

Minutes of the joint workshop of NCRC and Department of Agriculture for need assessment & planning in agriculture for Tsunami affected villages.

On: 06.08.05 at Collectorate Main conference Hall, Nagapattinam.

The NGO Co-ordination & Resource Centre (NCRC) and the Department of Agriculture (DoA) had jointly organized a workshop with the participation of Department of Horticulture, Department of Animal Husbandry, Panchayat presidents and farmers in the Tsunami affected Villages. More than 50 participants representing various panchayats and farmers from affected villages attended the workshop. The District Collector, Dr.J. Radha Krishnan, NCRC Steering Committee Member Mr.Vivekanandan and Ms. Annie George, CEO, NCRC were among the participants.

The workshop comprised of 3 sessions. The first session began with the opening addresses by the Agriculture Department and the line of departments on the status and plans for the Tsunami Rehabilitation, the second as an open forum discussion and the final session was meant for consolidation by the department and NCRC.

Mr. Chandrasekharan, the sector team leader for livelihood, NCRC welcomed the delegates and introduced the dignitaries to the gathering.

Mr. Muthuvel, Joint Director of Agriculture, while addressing the gathering said that the necessity of such a workshop is to bring out the need assessment and planning in agriculture sector in the Tsunami affected areas. He pointed that the Agriculture Department is planning to offer Rs 12,500 per hectare for three years to the affected farmers to assist reclamation of lands. The department had also formed near about 295 self-help groups members each of 20 from the affected villages to assist the reclamation process.

Mr. Chandrahassan, Horticulture Officer, Department of Horticulture, said the department has a similar package at par with the agriculture department for reclamation purpose. The department had formed near about 100 self help groups from the affected villages to assist the project. He added that as part of reclamation, the department had offered mango and cashew crop saplings to the Tsunami affected farmers and would reduce the price in cashew crop sapling. As the department did not formulate any special schemes for Tsunami affected villages, it had offered the same incentives and schemes proposed by the Agriculture department. The Horticulture Department is eagerly waiting to see the resolutions of the self help groups formed in the affected villages and would scrutinize the decrees for further action.

Mr. Lakshmanan, Joint Director In-charge, Department of Animal Husbandry while addressing the group said that the department is setting up Community based Veterinary working centres in seven villages and a district Veterinary extension Centre in Mayiladuthurai. The department is ensuring its best to deliver the vaccines and drops for the cattle. The department is ready to help the farmers in giving all precautionary measures for the cattle.

In the Open Forum discussion, the farmers and the Panchayat leaders questioned the amount fixed by the Agriculture department i.e., Rs 12,500 per hectare. They said, the expenses they have incurred on for desalination, crop loss and sand mud cast is more than the said amount. They had asked the Agriculture department to reconsider the amount

and reduce three years to one year.

Discussions like concession for paddy stock discussed and debated in the forum, as the aftermath of Tsunami had left no grass on the ground, which leads to starvation of animals. A section of farmers complained that none of the Veterinary Doctors had visited the Tsunami affected villages to give proper medicines to the surviving cattle. Schemes and allowance for loss of livestock to the farmer and development of dairy products in the affected villages, proper supply of vaccines and drops to animals, separate funds for weeding, pumping out sea water from ponds, desilting of common ponds and farm ponds were raised.

Issues discussed, clarified and suggested in the open forum by farmers

1. The amount allotted for reclamation of land per hectare for three years i.e., Rs12,500 should be for one year and the amount should be fixed as Rs 12,500, in which Rs 6000 should be as cash.
2. Subsidy and concessions for digging well
3. Subsidized rates for oil engines, motors and spring pipes.
4. Pumping out saline water from common ponds and farm ponds immediately from the affected villages.
5. Vaccines and drops for animals made available at the department.

Mr. Vivekanandan, Senior Steering Committee Member, NCRC expressed that the NGOs came to this district for the purpose of rescue, relief and rehabilitation. They are not aware of the nitty gritty of agriculture and fishing sector. They had done yeomen service to this district like cash for work, desilting of ponds and farm ponds and more. They did not have any knowledge on agriculture and fisheries except for a few. Because of the funds, they have limited their exercise. NCRC is in the process of collecting the list of NGOs who are willing to work with the agriculture sector, we are here to discuss with the department, and the farmers to get a first hand report of what is mandatory to the whole rehabilitation process. The 10,000 and odd hectares of agriculture land which is affected in this district is NGOs prime focus, let us form a common agenda for the whole process and share our views and opinion on this to achieve our goal. Mr. Vivekanandan calls them for a collective effort and said this workshop is designed to address those issues; let make use of it.

Dr. J. Radha Krishnan, the District Collector attended the workshop to share his concerns. He suggested that NCRC should concentrate more on Agriculture and requested the agriculture department not to have a defensive role in safeguarding its policies, but to have an open heart to listen to the farmers' problem and try to do collective work for the district.

Mr. Chandra Mohan, Agriculture Sector team leader, NCRC then made a presentation on the types and extent of damages in agriculture and pointed out immediate measures to be adopted both in short-term and long-term basis. He formulated a comprehensive package to the gathering for immediate measures like

- Removal & transportation of sand / mud cast (if above 2 inches)
- Deep ploughing of the fields
- Trenching around the fields (along the bunds)
- Clearing farm ponds / common ponds
- Clearing irrigation / drainage channels

In short –term measures, he proposed activities like

- Green manuring in-situ
- Growing of saline tolerant crop varieties
- Application of organic manure in the form of farm yard manure / compost/vermi-compost

Moreover, in long-term action, the proposed activities such as:

- On farm production of biomass producing trees (on the bunds to cater to the needs of manure, fodder & fuel)
- On farm production of legume forage / fodder grasses on the bunds
- On farm production of compost / vermi-compost (effective recycling of organic wastes).

Mr. Chandra Mohan had pointed out the series of meeting (taluk-level and district level) with NGOs to determine willingness to work in respective revenue villages, complete coverage of package and comprehensive coverage of village.

Finally, in the closing remark session, the Joint Director for Agriculture said that he had noted down the requirements of the farmers and would forward the same to the Director for perusal.

Mr. Vivekanadan during his speech in the concluding session said that NCRC would make sure that NGOs would work with all the communities, he requested the gathering to allot some days to revise the system prevailing now in the district. NCRC will have a holistic approach to the agriculture sector and would ask the NGOs to work on a common objective. He said that the basic and immediate measures like trenching, ploughing, cleaning the ponds, clearing the irrigation and drainage channels would be done by the NGOs and cultivation would be taken care by the agriculture department, while the long term measures as shown in the presentation by NCRC would be discussed with the farmers for implementation. Finally, he appealed to the farmers that, the reclamation of more than 10,000 hectare of land which has been affected by Tsunami is not an easy task, and had sought their cooperation.

Mr. Muthuvel, Joint Director for Agriculture, delivered the vote of thanks. He said that, he believed that the workshop is useful to everyone. He thanked NCRC for organizing it and requested it to take necessary action. He expressed his gratitude to farmers for attending the workshop.