

# Sprouting Up...

## Sharing diversities, ploughing possibilities



From Old English comes an agricultural term – the ploughshare. From the Indian subcontinent, which has a history longer than its colonial English past, there is much to share about both agriculture and culture. The nascent wave of colonialisation of the food and farm challenges peoples without borders to revisit their cultures.

Thus it was at the World Social Forum in the southern city of Karachi on the 24–29 March 2006, a rich cultural sharing in what is otherwise regarded the poorest province of Pakistan – Sindh. This province primarily grows wheat, cotton and rice, and, like its neighbours in India, is poised on the brink of a “gene revolution” after suffering the “green revolution”.

So there was sharing about the struggles of landless peasants, tenant farmers and share croppers. In practice even today there exists a feudal serfdom where the poor have neither the option to leave the land (being bonded or at risk of being evicted where they are not wanted) nor the freedom to determine their private lives as they deem fit.

From another part of Asia, in the Dong culture, it is said that “as rice is food to the body, so songs are food to the soul”; but if only our songs could feed and free us! And not surprisingly even the cultural aspect of life is not untouched by issues of shared community creations versus copyright hassles; the Langas and Manganiars, traditional folk musicians found in India and Pakistan, who performed at the WSF, have their compositions lifted by the movie & music industry without any due acknowledgment. (photograph)

Meanwhile the 2006 World Economic Forum’s (WEF) annual meeting held earlier in Davos, Switzerland, closed with participants detailing new projects particularly in disaster relief, financing for development with a renewed emphasis on public-private partnerships. The WSF is

envisaged to be a counterpoint to the WEF. Indeed at the WSF the Pakistan earthquake of October 2005 remained a constant reference point, not only since it led to the re-scheduling of the WSF from January to March, but also that several groups working at the grassroots chose to give their limited resources to relief and rehabilitation work. But there are many more partnerships yet to be designed, as the sharing amidst peoples continues the importance of ploughing on to bring peoples’ together cannot be over-emphasised.

There is a word, that is well understood in both northern India and Pakistan – “sanjha”; it does not have an equivalent term in English but essentially means common as to imply shared with others. As the WSF song translated into Urdu aptly conveyed, our crops are shared, our cultures are shared.

So yes there are possibilities, and whilst we celebrate our diversities there is much to do to build another world.

A world in which there is space enough for the small.



*A traditional chef now selling sandwiches*



*Traditional Manganiar musician from India; they share much music and culture with their Pakistani counterparts.*



*Is there space in the world for the small seller? A vendor trying to sell pappads – flatbread snacks – might soon get outlawed with food laws leaving little room for the informal food economy to go on.*



*The traditional ice lolly – kulfi, common to the Indian sub-continent – slowly melts away as food chains and brand names take over.*

