

Sustainet policy position paper on 'Sustainable Agriculture'

India is the home of millions of small and marginal farmers. More than 60% of India's population derive their income directly or indirectly from agriculture. After independence, India has chosen the path of green revolution, which is technology driven and largely based on the western industrial model. This path has initially shown promising results but has gradually become more exploitative, threatening the very basic livelihoods of the farmers and their ecology. This is evident from the large numbers of farmers committing suicide, migration, displacement and environmental destruction. The model promoted under the 'Green Revolution' concept pushed by the international financial Institutions has aggravated the situation in rural areas. Increasing monopolization of the world markets favouring the strong has resulted in marginalization of small farmers and their families. The industrialization of agriculture has not only changed the selection of crops but also has resulted in a complete change of the cropping cycle. At times, it has been seen that the agricultural patterns are not synchronised with the climatic conditions. The manifestation of this phenomenon is reflected in the current agrarian crisis of the nation. The scenario becomes grimmer with the oscillation of weather that is brought about by climate change.

Core Beliefs

Sustainet India believes that farmers' control over resources should be the principal policy framework for addressing food and agriculture. This includes an increased say in participating in the formulation of policies pertaining to agriculture, fisheries, forest and land related issues at different levels of governance.

Sustainet proposes to work towards building alliances and coalitions with likeminded organizations and networks in all related spheres, to influence policy, practices and to promote sustainable agriculture across the country.

Major issues of concern

There are a number of issues of concern regarding agriculture in India today. Sustainet believes that all these issues must be addressed in an integrated manner, in order to bring about a change in the overall agriculture system in the country.

Agrarian crisis and small holders

The ever-increasing costs of cultivation due to externalization of inputs and falling prices have led to a crisis among all sections of farmers. In the last few years in spite of agriculture performing better, farmers are not getting remunerative prices and the current market reforms are only worsening the situation.

In addition, the large-scale shift of lands to non-agriculture use in the name of Special Economic Zones SEZs', bio-fuel, urban development, and other development projects have led to displacement of thousands of farmers across the country. Estimations show that if the existing crisis continues about 400 million farmers would be displaced by the year 2015. This would be the largest human displacement the world has ever seen.

Small and marginal farmers, whose land holdings are below two ha, constitute almost 80% of all Indian farmers, and most of them being dependent on rain for their crops. While smallholdings have their own identifiable economical and ecological advantages, the present policy discourse in India has portrayed smallholder farming as inefficient,



Sustainet and Sustainet India

Sustainet came into being in 2003 as part of the German federal government's initiative. Sustainet is an acronym for "Sustainable Agriculture Information Network." It is composed of a German network and three further networks in the pilot regions of India, Kenya/Tanzania and Peru/Bolivia. Three major non-governmental development organizations – Bread for the World, German Agro-Action and Misereor – along with the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) participate as equal partners in the joint venture. As the name suggests, the program aims to establish networks between institutions involved at local, regional and international levels.

Sustainet aims to systematically evaluate, communicate and disseminate good agricultural practices, local to international approaches and strategies in sustainable agriculture. SUSTAINET has gathered experience from three continents - Africa, Asia and Latin America -, which it has evaluated, documented and published.

Sustainet India has been initiated in India as a network of civil society organisations who have developed effective sets of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), which focus on sustainable agriculture, and work towards scaling up and promoting sustainable agriculture across the country - focusing on ecological, economic and social sustainability. Sustainet India believes that sustainable agriculture must contribute to conserving and improving soil fertility and water quality, restoring biodiversity and making economical use of energy. This results in overall improvement in productivity that and in farmers having a secure income. It must furthermore deliver long-term improvements in nutritional status and ensure access to food. And finally, sustainable agriculture must involve disadvantaged farmers in development, and take account of social customs, traditions and norms. It should utilise local knowledge and distribute work and income equitably between the members of a household, and between the genders and generations. This supports equitable access to land, water, capital and innovations and gives farmers the opportunity of extending their skills and knowledge.

unviable and unproductive. Policy discourse has predominantly favoured "land consolidation" as an answer to productivity problems, and has advocated free play of market forces, which could favour larger holdings and thereby forcing smallholders to exit farming.

Sustainet India advocates greater support to small holder farming, key support in terms of credit, insurance, subsidies, extension support, along with genuine land reforms, which ensure land to tillers and landless peasants. In this context, national and state governments should put in efforts to adopt, promote and protect regenerative and sustainable agriculture, on a larger scale.



Privatization of common productive resources land and water: Today there is a large-scale move to privatize the common productive resources like land and water. The industry is given a free hand to acquire, own and trade these resources. The reforms pushed by the WB and other institutions are mainly responsible for this situation.

Sustainet India demands that privatization of common productive resources (land and water) should be stopped. While we demand that the national and state governments should put in efforts to adopt, promote and protect models of local resource based agriculture, we also take all steps to establish these models of regenerative and sustainable agriculture on larger scale.

