

NATIONAL COMMISSION ON FARMERS

Regional Consultation on Farmers' Issues - Mission 2007: Hunger-Free India

Shillong, 3-4 November, 2004

A two-day regional consultation on Farmer's Issues and Mission 2007: Towards Hunger Free India was held at the ICAR Research Complex for the NE Hill Region, Umiam on Nov 3-4 2004. Organized by the National Commission on Farmers (NCF) in association with M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) and the United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP), the meeting was held to understand issues facing farmers in the region, the food security situation in the States and the steps needed to address the same. There were presentations from the State Governments of Meghalaya, Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura. The event was inaugurated by the Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Dr. D D Lapang and there was ministerial level participation from three States, viz. Mr. W A Chowdhary, Minister for Agriculture, Government of Assam, Dr. Surya Kanti Mishra, Minister for Panchayats, Government of West Bengal and Mr. Tapan Chakraborty, Minister for Agriculture, Government of Tripura. Secretaries and Directors of Agriculture from the different States were among the participants.

Professor M S Swaminathan, Chairman, National Commission on Farmers, in his concluding address at the meeting made summarized the recommendations; which emerged from the discussions.

Recommendations:

1. Progress in agricultural productivity and the economic and ecological well-being of farm families is inextricably linked to achieving the goal of a hunger-free India, since over 700 million of India's population lives in villages and their principal source of livelihood is agriculture, comprising crop and animal husbandry, forestry, fisheries, agro-processing and agri-business. Therefore, accelerated progress in enhancing the productivity, profitability, stability, and sustainability of the major farming systems is the best safety net against hunger and poverty.

2. The Eastern and Northeastern region is characterized by small and marginal holdings and resource poor farm families. Holdings are also often fragmented. Most of the agriculture is rainfed. Agriculture contributes 30 – 40 % of the State Net Domestic Product in the region. Unemployment is widespread, particularly among educated as well as rural youth. There is an urgent need for job-led growth strategies and for a paradigm shift from unskilled to skilled work. Women play a key role in this area both in the production and post-harvest phases of farming. They often do not have access to inputs and to new technological developments, knowledge and techniques. What the region needs is concurrent attention to ecological and livelihood security.

3. Eastern and Northeast India has a large untapped production reservoir, since the region is endowed with good rainfall, rich biodiversity and hard working and innovative farm women and men. The major objectives of the agricultural strategies in the region should be nutrition security of every child, woman and man, income security of farm families, work security of landless labour and the conservation and enhancement of the ecological foundations essential for sustainable agriculture.

4. Given mutually reinforcing packages of technology, services and public policies, the goal of achieving freedom from poverty induced under- and mal- nutrition by 15th August 2007, can be achieved. Endemic, hidden hunger (caused by deficiency of micronutrients in the diet) and transient hunger, as well as food availability (a function of production), food access (a function of purchasing power) and food absorption (a function of access to clean drinking water, environmental hygiene, primary health care and primary education) should receive concurrent and integrated attention. The additional food grain needs for eliminating endemic hunger are small and affordable. To bring about convergence

and synergy among numerous on-going programs, it will be useful to set up the following Regional Consultative and Monitoring bodies:

- a. **Farmers' Council for Sustainable Food Security**
- b. **Alliance for Elimination of Hunger and Poverty**, comprising representatives of governments, civil society organizations, women's associations, farmers' associations, youth organizations, business and industry, academia and mass media

5. Shillong Platform for Action

This common platform for action evolved at the consultation comprises interactive packages of technology, service and public policies.

A. Package of Technology: Technological upgrading of farming

An urgent need is to bring about a technological upgrading of farm practices. This should be based on sustainable intensification, diversification and value addition. The areas of technology which need particular attention for increasing the productivity and profitability of agriculture are:

i. New strains

Hybrid Rice, Hybrid Pigeon pea, Hybrid Sunflower, Hybrid Mustard, Quality Protein Maize, Superior varieties of Bamboo, Fibre-less ginger, potato, Jatropha and other bio-fuel plants, medicinal plants, Nitrogen-fixing "fertilizer trees" for agro-forestry systems, Plantation crops, hi-tech horticulture, vegetables, fruits and flowers.

ii. Decentralised Seed Production: Organization of Seed Villages, Horticulture Nurseries, Seed Technology Self-help Groups. Breeder's seed should be supplied by the research institutes/agricultural universities and government departments should provide the foundation seeds.

iii. Vaccines and Sero-diagnostics for diseases of cattle, Mithun, poultry and other farm animals.

iv. Technologies for Wasteland Development:

- Agro-forestry
- Bio-fuel trees
- Fertilizer Trees

v. Soil Health Care:

- Facilities for testing for micro-nutrients (Zinc, boron, Manganese, etc.)
- Soil Health Cards
- Integrated Nutrient Supply
- Community Land Care Movement involving local bodies

vi. Water Conservation and Management, Watershed Management

High value, low water requiring crops during the non-rainy seasons

vii. Plant Health Care:

- Integrated Pest Management
- Botanical pesticides
- Genetic resistance
- Bio-control agents

viii. Organic Farming

- Soil fertility enhancement- compost, biological nitrogen fixation, microbial fertilizers
- Plant health maintenance
- Certification of organic products

ix. Farmer Participatory Research and Knowledge Management:

The region is characterized by rich diversity in climate, rainfall, topography, soil, and agro-ecological and socio-cultural parameters. Therefore, genetic heterogeneity is needed for optimizing the benefits of agro-climatic and socio-cultural variability and for meeting specific culinary and organoleptic needs. This will call for Farmer Participatory Research and Knowledge Management Systems. For example, a program for **New Rices for Northeast India** can be initiated using some of the principles adopted in the development of New Rices for Africa (NERICA).

