

Annexure 3

**National Research Programme on Plantation Development
Draft Research Agenda and Action Programme 2009-10
Submitted for the first Steering Committee Meeting**

Introduction: The Background

The plantation sector in India appears to assume more importance in the national and regional economies than ever before. While the importance of plantation sector on account of its significant contribution to foreign exchange has been highlighted in the yesteryears, its role in achieving inclusive and sustained growth is gaining greater attention. However, the ability of this sector to contribute towards these development dimensions depends primarily on its economic and commercial viability. If the available empirical evidence is any indication, as the policy pendulum shifted from protection to greater integration with the world market, some of the crops have lost international competitiveness while others faced heightened import competition. There has also been sharp decline and volatility in prices that in turn inhibited investment, as noted by the Taskforce on Plantation Sector. These and other related developments made the plantation sector, which generates massive employment especially for women and located largely in ecologically fragile regions, economically unviable and socially vulnerable.

In response, the Ministry of Commerce initiated various steps to enhancing the viability of plantation sector. In a context of greater role for state intervention in addressing various issues facing this sector, it was felt that the current state of research input for informed policy making is grossly inadequate, while commercial agriculture in developed countries like the US receives policy input from professors at Ivy League universities. In this context with a view to promote policy-oriented research on all aspects of plantation sector, a one time grant of Rs 5 crores was announced for Centre for Development Studies (CDS) in the Union Budget for 2008-09 at the instance of the then MoS Commerce Shri Jairam Ramesh. The National Research Programme on Plantation Development is an outcome of this initiative.

The Vision and the Objectives

The Programme envisages to help improving the international competitiveness as a conduit to inclusive and sustainable development by undertaking policy research on all aspects of plantation sector; facilitating capacity building through training, conferences/workshops and to work closely with all relevant stakeholders, both national and international, such that their synergies are harnessed, cooperation and knowledge sharing is facilitated.

Objectives

- To undertake policy oriented research and building up of a database on all aspects of the plantation sector at the regional, national and international levels
- To generate interest on issues relating to plantation sector among researchers and help capacity building to enhance research in future
- To act as a depository of knowledge and help its dissemination among different stakeholders to facilitate informed decision making

Research and Action Programme

The basic mandate of the programme, as stated above, is to undertake policy oriented research on all aspects of plantation sector. Here prime issue relates to identifying issues for research. To the extent that there are a wide range of issues concerning the plantation sector and there are time and resource constraints, there is a need to prioritize the issues.

We approached these issues as follows; On the sidelines of the signing of MoU between CDS and the Spices Board (on behalf of the MoC) for the setting up of NRPPD, a Round Table as well as a day long workshop was organized where in different stake holders from different parts of the country participated. The objective of the Round table and the workshop was to elicit the issues that the stakeholders considered important such that the research agenda of NRPPD is reflective of the reality. To initiate the discussion a background note, indicating the broad areas, was circulated while ensuring that the discussion is not confined or constrained by the note.

The discussion during the Roundtable centered on following aspects;

- Production, post harvest operations and processing
- Prices and markets
- Export and WTO related issues,
- labour and employment,
- Environment including global warming and climate change,
- Agricultural research, extension and diffusion of innovations,
- Financing plantation development and taxation,
- Issues specific to North East and
- Other issues.

During the workshop the discussion, initiated by the experts from Commodity Boards and supplemented by the academia and other stakeholders, centred on the crop specific issues. The proceedings of the Roundtable and the workshop along with the background note give an idea about the range of issues confronted by the sector. Here it may be noted that, in the absence of any review of studies on different issues highlighted, we cannot conclude that the state of knowledge on these issues remain rudimentary. While it will be practically impossible for NRPPD to simultaneously address all these issues, it has to be acknowledged that the issues are likely to change with changing times the Programme needs to be responsive to such changing demands.

On the basis of a preliminary exploration of the state of research on plantation sector in India, we have indicated certain issues on which the Programme shall undertake focussed research during the current year. We shall also suggest a few other initiatives that would help the programme to address other issues, though not exhaustively, that emerged from the Roundtable and the Workshop.

