

trialogue 2047

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Farmer collectives driving eco-system resilience & livelihood security



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Farmer collectives driving eco-system resilience and livelihood security **30th November 2016**

Domestic farm distress is one the biggest risks to the Indian economy today, given that agriculture sector directly contributes to about 15 per cent of the GDP and indirectly supports other sectors through raw inputs. 58% of our population is dependent on agriculture and 85% of the total farmers are small and marginal farmers; who are facing livelihood risks in the current paradigm of agriculture system. The risks to Indian economy are therefore also in terms of livelihood security and healthy workforce, that has its roots in food security and agriculture production. In India, the agriculture sector has been under duress of multiple challenges. Agricultural growth has been at best stagnant and has been marked by declining productivities in many regions. The hurdles in the path of agricultural growth in India become even more apparent when one looks at the context of land distribution and the impacts of climate change and natural resource degradation. Small and marginal farmers are characterised by low investment capacity, risk resilience and consequently low bargaining power of the small farmers in transactions for buying inputs and selling produce in the local markets. The market risk that farmers face is reflected in the price fluctuations in the market that further aggravates the distress.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare spelled out 10 points agenda reflecting the Government's vision to transform Indian agriculture and strategic interventions towards it. Topping this list were: "Farmers' income to be doubled in five years", followed by the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana, soil health cards, organic farming, self-sufficiency in pulses and oilseeds, neem-coated urea, national agriculture market (eNAM), Farmer Producer organisations (FPOs), mobile app, and disaster relief. Precision farming, shift to region appropriate crops are identified as some technologies that will bring economic advantages from agriculture to millions of farm families. There are however, some technologies promoted like genetically modified seeds, promotion of high value crops that may have possible negative impact on farmer livelihood security, environment sustainability and food security.

While the Government of India is quite elaborate on the scope of programmes and policies pertaining to input-based technologies (like precision farming, GMOs) to market based interventions (like eNAM, FPOs), the extent of its success in doubling farming incomes and ensuring sustainability in agriculture will critically depend on farmers' ability to understand, appreciate, invest and thus adopt of such interventions. An informed, aware community with capacities to adopt a certain technology and/or utilize a market linkage will be the key to the success of the agriculture programme of the country.

A common understanding is evolving that challenges in the agriculture sector cannot be entirely addressed at the farm level. As observed, natural resources are used and managed at a landscape level. The status of a natural resource will therefore depend on how a community chooses to use and manage its resource. The case is most evident in case of water as a resource where the ground water, is a private property of the farmers who own a well but exploitation of water by few can lead to adverse water tables of the entire region. This understanding roots the need of resource and use planning at the community level. Similarly, limited quantity of produce constrains the optimum price choice as well as increases the costs of marketing at an individual farm level.

This understanding has brought into focus the need for enhancing the role as well as responsibility of community institutions (informal/formal) in influencing agriculture choices of farmers, especially small and marginal farmers who face severe resource constraints. These institutions vary in their nature and functions. Some of the most common ones are Farmer Producer Organisations, Self-Help Groups, Panchayati Raj Institutions and informal community groups. Some of the primary functions that they perform across the value chain are listed below:

- Water budgeting and natural resource planning (Example: Hivre Bazaar)
- Technology choice and use (Example: Agromet Technology, Watershed Organisation Trust)
- Crop choice (Example: Timabktu's Millet Initiative)
- Input Supply (Ex: Non-Pesticide Management Shops, Centre for Sustainable Agriculture)
- Value addition and market linkages (Ex: NABARD's and SFAC's FPO programme)

Through this ***trialogue2047*** we aim to critically reflect on the current strategic direction of Indian agriculture sector with respect to the role of community institutions in making technology choices and other production choices and its impact in ensuring food security of the country & the livelihood security of a farmer in an environmentally sustainable and economically viable manner. Some of the questions that ***trialogue 2047*** will aim to address are:

- What role can local community institutions play in appropriate choice and adoption of agriculture technologies tested and promoted by the government?
- How can local community institutions be strengthened for influencing amongst their members to make agriculture production choices that are economically viable and environmentally sustainable in the long run?
- How can government scale up the formation and successful operations of farmer based community institutions?

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Speakers Profile

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Mr. M.V. Ashok is a Post Graduate in Agriculture from the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) New Delhi with qualifications in Financing Micro Enterprises from Reading University, UK, besides Financing of Agri Business Management from Cornell University, USA. Mr. Ashok has vast experience in development banking spanning 34 years, since 1980. Mr. Ashok has varied experience in dealing with local community institutions like NGOs, Village Watershed Committees, Village Planning Committees, Village Development Councils etc., and helping the villagers in designing and implementing sustainable rural development projects largely involving natural resource management projects. Mr. Ashok has headed two state Regional Offices of NABARD at Jharkhand and Maharashtra States besides serving in various other capacities in the States of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Corporate Office, Mumbai. He has extensive exposure to the development sector in several countries including Thailand, Kenya, China, Germany, England and US.

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Aruna is an alumni of Indian Institute of Management (Ahmedabad), and has 25 years of varied entrepreneurial and senior management experience primarily in the food, agriculture and retail sector. She has set up factories for processing spice oils and oleoresins, a food laboratory and import businesses for food products, as well as marketing and distribution channels for organic foods. She has been a consultant to Agri-products export promotion body of Government of Germany (CMA) and other reputed companies internationally. She has won the "Outstanding Women Entrepreneur" award for 2002, presented by the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. She has been the National Director, Cheshire Disability Trust implementing livelihood programs for persons with disability. In her current role as Executive Director, she is tasked with building up the organisational capabilities of IFHD to design and implement core programmes in greening economies.

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Sandip Das has been writing for *The Financial Express* since 2008. He has worked with mainstream media organisations such as - Press Trust of India, Business Standard, Down to Earth magazine & The Financial Express since last 14 years. He has received UNDP-Niti Ayog media fellowship on decentralised planning for 2015. In 2014, he received South Asia Climate Change Award (SACCA) media fellowship for writing features on impact of climate change on agriculture. He has also recipient of Panos fellowships (supported by Michael Bloomberg foundation) on reporting on issues concerning tobacco crop in 2010 and 2011. He travels extensively across the country and abroad for understanding critical challenges faced by agriculture sector. Currently, he is a Research Consultant at the Verghese Kurien Centre for Excellence, Institute of Rural Management (IRMA), Anand, Gujarat and is focusing on working of dairy cooperatives in the country.