World Agriculture
And The Way Ahead

1

The concept of world agriculture is neither a codified nor a precisely defined concept. This is, because world agriculture today does not exist as a single entity and, as such, is not managed from one centre. In fact, it at present signifies a collective of the various national units of agriculture, existing in all the nation-states. However, the UN has, since its inception, set up a group of specialised agencies (like ILO, WHO, UNESCO, etc.), including Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). Obviously, the FAO was created to guide and help world agriculture in its varying dimensions. But the history of past 60 years shows that it has miserably failed to fulfil its role as a guide and a helper in varying world agricultural problems

A

In 1945, after the termination of world war II, the main war-torn areas, like the whole continents of Europe and Asia, the entire Middle East and parts of Africa, where agricultural structures had been seriously damaged, needed financial and technical help. True, the FAO at that time was just a beginner, yet, even in that state, it was not beyond its capacity to offer them an appropriate agricultural counsel. Europe got rehabilitated through the US $13 billion Marshall Plan and Japan was rescued by its then ruling US military administration, but in Asia, the Middle East and the parts of Africa, the poor and hungry had to suffer a lot.

B

The next occasion came in 1960-70s when, after the breakup of the colonial order, a large number of newly independent countries emerged on the scene in Asia, Africa and Latin America, having no experience to organise, their ex-colonial-cum-feudal agricultural structures. While the FAO as usual preferred to remain silent, the wayout came from the newly-evolved anti-feudal but peasant-farmer based agricultural model followed by the communist as well as non-aligned movements.

C

However, FAO has never hesitated to reveal its pro-corporate capitalist bias on various agricultural issues. This is evident from its varying theoretical propositions and actions. For example, its proposed programme structure starts with its visionary proposition that the FAO stands for “corporate governance” which, as the world experience shows, makes capital growth as the be-all and end-all of human life. All other themes of its programme, like sustainable food and agricultural systems, knowledge exchange, policy and advocacy, decentralisation, UN cooperation and programme delivery are guided by its corporate vision.

2

Similarly, the FAO’s whole practice shows how it has shunned all those agricultural issues which cannot, in the present context, be resolved within the corporate framework. For example, it has hardly ever discussed the question of small land-holdings since existing in all the developing countries, despite the fact that three-fourth of these holdings have already become unviable from the market angle.

The question of the lack of finance is yet another problem confronting agriculture in the developing countries. Yet not even once the FAO has expressed its view on this point.

Inadequate infrastructure and the starting of various agro-industries in different developing countries is still another issue requiring immediate attention on which FAO has often suggested that the corporate sector should enter this field.

What sort of an agricultural development model should the developing countries adopt on this question, the FAO has consistently maintained silence according to its own perspective. The

corporate option, in the context of present heterogeneous land structure, is not feasible in the developing countries. And any non-corporate device is not to the liking of FAO.

The above-stated passive behaviour of FAO on the issue facing the developing countries' agriculture is quite contrary to its activist role as adopted in selling the corporate capitalist manufactured-technology and other inputs (like chemical fertilisers, pesticides, insecticides, etc.) of the 1960s green revolution. It was FAO which characterised the green revolution as the beginning of a new era in the history of agriculture. Yet today FAO has to concede that, despite remarkable progress in agricultural production, harm has also been done to the natural resources—land, water, forests, bio-diversity, air, etc. However, it puts the balame not on green revolution technology package, but on latter's overuse. Now, the experience worldover shows that the chemicalised resources had produced similar results in developed countries' expert-guided big farms and even in agricultural research plots operated by the specialists in every country.

The recent emergence of GM bio-technology was, in the beginning, lauded by FAO as the birth of a second green revolution, but later, in view of formers stiff opposition from a sizeable section of the secientists, it has been preaching that the green revolution technology is capable of providing the required safe food for the entire world population upto 2030.

3

The FAO's new note, prepared by its Global Perspective Studies Unit released at the end of July 2005 says: "although the annual rate of growth in global crop production is expected to reduce, the projected overall increment in world crop production of 57 percent (PP 95-96) will exceed population growth in 2030."

In contrast to FAO's above stated optimism about world food production, a report prepared by the research scientists published in the journal *Nature* on 9.10.2005 said that climatic change is expected to affect different regions of the world by making infectious diseases more rampant and damaging agriculture. Regions at highest risk included the coastlines of the pacific and Indian oceans and sub-Saharn Africa. These forecasts also predict more erratic weather patterns for many countries, wreaking havoc with subsistence farming and adding to the burden of malnutrition.

