
Proceedings of the workshop

Evolving an Alternative Paradigm for Seeds Systems for Rainfed Agriculture

Revitalizing Rainfed Agriculture
(RRA) network

27th – 28th, January 2011
ICECD Campus, Bopal, Ahmedabad

Organized by:

Satvik : Promoting Ecological Farming
Bhuj - Kutch (Gujarat)

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Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture Network

**Evolving an Alternative Paradigm for Seeds Systems for
Rainfed Agriculture**

27-28th January, 2011, ICECD Campus, Bopal, Ahmedabad, Gujarat

Evolving appropriate Seed Systems for meeting the specific requirements / challenges of rainfed agriculture is chosen as a core thematic area for action-research and advocacy by the Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture Network. A two-day workshop was organized at Ahmedabad to specifically discuss issues around seed systems for rainfed areas and also to chalk out advocacy issues and pilot programmes to be taken up by the network. Satvik has anchored the workshop. The background discussion note, programme schedule and the list of participants are attached as Annexures. The thirty two participants represented civil society organizations having long-standing experience in the subject, scientists from ICAR (including retired scientists), persons representing National Seeds Corporation and Agriculture Department and private sector.

DAY ONE

**27TH JANUARY, 2011
(THURSDAY)**

The workshop started with an overview of the Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture (RRA) Network and various initiatives taken up by the network, presented by A. Ravindra. Shailesh Vyas presented the processes that have led to the workshop and the detailed objectives of the workshop. The group activity and the expectations from it were introduced by A.V. Balasubramanian. With this brief introductory session participants deliberated in small groups on the themes of a) research priorities for an appropriate seed system b) production and distribution issues and c) alternate relevant experiences on the theme with several partners in the seed sector, with a focus on rainfed areas. Each group was asked to report back in plenary in the following structure:

- Identification of needs specific to rainfed areas
- Clear articulation of needs that are not being met by the existing seed systems
- What are the experiences in meeting these needs and a description of the current efforts
- What are the new efforts that are proposed, where can they be tried and who can be involved in them

The groups carried out discussions among themselves. The plenary re-convened at 3 pm which was chaired by Dr. Vasant Saberwal. Each group reported their discussions and findings in the plenary.

Group – I:

Overview of the Seed Certification Agencies and its processes:

1. Overview of the Seed Certification Agencies and its processes:

- Agencies only certify notified and released varieties either released or recommended by CVRC or SVRC (Central or State Variety Release Committee);
- Breeders can only produce the breeder seeds;
- Farmers own varieties cannot go into formal certification;
- Only 10% of the total seed requirement is produced and certified by the formal system

- Certification process – registration, verification of the sources of the parent seed, isolation, rouging, inspection, Growing Out Test (GOT), threshing, sealing, sampling, lab test, other distinguishable varieties (ODV), permissible limits, processing, tagging and marketing;
- The data for the seed is available on *seednet* of ICAR a web based database (<http://seednet.gov.in>)
- The small and marginal farmers aspire to use new seeds;
- What are the government subsidies – most of these subsidies were used by the large farmers, small and marginal farmers fail to avail these subsidies;
- Some of the subsidies available for seed production are - National Food Security Mission - Wheat (Rs.5/-), Pulse (Rs.12/-), ISOPAM (Cultivation of Red Oil palm Scheme),

2. Whether the seeds required for rainfed agriculture are adequately produced, available in time and at affordable cost?

Issues:

- The rainfed areas in the country have by and large wider diversity of the crops ranging from cereals like rice and wheat to , coarse millets like maize, and sorghum, minor millets, pulses and oilseeds, fiber and many underutilized crops;
- The cropping systems are generally under subsistence farming, most of the crops grown are for self consumption,
- Distress selling is more prominent in most cases or the crops which are consumed directly by the farmers;
- Farm saved seeds provides the bulk of the seed requirements in these areas;
- Cultivar Replacement Rate (CRR) is very poor, old obsolete varieties and in most cases the land races are still prominent and popular among the farmers;
- Seed Replacement Rate (SRR) is far below the state and national average;
- The formal governmental agencies either produce very little or none of the seeds and varieties preferred by the growers;
- Private seed industry is not very interested in such crop varieties and poor purchasing power of the growers do not attract them either;
- Availability of the right varieties, preferred by the growers is limited, little or no research is undertaken to provide better and bigger basket of choice to the growers;

