

## Foreword

Undertaking reclamation activities in a post disaster situation brings in lot of hardships for the stakeholders. The urgency of getting back to normalcy by resuming livelihoods of people whose assets have been either destroyed or damaged makes the situation more challenging. Given the extent of destruction on the farming lands in Nagapattinam, the farming community had an initial feeling that reclamation would not be possible at least for another two to three years. However, with the able guidance of the district administration and support of the farming community, the NGO Coordination and Resource Centre (NCRC) along with 23 NGOs put in a dedicated, synergic effort to reclaim the lands and make them cultivable again within a span of less than a year.

Even though NCRC played a pivotal role in bringing in a concerted effort, the whole hearted cooperation and earnestness of the NGOs paid rich dividends to the farming communities in Nagapattinam, who have been vulnerable to frequent disasters.

The laudable efforts of NGOs and NCRC need special mention and should be documented enabling learning for future interventions. NCRC is bringing out this document with this intention hoping that this would be a replicable learning in future disasters.

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## Acknowledgements

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The farming community in Nagapattinam  
Former Joint Director of Agriculture, Nagapattinam  
The NGOs working in Agriculture  
Agriculture department



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## **Post-tsunami agriculture livelihood restoration**

### **A district level coordinated effort**

*Nagapattinam district in Tamil Nadu was the district worst affected by the Tsunami of December 2004. The disaster destroyed nearly 8000 hectares of agricultural lands, which include both cultivated as well as fallow lands. Over one and a half years the reclamation of these lands has been done through a consultative, comprehensive approach. The community, with the support of twenty three NGOs, the NGO Coordination and Resource Centre and Government line departments worked intensively to make the affected lands cultivable. It had been a daunting task to bring back normalcy in the life of farmers by reclaiming the affected land and making it cultivable again. The uniqueness of these efforts warranted documentation of the processes that have been evolved and implemented for the purpose of replication of the methodology. This paper looks at the types of damages, responses from various quarters and coordination efforts in restoring normalcy. It serves as a dateline of events and can be used as a base for analysing learning for better management in future disasters.*

## 1. About Nagapattinam

Nagapattinam is a coastal district of Tamil Nadu. Karaikal, a part of the Union Territory of Pondicherry, divides the district into two parts. Nagapattinam is flanked to its north by Cuddalore district and to its west by Thanjavur district and to its south by Thiruvarur district. The Bay of Bengal lies to its east.

The population of Nagapattinam is 14.88 lakhs. The district has 11 panchayat unions, 3 municipalities, 9 town panchayats. There are 523 revenue villages in the district. In terms of development areas, the district has 11 blocks –

Vedaranyam,  
Talainayar,

Keelaiyur,  
Keelvelur, Nagapattinam, Thirumarugal, Sembanarkoil,

Kuttalam, Mayiladuthurai, Sirkazhi and Kollidam. The river Cauvery which rises in Coorg, Karnataka flows eastwards into the Bay of Bengal. Nagapattinam, along with Thanjavur and Trichy form the Cauvery delta area. The Cauvery irrigates large tracts of agricultural land in these districts. There are farmlands as close as 500 meters from the shoreline.

The Cauvery provides Nagapattinam an abundance of green paddy fields, tall coconut groves, vast gardens of mango and plantain plantations and other verdant vegetations. Paddy is the main crop of this district and it is grown three times in a year.

The first crop is known as 'Kuruvai' (the short-term crop) with duration of three and a half to four months from June-July to





October-November. The second crop called the 'Thalad' has duration of five to six months from October - November to February-March. The third is the 'Samba' (the long-term) crop and has duration of almost six months from August to January. Cereal crops of the district are cumbu, ragi, maize, korra and varagu. The pulses grown in the district are redgram, greengram and blackgram. Other food crops include condiments and species, sugar crops, fruits and vegetables. Among the non-food crops, cotton/fiber, edible oils crops (groundnuts, coconut and gingelly) non-edible oils crops (castor, miger seeds, though in very small area) are the important ones. But as much as the river and coast provide, so do they take away in the form of erosion, salinity and flooding. Nagapattinam is prone to cyclonic weather and storms that cause the Cauvery to overflow its banks, bringing havoc to inland communities. About 7.09% of the land<sup>1</sup> is marshy, affected by water logging and 56.21% is prone to floods. About 3.49% of the land available for cultivation suffers from salinity/alkalinity and 17.69% of the land is coastal sand. Thus land affected by soil problems constitutes about 84.48% of the total land.

