

trialogue 2047

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Local Community Institutions driving natural resource and livelihood security in Agriculture



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Domestic farm distress is one the biggest risks to the Indian economy today, given that agriculture sector directly contributes to about 15 per cent of the GDP and indirectly supports other sectors through raw inputs. 58% of our population is dependent on agriculture and 85% of the total farmers are small and marginal farmers; who are facing livelihood risks in the current paradigm of agriculture system. The risks to Indian economy are therefore also in terms of livelihood security and healthy workforce, that has its roots in food security and agriculture production. In India, the agriculture sector has been under duress of multiple challenges. Agricultural growth has been at best stagnant and has been marked by declining productivities in many regions. The hurdles in the path of agricultural growth in India become even more apparent when one looks at the context of land distribution and the impacts of climate change and natural resource degradation. Small and marginal farmers are characterised by low investment capacity, risk resilience and consequently low bargaining power of the small farmers in transactions for buying inputs and selling produce in the local markets. The market risk that farmers face is reflected in the price fluctuations in the market that further aggravates the distress.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare spelled out 10 points agenda reflecting the Government's vision to transform Indian agriculture and strategic interventions towards it. Topping this list were: "Farmers' income to be doubled in five years", followed by the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana, soil health cards, organic farming, self-sufficiency in pulses and oilseeds, neem-coated urea, national agriculture market (eNAM), Farmer Producer organisations (FPOs), mobile app, and disaster relief. Precision farming, shift to region appropriate crops are identified as some technologies that will bring economic advantages from agriculture to millions of farm families. There are however, some technologies promoted like genetically modified seeds, promotion of high value crops that may have possible negative impact on farmer livelihood security, environment sustainability and food security.

While the Government of India is quite elaborate on the scope of programmes and policies pertaining to input-based technologies (like precision farming, GMOs) to market based interventions (like eNAM, FPOs), the extent of its success in doubling farming incomes and ensuring sustainability in agriculture will critically depend on farmers' ability to understand, appreciate, invest and thus adopt of such interventions. An informed, aware community with capacities to adopt a certain technology and/or utilize a market linkage will be the key to the success of the agriculture programme of the country.

A common understanding is evolving that challenges in the agriculture sector cannot be entirely addressed at the farm level. As observed, natural resources are used and managed at a landscape level. The status of a natural resource will therefore depend on how a community chooses to use and manage its resource. The case is most evident in case of water as a resource where the ground water, is a private property of the farmers who own a well but exploitation of water by few can lead to adverse water tables of the entire region. This understanding roots the need of resource and use planning at the community level. Similarly, limited quantity of produce constrains the optimum price choice as well as increases the costs of marketing at an individual farm level.

This understanding has brought into focus the need for enhancing the role as well as responsibility of community institutions (informal/formal) in influencing agriculture choices of farmers, especially small and marginal farmers who face severe resource constraints. These institutions vary in their nature and functions. Some of the most common ones are Farmer Producer Organisations, Self-Help Groups, Panchayati Raj Institutions and informal community groups. Some of the primary functions that they perform across the value chain are listed below:

- Water budgeting and natural resource planning (Example: Hivre Bazaar)
- Technology choice and use (Example: Agromet Technology, Watershed Organisation Trust)
- Crop choice (Example: Timabktu's Millet Initiative)
- Input Supply (Ex: Non-Pesticide Management Shops, Centre for Sustainable Agriculture)
- Value addition and market linkages (Ex: NABARD's and SFAC's FPO programme)

Through this ***trialogue2047*** we aim to critically reflect on the current strategic direction of Indian agriculture sector with respect to the role of community institutions in making technology choices and other production choices and its impact in ensuring food security of the country & the livelihood security of a farmer in an environmentally sustainable and economically viable manner. Some of the questions that ***trialogue 2047*** will aim to address are:

- What role can local community institutions play in appropriate choice and adoption of agriculture technologies tested and promoted by the government?
- How can local community institutions be strengthened for influencing amongst their members to make agriculture production choices that are economically viable and environmentally sustainable in the long run?
- How can government scale up the formation and successful operations of farmer based community institutions?