

Dialogue on SDG Blueprint for Sustainable Agriculture **Date: 9th November 2023**

Venue: Marigold Hall, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi

Summary Points

Welcome Address

Dr Shailly Kedia (Senior Fellow and Associate Director, TERI): Dr Kedia delivered the welcome remarks and highlighted the significance of the study and the key components of the study, including synergy and trade-offs, and complex interlinkages that exist between sustainable development goals and sustainable agriculture. She emphasized the importance of the study given the current scenario where sustainability of agriculture is need of the hour.

Special Address

Ms Marit Marie Strand (Counsellor, Royal Norwegian Embassy): She emphasized the intricate nature of the relationship between the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and sustainable agriculture in her address. She delved into the activities and initiatives carried out by Norway within the agricultural sector on a global scale.

Ms. Strand also brought attention to the social obstacles that affect sustainable agriculture, including issues related to accessibility and awareness. These barriers can hinder the progress of sustainable agricultural practices by limiting people's ability to engage in or benefit from such initiatives.

Furthermore, she discussed the significance of oceans and the blue economy in the context of sustainable agriculture. Oceans play a crucial role in providing resources for agriculture, such as seafood, and have the potential to contribute to sustainable agricultural practices through the development of the blue economy. This highlights the interconnection between marine and terrestrial ecosystems and the need for a holistic approach to achieving sustainability in agriculture.

Chair's Address

Dr Prodipto Ghosh (Distinguished Fellow, The Energy and Resources Institute): Dr Prodipto Ghosh provided valuable insights during his address. He discussed the historical context of how agricultural practices have become unsustainable and identified the root causes of it. He highlighted the trend of food production systems in India, underscoring the deterioration of natural resources due to unsustainable agricultural practices.

It was noted that although some people attributed the issue to vehicle pollution, the primary cause is the burning of rice straw, which has significant environmental consequences. This highlights the importance of addressing this agricultural practice to promote sustainability.

Dr Ghosh also stressed the importance of informing the public about natural farming methods, which are more environmentally friendly and sustainable. Additionally, he mentioned the need for effective eco-labelling systems that can help consumers make informed choices and support environmentally responsible products. Government procurement practices were also highlighted as a crucial aspect of promoting sustainability in agriculture, as government actions can significantly impact the market and encourage sustainable practices.

Furthermore, Dr Ghosh emphasized the role of political will, capital, and acumen in driving progress towards sustainable agriculture. Political support and leadership are essential in implementing policies and regulations that support sustainable farming practices.

In addition to these points, Dr Ghosh drew attention to the critical issue of groundwater depletion in the Indo-Gangetic region. Groundwater depletion is a significant concern, as it can have adverse effects on agriculture, ecosystems, and the livelihoods of people in the region. It underscores the need for sustainable water management practices and policies to address this serious issue. He also gave examples of unsustainable practices around the world and quoted the challenges of palm oil plantation in South-east Asia. He also emphasized on the need to have eco-labelling practices which will further expedite sustainability throughout the agricultural systems.

Thematic Address

Dr Tapan Chakraborty (Scientist, Central Ground Water Board, Government of India):

Dr Tapan provided a comprehensive overview of the key interventions and initiatives undertaken by the CGWB in the water and agriculture sectors in initiatives like the Atal Bhujal Yojna and the Jal Jeevan Mission. These programs are instrumental in addressing water-related challenges in India, ensuring sustainable groundwater management, and providing clean water to rural communities, he highlighted. Dr Chakraborty highlighted that the CGWB aligns its efforts with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including 6.1 (access to safe and affordable drinking water), 6.3 (improving water quality), 6.4 (efficient use of water resources), 6.5 (implementing integrated water resources management), 6.6 (protecting and restoring ecosystems related to water), 6.a (expanding international cooperation on water-related issues), and 6.b (supporting local communities in improving water and sanitation management). While mentioning that community involvement has traditionally been limited, Dr Chakraborty highlighted the increased significance placed on community participation, particularly through the Atal Bhujal Yojna. This shift recognizes the importance of local communities in sustainable water management.

Dr Chakraborty discussed the necessity of artificial groundwater recharge due to the growing demand for groundwater in various sectors. The revised master plan for artificial recharge is a macro-level strategy aimed at assessing the feasibility of recharge structures in different terrain conditions across the country. This plan not only addresses over-dependence on groundwater but also promotes water conservation. Dr Chakraborty pointed out the collaboration between state and central government agencies in water conservation efforts, leading to an increase in the construction of artificial recharge structures. This collaboration signifies a concerted effort to address water resource challenges.

He also highlighted that the master plan for artificial recharge has already reached approximately one lakh beneficiaries through training and other support mechanisms. This demonstrates the tangible positive impact of these initiatives on local communities and their

access to clean and sustainable water sources. This will address the Vision 2047 of community engagement for management of groundwater resources.

Presentation on SDG Blueprint

Ms Palak Khanna and Ms Madhuparna Maiti (Researchers, The Energy and Resources Institute) provided a comprehensive overview of the SDG Blueprint. They delved into the research findings, shedding light on the valuable insights that emerged from their study. The researchers likely discussed the methodologies used in their research, explaining how they collected and analysed data to arrive at their conclusions.

Ms. Khanna and Ms. Maiti also highlighted the key areas of improvement at the policy interface in the context of SDGs and sustainable agriculture, emphasizing where progress is needed and potential challenges.

Discussions with participants

Analysing Data: Examining crop insurance data over a period of time allows for a comprehensive analysis of changing trends. Agriculture is influenced by numerous external factors, including weather patterns, economic conditions, and technological advancements.

Enhancing the Role of Private Players: Private players can play a crucial role in the agricultural sector by leveraging technologies like fintech and artificial intelligence for monitoring and evaluating crop insurance policies. These advancements can streamline the implementation process and make financial access more accessible to farmers. Private sector involvement can lead to more efficient and data-driven decision-making, ultimately benefiting farmers.

Defining the Scope of Organic Agriculture: Defining the scope and boundaries of organic agriculture is essential to ensure clarity and consistency in its practice and regulation. Also, licensing and certification of organic products can be considered as an indicator to understand the coverage of organic programs across the country.

Linkages or implications for SDG Index: The study can provide constructive perspectives for SDG Index in India.

Addressing groundwater challenges: Since groundwater extraction in India has exacerbated the groundwater depletion and is one of the highest in the world, it is important to address the issue and to look into crops systems that should be resilient towards the water scarcity. Food systems should be developed in a way that groundwater level is maintained.

Market fluctuations for crops: Price and output fluctuations for the crops make it challenging for farmers to and it is important to focus on the income support for farmers..

The dialogue concluded with a way forward to foster partnerships, integration, and holistic approaches to achieving the shared goals on sustainable development in context of sustainable development agriculture.