A land tested by the natural elements of wind, sun and rain was once again put to the test on 26 December, 2004 as tsunami waves lashed inland causing extensive damage to life, land and livelihoods.

## **2. The Tsunami**

The tsunami caused extensive damage in southern regions of India and the Andaman and the Nicobar islands affecting a total of 2,260 kilometers of coastline, constituting more than one-fourth of the coastline of the country. Waves as high as 3-10 meters flowed 300 meters to 3 kilometers inland. The most affected regions in India were in Tamilnadu state and Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Estimates put the total death toll at 10,740 in the mainland. Over 1.6 million families were affected in the state.

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<sup>1</sup> Does not include forest land and land not available for cultivation

All the 13 coastal districts of Tamilnadu were affected, but the worst losses were recorded in Nagapattinam where 6,065 people died. The fisheries sector in Tamilnadu suffered the



major damage in terms of lives, boats, gear and infrastructure such as harbours and fish landing centres. An estimated 85% people affected by tsunami were from the fishing community.

The agriculture sector too had its share of losses. Of the 11 blocks in Nagapattinam, coastal agricultural lands in Sirkali, Tharangambadi, Nagapattinam, Keelaiyur and Vedaranyam blocks were flooded with seawater. The damage was relatively more in villages in the south of the district as compared to the north. In the north saline water flooded the fields, but in the south, in addition, there was loss of standing crops in 42 of 73 affected villages; sand and silt cast on the top soil and in farm ponds ranging from a few inches to 2 feet deep; blockage of irrigation channels; damage and silting of common ponds. Seawater ruined grazing lands, water tanks and wells. Water turned saline and brackish. The paddy crop, which was near harvest stage, was fully damaged. Groundnut had just been sown, and the seed was lost.



### 3. The Response

In the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, more than 500 national and international organisations offered relief assistance. Co-ordinating the relief activities emerged as a daunting task during this time. Ably guided by the district administration, South Indian Federation of Fishermen's

Societies (SIFFS) and SNEHA, two organisations having long term stake in Nagapattinam district, along with many individuals, who had prior experience in disaster management took up the responsibility of establishing and running a co-ordination centre.

Called the NGO Coordination Centre, it began functioning in the Nagapattinam District Collectorate on January 1, 2005, enabling coordinated action and interaction between the District Administration, NGOs, volunteers donors, and communities affected by the tsunami.

During the first month of relief operations, the NGO Co-ordination Centre built a system for the efficient and transparent flow of relief materials and resources. About 400 NGOs registered at the centre during the first few days. Using volunteers the NGO Co-ordination Centre setup a two way information flow on the relief requirements in the villages and the materials available with the Government and NGOs.

In about a week's time the NGOs formed sectoral groups relating to shelter, livelihoods, trauma counseling, health and sanitation, children, etc, which flagged the critical issues in these sectors. They undertook the responsibility to try to address these on the ground.

**Phases in management post-disaster  
Management post-disaster goes through three phases:**

**Relief and recovery:** The relief phases is in the immediate aftermath of the disaster the first three-four months, during which immediate short-term needs of food, clothing, shelter, health are made available the affected communities.

**Rehabilitation:** After three-four months relief gives way to rehabilitation of the affected communities and focus shifts to shelter and livelihood rehabilitation. This phase presents the opportunity to plan for long-term improvements in the sector and for disaster preparedness.

**Development:** One year after the Tsunami the development phase begins which focuses on consolidating learnings, long-term development of the communities, sustaining efforts initiated during the disaster and ensuring preparedness for the future

The success of these sectoral groups in addressing issues resulted in the need for continuing the government – NGO co-ordination into the rehabilitation phase. However, unlike in the relief phase which requires coordination of relief material and resources, the rehabilitation phase demands coordination of knowledge resources, which includes access to and exchange of sectoral and regional perspectives, technical expertise, reliable data and its synergy with policy formulations. With this in mind, post-relief the NGO Coordination Centre was converted into a resource centre – the "NGO Co-ordination and Resource Centre" (NCRC).