3. What are the challenges in production of seeds for rainfed agriculture including addressing contingency situations?

Issues:

- Smaller holdings, subsistence nature, low external input use and poor investments are the key issues restricting the seed production program;
- Area restrictions imposed by the seed certification agencies and the seed production organizations do not permit the small holders to get into the seed production program;
- Seed quality assurance other than official certification standards are not in vogue, truthfully labeled seeds are not encouraged;
- These areas frequently suffer drought or some other natural vagaries and de-motivates growers, seed production agencies are averse to entering such high risk areas and normally prefer to work on the peripheries where they find better production conditions;
- Contingencies in the traditional farming systems and the cropping systems were not just to maintain the extra buffer stock, but the contingent crops, varieties besides the contingent extra buffer stock;

4. What are the changes required in the government system and policy to ease constraint and/or offer improvement? (covering areas of notification of varieties, certification, seed subsidy etc.)

Issues:

- Subsidies are only allowed on the larger formal recommendation domain, new and notified varieties, released by the governmental either state or central - hence most of the farmer preferred varieties remain out of the realm of the subsidies;
- The new seed bill in the offing provides no reprieve to such situations,
- Certification agencies are only interested in the principal crops like rice and wheat, private seed industry only looks for the profit where in low volume high value seeds, hybrids, GM and other advance types appear on the top of their priorities;

Recommendation:

- The farmers' seed producer organisations need to be incorporated in the rainfed areas, the poor and small - marginal farmers may become the shareholders
- These organizations should be encouraged to produce the seeds of the farmer preferred crops, varieties;
- Bench marking the SRR for farmer preferred crops;

- Use land races, involving land races in the formal seed supply systems, go for cleaning of the land races through scientific and yet participatory plant breeding processes in consultation with formal research systems and recognize them, some kind of state – aid to “do so” (not necessarily the subsidies);
- Including local crops in the PDS – may have a chain reaction;
- Develop separate and more localized and diversified seed standards, alternate seed certification like Growers Group Certification (GGC) with Internal Control System, Participatory Guarantee System (similar to the organic certification)
- Create local professionals and pool of local human resources, create better infrastructure and logistical support, Special attention to micro – stock – hypothecation, to remunerate for seed stock retention period;
- Economy of scale and proliferation of activities as farmer collectives, create, nurture the viable institutions;
- Pushing National Food Security Mission (NFSM), Rashtriya Krishi Vigyan Yojana (RKVY), Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA), National Rainfed Area Authority (NRAA) to include rainfed seed systems development in their programmatic intervention, repackage “Seed Village Concept” of NSC and GOI;
- Seed production insurance, VAT tax and Service Tax are also important issues;

Group – II:

Research Priorities for Appropriate Seed Systems in the Context of Rainfed Agriculture

The five members of the group namely - Dr. S.R. Maloo, Dr. M. V. Channabyre Gowda, Dr. S. N. Goyal, Dr. Manoj Gautam and Dr. A. R. Raju made presentations. The other members present were – Balu, Dr. Kaustav and S. Chandan. The following is a summary of the discussion.

- The general situation today is that seeds are being produced from various sources including – farmers / ICAR / SAUs / KVKs / State government / Private industry and to a certain extent by NGOs – SHGs or CBOs or institutions set up by them
- One of the most critical gaps that is being felt is that the needs of a large variety of varied eco systems are not being addressed – especially those that may be considered as harsh or less fertile areas.

- It was also felt by some scientists involved with the ICAR system that there are cases where a large amount of seeds are produced but the off take is very poor and these seeds are – “not moving”.