4

Coming to FAO's conceptual side, it has adopted a number of one-sided theories which not only present reality in a distorted form but also undermine the cause of world agriculture.

A

To begin with, FAO's concept of food security in the present-day world and even upto 2030 is based on a one-sided analysis. It applies the corporate supply side approach which divides the given total food supplies of a state by the given total number of its people. If the per capita supply is above or equal to the expert-prescribed level, then that state is considered to be food secure. This method does not and cannot measure the level of poverty, hunger or deprivation existing in a country or the world as a whole. Because food security in our money dominated world is a question of purchasing power. If one has money in his pocket, one can get anything in the market. Here, empty pocket deprives one not only of minimum food but can often take one to jail on the suspicion of being a criminal. In this wealth-worshipping world, all destitutes are looked upon as legal offenders. The supply side approach only expresses the food security or insecurity of the whole people of a given society. Of this whole lot, food will go only to those who have the paying capacity. Here all non-payers are forced to search their food from the filthy deposits.

The whole world experience shows that a fair estimate of poor and hungry people in the world can only be had on the household basis in each country and then compiled on the global basis. The FAO's present guestimate of 850 million hungry people in the present world requires a reassessment by a UN formed group of experts.

B

Looking at FAO's next concept that "hunger is both a cause and an effect of poverty" (as stated in the FAO document, titled "FAO Reform A Vision For The 21st century," chapter 2, page 5, lines 17-

18 from the top) is again not only a one-sided, but a highly fraudulent idea. The objective side of this sentence is that hunger is an effect of poverty, but the falsehood lies in its gibberish phrase that hunger is also the cause of poverty. What to say of common man, even the corporate capitalists know that the cause of hunger and poverty rests with their existing corporate system which, according to their explanation, denies opportunity to the inefficient and lethargic for suffering poverty and hunger.

C

Turning to FAO's Mission, it is, in the wording of FAO's Constitution, to ensure humanity's freedom from hunger. The organisation views the right to food as central to its mandate.

The recognition of the right to food as a fundamental right dates back to the early years of the UN. Article 25 of The Universal Declaration Of Human Rights adopted by the UN general assembly on December 10, 1948, says : "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food."

Eighteen years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants On Economic, Social and Cultured Rights (ICESCR), ratified by 150 states, marked a significant positive step, making the right to food the object of a stated regulation with binding value for the states parties. The ICESCR did more than recognise human rights principles: it transformed them into agreed norms. It was adopted by the UN general assembly on December 16, 1966.

Established in 1945 and having acquired the status of a specialised agency in 1948, the FAO amended its constitution in 1965 by inserting that the right to food is central to its mandate.

However, it could do very little to further the cause of its central slogan.

In the first half of 1990s, on the demand made by some governments and many NGO's to discuss and elaborate the concept of Right to Food, the first World Food Summit (WFS) was held at Rome in 1996. The Rome Declaration adopted at the WFS reaffirmed the right to adequate food and the fundamental right to be free from hunger. The most important decision taken at the conference was to reduce by half the number of under-nourished by the year 2015.

Since the goal indicated at the 1996-WFS of reducing by half the number of under-nourished by 2015 soon proved to be unattainable due to lack of resources and political will, another World Food Summit was convened in 2001 with the view to mobilise political will and identifying resources needed to achieve the goal. However, despite the two World Food Summits, the situation remains more or less the same.

The reason behind the failure of the FAO's central slogan of right to food to come into practice and subsequently of the two World Food Summits to ensure its application is that, the prevailing corporate development theory holds that income transfers to the poor and safety nets under the signboard of human rights are merely a waste of money from which there is no return and thus human rights approach acts as a brake on the corporate development process.

5

We appeal to FAO that it should, first of all, try to know the basic reality of our existing world and, only after knowing its actual position, it should take relevant initiatives.

Going by the corporate capitalist nature of the existing world, our view is that the prevalent mass poverty, hunger, malnutrition, etc., are the inevitable products of this system and cannot be eradicated within its framework.

In our view, it would be better for the FAO that, instead of taking those initiatives which cannot be fruitful within the framework of existing system, it should, as a matter of fact, try to know the existing state of its relevant subject, i.e., agriculture, and then determine its long-term and short-term objectives, chalk out its basic strategy and an immediate policy, all of which first work for the removal of the glaring wrongs operating in its various parts—thus making it a fair system.

FAO should also try to look at its own behavioural pattern that did not utter a single word of sympathy for those 10,000 farmers who committed suicide during the recent past 10 years in India. Nor did it make an appeal to the Indian government to seriously attend to the problems faced by the Indian farming community.

