Murtizapur taluka – An experiment in community extension...

Shri Anil Bonde joined as Taluka Agril. Officer at Murtizapur of Akola district three years back. Supplying earthworms in a sack on his back at the doorstep of a humble villager Balu Kathalkar in village Jamthi — motivated Balu to go with him village to village helping him to promote vermi-compost for 1300 farmers in the districts of Akola and Amravati. At almost no public cost, technology of vermi-compost converted nearly 300 farmers to organic farming bringing down the cost of cultivation to almost zero except the family labour. In village Arkhed, every backyard boasts of vermi-compost pit. Balu himself provides initial earthworms culture from a huge but a low cost shed having 60 beds of vermi-compost measuring 1 m. x 3 m. each. The entire women self help group members at Jamthi have vermi-compost pit and many of them do have sericulture unit at the centre of their dwelling house. Shri Rahul Wakude, an educated unemployed has now applied to Block Development Officer that his name should be deleted from the families below poverty line. An extension revolution is in making and presents the best example of human resource mobilization through “public–private” partnership.

**Financial Resources**

17.1 State should provide, proportionate budget allocation for agriculture sector as that of its share in State's GDP. While providing this increased allocation, relatively more funds should be made available for agro processing industries (other than sugar factories and cotton ginning and pressing factories), marketing of processed products, post harvest handling and grading sector.

17.2 There are several sources from where non-budgetary support to State’s agriculture could be tapped. These include Government of India, Ministries of Agriculture, Rural Development, Environment and Forest, Ministry of Food Processing, National Horticultural Board (NHB), Agriculture and Processed Food Exports Development Authority (APEDA), various export promotion boards like Cashew Board, Spices Board, Coconut Board, National Bioresources Board and National Medicinal Plants Board. Apart from this, support could be obtained through bilateral and multilateral agencies like DFID, IFAD, World Bank, GTZ etc.

17.3 Adequate resources for funding agricultural research should be made available through budgetary and non-budgetary resources. State’s share to research funding from institutions like ICAR and Ministry of Agriculture should invariably be provided. Research in joint venture with private sector should be encouraged. Internal resource generated by the Universities should be fully allowed to be used for
research activities for which entire non-plan expenditure on running educational and extension services should be provided under the State budget. Surplus land available with the Universities should be used for generation of such internal resources for funding the research activities.

17.4 State should seek financial support from World Bank to extension projects on the lines of NATP to make it applicable throughout the State. In addition, new projects in areas like rural self employment, Intensification and diversification of agriculture, saline land reclamation, Hightech Agriculture projects including Horticulture development, Agriculture Marketing, I.T. application in Agriculture, Agro Processing, Watershed development, promoting organic farming, use of biotechnology in agriculture and other environment friendly Agro based projects for promotion of concepts like IPM, INM and IRM could also be formulated for external assistance. Projects already in the pipeline should be pursued vigorously.

17.5 To demonstrate the impact of coordinated efforts, State should implement an Integrated project for market led production and marketing with Farmer-Research-Extension-Market operators partnership concept involving stake holders as producer farmers, Research and Extension functionaries in public & private sector and markets operators like processors and exporter. Such projects in each district should comprise of major components like market led contracted production by the farmers at mutually agreed price with buyback arrangements for which a projectised extension system would be required.
17.6 Projectised and increased financial assistance to the FIG's/FOs in rural areas to take up PHM, agri marketing and agri business activities at their own or through their federation needs to be considered. Special benefits through schemes for community projects like Food Park, Agri-Horti Estates, Community Markets (Rayatu Bazar) could be provided. Projectised financial assistance should also be provided to farmers organizations for projects ensuring food security, livelihood projects and the projects on conservation of Agro diversity.

17.7 Special and additional incentives like tax-benefits, enhanced moratorium period, removal of multiplicity of taxes, subsidized power and water supply need to be considered for the food processing sector.

b. Human Resources

17.8 State should draw out a plan for capacity building in managerial skills of existing manpower in input management, quality control, agro processing and agro marketing for public & private sector. For this, State should create additional infrastructure in public and private sector institutes to increase their intake capacity to provide additional skilled man power in specific upcoming areas.

17.9 Encouraging farmers organizations for skill upgradation of their managerial manpower to meet future challenges in Agro processing, Agri business and exports through state assistance like support for installation of Agri information centres in rural areas or necessary technical and managerial backup through training of entrepreneurs needs to be considered seriously.