POSSIBLE ACTIONS THAT MAY BE TAKEN

1. ICAR must survey each agro eco system and come up with a detailed report which on the one hand will be an atlas of available seeds and on the other hand would also make an assessment of the requirements from the area
2. There was one perception (not shared by all) that the ICAR / SAU system produces satisfactory source material in the form of breeder seeds and that it is the State governments that fail in multiplying and outreach. However, it was also felt by others that there is no real participation of farmers in the selection of varieties that are taken up for production and correction is needed at this level.
3. The current system of seed production is heavily weighted in favour of hybrid seeds. There needs to be a definite shift of emphasis so that there may be development of traditional paddy varieties.
4. ICAR must recognize the informal seed system which still caters to a large section of local needs. Active intervention and support may be required at this level. For example, land races that belong to an area may be multiplied and distributed repeatedly in the locality with loss of seed vigour because of poor seed replacement rate and the production of seeds under sub-optimal conditions. There can be positive interventions in this situation.
5. The research must also actively consider and include the extant local varieties, the role that can be played by them and how they can be improved.
6. Specifically in the case of cotton it was mentioned that there is an alarming decline in the indigenous varieties that are cultivated and even those that have to be cultivated as a legal requirement accompanying GM crops is not being met. There is a need to specifically nurture and encourage indigenous varieties.
7. With respect to the kind of research the current scenario differs based on the kind of seeds and sometimes even within the broad category there are differences. For example, in the situation with respect to millets, there are differences in the approach and performance between the major millets and small millets.
8. Differences exist with respect to the current status based on the kind of seeds (e.g. Millets and Small millets)
9. Who decides the policy on seeds and at what level should the decision be influenced is not quite clear. Recently when the need for working on seeds relevant to dryland areas was emphasized in a meeting the DDG retorted with the question – “Who is stopping you?” It is possible that there is nothing in the policy framework that is actually stopping anyone from taking up work on this topic. However, it is also a fact that these are not considered and

recognized as fashionable / hot areas to work on, with the result that this kind of work does not lead to publications and recognition by way of promotions.

DIFFERENCES IN VIEWPOINTS

There were sharply divided opinions on the following two topics and we are mainly recording the differences here recognizing the need to look at this in detail.

1. The relative role of the state and the central agencies

The ICAR - Agricultural Universities – KVK system has the responsibility to select the seeds and produce them at the level of nuclear and breeder seeds. After this, the responsibility of large-scale multiplication, production and distribution at a farmers level rests with the state government. There was one view that the problem of non-availability of seeds is entirely due to the failure of multiplication and distribution of the seeds at the farmers level by the state. However there was also a different view to the effect that the system was flawed at the level of the basic seeds that were chosen for work by ICAR – SAU – KVK because of the non involvement of farmers at the level of varietal choice.

2. Public Private partnership

Recently the Government of Rajasthan had initiated a public private partnership in the area of seeds involving state agricultural universities, the government and some private seed companies. There was a strong public concern about the agreement due to which the implementation has been put on hold and a committee is reviewing it. The group recognized that there is a need to investigate the merits of public private partnership and take a close look at those that are being mooted or are already operational.

Group – III:

Alternate Experience on Seed

- Identification of the needs
 - Rainfed areas are diverse, complex and risk prone, hence the solutions should be proposed keeping this reality in mind.
 - Biodiversity is rapidly decreasing, therefore it's restoration is of urgent need.
 - Successful experiences available but in isolation. There is a need to document, upscale and mainstream such experiences.
 - Documentation of traditional seed systems.

