked the women present for sharing their insights, and briefly summarized the major points that featured in the session:

- The cycle of monsoon and rainfall has changed now with erratic rainfall becoming more prevalent. This has had a huge impact on the lives of farmers and livestock.
- Rise in temperature: Farmers cannot work in the fields anymore during the months of April and May. As a result, the work for agricultural labourers has decreased. The food security of agricultural (landless) labourers is at risk.
- Only a few types of crops are being sown in Vidarbha now. The number of crops have been brought down to only cotton and Tur. This has increased the risk in farming, as it means that even one crop failure has dire consequences for the farmers, leading to racking up debts and eventually being driven towards suicide. Also, the lack of sowing food grains such as Jowar has led to lack of fodder for the livestock.
- Use of weedicides also has undesirable side effects on not only the crop, but also the labourers who contract rashes, and the livestock that ingest the chemicals whilst grazing.
- Destruction of forests has made animals desperate leading to an unprecedented increase in crop raiding. Not a lot of alternatives were seen during this session. Some examples were tomato, corn and turmeric farming. She emphasized the need to investigate a little more and to experiment with farming practices.

Session 3: Forest

Songs sung by women

1. *Nahi jivanat majhya sukhach*
2. *Pudhepudhe gram sabha*

This session was moderated by **Shubhada Deshmukh, NFT member, MAKAAAM.**

1. **Taibai Shila – Gadchiroli**
2. **Pushpa Kumare**
3. **Durga Rang At**
4. **Jyoti**
5. **Rekha Hate**
6. **Manda Kelzarkar**
7. **Kumaribai**
8. **Urmila bai**
9. **Yogita Shende**
10. **Nivja Meshram**

Shubhada spoke about the complex interrelationships between various elements of the forest. Tribal women saying “Aamhi maherun khali haat yeu shakto, pan janglatun nahi” (“Our natal family might send us home empty handed, but the forest never will.”)

Shubhada asked the women on the panel to explain what all they get from the forest.

Pushpa explained that she and her organization give guidance to schoolchildren on the subject of coexistence of environment and human life. They come from Gadchiroli district which has lots of forests. She said that they get lots of things from the forest – everything that is essential for human beings comes from the forest. Chairs, bed, wood for cooking – everything that they can get from the forest is important for their livelihood and survival. Indiscriminately cutting down trees in the forest, without paying heed to specific trees that are important, has led to destruction of forests, and has had an impact on the environment. This has had an adverse effect on human life as well. Areas where the forest is intact receive more rainfall than those areas where forests have been cut down. The forest fauna including monkeys and other small animals are also affected due to the deforestation. They are left with no homes, and hence are forced to enter human habitations. Their sources of food are reducing and hence they raid crops on farmland. The Madiya community is dependent upon the forest for their survival. This change in climate is affecting them as well.

Jyoti – Our entire lives are dependent upon the forest. There are only 60 people in our vasti - Only 10% of us practice farming, the rest of us are dependent entirely on the jungle. Our work (livelihood) is based on the forest, so we make sure that we preserve the environment and the forest. Initially when the forest was under the Forest Department, our forest was being destroyed. People (unclear whom she is implying) would pluck the produce, sell it off or steal from the forest. We got our claim of Forest Rights in 2012 - 1006.416 hectares were granted to our Gram Sabha (Pachgaon) - from then onwards, we have been working on the forest. As of now, we cut bamboo and auction it off. And all of this is done in a sustainable manner. We do not use the forest for anything apart from that.

Taibai Shila - Gadchiroli - We have a lot of forests in our region, and hence the *adivasis* living in these forests are dependent upon the forest. We live off the produce obtained from the forest such as vegetables, fruits, tubers (kandamule) and live our lives the traditional way. Even today we prefer our forest grown vegetables to the ones sold in markets, as they are without chemicals. Whatever fruits or vegetables we find in the jungle during the day, we cook and eat in the evening. The relationship between forest and human beings is very close. Although, nowadays, we see a lot of forests being destroyed due to government incentives for plantations or beet cutting (beet katai), nonetheless, it is the *adivasis* who are trying to preserve the forests. Even during the summers, one can find various fruits and vegetables in the forest. Moreover, eating them gives us strength. But now, it has all become commercialized - chara (charoli), Tembhorni (fruit), Hirda (fruit), Awla (Amla/Indian gooseberry) - all of these have become commercialized due to government schemes. Adivasi culture does not allow for the concept of storing (sathavnyachi sanskruti naahi) - we only use what we can gather and only for our needs. Government schemes have altered this mindset even within the adivasi community. Some of them plucked off fruits before they could ripen,

saplings were uprooted, but when they tried to sell it, the Forest Department refused to buy the products. But this practice is going on covertly.

Shubhada asked the rest of the women on the panel to explain what they get from the forest apart from the things mentioned by the earlier speakers.

Rekha Ghate - Moha, Beda, Dhinka, vegetables, bamboo, kadi (fire wood) - everything we need, we can get from the forest. We just need to work hard towards it. Our entire livelihood and sustenance is based on the forest (Aaplisarva roji-roti janglatach).

Manda Kelzarkar - We have a special, heartfelt connection to the forest (jivhalyacha sambandha aahe). We depend upon the forest's fruits and vegetables for our sustenance.

Yogita Shende - I consider the forest to be my friend because we get various fruits, medicinal herbs from the forest itself. We sell bamboo, tendu leaves, etc. There is a specific kind of broom, that is used mostly in rural areas - thorn broom. We collect the sticks used to make these brooms from the forest, then we clean and sort them and sell them in the market at Rs. 40 per piece. Earlier, these brooms were used extensively by women in rural households. But now, not only has the demand decreased, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find the right kind of sticks in the forest nowadays.

Nivja Meshram - Plastic has replaced most of the natural products. Earlier, people would use actual leaves to make patrawali (disposable plates made from leaves). Now they use plastic plates. This is harmful for our health.

Urmila - In our village, we no longer go to the forest - just a few women go now. Now that there are gas cylinders, lesser women go (women in the audience laugh).

Shubhada interjects that this is true to a certain extent, and also good for the women. But how many women actually receive the cylinder on time is another question! She said that we have heard from women on the panel about herbs, fruits and vegetables. She asked some of the women representatives from Chandrapur district to elaborate upon the problems they have with animals. The issues with animal raids have intensified in the past 4 to 5 years.