It should also know the fact that, according to a 2005-survey made by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) in India, 40 percent of Indian farmers have expressed the desire to leave the

farming profession if alternative job opportunities are available to them. And India alone perhaps contains one-fourth of the world farming community.

6

We firmly hold that the problem of agriculture now facing all countries in the world can be properly handled on the basis of a people-environment oriented agenda of the cooperatisation of agriculture in two stages, short-term and long-term. The difference between the two (i.e., short-trem and long-term stages) is that, while in the first stage the ongoing chemical-based and the newly-emerged GM or transgenic technology is replaced by the organic technology and the shares of different members of any cooperative farm are decided on the basis of their respective land-holdings, in the second stage, the organic technology, whether traditional or in some more developed technique, will be the only form and the shares of the different members of any cooperative farm will be based on the equitable income principle (with a maximum income difference of 1:2) and not on equal basis.

7

In our view, the following formula can provide us a short-term as well as a long-term agenda for the development of agriculture in developing countries.

(a) Agricultural sector everywhere naturally comprises two inter-connected parts, i. e., the social human factor of the farming community and the agriculture's mode of production. Both are inter-related. Study of the one without the other does not give a realistic picture anywhere.

(b) Social organisation of the farming community should be based on the pro people-pro environment cooperative principle according to which all existing farming units can unite and participate in the process of farming on a people-environment led cooperative basis, without any change in their respective owned farming units.

(c) The mode of agriculture should be firstly classified on the agro-regional (or agro-ecological) basis. Such a classification may comprise the following agro-regional (or agro-ecological) spheres: (1) Hill agro-region, (2) Arid agro-region, (3) Coastal agro-region, (4) Irrigated agro-region (5) Degraded or waste agro-region, and (6) Fisheries, both inland and Marine, sector.

(d) Every agro-region may then be divided into various agro-climatic zones each of which is naturally suitable for the production of one or two specific crops. The existing system of enforced crop-growing against the nature of soil brings forth poor quality crops with lower yields. Most of such zones or areas have already been demarcated in the records of agriculture and horticulture departments. The remaining can be immediately assessed through inter-action with agriculture experts and by sharing the experiences of local farmers. Such a mode will give best performance in terms of quality and productivity.

(e) In each agri-climate zone, a crop specific zonal cooperative farming society should be formed consisting of all the farmers (big and small) owning lands from the lowest unit to the highest one who will get their shares in accordance with the size of their respective land units.

(f) Each crop specific zonal cooperative farming society should establish a relevant agro-processing industry in its agro-climatic zone for value addition to the related raw one or two specific crops. It will provide required quantity of good quality and low cost produce with minimal transportation cost. Agro-industry will strengthen the economy of the concerned zone and provide employment to its unemployed.

(g) Each crop specific zonal cooperative farming society should develop market infrastructure with cold storage centres for safe preservation of product in the concerned zone to attract buyers from the other parts of India and abroad.

(h) Each crop specific zonal cooperative farming society will, as a rule, employ the necessary labour from within its zone as required by the various farming operations. Besides, it will make an appeal to the government to fulfil the following just demands of the agricultural workers: (1) each agricultural worker to be ensured for Rs 50,000, with equal contribution from concerned state and the centre; (2) old age pension scheme for agricultural workers; (3) implementation of a rural house site-cum-house construction scheme; and (4) social security for drinking water, educational and health services.

(i) Each crop specific zonal cooperative farming society should make an appeal to the government to take the following measures for democratising the rural structure:

* To improve the quality of education, health services and infrastructure in rural areas;

* To develop the knowledge and skill of the rural masses;

* To ensure a stable price policy, fair national market, long-term credit, export facilities, etc., to the crop specific zonal cooperative farming societies;

* To authorise the village elected committees to supervise the proper utilisation of funds earmarked and spent on their village development under various schemes, i. e., IRDP, Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, Indira Awas Yojana, etc.;

* To fully democratise the cooperative movement now based on a bureaucratic law and its policy by a people-environment oriented law and its policy;

* To make women co-owners of their respective husbands belongings, including land, and give them 50 percent reservation in all elective bodies;

*To make every panchayat (i.e., all of its members) accountable to its electors by placing a legal obligation on its each member to visit his constituency after every six months (i.e., twice a year) and present his six monthly record before the electors general meeting for the latter's discussion and remarks;

(j) Each crop specific zonal cooperative farming society should set up its own farmer-centric market mechanism (i.e., management system) for the sale of its surplus products at the appropriate time and the purchase of its required farming inputs. In both these transactions, it will hold increased bargaining power enhancing the profit margin of the concerned farm. Each market mechanism will establish its market research and investigating wing.