- Needs not being addressed
 - Existing delivery mechanism is based on green revolution experience hence it is irrelevant and inadequate for addressing diversified needs.
 - Emphasis on centralised system and bias towards multi-nationals seeds.
 - No space for alternate decentralised support systems
 - No emphasis on contingency seed supply systems.
 - Research bypassing the specific needs of rainfed farmers.
 - No emphasis on notification of indigenous and farmer bred varieties.
 - Big gap between demand and supply of suitable seeds for rainfed agriculture

- Experience and current efforts
 - CIKS: indigenous seed conservation and bio-diversity maintenance. Multiplication of indigenous and mainstream seeds-promoted through community managed seed banks-organic and certified seeds
 - Chetna Organic: Multi location varietal trials, demonstrations, participatory hybrid cotton seed production. Promotion of mixed crops and convergence with research and development departments.
 - SAHAJA SAMRUDHA: Promotion of millets based multi cropping systems, revival of seed diversity, popularization of farmer bred varieties through seed savers groups.
 - SEVA MANDIR: Community varietal testing pilots ,multiplication and promotion through seed banks in collaboration with research and development institutions. capturing and characterizing plant, animal and fish bio-diversity.
 - CSA: Network of community seed banks, documentation on seeds, participatory plant breeding, varietal production and marketing through seed co-operatives, convergence with research and development organizations.
 - WASSAN: Cluster level seed banks through federation of women SHGs, management aspects related to seed banks, convergence with research and development organizations.
 - SPS: Participatory varietal testing, seeds multiplication through SHGs, procurement and distribution to farmers in convergence with research institutes.

- Proposed Efforts
 - Consolidation of learning from successful experiences for sharing, upscaling and advocacy for policy reforms .
 - Identifying pilots for addressing gaps listed.

Clarifications were sought by participants on specific issues. Later Ravindra has facilitated a discussion on understanding gaps and requirements. In this session some of the following issues were discussed:

- What are the problems related to large numbers of farmers using farm-saved seeds in rainfed areas and , and why is it needed a change?.
- How alternate group based seed certification systems such as Participatory Guarantee System being followed in organic agriculture are useful?
- If existing system of notifying variety is only looking at parameters of high productivity, how a parameter like varieties performance in harsh conditions and diverse locations can simultaneously be addressed by the same system?
- How the seed village scheme be repackaged in a way appropriate to the rainfed situation?
- How to include the concerns of productivity and stability in harsh conditions such as marginal soils into a research system that is designed to target hybrids giving high productivity in high input situations?
- In some cases where the research has this orientation, how to address the issues of supply?
- How farmers, their knowledge and preferences occupy a central stage in seed research – which is so important for the diverse rainfed areas?
- Why the seed replacement is important and where is it required?
- Need to understand the requirement of micro hypothecation, if the seed is produced by farmer at the village level to raise financial resources.
- Need to understand taxation system related to seed.

DAY TWO

**28TH JANUARY, 2011
(FRIDAY)**

The second day of the workshop was mainly centered around developing a framework and program for advocacy for the RRA network to further the agenda of developing appropriate seed systems for rainfed areas. The discussions are mainly around developing a) an advocacy program and b) action-research program in practically evolving the desired seed systems on ground across select locations in the country. The deliberations were facilitated by A.V. Balasubramanian and A. Ravindra

The morning programme started with a presentation by a special representative from the seed industry. This was then followed by a discussion regarding the frame work for future action.

Dr. P. P. Zaveri is the CEO and Proprietor, Biogene Agrotech based in Gujarat. He was formerly a scientist working with the ICAR and hence had an excellent overview of the ICAR system. He made a presentation regarding the overall seed scenario and what is being done by the private seed industry with focus on Gujarat. He also expressed that it would be possible to evolve a meaningful partnership between the seed industry on the one hand and local communities and farmers groups who can tie up with them for production and sale of quality seeds.

FRAMEWORK FOR FUTURE ACTION

The deliberations led to the following plan of action to be initiated in three major areas:

1. Developing the rationale for differentiated seed system for rainfed areas:

The need to articulate the reason why rainfed areas require a different seed system has come out sharply in the discussions. Currently various partners across the country have a good understanding about the need for an appropriate seed system based on their rich field work and limited engagement with the state and the universities. But this understanding needs to be articulated and spelt out rigorously with proper databases and research. Such an effort may produce a working paper which can be a reference document on the theme for various initiatives of RRA network on the theme. This working paper will also help in advocacy- for the Planning Commission to look seriously into this need and the potential contribution of such a seed system specially developed for rainfed areas.

