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SUMMARIES OF GROUP DISCUSSION

Subject III

Rainfed Agriculture

Rapporteur: Dinesh K. Marothia*

The session began with a brief presentation of the Rapporteur's Report followed by detailed discussion on the various issues spelt out in the Report for in depth deliberations. A few more issues were also identified for focused discussion. The paper writers presented their papers and brought different perspectives from different parts of the country pertaining to rainfed agriculture. Based on the discussion and issues raised in the Rapporteur's Report the participants arrived at the following conclusions:

1. The National Rainfed Area Authority (NRAA) has recently been established to coordinate all the on-going programmes of the different Ministries of Government of India. NRAA is currently facing the initial administrative and technical problems to co-ordinate with different ministries, organisations and institutions. To make NRAA effective it is important to designate it as a co-ordinating body on the line of a State Planning Board functioning in different states of the country. NRAA may be assigned the responsibility to develop resource based planning with detailed activity mapping of various schemes and programmes currently being implemented by the different ministries. Funds from various ministries to the States for various programmes pertaining to rain fed area development may be channelised through NRAA. The organisational structure of the NRAA may be developed horizontally and vertically right from state to village panchayat (preferably a cluster of panchayats in thinly populated areas) level. NRAA has also to prepare a base document regarding alternative mechanisms to design coordination paths for effective implementation of different programmes through NGOs, SHGs, PRIs, ICAR institutions, ICRISAT and other CGIAR institutions, SAUs, KVKs and different wings of the agriculture and rural development state departments.
2. NRAA has a multi disciplinary team to develop comprehensive plan for rainfed agriculture development for different agro-climatic conditions of the

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country. The participants strongly felt that a full time Senior Agricultural Economist needs to be inducted to provide input on the policy issues. The participants further emphasised that NRAA may develop a network with all the institutions and organisations who are working for the development of rainfed areas in the country and outside. The participants felt that individuals within these organisations and institutions can be identified for such activities.

3. The participants felt that NRAA should immediately prepare the inventory of technologies developed by SAUs, ICAR and other institutions in crop, livestock, fisheries, agro-forestry, horticulture and other sectors. The inventory of technologies can be further classified and assessed for different agro-climatic zones to ensure effective replication of the appropriate technologies. For example, drip irrigation, even without subsidy (with proper water and power pricing) can be an economical as well as socially and environmental friendly technological intervention. Similarly, SRI can be promoted on a large scale with genetically potential varieties of paddy. Also there are a large number of medicinal and aromatic rice varieties which are being grown under organic conditions and have comparative export advantage. However, R & D for developing protocols for the organic certification of crops, Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFPs) and other enterprises can be intensified.
4. In most of the rainfed areas of the country a rich biodiversity is available with very vibrant and living traditional ecological knowledge. There is urgent need to synthesise the traditional ecological knowledge with the contemporary knowledge to transform rainfed areas. NRAA with other organisations, that are working in reconciling the system of indigenous ecological knowledge with modern scientific knowledge, can prepare a comprehensive document. Such document may help NRAA to design appropriate strategies for development of rainfed areas.
5. A large number of the policies pertaining to incentive structures, rural infrastructural development and life support system have been designed and implemented in the past in the rainfed areas. The group felt that most of these policies have been designed for the irrigated agriculture system and have little relevance for the rainfed agriculture. Also several policies have conflicting priorities. A hard look is required to reassess the relevance of these policies for the less favoured or disadvantageous or underprivileged regions of the country.
6. The rainfed areas have extensive common property resources (CPRs) (common grazing land, common water bodies, fresh water aquaculture, capture fisheries,

non-timber forest products, plant and animal genetic resources) and these have traditionally been managed under the common property regimes. These resources have degraded open access regime due to weak institutional arrangements and property rights regimes and ineffective local authority system. CPRs are blood vessels of the rainfed areas and significantly contribute to support the livelihoods of millions of the underprivileged and deprived people living therein. The participants felt that a comprehensive CPR management policy may be designed by the NRAA in collaboration with the individual experts working in various institutions and organisations including NGOs.

7. The rainfed areas have sizeable deprived rural population and the livelihood options are depleting day by day due to various physical, biological, socio-economic and political factors. Such factors are responsible for distress migration in a large number. These migrants largely belong to landless, small and marginal categories and have become environmental refugees due to degradation of natural resource base in their local settings. The participants felt that an integrated view must be taken to redesign the livelihood alternatives to minimise the distress migration.
8. Comprehensive District Agriculture Planning (C-DAP) has recently been initiated to achieve inclusive growth in the Eleventh Five Year Plan. Few states have initiated the process of C-DAP. However, to incorporate the perceptions of local people/stake holders, the planning process has to start from village level. Under PRIs the activity mapping including rainfed agriculture can be developed with capacity building assistance from NRAA and other local organisations.
9. ICTs must be effectively used for efficient implementation of rainfed area development schemes and projects. ICTs may also facilitate the easy access of the beneficiaries and other stakeholders to information relating to rainfed area development programmes and projects.