**Innovative Agriculture**

‘Krishi Mahotsav’- The New Extension Approach –

Reach Out To Farmers at Doorstep

The Gujarat Experience

I moved in as Agriculture Secretary in May, 2003. I received a call from our Agriculture Minister Shri Bhupendrasinh Chudasama. “Be ready – CM has called us for some important matter”. We went together. Shri Modiji told us “Let us revive Gujarat Agriculture”. We need to reach farmers at door-step – let us call it Krishi Mahotsav – meeting farmers at village prior to sowing time in the month of May. Let us drought proof Gujarat with sustainable Agriculture.

We quickly set down and prepared a basic concept note based a draft prepared by Dr.P.K.Mishra – current Principal Secretary to Hon’ble Prime Minister who was my predecessor. He had worked on a plan. We immediately used and expanded it and prepared a draft.

This was discussed with Shri Modi. He improved it – “let us introduce technology – if we have health check for ourselves – why soil can not have Health Check to know what nutrients are missing – what crop it can produce with its chemical composition” – we came out with Soil Health Card for each farmer. This was introduction to Climate Resilient Agriculture – in the year 2004 – much before the world thought about it.

CM, further improved our design and introduced concept ‘Krishi Rath’ to visit each village with a team. Rath was a small tractor – truck mounted with exhibition of good crop practices and videos with agriculture team to visit each village and meet farmers at village level to interact and solve their problems. CM, further, suggested let us have a demonstration to check what is missing – before we launch the program, which we did, and presented and then he gave go ahead. Such is his meticulous approach with participative management to make it full proof and result oriented.

Then he called upon to make presentation to the Cabinet. The Cabinet approved the approach. After Cabinet meeting Shri Hasmukh Adhia – Principal Secretary told me “Ball is in your court”. I said with “Hon’ble CM’s backing – we will all make it happen”.

Gujarat is a state situated on the western coast of India. Diverse in its topography, it boasts of a 1600 km coast line and is home to the largest desert in the country known as Rann of Kachchh. The state has all possible handicaps faced by agriculture such as 70% of agriculture being rain-fed, recurrent droughts, untimely/irregular rainfall and some areas receiving rain only three to four days in a year. Gujarat’s agriculture suffered heavily whenever there were droughts. The growth rate of agriculture used to be negative during such years. In a normal year, the agricultural growth rate used to be 1 to 2%. Agriculture was not sustainable in many parts of the state, due to recurrent crop failures, resulting into continuing of poverty in rural areas.

However, this is a story of the last millennium. In the new millennium, Gujarat, with determination and persistent efforts, changed the agriculture scenario. From 2004 onwards, agriculture witnessed a major turnaround with a growth of 11% per year. The state became a front-runner in agricultural production in the country. This turn-around became possible due to certain effective initiative in all 18,000 villages of the state, known as “Krishi Mahotsav”.

This was led by the Former Hon’ble Chief Minister Shri Narendra Modi – who is currently the Prime Minister of our country. It was started from top by Chief Minister himself - for action at bottom - the village level and at individual farmer level, with focus on selection of crops which soil can sustain, Free input assistance to poor farmers.

The key to this success was direct involvement of public leadership both elected and non-elected members of Public Governance System. Effective soil and water management and proper land use by using mass communication approach; micro level management.

On the water front, more than 1,00,000 check dams and ponds got constructed. In the previous decade, the numbers of new check dams constructed were only 6000.

It inter-linked rivers such as the Mahi and the Sabarmati. These rivers, in turn, were linked with Narmada and Mahi canals. In its rain-starved areas, such as North Gujarat and Kutch, a special scheme for irrigation known as “Sujalam-Sufalam” was introduced. Scientific agriculture was introduced by distributing Soil Health Card to every farmer. 50 farmers from each village were given such cards every year including soil moisture analysis and past five year’s average market price of the crop grown in their area and suggestion for alternative crops. This helped them make to informed choice in the selection of crops. Farmers now sowed crops that gave them higher return and were sustainable in the soil of their farms in arena of adverse and intense weather events.

The poor farmers were focused for assistance. Every year 15 poor farmers of each village were assisted with free Input-consisting of Certified Seeds, package of Fertilizer and Pesticides and one tool like sprayer

A direct door-to-door extension programme for guiding the farmers at village level was introduced under a pre-kharif (pre-monsoon) programme. Every village was visited by a development team comprising agri-scientists and officers from the veterinary department, co-operative, irrigation department, rural development department and local Banks etc. High-yeild crops were identified. The farmers were guided about using certified seeds and looking at price of APMCs before selling their farm produce. The campaign was led by District Magistrate – DM and District Development Officers(DDO). Cattle camps were organised for health check-up and vaccination at every village.

Bhaskaracharya Institute For Space Applications and Geo-Informatics, prepared a micro-level water harvesting plan for land use by identifying sites for check dams and villages ponds for every village.

Learning material - guidebook was made available to the farmers for crop and animal management, including use of fertilizers and pesticides. Free telephonic Help Line was introduced to answer the queries of farmers.

All these initiatives were backed by total involvement of public leadership, both elected and non-elected. And all schemes related to farmers converged at village level for implementation. The Chief Minister to village Sarpanch, The Chief Secretary, to village level worker, voluntary agencies, input dealers and co-operatives and bankers- representing the rank and file of institutions were involved in the mass communication meets at village level.

The joint initiative brought sustainability in Gujarat agriculture. Bringing about overall growth in all important crops and Horticulture. An increase in the per capita income of the average farmer. The major transformation occurred in the state’s most difficult areas of Saurashtra, Kachchh and North Gujarat and farmers doubled their income.

This is an example of Strong Political Will – by the Chief Minister Shri Narendra Modi backed by meticulous plan implementation with participation of farmers. As Prime Minister of Country now Shri Naraendra Modi has introduced the soil health Card, Micro- irrigation and other schemes for benefit of all farmers of our country and given a call to double their income.