2. Area based approach

A comprehensive and relevant seed system needs to be evolved on an area basis integrating the mainstream institutions, community organizations and private sector. Such a seed system cannot sustain on its own without the support from government as it involves maintaining buffer seeds (of diverse crops and varieties, and of different contingent crops) and seeds of not much commercial value. An area approach to development of such seed systems in different agro-climatic zones is therefore, proposed in the deliberations. RRA needs to commence pilot programmes in which there can be a comprehensive plan for a relevant seed system in an area of the size of at least one block in various agro-climatic zones in Rainfed areas. Such a pilot program will be designed based on a synthesis all field experiences in the civil society and research organizations, and

within the mainstream. Several of these experiences were looked into by the Group III.

3. Advocacy

There is a need to define the strategy of advocacy in terms of – defining the problem areas and outlining options available (drawn from the already existing experiences), which are the groups or organizations to be influenced in terms of policy and what specific changes are being planned so that advocacy has a clear purpose and direction.

Highlighting the strengths of an advocacy strategy where the government (targets of advocacy) being part of the process to start with (rather than they listening to the end-outputs), Sandeep Virmani proposed that RRA network to take up a larger initiative in one area within the mainstream and establish the merit of the case. Agreeing to the proposition, the group felt that opportunities for the same will be explored in course of time.

Responding to the suggestion from Bharati and Shailesh, the group also felt the need for clearly developing a statement of purpose for the entire initiative.

The group decided to take up the above three initiatives from the RRA network.

PLAN FOR FOLLOW UP

Based on all the above discussions, the following was accepted as a framework for the follow up action.

1. Evolving a rationale for an appropriate seed system for rainfed areas

It was decided that a suitable Consultant (one or two persons) should be identified to take this up as a time bound assignment so that we may have a well researched and clearly articulated document on this subject covering the seed sector in general with a prominent section relating to research, with a focus on rainfed areas. It was felt that it would be good if the person is familiar with the ICAR system and also various alternatives.. It was decided that the terms of reference and the identification of a suitable resource person should be completed by the end of February after which the report can be generated over a period of three months (by the end of May 2011).

2. Area based pilots

It was decided that pilot programmes on seeds can be launched in select areas across agro-climatic regions. Some of the general features that were agreed upon are listed below –

- a. The pilot should make an assessment of the seed systems available in the area and their performance with respect to the needs of rainfed agriculture in the area.. Based on this a model would be developed for meeting all these requirements through multiple sources including – farmers, community based efforts, government and private industry. Synthesis of existing experiences will feed into the design.
- b. Based on the preliminary work, a meeting would be held to spell out a plan of action that is developed. The refined plan would then be taken up for implementation.
- c. It was agreed that such a programme must have robust linkages or ideally be embedded in efforts that are being undertaken by the state and central government (and research institutions) of that area.
- d. The actual number of pilots would depend on – location of partners who are active and available, geographical areas that need to be covered and partly on the funding.
- e. Wherever possible, synergies will be sought between these pilots and pilots that are already underway or being planned by other thematic groups such as – soil fertility, water, millets etc.

3. Advocacy strategy

It was decided that an advocacy strategy would be spelt out in a meeting that may be held five to six months from now building on the progress that has been made under sections under the previous two components.

WORKING GROUP ON SEEDS

It was decided that in order to take these efforts forward a small working group would be constituted within RRA network and the following were agreed upon as members of the committee through consensus.

1. Mr. A. V. Balasubramanian, CIKS, Chennai (Convener)
2. Mr. Shailesh Vyas (Satvik, Gujarat)
3. Dr. Arun R Joshi, NRLM, Madhya Pradesh)
4. Mr. G. Krishna Prasad (Sahaja Samrudha, Karnataka)
5. Mr. A. Ravindra / Dr. N.K. Sanghi (WASSAN, Secunderabad) (from the Secretariat)

ANNEXURE - 1

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ANNEXURE - 2

BACKGROUND NOTE

Draft Note for Discussion on Seed Systems for Rainfed Areas

RRA network - Meeting on 27-28th, January

*Venue : International Centre for Entrepreneurship and Career Development
(ICECD), E-1/41, Sterling City, Bopal, Ahmedabad*

Revitalizing Rainfed Agriculture network works toward evolving and advocating for appropriate and adequate public investments in revitalising agriculture (including livestock and fisheries) in rainfed areas.