Hemlata Jibhkate, Brahmapur taluka, Chandrapur district, from Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi, spoke about how they used to grow rice, but now due to lack of water and no proper rainfall, their crops are failing. We have been digging our wells deeper and deeper, yet there is no water. *Amchya ithe nusti pawasavarchi sheti aahe*. We cannot get any (substantial) yield, nor do we get any employment. Due to this, we cannot grow Tur, etc. If we grow Tur crops, animals from the forest raid our fields. In our village, we have a major problem with tigers who often hunt our livestock and sometimes even our infants or toddlers. We can't go out of our homes in the evening, due to the fear of tigers.

Jyoti - In our forest, there are three to four tigers, and those tigers have also had cubs recently. Not only tigers, various other animals such as wild buffaloes, wild boars, goats, etc. have increased in

our forest. Every single day, we go to the forest. But each one of us faces the tigers head on, and they leave us alone. The tigers do try to hunt our livestock, but they have never harmed human beings. They come close to the village, even inside the village sometimes, and they might pounce upon an animal, but not any woman. Even if a single man crosses their path, they do not attack. There is a close relationship that the tigers have with the humans in our village. From the olden times, the people of Pachgaon have been going into the villages, and even back then, the tigers and the villagers have had friendly relations. So the tigers just look at us, but do nothing. (audience applauds)

Durga also chimed in to confirm that tigers near her village too did not attack human beings.

Shubhada - These issues are very important. Often we hear villagers say that we face a lot of problems due to animals raiding our livestock or farms, and so they ask for permission to kill these animals. One should also not forget that the women from these villages have helped preserve their forests, and even helped expand the forest. On the other hand, the other group of women hail from villages where the forest was not given much consideration - they have farms and farming related problems. Also, forests had to be cleared first, in order to practice farming. We have a bond with the jungle - with the animals of the forest. We are seeing two different experiences within the same district - this is due to the change in the management (vyavasthapan). Let us move on to insects - good and bad effects. For instance, we get honey from honey bees, but it has now been commercialized - through government schemes. I have heard that the production has recently gone down. Would you like to comment on that? Also, how has climate change affected you? Given that there have been untimely, and more frequent hailstorms.

Jyoti - We collect honey from bee hives in the forest. It is useful for a cough, especially for young children who have trouble breathing.

Deepak, CORO - East Vidarbha used to be the bastion of beekeeping. But in the past four to five years, it has been observed that due to changes in the weather, the amount of honey found in the forests has decreased.

A woman in a pink saree from the audience opined that climate change has resulted in the decrease of flowers (flowering) on crops like Tur, barbati, etc. The honey bees would collect their nectar from these flowers, and turn it into honey. However, climate change has destroyed flowers, and so the production of honey has gone down.

Malati from Uttarakhand - There are 13 districts in Uttarakhand, of which only 3 districts are involved in farming. In the other 10 districts, the agricultural production is very less. We heard all of the women present talking about their production in terms of quintals. There is no way quintals would be used in Uttarakhand - if a family works round the year, they can only get rations worth 3 months. In the context of forests, our women have been instrumental in preserving our forests. However, from 1980 onwards we have been facing a lot of difficulties as our rights on our forests have been whittled down. Women have had to go to jail just for a piece of wood - can you imagine our situation? Moreover, we too have been dealing with the menace of animals such as tigers and

bears killing human beings, raiding our crops. We were pleased to hear that you get land from the government. We are learning a lot from listening to your experiences.

Satish, Pandharkawdha, Yavatmal- Sahara bahuddeshiya sanstha - As a child, I remember seeing Tur crops having bee hives. Climate change might have reduced the production, but I think BT crops are also to blame, since bees do not make their hives on such crops.

Niranjana Maru: Could you explain to us the effects of climate change in the context of forests?

Vijaya Thakre - Kamalnayan Bajaj Foundation - reiterated Satish's point.

Jyoti - We are trying to make sure that we conserve our forests. Our forest has water available round the year. Around 85 acres of the forest has been reserved for the animals. We collect sand and create a channel with bamboo and sticks, and through that we divert a bit of water, due to which flora and fauna get enough water. We clean our forest and get rid of twigs that could kindle a forest fire.

Kumari bai - The variety of fruits found in the forest has decreased over the years. The number of plants bearing amla, bel, etc. have decreased to such an extent that it is barely enough for us. This is clearly an effect on climate change. The incidences of infestation of tendu leaves has also increased in the past two years. They got their nutrients from the forest through tendu leaves and kandamule. She asserted that it made them stronger, and people would not fall sick. However, nowadays, the produce from forests is ignored, in favour of foodgrains that are grown with chemicals. This has decreased the strength of the people in their community. Due to this, she claims that they are no longer able to walk for longer hours in the forest. They can no longer see the usual kind of birds - not even the small sparrows, due to the destruction of their habitats. Big tower lines have been constructed through the forests. This has rendered the soil in the forest extremely dry and hard, and thus, unfit for farming. People have complained of getting current shocks due to the tower line. They rarely use the medicines found in the forest nowadays, because even these plants are getting destroyed. The locals uproot the entire plant for the fruit, which means they can only get to eat it once. More sustainable practices necessary.

Manda - Around 10 years ago, one family could produce around 10 to 15 quintals of Moha. But this has decreased over the years due to climate change.

Yogita - Increasing population and deforestation are responsible for the destruction of forests. She admires how eating natural herbs and medicines has kept the generation before her own stronger.

Shubhada - Some of these issues are directly related to climate change. Others are related to human interference (the concept of 'vikas'). What is the impact on women?

Durga - They used to collect tendu leaves from the forest and sell it. However, tendu leaves were banned because they were used to roll bidis and the women lost a of work due to this.

Jyoti - She explained how their village would earn close to 8 to 10 lakh rupees annually from the sale of tendu leaves. However, people would tear down the entire tree to get the leaves, so they

were unable to eat the fruit of the tendu plant. In fact, people from outside their village try to sneak in and collect tendu leaves, but they are promptly caught by the villagers.

Shubhada gave further clarification. The fruit of tendu is useful in terms of nutrition. There is a lot of magnesium in the tendu fruits which is crucial for the development of the brain. In Jyoti's village, Pachgaon, the gram sabha analysed the benefits of tendu fruit and decided to stop selling tendu leaves.

