

Online FOOD SYSTEMS DIALOGUES (FSDs), INDIA

9 July 2020

ORGANIZED BY Bharat Krishak Samaj

On 9 July 2020, an independent online Food Systems Dialogues (FSDs) event took place in India organized by Bharat Krishak Samaj. This was the third FSDs event to take place in India and was another opportunity to strengthen relationships formed at the 2018 and 2019 events, to review progress, and further develop ideas and projects for change.

Approximately 50 participants attended, reflecting a range of actors working in food systems. The event was curated by Dr. David Nabarro, Senior Curator of the Food Systems Dialogues, Special Envoy on COVID-19 for WHO and recipient of the World Food Prize in 2018.

The following is a summary of the groups' proposals for food systems transformation as well as the discussions that led them to their conclusions. As is the norm at FSDs events, all Proposals outlined in this Summary Report are not attributed to any particular individual or organization. Each proposal did not necessarily receive universal support from all participants at the event; rather, the aim of this report is to capture recommendations made at the event, in order to allow continuity and consensus - a 'red thread' - to emerge across all FSDs events.

Introduction

COVID 19 has made the magnified problems in the food value chains and people's access to food more visible. The Government of India has responded by initiating steps to mitigate the distress and drive investments into the agricultural sector. This Food System Dialogues event looked at alleviating distress and harnessing opportunities for public good in times of COVID-19.

Topic 1: Reviving the Indian economy

The Indian GDP was falling before the COVID19 pandemic crippled the world economy and many millions were suddenly left without work. The government of India has announced many monetary and fiscal incentives to revive the economy.

The session explored incentives and sought to identify gaps and steps required to not only revive businesses but mitigate livelihood distress.

Proposal for Action: State should increase infrastructure and financial support towards the informal sector rather than the organized sector. Agriculture sector has become like residual sector for the economy and there is dire need of public investment in this sector. Need of improved public infrastructure and public reforms was agreed upon. Example of work done by the NABARD in tribal Indian in formation of self-help group was hampered by a lack of marketing due to no roads and lack of inputs. The central government should not treat each state in same way because there are huge differences between them. A need to improve the wage rate of MGNREGA was desired. Due to good monsoon there is prediction of higher agricultural production which may push market towards a glut like situation. There should be a correlation between all the sector which may provide holistic approach towards.

Topic 2: Food value chain investment after Agriculture reforms

Recently the union cabinet, government of India cleared three landmark ordinances which will usher in a revolution in the agricultural landscape of the country. Large scale private sector investments are expected.

The session explores the opportunities and sought insights into key areas which may require more clarity and identify steps needed to further improve the business environment for fulfilling the policy objectives.

Proposal for Action: Small affordable investments on infrastructure development at farmer's level need to be happened at grass-root level in rural areas to minimize postharvest losses. The value addition of farmer produce can be improved with improving storage, packing, processing, transportation and marketing of agriculture and dairy sector. Transparency, bar-coding and traceability of agriculture, dairy produce will give more access to quality produce of farmers, hence more realization of farm produce. Government should focus on cluster approach for crop data, monitoring, mapping, food flow and marketing. Government should work on crop planning to meet the demand & supply of market and find the gaps and opportunities for sustainability of Agro-Ecosystem. Need to support farmer entrepreneurs and food processing industry in India. Financial inclusion through information technology which provide us the transparency and can play a vital role in improving the economy.

Topic 3: Access to food in COVID19 times

The government of India has initiated many steps to mitigate distress arising out of COVID19 pandemic. Recently it extended the PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana to provide free ration to 80 crore poor till the end of November.

The session explored the benefits, challenges, and implementation externalities. It sought to identify sections of society that may have been left out and how best to proceed such that no one is left behind.

Proposal for Action: The participants raised serious concerns on reduced access to nutritious foods by the vulnerable sections of the society during the COVID pandemic. These challenges are now compounded by the uncertainties around the lockdown. Also discussed was problems of workers, more specifically migrant workers, the millions who were compelled by circumstances to return to their villages far away. Such migrant workers do not have valid documentation to access subsidized food grains in their native place of stay where they returned. It was also mentioned that India has surpassed stockholding limits continuously for a few years, the wheat harvest has been exceptionally

good and even the monsoons are generally progressing normally. Therefore, it was felt that the grains should be made available to all those who approached for food support.

Topic 4: Planning for nutrition security in 2030

Ongoing health crisis has exacerbated the fragility of the food systems. India is on the cusp of a gigantic agrarian challenge. By 2030, the country must produce an estimated 345 million tonnes of food grains for its population. With significant regional variations in malnutrition, contextual strategies tailored to each state are needed to achieve the desired outcomes.

Proposal for Action: The discussants shared best practices for replication and suggested multiple dimensions of planning interventions and implementation that are crucial for achieving sustainable food systems. To achieve the nutrition security the design of the farming system has to be location specific. Must attempt to demonstrate the viability. As we urbanize even in rural household more than 70 per cent of food comes from markets. Orrisa is the only state where 'take home food' is provided by the Self-help groups to Aganwadis. The State has involved women SHGs in paddy procurement and PDS outlets. Affordability plays a large role, but it is not the only factor in nutrition. Awareness and easy availability is one of the factors. What hurts the producers today will hurt the consumers tomorrow. Present situation has shown us that the present food systems cannot sustain us.

Topic 5: Promise of AgriTech startups in re-imagining food systems in India

AgriTech investments in India are at all time high and estimated to reach \$300-\$350 million in 2019. Advancements in technology plays an important role in transforming our food systems by providing on-demand extension to farmers for responsible production, bringing efficiencies on how our food travels from farm to plate and ensuring the best quality produce through artificial intelligence, blockchain and precision farming.

In the session, India's most promising startup founders shared their experiences on how they are adding value to reimagine food systems in India".

Proposal for Action: All agritech startups briefly shared their innovative solutions and realized that each one of them is solving unique food systems problems across the value chain for smallholder farmers in India. The two key areas where they felt more work is required were need for better 'Collaboration among startups' and 'building more trust with farmers. Startup founders felt that by closely collaborating with each other they can deliver a better value proposition to both farmers and consumers. This was further strengthened by the fact that farmers seek 360-degree solution. Most Farmers are still reluctant of dealing with agriTech startups and their full technology stack and/or services.

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