x. Quality and Trade Literacy:

There is need for imparting both quality literacy (sanitary and phytosanitary measures and codex alimentarius standards) and trade literacy (quality, price, quantity, etc.) with reference to home and external markets. Assured and remunerative, producer-centric marketing opportunities are needed.

xi. Sustainable Jhum farming:

The initiatives under way in Nagaland, the ICAR Research Complex for NEH region and at other centers to combine the ecological prudence of Jhum-farming families with techniques which can help to enhance the productivity and income without associated ecological or social farm need to be popularized in all *Jhum* cultivation areas. Jhum economic, ecological and social sustainability rather than jhum replacement should be the principal approach.

xii. Agro-Forestry and Joint Forest Management:

Promote *Arjun* trees for *Tasar* silk production, Fertilizers trees, hybrid *arhar* and other soil health enhancing plants should be promoted.

xiii. Sustainable Aquaculture: There is much scope in the region with a large variety of fishes like air breathing fishes. Attention has to be paid to proper seed and feed production, as well as to the efficient management of cubic volumes of water.

xiv. Farm Implements, particularly for women farmers – take account of the gender dimension in designing and distributing implements, Post Harvest Technology and Pro-poor Rural Innovations need particular attention. At present, there is a mismatch between production and post harvest technologies.

Thrust areas are:

- Agro-processing, value addition and packaging at the village level
- Brands names and Certification for new horticultural products (Action: Horticulture Mission)
- Monitoring of Cost, quality and reliability of supply
- Rural Godowns, to prevent distress sales, market exploitation and storage losses. Storage facilities for perishable commodities (fruits, vegetables, flowers and animal products need to be spread in the area).
- Rice Bio-parks: Value-addition to every plant of the rice biomass grain, straw, bran and husk
- Pineapple Bio-parks/ Other fruits
- Food Parks in association with the Ministry of Food Processing, GOI
- Agri-Export Zones in association with APEDA

xv. **Knowledge Revolution:** Farming has to become knowledge intensive if it is to become competitive. ICT should be mobilized. An ICT-SHG programme should be initiated with the help of NABARD. The National Alliance for Rural Knowledge Centres and the North Eastern Space Applications Centre should work out a strategy for establishing Rural Knowledge Centres.

xvi. **Promote Farming Systems Approach** based on in crop-livestock-fish integration

B. Package of Services

a. Capacity Building

- Retooling and retraining of extension personnel
- Develop N.E. cadre of ICAR Agricultural Research Service (ARS), on the model of Union Territories cadre of IAS
- Agricultural College in Tripura, KVKs, Rural Knowledge Centers
- Special attention to women (farmers and farm labor)

b. Rural connectivity and infrastructure - road, energy (renewable energy). **States should give priority to providing basic infrastructure essential for enhancing livelihood security in utilizing the funds provided by GOI.**

c. Input Supply: Seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, vaccines, fish seed and feed, etc.,

d. Credit Supply: Importance of timeliness, adequacy, and affordable rate of interest. Promote Kisan Credit Cards, NABARD's poverty eradication model needs to be spread.

e. Storage and Marketing Facilities: Drying, Quality Management, Market Segmentation in accordance with volume and variety.

f. Self-employment Facilitation Center:

Integrated information centers on all schemes (technology, credit, training, etc.) available for entrepreneurs (e.g. agri-clinics, agri-business centers, food parks, Horticulture Estates) need to be established as a single window facility in all Agricultural, Veterinary, Home Science and other colleges, in order to help unemployed youth

g. Production Planning and Market Management:

Production advice to farm and families on land and resource use planning in order to ensure a match between production and market demand.

Set up '*Small Farmers' Horticulture Estates*', *Small Farmers' Aquaculture Estates*

There is need for institutional devices to confer on small producers the power of scale at the production and post-harvest phases of farming.

C. Package of Public Policies

a. **Involvement of Panchayati Raj Institutions** in natural resource conservation and sustainable use and in implementation of the hunger elimination interventions.

b. **Calamity Relief** during Flash floods, drought, etc; review calamity relief procedures

c. **Establishment of a Regional Marketing Network** with the help of SFAC, NHB and APEDA

- Harness the power of scale in production and marketing
- Integrated use of processing facilities
- Sourcing of good quality, aflatoxin and pesticide-free raw material

d Recognition and Reward for Primary Conservers:

- Biodiversity and indigenous knowledge inventories
- Farmers'/ Conservers' Rights Resource Centers (recognition and reward from National Gene and Bio-diversity Funds)
- Create an economic stake in conservation
- Promote genetic and legal literacy relating to the different Acts (Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act and Biodiversity Act)

e. **Public and Private Investment** needs considerable stepping up for essential infrastructure and for sustaining the horticultural progress

f. The small amounts of Non-trade distorting support being given to small farmers should not be referred to as subsidy but **Farmers' Life Saving Support**.

g. Governments in this region should give the highest priority to **pro-poor, pro-women, pro-livelihood and pro-environment projects** while seeking help from the Centre or bilateral and multi-lateral donors.

h. NGOs should play a **handholding and mentoring** role- Empowerment for Self-reliance should be the pattern of help.

D. Conclusion:

This region is a genetic, ecological and cultural paradise. Accelerated agricultural progress holds the key to livelihood, food and ecological security. All R & D programmes should take into account the rich biological and socio-cultural diversity of the region and foster a decentralized, pro-nature, pro-poor, pro-women and pro-livelihood pattern of enhancing human well being.