The initiative on evolving appropriate seed systems for rainfed areas, anchored by Satvik is evolving. Purpose of the meeting on 27-28th is to conceptualize a programmatic action for evolving an advocacy agenda on evolving appropriate seed systems for rainfed areas. It draws upon the earlier discussions, exchange from mails and from various experiences. It is expected that the meeting will lead to a road map for action on the subject.

The rainfed areas face specific challenges that impose specific requirements of a seed system. These challenges are:

- **Weather aberrations** particularly during the onset of monsoons requiring repeat sowing and contingency crops.
- Uncertainty in proper distribution of rainfall during the season also requires a diversified crop system to sustain.
- Loss of crop in an abnormal year puts enormous pressure in the subsequent season for seed.
- Timeliness of seed availability is crucial as the sowing-window available in rainfed agriculture is very small.
All these constraints require maintenance of seed buffers.
- **Marginal landscapes-** a large part of the rainfed areas is with marginal lands (undulations, low soil depth, stoniness, soil salinization etc.) that requires varieties that survive these constraints rather than those that respond the most in given best resource endowments
- The agriculture economies in these regions are not entirely commercial and the **penetration of markets is low.**
- Seed industry also do not produce seed that is difficult to handle (groundnut for e.g.), seed of self-pollinated crops and seed that do not generate much profits but yet crucial.

- The rainfed areas are also a repository of a diverse genetic material and traditional seeds selected specially for the local situations over time. As these indigenous seeds are not officially notified, their multiplication and supply through formal channels is constrained.
- While **diversification is the key to survival** in rainfed areas, the seed industry provides for only specific crops and varieties/ hybrids. Also, the needs of green manure crops etc., are not much recognized.
- In several situations, rainfed agriculture **sustains families in their food requirements**; various millets, pulses and oilseed crops that are not the mandate of markets or public sector seed systems often are very important for food and nutrition security.
- **Seed cost** is an important aspect considering the low levels of commercialization of agriculture in several rainfed areas.
- Agriculture in rainfed areas is **integrated into the livestock systems...** fodder becomes crucial component of agriculture; appropriate fodder species or dual varieties that yield good fodder and grain are not part of the mandate of formal research system.

Modeled to steer the intensive agriculture programs, the conventional seed system in India is mostly evolved to respond best to intensive inputs in well-endowed areas. Seed markets are evolved / evolving around specific crops in commercial locations. Not much of a priority of either of public or organized private seed systems, seed continue to be a constraint in rainfed agriculture. The public investments in agriculture research and extension relevant for rainfed establishing appropriate seed systems are also meager. Much of the seed requirements are met through farmer saved seed, development of which does not figure in official strategies.

In last couple of decades, systems have relied on seed market to ease constraints. Especially where low price seed is required in large quantity (case of majority of rainfed crops) and in self-pollinated crops market has not offered big relief. Formal supply of seed through Agriculture Department and Seed Village Program has been the major plank in the public sector seed systems in addition to regulation of seed industry. In the informal sector, farmer saved seed and seed supplied by farmer-entrepreneurs constitute significant chunk of the total seed consumption. Seed banks have been a dominant mode of seed intervention in the civil society organizations. Analysis of these systems will provide good insights into developing an appropriate seed system for rainfed areas and to evolve and advocate relevant policies.

The need is therefore, to look into the specific requirements of 'seed' in rainfed situations, evolve appropriate architecture of a seed system and to advocate for a comprehensive public investment on the same. The RRA initiative on '**Seed**

Systems for Rainfed Areas' is intended for this purpose. Several experiences across the country may provide good insight into this exercise.