(k) Each crop specific zonal cooperative society should appeal to the government to set up a professional committee comprising the zonal expert of the crop, zonal scientist of the crop, representative of farmers and representative of the market wing. The committee should meet as per requirement to discuss the problems of the said crop. The area specific-crop specific committee of experts will be more capable to sort out problems concerning the specific crop.

(l) Each crop specific zonal cooperative society should appeal to the state and central governments to increase their respective budgetary allocations to agriculture sector.

(m) To make agriculture human and environmental friendly, every crop specific zonal cooperative society should in the beginning undertake farming on the basis of two types of technologies, organic and integrated, i.e., a technology using both the organic technology and the chemical based technology. In the latter case, a part of the area will be cultivated on the organic basis and the other on the integrated technological way.

(n) To maximise the water use efficiency, the water withdrawal/recharge ratio should be maintained at the proper level. Every effort should be made to promote all environmental resources, i.e., air, water, land, bio-diversity and forests.

(o) Next to its specific crop, each crop specific zonal cooperative farming society should undertake dairy development as it next most important activity. Apart from the sale of milk, it will engage in its processing and the export of milk and milk products. Besides dairy farming, other agriculture-friendly schemes, like bee-keeping, fisheries, khandsari and gur-making from suger-cane, agro-forestry in arid regions, medicinal and oil bearing plants (like senna, guggal, isabgol, henna, etc.) and sheep-breeding in waste lands (e.g., Rajasthan) should be immediately implemented—thus supplementing the farmers' meagre incomes.

(p) To insure certain minimum level of income to the farming community in any part of during the period of crop failure, each crop specific zonal cooperative farming society should demand of the government to arrange the launching of an effective crop insurance scheme.

(q) To stop all sorts of WTO unapproved, i.e., illegal subsidies or grants to agriculture (as is being done by the US and EU) and to prepare a level playing field for world trade, all the cooperative farming societies should stand for fair trade everywhere.

(r) Contract farming methodology is only a corporate capitalist device to corporatise the agriculture of the under-developed countries. With this understanding, however, if any such contract seems to be beneficial to any crop specific zonal cooperative farming society, there is no harm in entering into such a deal, provided it is accompanied by two precautionary steps. One is to get such a

contract whetted by a legal expert. And the other is whether the state does undertake the responsibility to get the contract executed fairly and justly.

(s) Lastly, but more importantly, taking into account the question of the acute indebtedness of farmers in the developing countries, the entire crop specific zonal cooperative farming societies in each country should appeal to the concerned government to fulfil the below noted three demands: (1) To remit the entire debt, whether institutional or non-institutional, due from the farmers (including the rural landless); (2) to make a provision for providing cheap credit to farmers through 30 percent of the whole institutional (official or semi-official) lending and 10 percent to rural landless and urban poor, while prohibiting all non-institutional lending; and (3) to restructure agriculture on the cooperative basis (which will not disturb the existing land-holding units and prove far superior in quality, productivity and profitability than the corporate farming that will, within a short time, lead to the dispossession of all the farmers, small or big, from their lands and transform them into a group of unemployed workers. Further, the cooperative farming will establish the vitality of its democratic, equalitarian and creative principles in contrast to the Soviet collective farming which even denied trade union rights to its workers.

8

In the developed countries, big corporate farms should be, after paying due compensation to its owners, transformed into cooperative farms by selling its shares to the common people as provided by the people-environment oriented cooperative law.

9

The above analysis calls upon all those who agree with its orientation and agenda to carry out a three-sided task. That is, to create awareness and generate motivation among the farmers about the steep crisis facing agriculture, its cause and solution.

10

To accord a proper place to agriculture in human society, it is necessary to change the existing capital (i.e., money and wealth)-oriented corporate capitalist system (whose only priorty is to help capital owners in the maximisation of their profit by following its (i.e., corporate system's) pet double-dealing style, i.e., saying one thing and doing another) and to replace it by a nature-human directed social system [which stands for two top priorities, i.e., environment and man, which follows five basic principles, i.e., environmental promotion, fair equality (i.e., empowerment of the people in place of corporate capital supported political parties and business circles, social security to every deprived and needy person and the rationalisation of irrational income differences in the proportion of 1:5), productivity (or growth rate), peoples-led democracy and all-sided transparency and which, taking into account the highly important position of agriculture—concerned with human food and health, on the one hand, and with the proper development of all environmental resources, i.e., land, water, climate, bio-diversity, forests, etc., on the other—accords first place to agriculture in the social development model].

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