

# National Commission on Farmers

Regional Consultation, Ahmedabad  
28-29 October, 2004

## Conclusions and Recommendations

1. The consultation served as a wake-up call and stressed that a “business as usual approach” in planning as the persistence of a wide gap between planning and implementation will come in the way of achieving Mahatma Gandhi’s plea for a hunger- free India.
2. In general, there was optimism that Mission 2007: a hunger free India is achievable, provided agricultural production programmes are implemented in a **mission mode**, with concurrent attention to production , marketing and consumption. **There is also need for convergence and synergy among the numerous vertically structured social safety net programmes.**
3. There is need for a whole life cycle approach in dealing with nutrition security at the level of every child, woman and man. There are, however, serious gaps in relation to the nutrition of adolescent girls, pregnant women and young infants (0-2 years). This is leading to the birth of children characterized by low birth weight. Such children suffer serious handicaps from birth, particularly in the area of brain development and cognitive abilities. This situation will have a long term adverse impact on the performance of the vast human resource of the country.
4. In addition to the safety net programmes of the Government of India, State Governments in this region have initiated several innovative programmes. Some examples are:Dayanad Social Security Scheme of Goa for pregnant and nursing mothers, old and infirm persons, widows etc., The *Shram Yogi Scheme* of the Government of Gujarat, designed to assist five poorest families in every village, is another useful initiative. It was agreed that the issue of a Household Entitlements PassBook, to every family below the poverty line and to small and marginal farmer families will be useful, since this will help to make them aware of their entitlements and also familiarize them with methods of accessing their entitlements. This principle should be used in the 150 districts chosen by the Union Planning Commission for organizing a special Employment Guarantee Scheme.
5. Convergence in implementation and the involvement of the women and men members of Panchayats will reduce transaction costs and impart transparency. For example, there are several separate watershed development programmes, each functioning in isolation. Unless implementation is both coordinated and decentralized, the cost and efficiency of project execution will be adversely

affected. The Gujarat Government has introduced a Karma Yoga Abhiyan, to sensitive Government functionaries on such issues.

6. To achieve the goal of Mission 2007, it is essential to develop and foster mutually reinforcing package of technology, services and public policies. A few essential components of the integrated strategy are the following.

#### **A. Package of Technology**

- a. Conservation and enhancement of the ecological foundations essential for an ever-green revolution (i.e., advances in productivity in perpetuity without associated ecological harm):

Soil healthcare with particular reference to physical structure, soil organic matter and micro-nutrients needs urgent attention. **Soil health cards** should be issued to every farmer. Water harvesting, conservation and efficient and economic uses need overriding priority. In areas like Kutchh, where evaporation exceeds precipitation most of the year, it would be useful to promote low cost green houses along with fertigation techniques. High value but low water requiring crops should be promoted. Provision of micro-nutrients like Zinc and Boron will help to improve productivity considerably in dry farming areas. The conservation of agro- biodiversity, particularly in the arid areas of Gujarat and Rajasthan needs attention. This is particularly true of hardy animal breeds which are vanishing.

- b. Farmer-centric research and technology development:

There is a growing gap between the research priorities of Agricultural Universities and ICAR Institutions and the felt needs of farmers. Also, research needs to be organized on a farming systems basis, involving crop-livestock-fish integration. Biotechnology research needs to be intensified in the public sector, so that there will be social inclusion in access to the products of such research.

- c. Farm implements:

The special needs of women farmers and farm labour should to be kept in view while designing and spreading new machinery and implements. Appropriate implements are essential in vertisols (black soils) for ensuring timely sowing and for promoting a ridge-furrow method of raising crops.

- d. High yield Organic Farming:

To be sustainable and successful, it is essential to undertake detailed research on soil fertility enhancement and plant protection. There is also need for internationally accepted certification procedures. Contract cultivation of organic products should be encouraged on the basis of producer oriented marketing. The principles of organic

farming and biotechnology should be harmonized, in order for India to evolve its own Bio-Organic Farming Technologies. Such products can have special brand names.

e. Wasteland Development:

Research should be done on raising efficient biofuel plants like *Jatropha* in areas covered by wasteland development.

f. Coastal agro-aqua farms:

There is great scope for introducing agro-aqua farms along the coast. Such farms will involve the cultivation of mangroves and halophytes like *Salicornia* and *Atriplex* along with shrimp culture.

g. Information Communication Technologies (ICT):

The integrated application of the internet, cable TV, community radio and the vernacular press will help to accelerate progress in the knowledge and skill empowerment of rural and farm families. Reaching the unreached in knowledge empowerment will then become possible. While connectivity can be achieved, it is the relevance and timeliness of the content that will determine the interest of rural families in ICT. Every effort should be made to support the National Alliance for Mission 2007: Every Village a Knowledge Centre.

