

Date : 24.12.2005

Time : 11.45 a.m.

Venue : Adharsh Matriculation Higher Secondary School, Nagapattinam

Organised by : NCRC

A workshop on Land Reclamation of tsunami affected agricultural land was organised by NCRC on Saturday, the 24th December 2005 at Authors' Matriculation Higher Secondary School, Nagapattinam. The meeting began at 11.45 am. Mr. Ranvir Prasad, the Additional Collector of the District was the chief guest. The other dignitaries at the dais were Ms. Annie George, the CEO of NCRC, Mr. M. Bose, Assistant Director of Agriculture, Mr. Mohammed Rasheed, Assistant Director for Horticulture and Mr. Gouthaman, Professor and Head of KVK. Experts from agricultural research centres and Representatives from NGOS and Farmer's Association had come in big numbers for the workshop. Mr. Chandra Mohan, NCRC welcomed the gathering. Ms. Annie George briefed the scope of the meeting as the first step toward taking agriculture to restoration for the coming year.

Mr. Gouthaman and Mr. M. Bose briefly explained the present condition of agriculture in the district. The former spoke about the importance of conducting soil sample tests prior to the research in order to identify the intensity of salt content in the land. Mr. Mohammed Rasheed compared the damages in agriculture caused by the tsunami in India to other countries and said it has been peculiar to India as opposed to higher yield in Japan. He said that the nature of the research would be first of its kind for the whole world.

Lauding the great works done by various NGOs and NCRC, Mr. Ranvir Prasad warned them of complacency. He hinted at removal of sand casting, digging of more farm ponds and bringing the land back to cultivation as the main scopes of the future endeavors in the field of agriculture. He asked the gathering to take the 4800 acres of affected land in the district to more productive fields.

At this juncture, Dr. Vanthana Shiva, Director of Navdanya, Delhi, joined the workshop. She gave a brief speech explaining the purpose her visit. She said she was there to study and assess the growth of the seeds they had once fashioned in Orissa following the earthquake and distributed in the district after the tsunami. The Deputy Collector thanked her and assured to continue promoting cultivation of the seeds.

During his presentation, Mr. Chandra Mohan explained the extent of damage caused by the tsunami and the plans ahead to reclaim them. He proposed three ways to reclamation. They were removal of sand or mud casting, green manuring in-situ and on-farm production of compost. He also added simple farming system and the integration of horticulture, forestry and animal husbandry in agriculture as the plans ahead.

Mr. Mohammed Rasheed invited the farmers to come on to the stage and share their difficulties. He said as the experts were present at the venue, they could put their minds together in pursuit of bringing fertility back in the agricultural land.

After the preliminary rounds of presentations, the floor was left open for discussion. Mr. P. Uthandi of Therku Palpannaichery, the Cashier from Thamarai SHG, Vadakku Palpannaichery, Mr. Dhanapal of Kaveri Farmers Association and Mr. Pasunthalai of Vadakku Palpannaichery came up with valuable opinions and suggestions for revitalizing agriculture in the district. They asked for a list of land owned by the farmers in the district. They also requested to find out more salt absorbing plants like the 'thakkapoondu' they already have. Another concern was making farmers aware of the problems of digging the land more than twenty feet deep. Since the lagoon is broken after that depth, it becomes easier for salt water to mix up with water on the field. They also expressed concerns over promoting non-organic farming. Then the meeting was adjourned for lunch at about 2.00 pm.

After 45 minutes of break, Dr. Vandhana Shiva gave an inspiring message on disaster and rehabilitation. She addressed various issues relating to the area like the shrimp farm, saline water and non-organic farming. Suggesting biodiversity of crops and seeds as the tool to counter the problem, Dr. Vandhana called for rejuvenating the entire system of agriculture. She asked the gathering not to remember Nagapattinam as a place hit by tsunami, rather take the situation as a challenge to rise from heaps to evolve resilient farming systems.

Followed by the talk, Representatives from Kudumbam, CCD, TOFAM, Nagore Tsunami affected Farmers Association and M.S. Foundation detailed the strategies and technologies they put in reclaiming the agricultural land in their respective adopted places.

Dr. Baskar, an expert from PAJANCOA gave a detailed presentation on the impact of tsunami on soil quality and reclamation strategies. He briefly explained the scientific reasons for the recent tsunami. As different agricultural fields had reacted differently to tsunami water, he emphasized the need for promoting separate relief package for every type. Mr. Gouthaman highlighted the need to introduce technology to restore fertility in the land. He said that productivity depends on the organic matter. Thus the quality of the soil has to be improved in the organic way. Speaking about On Farm Trial, he suggested farmers to go for alternative and winter crops like beans and radish. Meanwhile few farmers asked if they would come up well. He suggested trying them on trial basis.

Followed by the talk, Ms. Annie George asked the gathering to decide the next process of action. A handful of farmers expressed their concerns over the decreasing yield of crops. As a decision was not arrived after the discussion, it was decided to conduct an opinion poll among farmers to find out what they exactly like to realize in the coming year. With the vote of thanks from Mr. Chandra Mohan, the meeting came to an end at 6.25 p.m.

Annexure: *List of participants*