Mangesh Kolhe, Bhandara - asked a question on gum (dink), keeping in mind the effect of climate change. Dink is found mostly in the months of January/February. Due to untimely rainfall this year, the gum was destroyed, and the women lost a source of income.

Rekha - Their village received a patta in the forest in 2011. When their Gram Sabha started functioning, they didn't have any money. They borrowed money and pursued bamboo cutting, and earned a lot of profit. Everybody in the village got a livelihood. The bamboo that had been cut was auctioned off, and the Gram Sabha earned around 8 lakh rupees. They also started making agarbattis (incense sticks) in order to give employment to the women in the village.

Shubhada talked about how the FRA gave rights to the Gram Sabha, due to which, for the first time ever they felt like they have power over their own lives. She asked the women to describe the effect on social relations.

Jyoti - Initially, the work that they had was less, and the men would get all of the money from the work. The women would not receive anything for their efforts. But the Gram Sabha was formed and it changed everything. The Gram Sabha gives equal rights and equal pay to men and women. The money goes into the joint account of the husband and wife. Now, the girls of the village are able to travel outside the village and go to the cities to study. The Gram Sabha pays for the expenses of their studies. Women are taking initiative in all matters and are able to participate in decision making processes.

Kumari bai - The collective rights that have been given to the villagers through the Gram Sabha are very important. The money goes directly to the Gram Sabha. Many decisions have been taken keeping in mind the issues of women. Earlier, the money made from auctioning tendu leaves would go to the men, who then had the decision making power. Last year, the women from the taluka raised their demands before the Maha Gram Sabha, asking for the money from the tendu leaves to be sent equally to the accounts of the women as well. Around 20% of the money has been reserved for the process of village development. Additionally, seasonal fruits such as Jamun fruit used to be sold to middle men from Nagpur, who would then sell the fruit at higher rates in the city. Now, the Gram Sabha collects and sells the fruits themselves.

Shubhada spoke about the issue of reduction in production of forest produce, and how there is a need to study this issue further and deeper. She summarized some of the major points that were raised during the session:

- Commercialization of forest produce leading to destruction of forests and the over-exploitation of forest produce.
- Tribal culture gives importance to living in mutual interdependence with the forest.
- It is important to conserve and maintain the forest cover through various techniques such as building bunds within the forest as discussed by Jyoti.
- The effects on animals and birds due to destruction of their habitats were also discussed.

Session 4: Nomadic and settled pastoralists and livestock

Kaustubh Pandharipande and **Sajal Kulkarni** moderated the fourth session on nomadic and settled pastoralists and livestock.

1. Manisha Khawle/Khevale (differing pronunciations)
2. Prabhabei Kalokal, Talegaon
3. Yogita Gajanan Bhoyar
4. Priya Jagdish Pawar, Wadhala
5. Jyoti Chavan
6. Chandatai Gulab Chavan
7. Kuldeep Rathore
8. Lobheshwar Asole
9. Masru Rabbari
10. Parvat Rabbari

Kaustubh invited members of a community called Nanda Gawli on the panel. He gave a brief introduction to the history of the community. The British had called it the Denmark of India - Denmark is famed for its milk and dairy products in the world. He also invited members of a nomadic community called the Rabbaris. The women from these communities had come for the consultation in the morning session, and we had discussed the effects of climate change on their lives. One of the first effects that they told us was the women would not be able to come for the session, because their day starts at four in the morning, and ends at 2 in the afternoon, and then

again from 4pm onwards. They say they are working for longer hours than before. He also spoke about a village named Wadala in Akola district that had got together and preserved grass meant for fodder in the neighbouring forest, grew the grass and sold the fodder to buy livestock. He invited representatives of this village on the panel. Kaustubh reminded the audience that all of the people on the panel are speaking publicly on such a stage for the very first time. He lauded MAKAAAM for including women engaged in animal husbandry as well.

Masru Rabbari: Our community is from Gujarat originally. We have been roaming around in Maharashtra for at least 50 years. Although, we haven't settled down anywhere - we just keep roaming. Why do we keep roaming around? This is because we have a huge livestock and they require fodder.

Parvat Rabbari: I was born in Nagpur. My community hails from Kutch region in Gujarat. We have camels, sheep, goats, etc. and if we settle down in one place, we cannot feed them.

Kaustubh introduced **Pratul Kalokal** to the audience. He is the first person from the Nanda Gawli community to pursue a PhD. He also spoke about the representatives of the Phasey Pardhi community - two young women from Wadala - **Priya Pawar** and **Jyoti Chavan** - who own and rear 20 goats each.

Jyoti Chavan spoke about how they defied patriarchal norms by taking their goats out for grazing on their own. She also spoke about how the norms have been relaxed a bit now that she earns money from this.

Chanda - Scarcity of fodder and water due to increase in the number of animals. The community Gram Sabha decided to do charabandi. First we decided to grow fodder and cut the grass. Earlier, only women would bring grass/fodder for the animals. Now, men and women do all of that work together.

Kaustubh introduced two representatives from the Bharwad community - **Deva Rathod** and **Lakhan Rathod**. They are involved in animal husbandry. Deva Bhuraji Rathod's family owns around 200-250 cows, while Lakhan's family has 100-150 cows.

Kaustubh asked the people on the panel to describe their childhood and what kind of conditions were prevalent back then.

Prabha said her childhood was good. They used to send around 2 to 3 cars (carts?) loaded with milk every day for sale. At the moment they have 10 acres of land. Earlier they would sow Jowar, and they used to have 50 to 60 cows and buffaloes. In the current drought situation, it becomes difficult to find kadba (stover/fodder). She emphasized that the local Gawlai breed of cow gives plenty of milk, and said the Jersey cows were no match to them. She urged for conserving and encouraging the local breed of cows.

Kuldeep Rathod talked about how the nomadic tribes are affected by climate change, and how they have to walk longer than 50 kms every day. He cited a news story recently, when a 4 year old girl from a nomadic tribe died due to the heat. Earlier they would start leaving from March/April, now they leave from February itself, in search of grazing grounds. The planting of soybean poses a

problem for their community, due to lack of fodder. Kuldeep says they are seeing a decrease in the milk produced. As soon as it gets cold, the production of milk decreases. The animals don't get the right temperature.

Kaustubh asked Kuldeep whether all of this has had any effect on the women of his community.

