

Arriving at a Framework for Rainfed Farming Policies
23rd June, Workshop on Rainfed Farming

Why Invest in Rainfed Farming?

- Poverty geography of the country – vast area & population, both people & ecology at stake
- Specific vulnerabilities – fragile ecosystems, marginalization due to natural disadvantages and policy neglect
- Produces food (pulses, millets, cereals, oilseeds..) for the country – home of biodiversity
- Increasing Climate risks – compounding vulnerability, even paying price for somebody else's mistakes!
- Has direct bearing on national food security, HDI and national growth
- Rich, diverse and unique culture – at stake

Specific features:

- Low rainfall, high fluctuations // higher rainfall –low retention
- High diversity in land use / crop systems
- Dependence on multiple livelihoods (livestock / fisheries / agriculture/ commons)
- Strong inter-linkages among agriculture – livestock – commons – forests sustaining each other. Yet, the interdependence is being threatened due to degrading environment (declining soil fertility, depleting vegetation, pressure on groundwater) as also the changing lifestyles, changing aspirations...
- Poor soil organic matter
- Repository of farmer/ indigenous knowledge, including knowledge on coping mechanisms
- Significant contribution to the sector by women, yet neglected

Elements of interventions in Rainfed Farming

- Better management of natural resources – on and off farm (in situ rainwater conservation, soil health improvement, augmenting biomass)
- Promote diversified crop/ farm systems & diversified livelihoods
- Protect and increase Millets in food basket
- Due space for livestock (importantly non-dairy livestock)
- Moisture management is critical
- Protective/ critical irrigation – water provides security/ minimizes risks
- Conjunctive use of surface and ground water & shallow and deeper aquifers
- Key investments in **Soil health** (look beyond conservation)
- **Biomass** is the key
- Minimize risks through a combination measures not just insurance.
- Focus on net-incomes
- Harness indigenous knowledge, nurture community based institutions and people's initiatives important
- Decentralised, Stronger and resilient support systems, in the hands of communities
- Inclusive R & D approach (people, ecology & technology)
- Markets for rainfed produce – millets, pulses, oilseeds, forest/commons produce, meat, organic markets