

Mr. Vijay Kumar, IAS (Retd.)

Deputy Chairman

Rythu Sadhikara Samstha,

Zero-Budget Natural Farming wing,

(A Non-profit entity established by Government of Andhra Pradesh),

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**“CLIMATE RESILIENT ZERO BUDGET NATURAL FARMING” (CRZBNF)
Is This 'Exclusivity' & Nomenclature Justified in a Government Scheme?**

Dear Mr. Kumar,

We appreciate your contribution to the promotion of pesticide-free agriculture in AP since 2005 and your offer to address our concerns about the recently launched CRZBNF, which is being implemented by Rythu Sadhikara Samstha (RySS). Our concerns are about what the programme excludes and the secrecy of the MOU/Agreements concluded in advancing the programme. Our concerns are also about what is not covered by CRZBNF, such as Walmart's entry into AP agriculture and the role being played by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF).

We seek a clearer understanding of where AP agriculture policy is headed. May we reassure you straight away that it is far from our intention to confront and oppose without reason. We stand firm with you in promoting the 'alternative agri' models of farming, which we consider are fundamental to India securing her agriculture through the sound principles of *agro-ecology* that are synonymous with 'food security'. Agro-ecological farming, based on the evidence that is now in, translates into food sovereignty for India, safe and nutritious food, with no yield fall-out, and is directly opposed to GMOs and chemical farming, which overlap and do not deliver on the dimensions mentioned.

But there are serious issues, which are cause for deep concern and to which we have no answers. We have been given none, thus far. However, over the past two weeks, in an effort to crystallise thinking on this subject, we have interacted with a specific group of people, scientists, farmers/leaders involved in alternative agri/agro-ecological principles of farming and policy, and they include those involved in the strenuous efforts to keep GMOs out of Indian agriculture. These views are distilled in this communication to you in hard, clean comments that focus on 3 core issues of policy. Therefore, this overview provided below, seeks to prepare the ground for the proposed meeting after which, it would be appropriate to compile a comprehensive list of questions.

1. Why is ZBNF being promoted exclusively?

We stress that the Q addresses a formal government scheme, (not a personal way of farming), in this case the AP Government promoting **CRZBNF**. We ask this Q:

Ø Is it that the AP Government is promoting a 'new' label (on an 'old wine bottle') and in so doing leaving out the wider community of Agroecology systems including Organic Farmers, permaculture, biodynamics, Jaivik Krishi, etc.? Should this be the case, then is not the AP

government effectively discriminating against the diversity of time-tested and proven approaches to agroecology?

ZBNF is not separated, but firmly rooted in Organic/ agro-ecology systems and is contained under this umbrella definition. The latter has the data that validates it. And ZBNF relies on that data to validate it! There is no fundamental difference between ZBNF and agro-ecology, conditional on chemicals and GMOs being absolutely incompatible with ZBNF. It includes its "*four wheels*", which are some very specific processes of organic/agroecology. But in the case of ZBNF more limited and hence restrictive. And, it is also clear, agro-ecology is accommodating of variations as long as the core rules are maintained. For example, organic/agroecology acknowledge the need for local adaptation, while maintaining the "*four wheels*". But ZBNF is not 'accommodating'. It is our view that its rigidity will cause problems for farmers in validation of the system or it will be 'fudged'. Furthermore, social aspects of agroecology, especially food sovereignty, have been sometimes mentioned, but not written down as a core principle of ZBNF especially when factoring in the external funding which is involved in the scheme and for which we seek data in the public domain.

The organic farming community has been alienated by Mr Palekar's rubbishing of Organic. There is real anger. But the much more serious issue is that no government agency may support and furthermore, promote such an 'exclusive notion', which clearly has no exclusivity. It is not only unjust and unethical, but it will cause serious harm to Indian organic farming/ agro-ecology, through leveraging external and internal funding to 'push' a mere 'name' as is being done. A case may not be made 'à nouveau', ie for a new basis to carve out a separate niche, through the tactic of essentially 'rubbishing' organic/agroecology systems. We provide a strange analogy from GMOs, of the notion of '*substantial equivalence*' (with traditional breeding techniques), proven and discarded (CBD) as an unscientific notion, and which has been employed by Monsanto and GMO Corporations (with Regulators in tow, including Indian), to argue their case. Curiously, the use of semantics is similarly being used in CRZBNF, and ZBNF also, but to make the opposite case. It is '*substantially inequivalent*' to Organic/agroecology and yet is not, as a practice! The bottom line is quite straightforwardly this:

➤ *To posit an opposition between Organic and natural farming is false, as it is wrong.*

Therefore, it is somewhat implausible for any government to tag an 'exclusivity' to ZBNF, and spend thousands of crores, (currently Rs 17,000 crores ~ \$ 2.3 billion in Foreign Direct Investment), to promote it through 'outreach' programmes, for example, to recruit farmers to this new label? This is to disenfranchise the legitimate and decades-old organic farming system and all farmers in this system.

