

# Agroecology and Natural Farming Could Accelerate Inclusive Economic Growth in India

Posted On: 01 JUN 2020 2:49PM by PIB Delhi

International experts in a convention organized on 29 May by NITI Aayog endorsed efforts to significantly boost agroecological and natural farming approaches in India.

Speaking to an audience of senior international and national experts and policymakers, Minister of Agriculture Shri Narendra Singh Tomar stated, “Natural farming is our indigenous system based on cow dung and urine, biomass, mulch and soil aeration [. . .]. In the next five years, we intend to reach 20 lakh hectares in any form of organic farming, including natural farming, of which 12 lakh hectares are under BPKP [Bharatiya Prakritik Krishi Paddhati Programme].”

He further noted that the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana launched in 2015 to promote organic farming among small and marginal farmers has in the last four years covered 7 lakh hectares and 8 lakh farmers. He pointed out that Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, and Kerala have taken up natural farming on a large scale. Andhra Pradesh alone has brought 2 lakh hectares under natural farming under this scheme. He concluded by highlighting that the need of the hour, in light of the covid-19 pandemic, was to have ‘food free from chemical fertilisers and pesticides’, while not ignoring the need to feed and nourish the country.

Setting the scene for the online High-level Roundtable, the first of its kind in India, NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Dr Rajiv Kumar established a high bar for the transformation and renewal of agriculture in India when he asked whether agroecology and natural farming can ‘avoid excessive and wasteful use of water, prevent farmer indebtedness, contribute to mitigating greenhouse gases while supporting farmer incomes and their ability to adapt to climate change’.

International experts from the US, UK, Netherlands, CGIAR, Australia, Germany, and of UN acknowledged India’s pioneering leadership in the arena of agroecology—the science of applying ecology to agriculture for sustainable outcomes that are more resilient to climate shocks such as droughts or flooding and pest attacks, but are still productive and support farmer’s livelihoods—and especially natural farming, which is a form of agroecology. Natural farming avoids use of synthetic fertilisers and pesticides, while focusing on reviving the beneficial soil organisms that contribute to fertility and good nutrition of the plants. Experts explained that well-nourished plants lead to well-nourished human beings.

The gathered experts provided evidence from latest studies, cutting-edge research, and science as well as practical experience from economics, finance and markets. The overwhelming conclusion was to support the Minister’s conclusion that natural farming and other agroecological approaches, such as organic agriculture, have great promise for a renaissance of Indian agriculture, so that farming is not just productive but truly regenerative and sustainable.

Experts concluded that it would be a mistake to view natural farming as a step backwards to the farming techniques of our forefathers, but rather, as the high level panel of experts report on Agroecology to the Committee on Food Security of FAO so clearly demonstrated, it is based on

## **Programme & Speakers**

### **Welcome remarks:**

Dr Rajiv Kumar, Vice Chairman of NITI Aayog, Government of India

### **Opening remarks:**

Mr Narendra Singh Tomar, Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare; Minister of Rural Development, Government of India

### **Panel Discussion on Environment and Ecology:**

Moderator: Mr Pavan Sukhdev. This session focused on the challenges and potential benefits for India by adopting a system-scale transition to natural farming.

Speakers: Prof. Philip Landrigan, founding director, Global Public Health Program, Boston College; Dr Pushpam Kumar, Chief Environmental Economist of UNEP; and Mr Walter Jehne, Climate Scientist and Microbiologist.

### **Panel Discussion on Regenerative Agriculture:**

Moderator: Mr Alexander Mueller, Managing Director of TMG Thinktank in Germany, is former German State Secretary and Assistant Director-General of FAO. This session focused on the tremendous opportunities in harnessing India's ancient agricultural practices and wisdom in rolling out a sustainability revolution based on regenerative agriculture improving livelihoods and health of people and the planet.

Speakers: Prof. Ramesh Chand, Member (Agriculture), NITI Aayog; Dr Ravi Prabhu, Deputy Director General, World Agroforestry (ICRAF); Mr Sanjay Agarwal, Secretary, Agriculture, Government of India; and Mr Daniel Moss, Executive Director of AgroEcology Fund.

### **Panel Discussion on Market Access and Sustainable Finance:**

Moderator: Mr Satya S. Tripathi, UN Assistant Secretary-General. This session focused on expanding market access for naturally farmed agricultural commodities and sustainable financing options for a system-scale transition to natural farming.

Speakers: Mr Sean Kidney, CEO, Climate Bonds Initiative; Mr Craig Cogut, Chairman and CEO, Pegasus Capital Advisers, Mr Joost Oorthuizen, CEO of Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH); and Mr David Rosenberg, CEO of Aerofarms.

### **Observations and Insights:**

Prof. K VijayRaghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India

### **Closing Remarks and Next Steps:**

complex adaptive systems that are the basis of a healthy natural world. Working with nature, understanding how to do so will help us ‘build back better’ as one expert noted.

Others noted the huge interest, to the scale of hundreds of billions of dollars, in investing in natural farming and agroecology as they were systems of the future. Prof. Ramesh Chand, Member (Agriculture) of NITI Aayog, called for more research to ensure that natural farming could truly live up to its expectations. The need for innovation, science and technology was endorsed by experts who noted the importance of regenerating soils and building on biodiversity as two key elements, along with use of natural inputs readily available to farmers in this knowledge intensive approach.

Commenting on the presentations made by assembled experts, Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India Prof. K. Vijayraghavan remarked, ‘We are running behind yields at the cost of diversity and nutrition. To protect our planet there is need for change in our attitude towards use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Technology can help in changing the way we farm and will enable the poorest of the poor to enhance their nutrition status and livelihoods.’

In his concluding remarks Dr Rajiv Kumar emphasized that agroecology is the only option to save the planet and is in line with Indian traditions said, ‘[. . .] it is not man vs nature, but man in nature or man with nature. Humans need to realize their responsibility in protecting other species and nature. We need knowledge-intensive agriculture and the metrics need to be redefined where production is not the only criterion for good performance. It has to include the entire landscape and the positive and negative externalities that are generated by alternative forms of agriculture practices.’

**Participants & Programme:** Notable participants, other than Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar, included the host, NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Dr Rajiv Kumar; Principal Scientific Adviser Prof. K. Vijayraghavan; Mr Satya S. Tripathi, UN Assistant Secretary General; Mr Pavan Sukhdev, President of WWF International; Mr Alexander Mueller, Managing Director of TMG: Think Tank for Sustainability; Dr Ramesh Chand, Member NITI Aayog; as well as a host of very senior officials from the GoI and state governments, leading experts, researchers, specialists and thought leaders.

## Virtual High level Roundtable on Agroecology and Regener...



List of speakers is available below along with the programme.