Research

❖ Production and Post harvest operations and Processing

It is understood that there are a series institutional issues that are having bearing on land utilization, crop selection/diversification/intercropping. Hence to facilitate appropriate policy changes a study may be initiated. A related area of proposed research related to taxation; here issues relating to the implications of multiple taxation, inter-state tax differences, ways to simplify the tax administration.

❖ **Exports and Commodity Problematic**

To the extent that the fortunes of most plantation crops are determined by the export market, issues relating to export and commodity prices have to be continuously analyzed and monitored by the programme. Hence apart from analyzing the export competitiveness, implications of integration with the world market and that of multilateral and regional agreements are also proposed to be explored by the programme.

❖ **Prices and Markets**

It has been argued that the application of new technology could help addressing many traditional issues. In this context it is proposed to examine the different ways in which ICT is being harnessed, especially through e auctions, and its impact on marketing efficiency.

❖ **Labour and other Social Issues**

The importance of plantation sector to the national economy today is not so much on account of its export earning but on account of its contribution towards employment generation mostly for the women labour. Yet various issues relating to employment, wages and working conditions seems to have not received the attention of researchers that it deserves. It has been reported that plantations in certain parts of the country are facing severe labour shortage and research on ways and means to address this issue, including mechanization, is important today than ever before.

❖ **Issues relating to Technology and Innovation System**

It is increasingly being recognized that any discussion on the present state of plantation sector cannot be de-linked from state of research and extension pertaining to the plantation sector in general and that of specific crops in particular. True, substantial investment has been made over the years at the instance of commodity boards, agricultural universities, ICAR and Planters' Associations to evolve a vibrant innovation system in case of most of the crops. The nature of innovation system as well as their outcomes, however, was found varying from one crop to another. In this context, apart from an exploration of the innovation system in the plantation sector in general to locate the factors that inhibit the system to proactively respond to crisis situations along with its inclusiveness, studies on the innovation systems across different crops might help drawing useful lessons.

Capacity Building

Any state intervention or support for the plantation sector has to be supported by crop specific and region specific studies. This could be undertaken only if there are researchers and analysts interested in and with the necessary capacity to undertake such tasks. Unfortunately, notwithstanding the prevalence of various issues of relevance for development as highlighted above, commensurate number of scholars is not engaged in research relating to plantation sector. NRPPD, therefore could initiate steps to address this gap with the long term objective of generating a group of both young and experience scholars capable of and interested in dealing with plantation related issues. This could be accomplished *inter alia* by training programmes, offering fellowships at M Phil/Ph D/Post doctoral level, conferences and commissioning papers.

Training Program: For the last few years CDS has been organizing a 21 days training programme for the research scholars and College lecturers on Contemporary issues in International Trade, sponsored by the UNCTAD. This programme has been well appreciated and has attracted participants from all over the country. This programme could be adapted to cover issues specific to plantation sector and could be offered jointly with UNCTAD. While undertaking the capacity building initiatives, special focus will be given to those colleges/universities established in the plantation areas. Here, the NRPPD could induce large estates to support research units in such colleges and NRPPD could impart the necessary training for research capacity building.

Conference: We also propose that an Annual Conference on Plantation Sector may be initiated to provide a forum for discussing various issues relating to plantation sector and facilitate interaction between the academia and policy makers with different stakeholders. This conference should have provision for research paper competition for research scholars and the best paper may be provided with a fellowship for undertaking further research/ admission for the training program/cash award.

Depository of Knowledge: The NRPPD shall build up a database on all aspects of plantation sector along with depository of knowledge with respect to plantation sector.

Dissemination & Stakeholder interface

The programme also envisages participation beyond Commodity Boards like the state governments, Planters' Associations, voluntary organizations and others. Though the stakeholders vary in terms of their character and objectives it would be challenging and socially useful to work with them so as to harness their synergies. The research output generated through the programme will be made available to various stakeholder groups by means of the following activities: workshops and seminars organized for various stakeholder groups; inputs in various training programmes, as publication of research reports, working papers, and articles in professional journals and of policy briefs; and as annual development reports on the plantation sector.

As an experiment it is proposed to work with various NGOs in the plantation dominated district of Wayanad to evolve a comprehensive development strategy for the district by bringing together and highlighting the possible role of different stakeholders. It is our hope that such experiments could be replicated with appropriate adaptations in case of other plantation dominated regions in the country during the years to come.