NCRC supports communities to liaison with the government, donors and NGOs to ensure that the strategies for rehabilitation are long-term and sustainable. This is achieved through sector-specific strategies focusing on:

- ◆ Fisheries
- ◆ Agriculture
- ◆ Other livelihoods
- ◆ Shelter
- ◆ Children

#### **4. Bringing the focus on agriculture**

Sector-wise, the most visible impact of the tsunami was in the fisheries and shelter sectors and the response of the government and the individual and institutional donors was also slanted towards these sectors. There was relatively less attention was given to agriculture. The immediate damage assessment in agriculture by the government was rapid and the response was slow. Through coordination and advocacy efforts NCRC showed that there was a considerable extent of damage to the agriculture sector and that responses could not be uniform, but needed to vary depending on the type and extent of damage.

#### **5. Assessing damage**

##### ***Assessment by the government***

Soon after the Tsunami, in the month of January, the district government conducted a rapid assessment, on a sample basis, on the type of damages to agricultural lands. Later in the month

of March a comprehensive land survey, based on land records, was conducted jointly by the agriculture and revenue departments to assess the damage to agriculture. Based on these surveys, the government estimated that 4657.26 hectares of agriculture land and 495 hectares of horticulture land were affected. These assessments were based on the damages related to the standing crop due to tsunami.

The Department of Agriculture also carried out soil testing along with the damage assessments. It was observed that the PH of soil had gone up and hence the alkalinity of the soil. There was an increase in the Electrical Conductivity (EC) and alkalinity of the soil that made the land unsuitable for cultivation.

These preliminary studies were done to plan a response for the sector.

#### *Assessment by NCRC*

Amidst growing concerns about the adequacy of the tools used by the government for assessing damages, NCRC carried out a quick damage assessment in April 2005 that took into account the types and extent of damages. Done revenue village-wise, the assessment was based on the information available at

Village Administrative Office. The results were cross checked with the government data and it was noticed that the figures varied extensively.



In order to get a more accurate understanding of damages, NCRC conducted an intensive assessment of the damages during the month of June. The growing concerns among the farmers that the extent of damage was much more than what have been estimated by the government; the need expressed by the donors to have a fair assessment based on which they could commit the funds and the need to have credible information that would facilitate informed decisions were also the reasons for taking up a second round of assessment.

This intensive study relied on four sources of information i.e., the Self Help Groups (SHGs) of farmers, the panchayat presidents, the VAOs and the individual farmers (during field visits).

The assessment that was done in three taluks – Nagapattinam, Kilvelur, Vedaranyam focused on:

- ◆ The type and extent of damage
- ◆ The type of activities required for reclamation
- ◆ The approximate budget for carrying out reclamation activities

Two teams comprising 3 members, of which one was a village volunteer, visited the affected villages. Transect walks in the villages gave an indication of damages. In addition the teams conducted focus group discussions with the affected farmers. Group discussions were held with most of the Tsunami Farmers Self Help Groups (TFSHGs) in the area covering nearly 8727 farmers.

The overall assessment showed an increase in extent of damages that was one and a half times what the government had estimated. This was mainly due to the inclusion of the following lands:

- ◆ Fallow land
- ◆ Common land
- ◆ Temple land

The damages in agriculture were as follows:

*On individual farmers' lands:*

- Loss of standing crop
- Sand/ Mud casting on the agricultural lands
- Salination of cultivable lands
- Silting of farm ponds

*On common lands:*

- Silting of common ponds
- Silting of irrigation / drainage channels

The assessment was completed by mid-July.

Since many NGOs needed funds to work on implementation in agriculture, NCRC presented the extent of damages to a group

of donors who are part of Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC) in the UK and having a local coordination in Chennai. The presentation was done twice, the first time following the rapid survey in June and the second time after the intensive study in July. Based on this assessment donors came forward to support the NGOs. Oxfam, Concern World Wide were the first to commit funds.

## **6. Providing relief**

### *Initial relief*

Soon after the tsunami, the government announced an immediate crop compensation of Rs.2,500 per hectare in cash for standing crops lost. The amount was credited to farmers' accounts with the Primary Agricultural Cooperative Bank (PACB). The relief sanctioned by the state benefited 8,827 farmers.