Kuldeep said that earlier the women would get up at 4 am and go about their chores. In their community, the cow dung is cleaned by the women only. It is the women who care for the calves. The men are only involved in actually milking the cows and selling the milk. Now, the women are working longer hours than ever. Whenever a girl gets married in our community, a cow from the girl's house is sent along with her, signifying the depth of bond between the woman and the cow.

Kaustubh also added that the element of gene diversity was also very important in this context. The cow from the bride's home helped increase the genepool of the livestock. Kaustubh and Sajal also said they would prepare a small report in the coming days regarding the practices of this community and its women. Sajal also requested the organizers to make sure that next time, the consultation would have to go to the livestock rearers so that there could be a fruitful interaction with the women, given how busy the women are all day. They asked Masru bhai to talk about his childhood memories of how his community was, and compare it to the community at present.

Masru Rabbari - They left their desh (homeland) after a 7 year drought and came here. They have been living in this state for 50 years now. They alternate between Nagpur and Wardha districts. Earlier, they could set up their camp in the forest. Now they can't do so due to the harassment of the forest officers. They can't pay the bribes demanded by forest officers. They have to keep walking all day, sometimes only setting up camp for a couple of hours to cook and sleep for two hours before the officials chase them away. He told the audience that they too would cry at the condition of his people.

Sajal spoke to another nomadic community that comes from Rajasthan to Daryapur and Akot. This year, due to scarcity of water, the villagers attacked their camp, and drove them out. If one thinks about it, one would realize that agriculture is dependent upon the livestock rearers, because they require manure. He also cited a positive example of how nomadic livestock rearers mitigated climate change in Marathwada. A woman from the LakhaBanjari nomadic tribe - Rajabai Rathod, around 60-65 years old. She had around 100 animals. She ensured that all of the cows would conceive and deliver their calves before the monsoon arrives. This is an example of experiential and traditional knowledge that women have. This is going to play an important role in mitigating the effects of climate change.

Sajal asked the two persons from the cow herding community as to what effect climate change has had on the women of their community?

Lakhan Rathod said they had to reduce the number of cows they had, since there was not enough work. They began a side business of transporting their own milk.

Sajal asked whether there were any problems that the livestock faced due to climate change.

Lakhan replied that the increasing use of polythene plastic bags has had a bad effect on the health of the cows. The cows swallow the plastic bags and that creates problems.

Masru Rabbari and **Parvat Rabbari** spoke at length about the various bureaucratic hurdles that they have been facing in order to set up camp. Masru Rabbari told the audience that their community was paying Rs. 35 lakh to officers to stay at a place for 3 months, just because they weren't being given a pass by the government. All this for 100 families.

Kaustubh asked Praful to talk about a constructive step taken in the context of 'protected areas'.

Praful, a PhD scholar, said that everybody cares about preserving tigers, but what about the shepherds who live in the forest. If an animal strays into the forest, the animal gets auctioned off. They would need to produce a certificate from the Sarpanch to obtain grazing rights in other villages. "Vidarbha chi khari olakh kapus navhe tar, gavtachya vividhatene natileya pradeshachi aahe." (Vidarbha is known not for its cotton but for the diverse fodder species that are found here) He questioned the government's flawed policies and held it responsible for the problems faced by livestock rearers. He asked how it was fair to shut down the means of livelihood and survival of 500 families in order to save one tiger. Women are also affected by these issues. A number of young girls died last year due to the heat. In our community, it is the women who go to the market and sell the milk. Thus, they also handle the business.

Sajal - Pastoralists and rearers contribute almost 35000 crore rupees to the economy.

Session 5: Fishery

Session facilitated by **Mr. Manish Rajankar**.

1. Mangesh Kolhe – Kokna, Gondia
2. Sarita Meshram –Sawartola, Arjuni, Gondia
3. Charu Kolhe – Nimgaon, Arjuni, Gondia
4. Varsha Gedam – Nimgaon, Gondia – from the Dhivar caste.
5. Yogita Zende – Channa, Arjuni, Gondia.
6. Nivja Meshram – UMED – Sawartola, Arjuni, Gondia
7. Vandana Kolhe – Nimgaon, Arjuni, Gondia
8. Jageshwar Meshram – Arjuni, Morgaon, Gondia

Manish explained that Bhandara and Gondia districts of Vidarbha are known as districts with ponds due to which there are a lot of fishing communities in these two districts. But even apart from this, there are other districts in Vidarbha that have various fishing communities, including some tribal communities that practice fishing on the rivers of Gadchiroli district. This topic of climate change and its effect on fishery is something of a new subject, and he looked forward to learning something new from the fisherfolk present on the panel. He asked everybody on the panel to explain the various issues that are faced by the fishing community right now.

Sarita said they work on the ponds (talav). Earlier, there used to be water in the ponds for all 12 months of the year. This has now reduced to 6 or 4 months of water in ponds, due to lack of rainfall. This poses a question mark on their livelihood and survival. Nowadays, they go fishing from 9 in the

morning to 4 pm and only manage to bring back fish worth Rs. 90 or 100 every day. Earlier, the local (mulki) variety of fish would come into the ponds through flooded rivers. Our fishermen, in spite of having the technical knowledge about the local variety, import fish from Kolkata, Mumbai, Delhi, etc. The local herbs and plant life within the ponds is disappearing. They are trying to figure out ways of conserving the local fish variety.

Mangesh Kolhe - If there is no water left in the forest ponds, there can be no fishing. Their entire livelihood is dependent upon the ponds. Moreover, they don't have farm land, nor do they practice farming.

Manish asked about some of the other issues that they face due to climate change.

Jageshwar Meshram – The government has incentivized schemes that are responsible for damaging the local ecology. In order to increase the production of fishes, a variety of Bengali fish has been introduced via government schemes.

Charu Kolhe – She was married in 2008, and there were plenty of local fish in the ponds back then. Now, only sarkari fish (government introduced fish) can be seen. The local mulkya variety of fishes are more sustainable. The runoff water from nearby farms, poisoned by the chemical fertilizers, enters the ponds as well. There have been changes in the ponds too, killing the herbs and plant life. If there are no herbs/plants, then there will be no fish. If there are no fish, it will have an effect on health. Women's health also has been affected. Before they used to eat fish thrice a week, now they can barely have fish once a month!

Manish asked them how they run their households in light of these issues. He also asked whether fishing is a feasible livelihood for them at the moment.

