

Chapter 12: Implementation issues and the Agriculture Technology Mission

In this report the Commission has suggested a wide range of interventions that are possible by the state government, immediately and over the medium-term. The new role envisaged for the state government will require a substantial increase in public expenditure. **It is clear that the effectiveness of these recommendations will therefore depend essentially upon the political will to translate them into government policy and on the ground-level implementation.** Public expenditure on agriculture and allied activities should reach 5 per cent of GSDP in the next budget. However, it must be accepted that simply providing more resources and physical infrastructure for the implementation of many of these recommendations will not be sufficient, and that there can be serious concerns with respect to the functioning of public institutions, the accountability and responsiveness of officials and other government staff and the efficiency and quality of public delivery systems. Since we have suggested a substantial increase in the public presence in all areas relevant to farmers, from credit, access to water and other inputs to prices, marketing and non-farm activities, it is necessary to consider seriously the means by which this public presence can be made effective and democratic. The purpose of all these proposed public interventions is not only to empower the state but to empower farmers and the rural community in general, including rural workers.

Some of the recommendations made in this Report fall outside the ambit of the state government. The Government of Andhra Pradesh must take a leading role in ensuring that these issues are addressed by the appropriate authorities, such the Government of India, the Reserve Bank of India and NABARD. Further, the challenges posed by the WTO discipline have not been adequately addressed by the Government of India, but these challenges are likely to be even more pressing in the near future, particularly from early 2005. Therefore the state government needs to mobilise the WTO cell (which should be

placed in the Department of Agriculture) to become the focal point for all relevant research in this area and propose the necessary policy interventions.

The Commission recognises that the success of the policies that have been proposed depend critically upon the quality, accountability and responsiveness of public delivery systems. It is unrealistic to depend only upon the assumed seriousness and integrity of government officials and staff. Rather, systems must be put in place that enforce a substantial degree of accountability and ensure a much greater degree of public participation and voice in the implementation of these policies. These proposals are based upon the expectation that the panchayati raj institutions in the state will be substantially revived, given greater powers and made to function in a democratic and participatory manner. We realise that this cannot be achieved overnight, especially when these institutions have been weakened over several years through various measures and by the proliferation of parallel structures. **We also acknowledge that prevailing unequal power relations are likely to make local panchayats the instruments of local elites and may not always reflect the interests of the less powerful majority. However, we do believe that the process of democratic decentralisation of administrative, functional and financial powers to locally elected bodies sets in motion a process which progressively empowers poor and marginal groups.**

The revival of panchayats in the state will not be an easy task, for a number of reasons. Ideally some untied resources for planning should be devolved to lower rungs of elected bodies. Even tied funds which require area-specific expenditure should be handed down to ensure more relevant and accountable spending. Unless the panchayats are given functional authority and sufficient resources with which to execute their responsibilities, the effort will remain symbolic. But it is not easy to get line departments to cede or share their powers to lower rungs, and even in other states it has been found that each level of devolution tends to prefer to concentrate power at its own level rather than

devolving it downwards. Elected representatives at higher levels may also create constraints to greater power being devolved to the panchayati raj institutions. In Andhra Pradesh, the authority of these locally elected bodies has been eroded not only by the control of line departments but also by the establishment or creation of various parallel bodies which are dealing with related issues. Our recommendations require the local officers of various line departments, including not only the Department of Agriculture, but also Marketing, Irrigation, Rural Development and others, to work under the panchayati raj institutions at different levels. Therefore it will be necessary to clearly state the role, responsibility and power of each level of the panchayati raj institutions, all the way down to the gram sabhas, and to make very clear the exact relationship to other rural authorities including the staff of line departments. Those local groups which are accessing government resources (such as water users' associations and watershed committees) should also be brought under the overall monitoring of the panchayats.