The two day meeting on Seed Systems Initiative aims at developing an advocacy program in the above lines. The advocacy program comprises of conceptualizing an appropriate seed system for rainfed areas (based on the existing experiences) and also, to generate field experiences on the same. Specifically the meeting intends to work around the following four basic questions:

1. What are the specificities for an appropriate seed system for rainfed areas?
2. What are the different approaches (in public sector, organized and informal private sectors and community based) for establishing appropriate seed systems? (based on the existing experiences)
3. What public investments are required? Where? And what should be the role of government? What policy shifts are required?
4. Whether we can generate working experience (preferably, within or in collaboration with the mainstream players)? These can be the pilot initiatives to be tried on ground.

To do so work can be thematically categorized in following manner based on which pilot on seed can be developed.

Assessing and setting research priorities:

Origin of National Research and Extension System is closely linked with Green Revolution. Vibrancy of system can be felt in irrigated agriculture but the same is missing when it comes to rainfed agriculture.

- Whether the seed requirements of rainfed agriculture adequately reflected in the public sector agriculture research or in the private sector?
- What are the changes required in the mainstream agriculture research and extension system (related to seed) to contribute effectively to improvement in rainfed agriculture? Also, how the approaches of participatory plant breeding, conservation and improvement of indigenous varieties figure in mainstream research?

How to arrive at the above? What should be the program of RRA in such advocacy process?

Production and distribution of appropriate Seeds:

Seed market operates on demand and operational viability; on this account several of the requirements of rainfed agriculture can not be met by market alone. The public sector is also not able to cater to the requirements as detailed

above. Is there a role for community level institutions in establishing a better seed system for rainfed agriculture?

What could be an appropriate mix of public, organized and informal private sector and community based approaches? What does the experience in the field so far, suggest? What role does government play in establishing and strengthening such a system? What shifts are needed in the governance systems?

Appropriate architecture of community institutions (and their link with Gram Panchayats), appropriate level at which such institutional arrangements can be made, the modalities of forming and strengthening them, their linkages with seed industry and public sector research institutions, investment requirements etc., are the conceptual issues that need to be worked out based on existing experiences. More important, is the issue of how to recognize the community level institutions in terms of wedging them into the overall agriculture administration, establishing seed certification procedures, restructuring the seed-subsidy etc., are to be worked out. The issue of long-term sustainability is crucial.

Issues of developing required decentralized infrastructure and knowledge support systems in support of a vibrant seed support system for rainfed agriculture and the investment requirements of the same need to be assessed.

Addressing Contingency Situation:

In one way even today rainfed farming is still considered as gamble in monsoon. If farmer has sown one crop seed and the rain has failed, in that situation farmer has to implement his/her contingency plan. Good contingency plan should ensure seed of various crops for different sowing situation and should ensure the availability of same for the next year.

Traditional/community system of addressing contingency situation is fast disappearing. Community participation in Government system of contingency planning and its implementation is missing. This needs to be strengthened by addressing following issues...

- How rainfed farmers are presently handling contingency situation?
- In the absence of appropriate system of handling contingency situation, what kind of loss farmers are facing?
- What improvement in existing system is required?
- What should be the scale of contingency plan – community or state? OR Upto certain scale activity can be handled by Community and After that State may have active role?

- Who will help community to evolve and implement appropriate contingency plan and required preparations?
- How community can ensure the seed material for contingency situation?
- Who will produce seed? Who will store it? What about viability of seed?
- What roles can the organized private and public sector systems can play?

What are the existing programs and investments of state and central governments? To what extent they are amenable for changes? Whether the above concerns can be integrated into the existing programs? How to evolve comprehensive new programs?

Is there a need for RRA to conceptualize and develop field experience? If yes, how?

Can RRA partner with mainstream institutions/ programs in evolving such experience? What could be the advocacy initiative?

Though ambitious, the meeting on 27-28th aims to evolve a road map for an RRA advocacy initiative on evolving an appropriate seed support system for rainfed agriculture.

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