

Regional Dialogue on “Renewed Policy Action for the Poorest and Hungry in South Asia”

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FROM WORDS TO ACTION: STRENGTHENING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

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Ensuring food security for the poorest and hungry – ‘we can’

*Lessons learnt from poverty eradication through social mobilization and empowerment of the poor in A.P, India – a 12 year experience. Key impacts of social mobilization: a state wide sensitive support structure, **9.6 million rural poor women** (a population of 45 million people) organised into 8,10,000 S.H.Gs, 34,500 Village level federations and higher order federations. 90% of rural poor organized. Largescale microfinance support – close to Rs.12,000 crores accessed from banks. Unique food security credit system covering 2.2 million households. Social capital of 1.6 million women leaders, 250,000 paraprofessionals and 20,000 community resource persons.*

I. Right policy first. Guiding principles for achieving sustainable development and food security:

1. Social mobilisation – building institutions of poor, women self help groups and their federations. Poverty eradication is possible only through strong institutions of poor.
Unleashing the power of the poorest.
 - a. Faith in the capability of the poor and building institutions of the poor
 - b. Setting up a sensitive support structure to facilitate this work
 - c. Strong political commitment and administrative perseverance
 - d. Continuous nurturing – 6 – 10 years
2. Strong voice of the poor – the poorest first. Nothing about the poor without them. Proper targeting – who are the ultra poor? Participatory identification of the poor. Involving poor in all aspects – planning to implementation. Ownership of the plan by them.

II. Program components for sustainable development:

3. Institution and human capacity building - Building and nurturing institutions of poor, social capital formation and strengthening, strong leaders of institutions, community best practitioners and resource persons, para professionals
4. Financial support to the poor
 - a. Financing women S.H.Gs – own savings, ‘seed capital’ support, banks, community owned financial institutions
 - b. policies to facilitate flow of adequate finances for the poor
5. Intra family equity – eliminate gender discrimination
6. Food security:
 - a. demand side – bulk purchases of food grains by S.H.G federations – pooling demand, bulk buying and supplying to members on credit
 - b. supply side - enhanced food production by the poor: *in situ food security*
 - c. Reduce food miles – close the production – consumption loop early

7. Ecological and sustainable agriculture: 'zero' input costs
 - a. Promote food production *by* the poor
 - b. Environmental sustainability
 - c. subsidies to incentivise shift to eco-agriculture
8. Life cycle approach to food security – plan for special needs of pregnant women, lactating mothers, children, and adolescent girls
9. Strong entitlements of the poor – 'right to live' - 'national rural employment guarantee scheme', risk mitigation, land rights of the poor, etc. Clear and unequivocal articulation, and implementation plan
10. Social protection for old aged and destitute citizens – pensions, shelter homes, nutrition support

III. Do's and don't s – learnings from 12 years of implementing social mobilisation strategy :

- 11. Looking at all issues from the point of view of the poor**
12. Comprehensive and end to end planning. Arrive at a holistic solution with the involvement of all key stakeholders. The poor should not play a passive role. Involve them meaningfully. It should be their plan. Avoid 'tip of the iceberg' syndrome - P.D.S, I.C.D.S.
13. Smart subsidies – 'green' incentives, interest subsidy for the poor, capitalising the institutions of the poor
14. Innovations in knowledge dissemination – not top down, peer group learning, experiential learning, best practitioner model.
15. Macro policies to be pro poor, not rigid but evolve by learning from the ground.
16. Pro-poor programme implementation architecture – incorporate institutions of the poor in all anti-poverty programmes
17. Learning from each other: south – south cooperation. Learn from large scale experiences. Cross visits. Learning notes. Effective communication strategy. Learn from community innovations and best practices.