Charu Kolhe explained how the women have taken initiative to form a Gram Sabha in her village. It was the women who took efforts to restore the local vanaspati in the ponds. They realized that the fishing business was not enough to support their livelihood, so they planned for the employment guarantee scheme that provides at least 90 days of work in their village today.

Jageshwar Meshram – The current, younger generation of men are migrating to the city.

Given that the production is less from only fishery, Manish asked them whether there is any kind of allied business that they are practicing.

Varsha Gedam – The traditional fishing method involved adding chuna, quicklime, to the ponds. If there was enough rain, they would add manure to the ponds. That manure serves as food to the fish.

Manish added that Varsha is the new Mastya Sakhi of her village.

Jageshwar Meshram – A new program was introduced in his village last year. The pond was ploughed through tractors and lined with quicklime. One month after the rain fell, the result was encouraging. The local variety of fish increased and local birds also returned.

Charu Kolhe noted the change in the method of fishing, moving from traditional methods to mechanical methods that destroy the pond's ecology. She cited the example of her own village, where the women took the initiative. Increasing women's participation is imperative as women tend to be more sustainable in their approach. She also cited the instances of domestic violence. Women do not pay attention to their own health because they could not pay for the expenses. Women-led Gram Sabhas have increased exponentially. She explained how women from her village, including herself were ridiculed by the men, when they started fishing on their own, saying fishing is not a woman's job. But they proved everybody wrong, and by following the traditional fishing methods, they restored the pond's nutrients, reintroduced local fish and increased their productivity.

Sarita Meshram – We have been growing herbs. Women have the traditional knowledge. "I too took initiative. We have empowered ourselves." Alcohol addiction is a major issue and women suffer from mental stress due to this. "We take initiative and teach other women's groups as well."

Yogita Zhende – Addiction is a major issue in the fishing community among the men. They spend half of the money on alcohol, but the women are still earning and providing for the family.

Vandana Kolhe said they also make and sell fish pickles.

Manish – For increasing production, it is important to rejuvenate the ponds using traditional methods and growing local herbs. It is a myth that traditional methods cannot yield better results in terms of production. One can see how the younger generation, particularly women, are returning to their villages and practicing their traditional occupation.

Day 2: February 19, 2019

In the beginning of the session, a short clip was screened regarding the issues of forest rights and violence against the women.

Chhayatai pointed to one important phrase in the clip – sexual harassment. She wondered what kind of people would ask a woman to produce the death certificate of her husband. Films such as these help us understand the various issues being faced by the women at the ground level.

Malati and Prema, from Uttarakhand discussed the Khatima case in the state. It all began on November 23rd, 2018. They were criminalized for being forest dwellers. Protest by the local women led to multiple instances of sexual harassment of the women. There has been little to no response from the NCW. The situation is different in Maharashtra and Odisha as compared to say, Rajasthan, wherein the forest department is uncooperative to say the least, or actively criminalizing forest dwellers.

Session 6: Agricultural labour

Mr. Rahul Bais and Mr. Deepak Margade facilitated this session. The following women labourers and activists were called to the panel.

1. Ranjana Neware
2. Kalpana Gondane, Amravati
3. Archana
4. Lata Vike, Dhanora, Gadchiroli
5. Sarita, Bhandara
6. Mangesh Kolhe, Kokna, Gondia
7. Sudhir Kumbre, Gurgkheda, Gadchiroli
8. Satish Khandagale, Yavatmal

Rahul Bais asked the women on the panel about how many days of daily wage labour work they got.

Satish Khandagale – When farming was done earlier, traditionally, there used to be a variety of work available around the seeds. The advent of BT Cotton has reduced the amount of work for labourers, and fragmentation of land has led to an increase in the number of small landholders.

Kalpana Gondane said that there isn't enough work available for labourers.

Ranjana Neware recounted how ten years ago, the labourers used to grow cotton crops. The sowing doesn't happen nowadays even in the season due to untimely rains. The production of cotton plants has reduced. Work is available for 15 days, Rs. 700 weekly wages.

Ranjana Neware talked about the issues around soybean and how cotton is no longer profitable. Soybean doesn't require employing a lot of labourers, unlike other crops.

Lata Vike talked about how climate change has led to numerous issues. There is no work available except for four months. Farming without using chemical fertilizers leads to more yield. Over the years, rainfall has decreased.

Sudhir Kumbre – Farming used to provide at least four months of work for the labourers. Nowadays, due to mechanization, the work of weeding is also lost. He asserted that mechanization has led to unemployment.

A man in the audience retorted that farmers are not trying to punish labourers, but are merely trying to cut costs. They are merely worried that the rain will fall and destroy the crops. Hence, the process of churning of soil cannot be delayed, and farmers resort to using machines.

Satish Khandagale added that the soil has become very hard due to chemical fertilizers. Earlier, the soil was very fertile, so it was easier to uproot the plants by hand.

Mangesh talked about how the heat in the soil has increased due to change in temperature. It has become difficult for the labourers to work in the increased heat and sun nowadays.

Lata Vike talked about how animals such as Ghodeni and Sambar have become a menace and how the crop raiding has increased.

Suvarna Damle added a point of information regarding the role of migration. She said that recently a lot of accidents have occurred wherein women agricultural workers are transported in the backs of tempos for working in other villages. A large number of accidents have occurred while the women are travelling for work. They have no security. She asked what measures should be taken to prevent this.

Lata Vike acknowledged that this was a troubling phenomenon. She recalled how six people had died because they entered a well that had been electrified. Big farmers tend to not employ people, only machines or tractors.

Shalu Kolhe said that mechanization is the reason why labourers don't get work. She also cited lack of sangathan (union/organization).

Seema Kulkarni asked them the reason behind the increase in mechanization. Was this because there isn't enough labour available?

Uttara Pande, Hirpur, Prakriti, answered that it is easier to get the work done through machines. She opined that there is a struggle between the farmers and the workers.

A woman from the audience added in a slightly agitated tone that farmers ought to get sowing done through machines as well, since they already use machines for everything else. She is a labourer herself and is upset at the lack of work available.

Satish from Pandharkawda replied the environment has become unreliable. Farmers have to worry about the *hamibhav* (minimum price). He said that all work becomes available at once and all labourers are busy at the same time, hence farmers turn towards machines. This intensifies the struggle between labourers and farmers. He also opined that this conflict is also centred around the question of status or hierarchy. The labourers get alternative work, due to this migration has increased. The general perception about labourers is that 'majur maajla' – meaning labourers are lazy and have choices.