The department intimated the insurance company in the cases where farmers had insured their crops. Unfortunately, only some 10-20% of farmers were insured for their crops. Compensation package by the government.

The value of reclamation of lands was estimated at Rs.1.32 crores by the government. The reclamation phase started in April 2005. The agricultural department formed affected farmers into 297 Tsunami Farmers' SHGs (TFSHGs) with a minimum of 10 and maximum of 30 members in each group, and the Agriculture Development Officer (ADO) as ex-officio member of each SHG. All the affected farmers were covered through TFSHGs. Bank accounts were opened for TSHGs with the ADO and one other official of the agriculture department as signatories. A compensation package of Rs.12,500 per hectare was computed, of which 66% was allocated in the first year, for activities like green manuring, applying gypsum and distributing saline tolerant crop varieties. The balance amount was carried over to the 2nd year and 3rd years. From the amount credited to its account the TFSHGs bought the farming inputs for its members. No cash was given to individual farmers

## **7. Evolving a common approach**

### *Developing a comprehensive plan*

During the relief period itself NCRC recognised the need for systematic approach towards rehabilitation of the agricultural sector. However, at that time focus was largely on immediate relief, and on shelter and fisheries. A few meetings during the relief period were organised with the NGOs to understand the damages and to discuss solutions.

It was understood that the package announced by the government should be supplemented by another comprehensive package ensuring total reclamation of affected land. A holistic package covering desalination on one side and fertility enhancement and sustainability of farming on the other was very much needed. Based on this understanding, NCRC went in for developing a common package for implementation with the NGOs.

The meetings held in the month of June and July were instrumental in introducing the idea and bringing all the NGOs together under a common platform. These meetings attended by 23 NGOs (see annexure-1) facilitated collective thinking on the common approach to be evolved. The group agreed that any plan would need to be a comprehensive one that covered immediate, short term and long term activities.

Six activities were planned for immediate commencement. Four of them were related to reclamation of individual farms and two to common land. All the immediate activities were related to desalination and were mechanical in nature.

The district administration was kept informed on the damage assessment, package development and the number of NGOs going to work for agriculture reclamation.

### ***Participatory area allocation***

Taluk level meetings of NGOs held in the month of July focused on identifying strategies, deciding on areas for implementation by each NGO, minimizing overlaps.



The strategies and activities agreed upon in the taluk level meetings were consolidated at the district level meetings held subsequently.

Commonality in approaches, including wage pattern, and importance of working in a contiguous area

were highlighted. The focus of all these meetings was towards covering the entire area and all type of farmers. Once this was achieved, time lines and action plans were set (see annexure 2-A&B for participation and roles of stakeholder in agriculture reclamation).

Consultations were held at the same time with the district administration, agriculture department and farming community to bring in their involvement and cooperation. Joint consultation with farmers, NGOs and government were also held to ensure participation in each and every step.

### ***Re-allocation of area***

Certain NGOs who did not have enough human resources to carry out the type of work, or were not able to ensure donor support on time withdrew from agriculture rehabilitation work. Thus to fill in the gaps, a re-allocation exercise was done with all the NGOs. This was done through a participatory manner.



**Clearing common ponds**

## **8. Reclamation**

From August onwards the NGOs started reclamation activities in their respective areas. Review and planning meetings were held at regular intervals to ensure that activities are completed in time, discuss issues emerged during implementation and to ensure that all the areas are covered.

Most of the short term activities were completed before the monsoons in November. Donor level advocacy was done to enable NGOs to be more inclusive of the target community.

## Activities planned for Reclamation

### Immediate activities:

#### *On individual farmers' lands:*

- Removal and transportation of sand / mud cast (if above 2 inches)
- Deep ploughing of the fields (upto a minimum of one foot depth)
- Trenching around the fields (along the bunds)
- Clearing farm ponds (mud as well as saline water)

#### *On common lands:*

- Clearing common ponds (mud as well as saline water)
- Clearing irrigation / drainage channels (sand / mud)

### Short-term activities:

- Green manuring in-situ (before taking up the seasonal crop)
- Growing of saline tolerant crop varieties
- Application of required quantity of organic manure in the form of Farm Yard Manure / Compost / Vermi-compost as basal dose

### Long-term activities (desirable):

- On-farm production of compost / vermi-compost (effective recycling of farm wastes)
- 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)

By October many of the immediate, short-term activities were complete. The consultations during this time focused on:

- Reviewing the short term activities
- Introducing long term activities with the NGOs
- Mid season sorting out of issues
- Planning for the long term – NGO wise, area wise

### ***Encouraging NGOs to take up long term activities***

To encourage NGOs to take up long term activities and to impart some skills towards this, in the month of November NCRC facilitated a training programme for the NGO field level staff on:

- Bio-mass tree planting – the need for bio-mass in relation to improvement in soil fertility status and the management of soil salinity.
- Recycling of organic waste- Vermi composting, the importance of it.

