

1.4. Strategies for 2008-09 Agriculture and Rural Development

The strategies for the Annual Plan 2008-09 are based on the approach adopted for the Eleventh Plan.

Sustained agricultural growth is essential to attain a high economic growth in the state. As put forward in the Eleventh Plan, the state proposes to address issues like increasing area under cultivation, decreasing the yield gap, optimizing water management and improving post harvest processing and marketing. Increasing farmers' access to cultivable land is a major priority area under the Eleventh Plan. The flagship scheme for distribution of two acres of land to landless agricultural labour households has attempted the successful transformation of wastelands to cultivable land, through land development and creation of water sources.

The challenge of improving the overall productivity of the land and reducing the yield gap for various crops is proposed to be addressed by making available all the inputs such as quality seeds, fertilizers and pesticides. It is proposed to strengthen agricultural research and revamp the extension services so as to achieve dissemination of appropriate agricultural technology to the farmers,.

In order to make agriculture a viable and sustainable occupation, it is proposed to ensure farmers' access to credit from organized financial institutions at reasonable interest rates. Accordingly, the state continues to implement the scheme for loan and interest waiver for farmers who have obtained credit from cooperative banks in the state, in view of the successive crop failures in the recent past.

Water availability and management is another critical factor for increasing overall production. As the state has already exploited its surface water potential to a large extent, it is proposed to promote rational use and management of surface and ground water. In the

absence of assured irrigation facilities, the state is making attempts to promote water saving techniques such as micro irrigation, farm ponds and check dams and to incentivize less water intensive crops. Technology and research to develop drought resistant crops for better returns in dryland farming will be encouraged.

The schemes of the National Agricultural Development Programme (NADP) coupled with precision farming techniques would be effectively utilized to promote horticulture and floriculture in the State. Providing adequate warehousing facilities, strengthening the marketing linkages, endowing the farmer with needed information and eliminating middlemen forms another set of strategies to increase farm income during the year 2008-09.

Environment and Forests

Development and environmental degradation must be balanced to meet the needs of the society. Protection of fragile ecosystems, and reclamation of degraded forests are some of the strategies proposed for the year 2008-09. Education and training of environmental managers and creating environmental awareness among students and the general public will also be taken up to increase the capacity for better environmental management in the society as a whole. Research on development of timber and timber products will be an area of priority. The state will consciously encourage farmers to utilize fallow lands for taking up tree plantation in an effort to achieve its overall green cover target.

Industry and Infrastructure

The Tamil Nadu economy is driven primarily by non-farm sectoral growth since 1990. Balanced industrial growth is essential to provide employment opportunities to the migrant labour force from agriculture as well as to equitably disperse growth centres across the state. The need for state intervention to ensure such spatially well spread industrial development in Tamil Nadu assumes renewed

significance in the context of increasing regional imbalances over the last one and a half decades.

While continuing the role of the public sector in providing infrastructure facilities such as roads, transport, power and connectivity to retain Tamil Nadu's premier position as a favoured investment destination, the state is poised to facilitate industrial investment and growth in the state through the creation of industrial estates and Special Industrial Areas ensuring access to credit through industrial financial institutions as well as through simplification of procedures for industrial clearance. This will help to create employment opportunities and balanced regional development.

The promotion of small and tiny industries through cluster formation will take centre stage in the industrial policy because such units are especially effective in increasing employment opportunities and in spatially spreading the growth process.

Rural and Urban infrastructure

The urban population is on the increase. It is therefore proposed to improve urban infrastructure facilities such roads, water supply, sewerage and housing. Rural infrastructure will also be constantly upgraded to ensure quality of life for those living in the rural areas. Road connectivity, provision of drinking water and sanitation, as well as provision of social infrastructure in the villages are the priority areas for the year 2008-09.

Employment

Sectors such as agriculture and allied industries, wasteland development, small and cottage industries, housing and construction, service and maintenance sector and rural infrastructure are geared up so as to achieve the targeted number of new jobs in the Eleventh Plan. Increase in skill formation through expansion of capacities in ITI's and polytechnics, establishing linkage with industry to develop relevant training programmes in newly emerging growth areas, strengthening

of labour security measures for unorganized labour and reducing gender gap in employment and wages are some of the other strategies during 2008-09 that would help the state to create employment opportunities.

Human Development

Provision of education and health to improve human capabilities along with poverty alleviation is a major priority in the Annual Plan 2008-09 as in the Eleventh Plan. Having achieved universal enrolment and retention at the elementary level, the state proposes to shift the focus towards quality improvement. Extending the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan to secondary education is another priority for the state. A foundation is expected to be laid during the year 2008-09 for the introduction of the equitable education system with a view to unify not only the syllabi and evaluation system at the secondary level but also to ensure quality infrastructure facilities in all schools. In the field of higher education, it is proposed to expand educational opportunities and impart employable skills to the students.

The state can pride itself on having a well spread network of health facilities at primary, secondary and tertiary level. Though there has been consistent improvement in the health indicators such as IMR and MMR, a renewed thrust is necessary to accelerate the progress towards the state's development goals. The state has put in place various innovative approaches to reach the unreached and provide them with access to quality health services both in rural and urban areas. Prevention and control of communicable and non-communicable diseases and newly emerging vector borne diseases such as chikunguniya as well as lifestyle diseases such as diabetes and cancer will also form priority concerns of the state during the year 2008-09.

The state is well on its way towards achieving its human development goals. However, there are glaring inter district and intra

district disparities in attainment levels. The human development paradigm should form an integral part of the planning process, so that resources can be allocated based on backwardness and all can equally share the fruits of growth.

Welfare of SCs and STs

As a part of fulfilling the state's objective of social justice, the state proposes to effectively implement the SCSP and the TSP through appropriate monitoring of the schemes. The flow of funds to SCSP and TSP is expected to be around 19.5% and 1.5% of the total plan outlay of Rs. 16,000 crore.