

## International Mountain Day 2008: Food Security Concerns from Thajal village of Kashmir, India

International Mountain Day (IMD) 2008 was celebrated with the villagers in remote Thajal village of Jammu and Kashmir, India by Centre for Environment Education (CEE). In 2005 this area was severely affected by the earthquake impacting both land and agriculture. People had even lost their seeds in the affected villages. CEE's Himalaya unit is involved in rehabilitation and recovery initiatives in the area since 2005.

In spite of chilling cold and heavy rains, villagers including elders, women and children gathered at Thajal Tailoring Centre to participate in IMD 2008 celebrations. They were apprised of the history and importance of observing IMD and the relevance of this year's theme "**Food Security in Mountains**" for the area. Food security in the mountains is of special concern in light of the projected climate change impact.

Prevailing agro-practices in the area and scope for adopting new technologies was discussed. Villagers expressed their concern about many local crops grown traditionally but were gradually substituted by the new high yielding hybrid varieties. According to them the new hybrid varieties were neither good in taste nor were healthy but still they were adopting those for higher economic returns which were obtained seldom due to unexpected weather conditions. Studies indicate that agriculture which is at subsistence level in the area is further declining due to various reasons.

The most common crops grown in the area are wheat, paddy, maize, kidney beans, black gram and the vegetables like knol-khol, peas, brinjal, tomato, cabbage, cauliflower, carrot and beans etc and the agriculture is rain-fed with supplements of chemical fertilizers as per need. This area is potentially important for Horticulture and Pears, apple, walnut etc are grown commercially. Wild apple, almond and pomegranate, are found growing in abundance in these hills.

### **Main concerns that emerged during the discussions are:**

1. Farmers are using old techniques in lack of knowledge about locally appropriate new technologies
2. Soil quality at many places is not good and requires analysis followed by necessary reclamation measures
3. Scarcity of water in some area for agriculture
4. Poor liaison between farmers and agriculture department

It was observed during the discussions that people were not aware about the concept of food security and environment. No food safety nets are reported existing in the area but at the same time incidences of food shortage are also not reported.

CEE Himalaya is popularizing non-farm based technologies like poly-house cultivation, mushroom culture, apiculture, poultry etc through establishing demonstration cum training centers in 10 villages in the area. Local youth, women and farmers are being

trained on these technologies in collaboration with local agriculture department. The demonstration centers are being run by these trained members in groups. Mountain Day was celebrated for the first time in this area and the participants considered the discussion on Food Security to be very important.