NGOs were expected to give field level trainings on taking up long term activities. However this did not happen as the farmers were more interested in getting field level support rather than capacity building inputs. Also most of the NGOs did not have the purpose of having long term field presence in Nagapattinam and this prevented them mobilizing the farming community to take up long term activities.

### **Between Feb '05 to April '06 NCRC facilitated 44 meetings between NGOs, farmers, and the government department**

<b>S. No.</b>	<b>Level of meetings</b>	<b>No. of meetings</b>	<b>Outputs</b>
1	Farmers meetings	9	Identified gaps in implementation Identified farmers' felt needs in the second season
2	Technical consultative meetings	2	Developed qualitative and quantitative indicators of reclamation
3	Workshops with NGOs	2	Participatory assessment of the needs and legitimisation of the package Experience shared and identified best practices
4	Taluk level NGOs, department and community meetings	10	Triangulation of the extent of village wise damages Finalising village wise allocation of NGOs Introduction of the package to the villagers/farmers
5	Taluk level NGOs meetings	6	Participatory allocation of area Sorted out issues Ensured comprehensive coverage of the area
6	District level meetings	14	Status on implementation and plan Developing a common technical package
7	NGO's training programme	1	NGOs taking up bio mass plantation, vermi composting

## 9. Information dissemination

Towards increasing the awareness of farmers on immediate, short and long term activities, a simple brochure was designed that could convey the message even to an illiterate farmer. This was disseminated through the Village Information Centres (VICs) set up by NCRC<sup>2</sup>, by NGOs and farmers sanghams.



On 28th October in its “Uzhavum Vazhvum” (farming and living) programme, Karaikal All India Radio had

broadcast a discussion with Mr. Chandra Mohan, head of the agriculture sector unit, NCRC. The discussion touched upon the damages, the agriculture reclamation package and the progress of reclamation.

## 10. Monitoring progress

NCRC rigorously tracked the progress of agriculture reclamation in the field mainly through:  
The VIC set up across the affected areas of the district.  
The VIC coordinators



Monitoring the progress

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<sup>2</sup> Village information centres were established by NCRC as data/information collection and dissemination centres on damages, relief and rehabilitation. One VIC served nearly six-seven villages. The VICs were connected through a VFU (village facilitation unit) at NCRC office. The VFU consolidated and analysed data/information from the field. This structure enable quick and smooth information flow between all stakeholders involved in tsunami relief and rehabilitation activities.

collected information from the field and sent it through an online reporting format. The information was collated and analysed at NCRC.

Field visits by the NCRC sector staff enabled direct observations and feedback from the farmers. Information on progress was also triangulated during these visits

### **11. Planning for the long-term**

December end of 2005 marked a year of the tsunami. A lot of effort had gone into rehabilitation in all sectors including agriculture. The first quarter of 2006 was spent in planning for long-term activities in agriculture.

As a starting point for developing the long-term vision NCRC conducted district level meetings to:

- Review the long term activities – bio mass and vermi composting
- Prepare plans for the second season – giving inputs to NGOs to facilitate conceptual thinking, planning for activities, capacity building needs, and sustaining participation of farmers.

In February and March, the NGOs having a larger field presence started coming up with long term plans.

A few of the NGOs like Tamilnadu Organic Farmer's Movement (TOFARM), Kudumbam, Covenant Centre for Development (CCD), and DHAN (Development of Humane Action) were already ready with the plans for the second season by January.