Niranjana said that along with climate change, the social situation has also changed. The price of agricultural produce has not increased in that proportion either. She spoke from her own experience and cited the lack of technical skills of labourers and how there are no labourers available for sowing nowadays, and that means she has to rely on machines.

Prema from Uttarakhand asked the women how they run their households if there is no work.

Rahul Bais replied that this question will be taken up in the latter part of the session.

Archana Keche, Prakriti – 'Shetkari nehmi aakashakade pahto' - the farmer always keeps an eye on the sky, waiting for the rains. She highlighted the unpredictable nature of rainfall.

Harish Bhagat compared the *hami bhav* in the past twenty years to emphasize the lack of proportionate rise in prices. Labourers are given Rs. 250 as wages, but cotton prices are still Rs. 5000. Women are caught in the trap of microfinance. He cited that the men of Vidarbha are addicted to alcohol.

There was a bit of a back and forth between agricultural labourers and the farmers – while the land-owning farmers said that they couldn't find skilled labourers willing to work and defended using tractors for lowering costs, the agricultural labourers took issue with being perceived as lazy and pointed out that the issue of non-availability only crops up during the harvest season, when there is plenty of work, but lesser time and not enough labourers.

Seema stated that this should not devolve into a 'farmers v/s labourers' debate. One should keep in mind that quite often farmers also work as labourers. There is also a need to explore the issues and concerns of the labourers. She asked that the conversation be brought back to the original question i.e. the impact of climate change on the work of labourers.

Rahul Bais asked the women present whether the work available in the forest has increased or decreased?

Satish – The forest produce used to be plentiful earlier, because the forests were denser.

Mangesh said that there is a difference now. The flowers of Moha have reduced, amla fruits have decreased. He attributed all of this to climate change.

Sudhir – The forest dept has cut down the forests. Now with the help of employment guarantee scheme, in his village, they have 10 to 20 acres of plantation.

Deepak – Given that the flowers of Moha trees have fallen due to the untimely rainfall. Many people who could've gotten some work from this, lost out on the opportunity. What other alternatives can be given?

Satish – Migration of labourers across villages was reduced by almost 60-70% in his village. He said employment guarantee is a good alternative. With the help of CORO Team, they helped organise the labourers. Trainings for the workers can be provided. They approached the BDO and with the power of organising, demanded work for employment guarantee.

Ranjana talked about the work received under the employment guarantee scheme. She explained that organising has helped her demand work. She said that it is not that labourers have become lazy, it is because they don't get enough work to support themselves through agricultural labour, hence they have to run after employment guarantee schemes. How does one provide for one's children with such unreliable work? Labourers are not lazy; they only want steady work.

Lata Vike said that their village has a workers' organization and through that they demanded and got work from rural employment guarantee schemes. They tended to moha trees, collected the flowers and made ladoos (sweet) from the moha flowers. Since diwali, they have sold around 3000 to 4000 ladoos, this year alone.

Sarita added that these ladoos help women suffering from menstrual cramps and are good for pregnant women. They also asked the collector to use their ladoos in the anganwadi program as a nutritional supplement.

Chhaya tai said that the money from MNREGA comes from Professional tax. She was part of the committee and had suggested that the money should be kept in an escrow account to be released only when approved for MNREGA work.

Shubhada opined that work should be made available for the entire year, not just for 90 or 100 days.

Session 7: Women farmers from suicide affected households

Nutan Malvi, a lecturer and activist from Wardha was the facilitator for this session. She asked the panel of women about the reasons why farmers commit suicide.

The following women from the audience were called as panellists.

1. Alka, Prerna
2. Yogita Zhughne (Need to recheck the surname)
3. Madhuri Bhoge
4. Sandhya Bhujangrao, Virkhede, Pachgaon.

Yogita Zhugne has 5 acres of land. Her husband committed suicide due to the burden of loans. He had taken loans from the bank and moneylender.

When **Madhuri Bhoge's** husband committed suicide, she found out that the land was still in her father in law's name. Her husband had committed suicide due the burden of double loans from the moneylender and the banks. There was illness in the family, and he had to shoulder double the expenses. Ultimately the mounting loans drove him to take the extreme step.

Sandhya's husband committed suicide in 2010. Loans from the bank and moneylender, increasing expenses due to illness, and supporting a family of 5 to 7 people took its toll on her husband, and he committed suicide. In order to get the Rs. 1 lakh compensation, she wrote an application to the collector. The compensation was given partially in the form of a fixed deposit - Rs. 70000 as FD and

Rs. 30000 that she could withdraw. She has not yet received gharkul or ration card. In addition, she has not received pension regularly, just once every 2 or 4 months.

Madhuri explained that she doesn't get pension, even though she had to jump through a lot of bureaucratic hoops. She was told that she won't get pension because the land is in her name. She has received neither gharkul, nor pension.

Yogita stated that there is no pension, no dakhla (document), and no land in her name. The land and house are in her mother-in-law's name and she refused to give Yogita her share.

Madhuri explained how when the husband dies, the in laws wash their hands off of them saying, 'Our son is dead, so there is no relationship between us anymore'. Her in-laws gave her a lot of trouble. She was driven out of her house, the moment her husband. Her in-laws didn't even care about their own grandchildren.

Alka spoke about how difficult it is for women to take care of education, healthcare, household expenses and chores. All of the responsibilities suddenly fall on the shoulders of the women after the death of the husband. She blames patriarchal attitudes as the reason why succession rights are not given to women.

Nutan spoke about how the the government's eligibility criteria (patra/apatra) for determining whether a death could be classified as farmer suicide or not is a matter of grave concern. She explained how women can't fight back due to lack of knowledge or awareness. She asked the women on the panel whether they have a ration card or not.

Yogita said she has no ration card, no grain, and no land. She said the authorities did not give her a ration card, even though she had submitted all of the applications and documents.

Madhuri said she still hasn't received a ration card in her name.

Sandhya said she has a ration card, although the farm is in the name of her father-in-law.

Yogita said her name was on the coupon for gharkul, and then her father-in-law drove her out of the house.

Alka explained how due to regressive attitudes, land is not given in the name of the women or their children.

