

Recommendations of Working Group No.1
(AGRICULTURE and ALLIED SECTORS, ANIMAL HUSBANDRY &
VETERINARY, WATER RESOURCES & IRRIGATION, HORTICULTURE,
FISHERIES, SOIL CONSERVATION, CO-OPERATION)

The Meghalaya State Planning Board Working Group No.1 covering Agriculture and Allied sectors, Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, Water Resources & Irrigation, Horticulture, Fisheries, Soil Conservation and Co-operation met at 3.00 PM on Saturday 4th October 2008, in Hotel Pinewood, Shillong. The following members were present:

1. Shri Mihsalan Suchiang - Deputy Chairman, Meghalaya State Planning Board
2. Shri Davy K. Manavalan - Honorary Member, Meghalaya State Planning Board
3. Shri V.S. Oberoi - Agricultural Production Commissioner
4. Dr. R.B. Dympep - Joint Director, Agriculture and Team
5. Dr. C.O. Rangad - Director, Horticulture and Team

Background

The Department of Agriculture is an integrated entity comprising of the Agriculture, Horticulture and Irrigation sub-sectors. The main focus of the agriculture sub-sector is to bridge the gap on food grain production to ensure the State's overall food security. In the process the department formulates and implements farmer-oriented schemes towards food security, livelihood improvement, poverty alleviation and overall balanced economic development of the farming community.

The following recommendations were made by the working group:

AGRICULTURE

1. Intervention to reduce top soil reduction. This requires in depth hydrological studies involving experts in this scientific field.
2. Focus on implementation of the Rashtriya Krishi Vikash Yojana (RKVY) or National Agricultural Development Programme (NADP). For this preparation of District Agriculture Plans (DAPs) is an integral part of this focus.

3. State Land Use Board needs to be strengthened.
4. Effective coordination between ICAR and the State government is necessary. This will create more linkages with the farmers at different agro-climatic regions.
5. Research organizations in the State (ICAR) should play a crucial role in maintaining and preserving local germplasm of better characteristics and adaptability.
6. Research laboratories in the State should be strengthened in terms of infrastructure and skill development.
7. Financial institutions like NABARD should play an active role to strengthen credit support.
8. Crop insurance should be extended to cover more crops of major importance in the State.
9. With the global climate changes having significant impact in the State, crop forecasting is fast becoming vital to enable farmers take necessary steps to avoid crop losses due to adverse climatic conditions. Meteorological support from the ICAR research complex, Umiam and the North Eastern Space Application Centre (NESAC), Umiam are crucial to agriculture activities.
10. Timely supply of inputs (seed materials) to the farmers is vital for better crop production and productivity. There is need to introduce the seed village concept with authentic certification. The State needs to set up a State Seed Certifying Agency.
11. MeCOFED needs to be strengthened to ensure that the constant supply of fertilizers is not hampered.
12. There is a need to upscale the skills and knowledge of available manpower in the Agriculture department. The goal of attaining food security in the State depends largely on the technological applications in crop production.
13. Integrated Pest Management, Integrated Nutrient Management including documentation of Indigenous Technological Knowledge are important systems to be adopted in the agriculture development of the State.
14. Loopholes in the State land tenure system need to be addressed to solve constraints in overall agricultural development.

15. Land reclamation of cultivable wasteland and utilization of fallow land will go a long way in area expansion under crop cultivation with multiple cropping and introduction of high yielding varieties.
16. Farmers training and dissemination of updated knowledge are important. Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) need to be set up in all the districts of the State.
17. Agricultural extension is weak in the State. Support to extension reforms need to be given utmost importance. Agricultural Technological Management Agencies (ATMAs) should be established in all the districts of the State.
18. The present fund allocation in the agriculture sub-sector appears to be too meager, it works out to approximately two per cent of the total State Plan Budget. Increase in Plan allocation under the sector is highly recommended.