However, NGOs having limited field presence were not very clear about carrying forward their work to the second season. Individual

Second season is second year cultivation. Many people (farming community and NGOs) believe that one year reclamation work is enough to get agriculture back on its feet. However, yield alone is not a good indicator of reclamation success. The comparison of the soil test results of post reclamation with immediate post tsunami shows that more than 25% soil is still saline. There is a need to work in the second year too. Reclamation alone cannot lead to long term development on improving fertility of soil, improving yield and income of farmers.

interactions with the chief functionaries of these organisations were held to facilitate developing a plan that helps them bring the activities to a logical conclusion thus ensuring the benefit to the community and the development of the sector.

## **12. Learning**

- **Approach for long-term sustainability needs to be comprehensive:** Disasters present an opportunity of creating from a blank slate. Availability of funds and expert advice provide an impetus to innovating and creating long-term, sustainable solutions. The efforts at Nagapattinam in the agriculture sector were addressed not only immediate rehabilitation needs, but also long-term sustainability and disaster preparedness.
- **Different stakeholder need to be involved:** In order to ensure successful participation, the government, community, implementing, donor and coordination agencies need to be involved throughout the process from conceptualisation and planning to implementation.
- **Comprehensive coverage of damaged land ensures comprehensive coverage of communities:** In order to ensure comprehensive coverage, from the outset rehabilitation of all lands was included in the implementation package – registered, temple and common lands. Thereby all types of farmers, marginal, small, medium and large also got covered.
- **Communication and coordination is critical for successful rehabilitation and development:** The success of rehabilitation of agriculture across the district lies on extensive efforts at coordination. Coordination by NCRC forged linkages between the communities, implementing agencies, government departments and donors. It enabled comprehensive coverage and avoidance of exclusion. Constant communication provided regular information flows between the community and decision making bodies at the field and within the government and implementers. Coordination also enabled problems and conflicts to be nipped in the bud.

- **Building common understanding improves effectiveness and quality of processes:** Considering the scale of the disaster and the numbers of stakeholders, each with diverse stakes, it was imperative that there was a common understanding on the rehabilitation package and roles and responsibilities to avoid conflict and ensure consistent implementation. Few NGOs had their own ideologies and opinions on how implementation should take place. They were unable to be flexible even though such issues were taken-up in many a meetings. This resulted in unnecessary comparison between two or more NGOs working in the same village affecting the process of implementation. Constant efforts to avoid such situation were undertaken, with some degree of success.

It was also necessary to build understanding of NGOs and donors that all communities in a contiguous area needed to be covered and preferences of some communities over other would affect smooth implementation.

Mr. Muthuvel, the former Joint Director of Agriculture said that even though a few of the NGOs had started their work at the initial stages, this was not known to the Government. Some of them approached and apprised the department on their activities and sought suggestions, but the response was scattered. When NCRC started taking a greater role, the government was informed of activities of all the NGOs working for reclamation in agriculture.

He observed that without NCRC the government would not have known the extent of activities in the field. He also lauded the efforts of NGOs and said NGOs have given additional benefits to the farmers. He also appreciated the activities of NGOs during the relief phase and noted “The effort of NGOs largely helped Nagapattinam to return back to normalcy in a few months after the devastation”

- **Constant monitoring of implementation is necessary for efficient implementation:** Quick and efficient implementation can take place only with constant monitoring and review of implementation. The monitoring and review process in rehabilitation efforts ensured identification of gaps, complete coverage, immediate redressal of problems – technical and coordination and timely implementation of activities.

Tamilnadu Organic Farmer's Movement (TOFARM) played a major role in reclamation, starting their work as early as February 2005. TOFARM feels that evolving a common approach has been a refreshing experience. Lack of coordination and duplication of work was common before the NGOs got in to the act together. Regular meetings helped share information on other NGOs activities, methods and functioning, and introduce funding sources. The coordination worked very well. And if the common approach had not been evolved, it would have resulted in non-uniformity in approaches, duplication and lack of coordination resulting in left outs of villages. TOFARM feels that the government has been very supportive, encouraging and guiding the NGOs in every step

- **Capacity building should also be comprehensive:** The capacity building efforts were aimed at training related to long-term farming measures. Capacity building should have also focused on building skills and knowledge on short and medium term activities like desalination, farm development. Capacity building efforts should have moved beyond training to exposure visits. This would have improved the effectiveness of the training and would have also provided impetus for NGOs and farmers to adopt long-term measures ■