2. The GMO Q: The stated standard required is Organic for the exclusion of and incompatibility with GMOs

We are similarly disconcerted when the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the socially discredited BNP Paribas Bank are to be involved in the financial arrangements to promote CRZBNF, and when the Niti Aayog, curiously, actively supports and promotes ZBNF nationwide. These raise red flags of serious concern and a conflict of interest. The BMGF has been discredited for funding and promoting GMOs into some parts of Africa, and states that its support for GMOs will stay in its own policy of financing agricultural initiatives globally. Niti Aayog in its agri policy document has stated baldly, without evidence or data in support, that GMOs are required in Indian agriculture for food security. Its exclusively favoured status for ZBNF in Andhra Pradesh is quite simply wrong and

worrying in itself, but, and furthermore, does not square with its GMO policy. So we may be forgiven for wondering -- "What is the catch"?

3. The Financials and Financing

Information relating to financing of CRZBNF, whether in the form of grants, co-financing, loans, subsidies, etc., relate to fundamental rights of farmers, pastoralists, forest dwellers, and consumers at large. Consequently, in the public interest, this information should be in the public domain, as the entire programme is based on and being leveraged through a Govt. Scheme. Briefly, transparency promotes confidence and fairness. The objective is to ensure that alternative agri/agro-ecology/organic/ZBNF is not manipulated/steered/hijacked into wrong arrangements and corporate influence, commodification, control and above all erosion of food sovereignty. These matters are not negotiable. Sooner or later, if these matters are brushed under the carpet there will be scams. It is our fervent hope and request that the scheme is made 'inclusive', for the advancement of agroecology/organic farming systems.

We plan (as part of a core group) to visit Andhra Pradesh to meet you, in order to discuss these matters and preferably in October at a mutually convenient date. We will co-ordinate.

Thank you for your cooperation and support.

Yours truly,

Leo F. Saldanha

And co-signatories

1. **Manohar Parchure**, doyen of Organic Farming in India; Nagpur (Maha)
2. **Vandana Shiva**, Navdanya, Dehradun
3. **Vasant Futane**, Agroecological farming & expert; Founder Member, Nagpur Seed Festival, Rawala village, Amravati (Maharashtra)
4. **Abbhijay Save**, Naresh Bhaskar Save, Suresh Bhaskar Save: 'Bhaskar Save Learning Centre for Natural Farming', District Valsad, Gujarat
5. **P Sainath**, Journalist, Mumbai
6. **Subhash Mehta**, Trustee, Devarao Shivan Trust, Bangalore
7. **Aruna Rodrigues**, Lead Petitioner GMO (SCourt); Mhow, MP
8. **Bharat Mansata**, VARA (Agroecological Regenerative Association); Raigad (Mah)
9. **Deepak Suchde**, Malpani Trust, Bajwada, Dewas (MP)
10. **Narasimha Reddy Donthi**, Hyderabad
11. **Dinesh Abrol**, Delhi
12. **Bittu Sahgal**, Editor, Sanctuary
13. **C Yathiraju**, School of Natural Farming, Tumkur (Kar)
14. **Soumik Banerjee**, Godda, Jharkhand
15. **Kshtij Urs**, Executive Director, Greenpeace India
16. **Maj. Gen. Sudhir Vombatkere**, (Retd.)
17. **Madhuresh Kumar**, National Alliance of Peoples Movement
18. **Claude Alvares**, Journalist and Organic Farmer, Goa Foundation
19. **Kul Bhushan Upmanyu**, Himalaya Bachao Samiti (HP)
20. **Prasanna Heggodu and Chockalingam**, Grama Seva Sangh, Bangalore

21. **Dr. Vasavi**, Kiro, HEDAN
22. **Manshi Asher**, Sambhaavnaa Institute of Public Policy and Politics, Palampur, Himachal Pradesh
23. **Ajay Jha**, Pairvi, Jaipur (RAJ)
24. **Ardhendusekhar Chatterjee**, Development research Communication & Research Centre (DRCSC)
25. **Ashok Sirimali**, Mines, Minerals and People
26. **Dr. C. Ramachandraiah**, Professor in Urban Studies, Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS), Hyderabad
27. **Dunu Roy**, Hazards Centre, Delhi
28. **Indira Vijaysimha**, Poorna Learning Center, Bangalore (K)
29. **Joe Athialy**, Centre for Financial Accountability, New Delhi
30. **Linda Chhakchuak**, Independent Journalist, Shillong, Meghalaya
31. **Vinay Sreenivasa**, Alternative Law Forum, Bangalore
32. **Soumya Dutta**, Bharat Jan Vigyan Jatha and India Climate Justice
33. **Ravi Rebbapragada**, Samatha, Vijayavada
34. **Madhu Bhushan**, women's rights activist-writer-researcher
35. **Mallika Viridi**, Maati, Munsiri, Uttarkhand
36. **Nagesh Hegde**, Senior Journalist, Bangalore
37. **Nityanand Jayaraman**, Chennai Solidarity Group
38. **Om Prakash Singh and Satyarupa Shekar**, Citizen consumer and civic Action Group (CAG), Chennai
39. **Suma Josson**, Film maker, Pune, (Mah)
40. **P Babu**, Institute for Cultural research and Action; Bengaluru (Ka)
41. **Ramanand Wangkheirakpam**, Indigenous Perspective, Imphal, (Man)