HORTICULTURE

1. Post harvest management
 - a) Creation of infrastructure to reduce post harvest losses and to add value to the produce through proper grading, packaging, processing etc.
 - b) Providing adequate connectivity for the collection, grading and processing of the produce.
 - c) Creation of forward linkages in the form of market surveys, avenues and proper market tie-ups.
2. Scaling up of production - Crops need to be taken up on a commercial basis by upscaling entrepreneurship.
3. Financial autonomy - Systems need to be evolved for financial autonomy of enterprises by upgrading administrative and operating systems especially in areas where PPP mode has been/will be undertaken. A commercial unit cannot run on departmental sanctions.
4. Capacity building
 - a) Capacity building at various levels is imperative – from the farmer/entrepreneur to the administrator/official level.

- b) There is need to set up institutes to cater to the specific needs of the State. The ICAR research station, Umiam needs to address local needs and to incorporate the “Land to Lab” component in their “Lab to Land” programmes.
- c) A training needs assessment (TNA) exercise is imperative to ascertain the human resource development (HRD) requirements of the State.
5. Outsourcing - Expertise in specific areas identified should be outsourced to achieve maximum mileage of the available resources.
6. Credit flow - Credit linkages (forward and backward) are very low to non-existent in this sub-sector. Financial institutions should appoint more field officers and link with other institutions such National Horticulture Board (NHB), North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd. (NEDFi) to ensure a boost in commercialization.
7. Crop insurance - To ensure that farmers/financial institutions are encouraged to enter into commercial ventures crop insurance needs to be propagated.
8. Database - The creation of a vibrant database is vital in the planning process. This may be brought about by dovetailing the present efforts of the State with outsourced professional services as well as those of remote sensing that could be entrusted to the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) through NESAC.
9. Allocation of funds - Horticulture receives less than 0.5% of the plan budget allocation. Plan funds for this sector should be upscaled to bring about the proposed changes in the horticulture sector.

IRRIGATION

1. There is need to set up more irrigation projects.
2. Irrigation projects once completed should be maintained through the participatory irrigation management programme which involves the beneficiaries.
3. Improvement and modernization of old projects should be taken up on priority.
4. Upscale the skills and knowledge of available manpower in the irrigation sector. There is need to acquire latest tools and equipment for survey and investigation, quality control and monitoring.

5. There is need to enhance water retention through construction of rain water harvesting structures, check dams, dug well etc.
6. Government should come out with specific policy to check unscientific mining and its effect on streams.
7. There is need to enhance budget allocation to meet the requirements and commitments of this sub-sector.

ANIMAL HUSBANDRY AND VETERINARY

1. Veterinary service and animal health - The existing veterinary dispensaries (74 nos.) and veterinary aid centres (59 nos.) are inadequate to meet the medical requirements of livestock and poultry. There is need to set up additional veterinary dispensaries and veterinary aid centres under the 11th Plan.
2. Cattle development - The existing artificial insemination network in the State needs to be strengthened. All veterinary institutions in the State need to be equipped with artificial insemination facilities.
3. Poultry development - People's participation (educated unemployed youth and general farmers) in poultry production is crucial to sustaining self sufficiency. Rural cluster approach on poultry development could also be aggressively taken up.
4. Sheep and goat development - Incentives could be given to farmers to encourage sheep and goat rearing and to supplement meat production in the State.
5. Piggery development - People's participation (educated unemployed youth and general farmers) in pig rearing is crucial to mitigating the shortfall and to achieve self sufficiency. Rural cluster approach on piggery development could also be aggressively taken up.
6. Feed and Fodder development - Participation of farmers in cultivating and producing feed ingredients (maize, soya bean, ground nut) in a commercial way should be encouraged. Transport subsidy (with central assistance) for supply of feed ingredients may also be considered. Setting up of Livestock and Poultry Development Board may also be considered.

7. Research, Education and Training - Vocational Training Centres should be set up in every district to impart necessary training to farmers on breeding, feeding, management, disease control etc. Capacity building for technical officers and staff should be organized both within and outside the country. This will enable them to keep abreast with new developments. Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratories should be set up in all district headquarters.
8. Dairy development - Incentives could be given to farmers to encourage dairy farming in order to increase milk production in the State.

The WG Meeting ended with a vote-of-thanks from the Chair.

Mihsalan Suchiang

Chairman, Working Group No. 1

Meghalaya State Planning Board