17.10 Induction of compulsory Agriculture subject in course curriculum of middle school education to create awareness and develop liking for agro sector among students to begin with, from rural areas, needs to be considered. The school course curriculum in rural areas should also include education for conservation enhancement for fragile ecological system and conservations as well as rejuvenation of natural resources. In addition to this, opening of Agril. Education and Research & Development activities for private sector to generate more skilled agri based human resource also needs to be pursued more vigorously.

17.11 Reputed NGO’s like BAIF, WOTR, AFARM should be involved in the capacity building of human resource available with State Government. Bio-diversity fund as well as Field Gene fund under Bio-diversity Act and Plant Variety Protection and Farmers Rights Act should be applied for capacity building of the communities in the respective areas of operation.
c. Infrastructural Resources

17.12 Integrated efforts are needed through a policy formulation to utilize the infrastructure in public as well as private sector for meeting the Agro technological requirements of Farmers, Researchers, Extension workers, Agri. Business and Export houses in private sector on mutually agreed terms and conditions. To begin with State should draw out a mutually agreed capacity building plan for human resource development in public as well as private sector. State should also encourage project based research in upcoming high tech agril. areas through joint venture with private sector.

17.13 The State should foster fair competition and proper price realization for agriculture produce. Its presence in the market to act as an intervener to balance out the market prices and also as a regulator should continue. State should develop a framework for contract farming or group farming under the existing land ceiling act/tenancy act. It should relax existing agro-produce marketing Act to promote direct marketing concept of Agro produce on the line of "Raitu Bazar ". The final aim should be towards an Indian common market by removing all restrictions on interstate transport of agriculture produce. For a better coordination between agri-production & agro-marketing, department of Agriculture & Marketing should be brought together upto the grass root level.

17.14 State should create investor friendly atmosphere for ensuing more private sector investments in upcoming sectors like Biotechnology, I.T., High tech Agril. and some specialized field in Agril. Sector. To start with, to attract private sector investment in the field of research, research through joint venture with public institutions on contract basis could be introduced.

17.15 State should utilize existing public agro industrial infrastructure for more efficient use through joint venture with private sector. To begin with, Govt. could accredit private institutes for providing public services to the farmers to create conducive atmosphere for private investment.

17.16 State should provide more support to Agri polyclinics for creating modern infrastructure with skilled manpower for technology dissemination, for providing consultancy & for diagnostic services in the fields of agriculture & horticulture.
d. Institutional Resources

17.17 An independent existence of state department of agriculture, outside the purview of local self government is a must to play its role in the field of technology dissemination, capacity building of the extension workers and to keep in place the regulatory framework for quality input and output supply in the field of agriculture and horticulture for greater role to be played by the state in future. Shift to local self Government in the field of agriculture can only be a gradual process and a complete shift should be considered only when the proposed agriclinics in private sector are fully developed for technology dissemination, market information and capacity building of the farmers and the recommendations included under the new deal for the self employed are largely operational. Keeping in view that even in those countries like USA where there is a strong federal structure of local self Government, there exists a powerful State department of agriculture, requirement of shift to local self government should not in any way undermine a similar presence of Department of Agriculture in the State.

17.18 Strengthening MCAER on the lines of ICAR to coordinate research and education activities in all the four Agril. Universities to avoid duplication and multiplicity of scheme & projects and to effectively enforce coordination between SAUs and Government Departments should be considered at the earliest.

17.19 Privatization of certain areas like marketing, Agro processing and export where Govt. has to act as a facilitator and a co-ordinator needs to be taken up in right earnest.

17.20 State should promote self - certification concept to attract investment and to inculcate more accountability in Agro inputs and Agro processing sectors.

17.21 Policy reforms needs to be introduced in existing land ceiling laws to attract more investment from private sector in Agro processing and exports, in watershed development, in resource conservation and in only that kind of contract farming which protects the interest of resource poor and marginalised sections of rural population and for which an adequate legal framework is provided.

17.22 Formation of core group in the form of a task force or an empowered committee with representation from public and private sector including farmers representatives to discuss, deliberate, guide and motivate the stakeholders to operationalise these recommendations for development of agriculture in the state through periodical review needs to be seriously considered. As a beginning, creating specialised cells under Commissionerate of Agriculture to promote Agro meteorology, Agri-business, Agricultural exports and to deal with WTO related issues in Agriculture would be a step in right direction.