Sandhya said that she lived in a joint family when her husband was alive. Her mother-in-law drove her out of the house, soon after the death of her husband.

Madhuri recalled how she was ostracized by not just her family but also her community. She explained how when she worked in the anganwadi, her sister in law worked at the same place, but never even acknowledged her or her children as family.

Yogita said she too works in the anganwadi.

Vijaya Wadhankar, Tivsa, Amravati – Her father-in-law drove her out of the house after her husband died. She went to a lawyer and fought long and hard to get 3 acres of land in her name. She

recalled the situation after her husband died, "My father-in-law kept a bottle of *rogar* (pesticide) in front of me and gave me two options - either drink the pesticide or leave the house." Her father in law said she could always go and marry another man. But she didn't give up. She said she has participated in various protests (organised by Ekal Mahila Sanghatana).

Archana Aate, Hinganghat – Her husband committed suicide in 2014. Their house had recently been furnished and was worth 5 lakh. But they lost it due to her opportunistic brother in law. When her husband was admitted in the hospital, he conspired and got the house. Her in laws ensured that all of the documents that she had submitted for the ration card disappeared. She did not give up and went to the Patwari and got a photocopy of the old ration card (where her name was mentioned) and used that for her documents. Now she has got 7 acres of land in her name. She has gharkul and said that NAAM foundation had helped her in this process. Today, her child is studying in 4th standard at a good english medium school.

Nilima Bhalerao said her husband committed suicide in 2015. She had to struggle hard to get 4 acres of land in her name. She has applied for gharkul and succession rights. She has no access to either pension, or any government schemes.

Pallavi explained that Nilima has faced really adverse circumstances, and a lot of mental harassment from her in-laws. She also informed the audience that Nilima had been present at MAKAAAM's protest at Azad Maidan, Mumbai, where she had put forward her demands at the press conference as well.

Kavita Bhopale, Viruli, Ekal Mahila Sanstha, explained how when the husband dies, the in laws and the system end up torturing the woman. She has no access to the antyodaya scheme.

Seema Kulkarni, MAKAAAM, reminded the women present that their motto should always be - "Radnaar nahi, ladhnaar aamhi" (We won't cry, we will fight!). All of the women chanted the slogan.

Nutan Malvi explained how government policies could be patriarchal at times. She said that women were often left with limited bargaining power since they were not part of any organization. Nutan cited an incident where a woman who had a two month old baby was driven out of her house. Hence, women's identity as 'farmer' is very important, and that is where MAKAAAM comes in.

Seema explained how the identity as a farmer enables access to social security which is just as important.

Plenary Session:

Facilitators were asked to come to the stage and summarize the most important points that had come up during the sessions.

Yogini Dolke laid out 6 important observations -

UNDERSTANDING CLIMATE CHANGE: RURAL WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES

1. The labour work for farming has become more and more difficult due to climate change and erratic rainfall. The disturbed schedule is evident in the harvest schedule that has become erratic.
2. In Vidarbha, we see that even land-owning farmers are forced to go and work as labourers on other people's farms due to the drought situation.
3. Only one or two crops – soybean, cotton and Tur are grown. The traditional mixed cropping method offered a fall-back option, however, now there is no fall-back mechanism, so more losses are incurred. Climate change exacerbates the situation.
4. There has been an increase in illnesses, with the effect on women's health most pressing. The types of crops have also resulted in affecting the health of women.
5. Cropping patterns have also changed, with the focus on cash crops leaving no feed for livestock.
6. Even the forests are affected by climate change, and destruction of forests leads to crop raiding by animals. The pesticides/weedicides are causing soil erosion.

They spoke about possible solutions/remedies, turning towards floriculture, turmeric farming, etc. She emphasized on organic farming and spoke about how crop insurance is absolutely essential in an unpredictable time. They are still looking for answers and alternatives.

Suvarna added another point about food security. Growing vegetables requires enough water. Hence, planning of water is important. She remarked that there is clearly consciousness but no action (Jagrutiaahe, pan krutinahi) at every level.

Kaustubh Pandharipande – Three major issues that were raised during the session on animal husbandry:

1. Climate change
2. The work has become even more difficult, implying that drudgery has increased.
3. The concerns of women

Remedies – He cited Wadala as an example. He said that their efforts taken to address these issues are noteworthy. He spoke about the 4 Ls – local knowledge, local breeds, local communities, local efforts. Clearly, traditional knowledge is important but he felt there was a dire need for further study.

Manish Rajankar – spoke about five main issues and their remedies regarding the session of fishery. Issues:

1. Rainfall has become erratic and hence ponds are affected.
2. Temperature rise: Fish can't survive due to rise in temperature.
3. Government policies/schemes: New varieties of fish along with the modern trawlers destroy the local ecological systems.
4. Alcohol addiction amongst the men has led to numerous instances of domestic violence.
5. Health of women is also affected by the lack availability of food (namely fish).

Remedies/Solutions -

1. Ponds need to be rejuvenated using traditional methods.
2. Women led Gram Sabhas are important examples of how including women in the decision making process leads to better solutions.
3. Cultivation of flowers of a local plant called the besharam: the local herbs can be cultivated and could generate employment opportunities.
4. Initiative by women for alternative livelihoods: Landless fisherfolk need employment guarantee schemes.
5. Government's policy - 'Neelkranti' should be implemented with an eye towards sustainable development.

Kaustubh added that he hoped this consultation would lead to some kind of concrete action.

Deepak Margade – made several observations about the session on agricultural labourers:

1. There has been a change in the way that agriculture is being practised.
2. There is a clear conflict between the farmers and the labourers.
3. New measures such as employment guarantee schemes should provide work for the stipulated 90 days at least.

He spoke about how the erratic rainfall is affecting agriculture, and how water scarcity has increased.

He said it was important to have nurseries for plants. He cited techniques such as water harvesting and creating bunds.

In Gadchiroli district, in a village called Jambli, employment is generated from cultivating tendu leaves and bamboo cutting. The women make ladoos from moha, through which women's health and economics is combined.

Regarding Amravati, he said that implementation is an issue in terms of employment guarantee schemes.

He reiterated that minimum wages should be given. He also spoke about the phenomenon of migration of labourers from village to village, and the effect that has on the women.

Rahul Bais added that the accidents that occur while travelling for work, another aspect of migration, is entirely avoidable. He said that employment guarantee schemes will work out only if there are organised efforts.

