



### Consultation on Sustainable Rain-fed Agriculture Development for Bundelkhand Region

A day-long consultation was organised on 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2018 by Development Alternatives (DA), in partnership with The RRA Network, Green Economy Coalition, INTACH, Peoples' Science Institute (PSI), with support from the European Union, in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. The objective of the consultation was to discuss upon strengthening rain-fed farming system to bring rain-fed farming families of Bundelkhand region into the growth story of Madhya Pradesh with focus in four districts of Bundelkhand region (of Madhya Pradesh), of which two will be aspirational districts.

Introduction to rain-fed farming in Bundelkhand was given by Anshul Bhamra (Manager, DA), followed by Seema Ravandale (PSI), who spoke about the issues and challenges in Bundelkhand. Farmers from the area were also invited as speakers for the event. One of the farmers, Prem Narayan, shared the challenges that the farmer community is facing - how run-off of fertile soil leads to low productivity; replacement of hybrid varieties of crops instead of local varieties leading to malnutrition. Solutions like local seed conservation programmes, maximum use of organic fertilisers, etc. can solve these issues. Apart from Premji, other farmers from Tikamgarh, Umaria and Panna districts (Madhya Pradesh), discussed issues of rain-fed agriculture in Bundelkhand. The key issues emerged were - timely availability of seeds, water holding capacity of soil, reducing landholding size, reduced animal rearing, less focus on fishery. Sandeep Khanwalkar (Senior Programme Director, DA), said that farming is controlled by the market and most of the farmers grow crops as per market demand and not as per the soil and availability of resources and annual average income of farmers has gone down to just INR 15000 -20000/annum.

Dr. Sabyasachi Das introduced the Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture (RRA) Network, elaborating upon rain-fed farming system, investments in rain-fed agriculture, its relation with natural resource management and livelihood. Mr. Ahirwal, Additional Director, Department of Farmer's Welfare and Agriculture Development, Government of Madhya Pradesh, spoke about social problems and local dynamics in Bundelkhand. He said that sustainable agriculture should be promoted along with natural

resource conservation and biodiversity conservation (especially local seed conservation). He spoke about the departmental schemes and how can these be useful for the farmers.

CSO representatives shared that work should be done on water and soil conservation and local language and technology should be used, for this *lokgyan* is also required, traditional crop pattern and its importance should be understood. Basudev (Secretary, Bundelkhand Sewa Sansthan, Lalitpur – Uttar Pradesh), suggested that not only small farmers, but also large land holdings farmers should be motivated for sustainable agriculture. He also shared that we have lost our traditional seeds, which had high nutritional value as compared to the hybrid seeds which have less nutritive value.

The consultation concluded with identifying next steps to take the agenda of agriculture growth of Bundelkhand forward. CSOs committed to build this informal network for identifying improved and better strategies for comprehensive agriculture in the region. A special programme needs to be designed or existing programmes need to be re-organised in the form of package for rain-fed farming to bring rain-fed farming families into the growth story of Madhya Pradesh. The programme would thus help in designing an alternative framework of investment in the Bundelkhand for rain-fed agriculture. The CSO partners expect to work closely with District and State officers to develop a prototype of a more comprehensive and holistic planning and implementation of agriculture policy with the triple aim of – reducing risks of small holder farmers, ease of doing farming, and enhancing income of the small and marginal holder farmer.