The implementation of several of the recommendations of the Commission would be facilitated in many ways by the active involvement of panchayats in their implementation. In the area of land relations, the panchayats are expected to play key roles in the identification of surplus lands, the granting of land rights to those cultivators who do not have them at present, the registration of tenants, etc. With respect to irrigation and water, our proposal for the eventual public control of groundwater relies upon the involvement of some local bodies (possibly water users associations monitored by the panchayats) in the implementation of decisions regarding water extraction, distribution and pricing. In the area of credit, panchayats can be useful in monitoring the activities of formal credit institutions and ensuring that they fulfil their mandate and perform in a pro-farmer manner. Panchayats can actively assist in the spread and efficacy of extension services and in moving to more sustainable cultivation practices. Input provision is to be regulated in the private sector and more extensively provided by the public sector, but both these types of suppliers require active

monitoring by the farming community, and panchayats can be one channel for collating individuals experiences and feedback on functioning, and thereby reducing undesirable practices. The same is the case for market yards. As far as wage employment programmes are concerned, panchayats can play a crucial role in devising locally necessary and useful activities in which such labour can be deployed. In matters of social sector public service delivery, especially in health and education, the supervision and control of local bodies is recognised to be the most efficient and democratic way of ensuring quality, ensuring accountability and reducing leakages.

Agriculture Technology Mission

Basic goal:

To create and revive public institutions in the rural areas and implement policies which will immediately reduce agrarian distress, and over time provide protection to farmers, encourage the most productive and sustainable forms of land and water use, provide stable livelihood and employment to the rural population and improve the incomes of the rural population over time.

Approach:

1. The ATM must act as the umbrella organisation for the planning, direction and implementation of the all policies relevant to agriculture and allied sectors and the welfare of farmers and farm workers. It should be a permanent body co-ordinating the activities of various departments
2. The focus should be on empowering the farming community, with the active involvement of locally elected bodies such as panchayats and participatory institutions such as gram sabhas.

3. The ATM must have a holistic approach to the problems of agriculture in the state, addressing the particular problems in each area within a broader context and in such a manner as to encourage co-operation and synergy between the activities of various state/central government departments/agencies and local level institutions.

4. Many of the proposals the Commission has made require a mission mode in order to be successful. Therefore the ATM itself must organise and impart a sense of urgency to the tasks at hand and ensure that they are undertaken on a priority basis.

Terms of reference:

The Mission should formulate policies and take action on the following:

- Meeting the challenges of the WTO regime especially from early 2005 onwards.
- organising policy research on critical issues in agriculture and recommending policies to meet the changing needs in this sector
- suggesting the measures required for educating the farmers through farmers' organisations

Areas of focus:

1. Formulate and oversee the implementation of a water policy for the state, including water management and the equitable allocation of water resources.
2. Ensure that the formal banking system in the rural areas covers all the credit requirements of farmers and others, and that the coverage of the formal financial system is extended to all rural households.

3. Set up a Distress Fund that will provide support to banks in chronically drought prone areas, and permit some debt relief to cultivators in extreme distress.
4. Focus on increasing agricultural productivity with sustained growth and lower costs of production.
5. Develop a land use strategy with particular reference to drought-prone areas.
6. Promote and provide incentives for sustainable agriculture
7. Identify input needs and monitor the provision of inputs to farmers
8. Promote relevant public research in agriculture, particularly dryland agriculture, for the development of drought and disease resistant seeds of cereals and pulses.
9. Analyse the relationship between input costs and market prices, and suggest appropriate and timely interventions by the state/central government agencies, in order to ensure remunerative prices to the farmers
10. Monitor the adverse effects of droughts and pests on agriculture and bring in the required initiatives by the appropriate agencies to mitigate distress on account of these calamities.
11. Oversee the settlement of land records, registration of all tenancies, and issue of passbooks to all cultivators including tenants.
12. Improve infrastructure for crop markets and the post-harvest management of the produce
13. Identify proper opportunities to promote rural employment, including non-farm employment, encourage diversification within and out of agriculture; develop value addition activities such as agro-processing in rural areas in a way that benefits farmers.