Shubhada Deshmukh – dwelled on some of the major issues raised during the session on forest:

1. Employment guarantee schemes are required, even in the context of forest.
2. Suitable planning is important. She said the government should enact stringent penalties for interfering with local processes. Regarding the Vanmitra scheme, she said that the claims need to be addressed on a priority basis.
3. Law on resources: In the 'abhayaranya' or protected areas, all official work is done in Marathi. This is unfair to the women who are more comfortable speaking in their own

language. She added that the selection of Vanmitra should be done properly, based on the practical realities.

4. There is a need to ensure the participation of women in the Gram Sabha decision making process. The funds that they are allocated should also be taken into consideration.
5. Action Research – TRI Department – Gadchiroli, Bhandara, Gondia, Chandrapur – The idea of forest-based development needs to be changed.
6. Commercialization of forest goods.
7. Continuous follow up is necessary. Women's organisations can play a role in this. All official documents must be translated into 5 languages.

Pallavi invited the panel of experts to share their observations, and asked them what kind of remedies they could offer:

Niranjana Maru said that this consultation had yielded some very good discussions. Keeping in mind the theme of the consultation, she quoted data analysed by agricultural university. The data shows that between 1970-2000, the month of July was dry nearly 12 times.

Talking about Wardha in specific and Vidarbha in general, she observed that the amount of rainfall has not decreased, but the irregularity of rainfall has increased.

One of her main concerns that she thought should be addressed was that of lightning strikes. Deaths by lightning have increased a lot recently, and she believes this is a matter that needs to be investigated.

Farm land based watershed development is important, and she said that water should be conserved and used wisely.

Three examples/remedies offered:

1. Niranjana offered her own example of farming. All of the changes were made by a woman engineer in their farm
2. Swavalambi Sheti – self sufficient agriculture - cash crops should be avoided. Mixed cropping is important because food security is ensured. Sowing crops like jowar or bajra is a kind of crop insurance. She warned the women present not to put all their eggs in one basket.
3. Traditionally, seed banks were created and stored by women and women should use this knowledge to mitigate climate change.

Swastik Das, UNDP – He spoke about the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN, which has 17 aims. He said that solutions should come from the ground up, from the women themselves. He also said women are the 'purveyors of traditional knowledge' and saw them as lead users and innovators. He emphasized the importance of participation of women at the policy making level.

Dr. Tarak Kate – The cycles of floods and droughts have changed due to climate change. It is evident in the increasing incidences of hailstorms. On comparing data from the 1930 gazetteer, it is clear that the days of rainfall have reduced, and it is evident that dry spells will increase.

The rainfall of July has become irregular and the period of sprouting has decreased (ankurnachya vela kami). Moreover, the cold has increased. Hence, change in temperature is also a major issue.

Policies -

1. Land grab by China in Mauritius and by India in Africa.
2. Import of foodgrains in India – proper facilities and fair prices should be given.
3. No jobs available even in the cities.
4. Water use – mostly by industrialists
5. Malnutrition – anaemia – 22% of women affected.
6. Soil conservation important
7. The current state of indebtedness should be avoided – lowering input costs and other costs of production should be looked into – kitchen gardens – 16 to 25 types of vegetables can be grown – variety of cows, goats, etc.
8. Planting trees is important – it is part of agriculture – nowadays I can't see farmers planting charoli saplings.
9. Increase collectivization
10. Forest and agriculture – village, forest, gairan – important to increase productivity of agriculture.

Vasant Phutane – He talked about how organic farming is the future of farming. He questioned the current framework of development (vikas). He discussed how BT Cotton is responsible for the suicides, and also induced rashes all over the body. He said there has been no proper study on the effects of BT Cotton. He believes we need to demand different varieties of crops.

He emphasized that trees increase the fertility of soil. He also discussed the ill effects of pesticides/weedicides on children and women. He laid emphasis on the need to give some concrete evidence to the government regarding the same.

He spoke about the concept of self sufficient farming (*Swavalambi sheti*). He invited the women present to take part in their training. He promised them that training will also deal with animal raiding by using various techniques.

He invited the women present to attend the Bijotsav (Seed Festival) at Nagpur in March 2019.

K.C. Malhotra

He reiterated that our strategy should be aimed at agro-forestry. He asked the women to ensure that some share of their farm should be devoted towards trees. He recounted a story in 2010, when he was appointed as an advisor in Tripura, Agartala Forest Department to increase forest cover. The locals practised shifting cultivation which reduced the forest cover. He said that 60% of land should be turned into forest, and it would increase the livelihoods of the people, and around 40% of the area under canopy is forest. He confirmed that 90% of the villages had implemented their plan, and an evaluation revealed that the canopy had increased to 40%. The groundwater was recharged, and their income quadrupled by 2015. Collective farming is being promoted and practised in Mizoram.

He said there were two types of forests – 1. safety forest, and 2. supply forest. He asserted that the micro-level of a village can be changed with right efforts.

He explained how they had created bunds, and had trees planted on them. It turned out that not even 1% of the bunds were left unutilized. The soil was retained, and it paved the way for 35 km long bunds in Madhya Pradesh. He emphasized the importance of biodiversity. He cited the 2002 Biodiversity Act as well as the People's Biodiversity Register in Kerala.

Dr. Soma KP, NFT member, MAKAAAM – She informed the women present about the issues taken up at the international level citing the Nairobi International Women's Conference and the Beijing Conference. The issues of rural women have been taken up at a lot of fora. She gave the motto of “Hum ablaa nahin, Sabla hain” to the women present, recognizing that they were determined to shift the narrative from victimhood to sisterhood. She said that will only be possible by setting aside our differences.

She also argued that policy changes should be made in accordance with women's experiences, but that is not what is happening right now. An intervention should be done, specially in cases of the menace of microfinance and the women's CAMPA Act.

On the one hand, the government talks of conservation, even as factories are being opened in forests. Soma said this duality in policy making should be addressed, but that women should not wait for it to be resolved by itself. Initiative must be taken by the women themselves. She gave another slogan for the women – “hamare gaon mein hum hi sarkar, aur Dilli mein hamari Sarkar” implying that women should hold the government accountable for its actions.

The consultation was concluded by a reading of the MAKAAAM Manifesto by Aarti Bais which lists out in detail all of the demands and concerns raised by the women in the two days of the consultation.