**B. Package of Services:**

- a. Seeds: There is a need for genetic literacy movement with reference to Bt cotton. Some land in central State farms can be given to women SHGs for seed production. Seed villages should be established to ensure the timely availability of the seeds preferred by farmers. It is unfortunate that the availability of good seeds continues to be a serious constraint in productivity improvement. Medicinal and aromatic plants as well as fodder plants need urgent attention.
- b. Bio-fertilizers and bio-pesticides: Standardization and quality assurance procedures are urgently needed, since farmers are being cheated with substandard products.
- c. Compost preparation: A well planned Lab to Land programme needs to be initiated in the areas of composting and waste recycling.
- d. Post harvest technology: The prevailing mismatch between production and post harvest technologies is affecting adversely both producers and consumers. Improved post harvest technologies and value addition are the felt needs of farm women and men.

### C. Public Policies:

- a. In areas where farmers' suicides are taking place, the collapse of the rural credit system is policy-related. Credit reform and credit linked insurance are badly needed.
- b. Both meteorological and marketing factors are causing instability in farmers' income. Income and work security are needed for small farm families and landless agricultural labour. An integrated health, weather, crop and livestock insurance for groups of farming families constituting SHGs will be very helpful. SEWA in Ahmedabad has introduced several innovative procedures for income and work security for women. The lessons learnt by SEWA will be helpful in spreading such procedures in other parts of the country. SEWA's *market facilitation centers* could also be multiplied in other areas. Lateral learning from successful civil society (NGO) efforts will be valuable.

The Gujarat government has established a WTO Centre to familiarize farmers on the opportunities and challenges involved in external trade under the WTO regime. Trade and quality literacy are urgent requirements. 2004 has been a good cotton year but prices in some centers of production are tending to become very un-remunerative and discouraging. Farmers need proactive advice on production planning, particularly of commodities intended both for domestic and external markets, so that the income security of farm families does not become a gamble in the market.

- c. In tribal and remote areas, it will be useful to promote *community food security systems* based on the establishment of Seed, Grain and Water Banks. Fodder and Feed Banks could also be established wherever animal husbandry is important.
- d. Gender dimensions of farming with reference to the support services (crèches etc.) needed by women farmers and farm labour need urgent attention. Also, extension services do not often reach women. Hence women may be trained to operate Rural Knowledge Centres based on ICT.
- e. Employment: The famine of jobs / livelihood opportunities is the single major cause of famine of food at the household level. Remunerative self-employment opportunities should be enlarged by launching a *New Deal for the Self-employed*. In this context, the ongoing self-help group (SHG) revolution, particularly in the Southern States needs to be extended to other parts of the country. Also, SHGs should be developed into sustainable self-help groups (SSHGs) by establishing backward linkages with technology and credit and forward linkages with markets. Management of SSHGs also needs attention and accounting software could be popularized to promote transparency and avoid misunderstanding among members in financial matters.

- f. Public investment: This has been going down during the nineties. The credit-deposit ratio is also going down. Enhancement of public investment in agriculture, irrigation and rural infrastructure is an urgent need.
- g. National Employment Guarantee Scheme: The introduction of this scheme should be accompanied by the simultaneous introduction of appropriate dryland farming technologies, whole life cycle nutrition intervention programmes, support services for working mothers, immunization and health care and educational services. **In other words, the ultra-poor families chosen under this programme should be helped in a holistic manner so that they are able to lead a productive and healthy life.**
- h. Paradigm shift from food security at the national level to nutrition security at the level of each individual: This should be the goal of the Hunger-Free area programme, so that every individual has access to balanced diet and clean drinking water.
- i. Promote Public-Private Sector Partnerships: This will be very helpful in areas such as input supply, contract farming and outsourcing of production. A *code of conduct* should be developed for promoting symbiotic contract farming
- j. Involvement of Panchayati Raj Institutions in making development programmes work: It would be useful to involve the women and men members of Panchayats in the implementation at the grassroot level of various schemes like DWACRA, ICDS, IRDP, Rural Godowns, KVKs, Agro-processing centers, Food Parks, Agri-clinics and Agri-business centers. Decentralisation and community involvement will improve delivery systems, increase success and reduce corruption.

What we need **are not new schemes, but sincere and sustained efforts to make the numerous ongoing schemes deliver the promised results.** There is also need for coordination among numerous government departments dealing with pro-poor, pro-women and pro-livelihood programmes in rural areas.

#### D. Conclusion:

If the above packages of technology services and public policies can become mutually supportive, the well-being of farm families and nutrition security of the nation can be ensured.