

India Needs to Invest in Agricultural Infrastructure



L-R: **Jayanta Roy**, Principal Advisor, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII); **Sanjay Jaju**, Commissioner (Civil Supplies) & Ex Officio Secretary to Government of Andhra Pradesh; **Suman Bery**, Director General, National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER); Moderator: **Sudha Iyer**, Chairperson and Managing Director, Srijana Group of Companies

Though India has comparative advantage compared to the rest of the world on the issue of food security, there was an urgent need to focus on agricultural infrastructure to retain that advantage. If this is not done, India could face a problem of food security in future. This was the view of panelists at the session on 'Spiralling Food Prices: Time to Panic?' during a seminar on 'Ideas India 2008', being organized by Aspen Institute India here.

Suman Bery, Director General, National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER), pointed out at the historical perspective regarding India's concern for food security. "The problem arising out of drought in the sixties led to a slew of measures in the field of technology and steps like minimum support price (MSP), public distribution system (PDS) that led to the green revolution," he said adding that today there was a need to take more steps to take the process forward. "Whatever we have done so far is not working in particular areas like malnutrition of children," he said. "Lack of good infrastructure is holding India back," Mr Bery said and suggested removal of trade barriers and facilitation of free movement of foodgrains in the country.

Sanjay Jaju, Commissioner (Civil Supplies) & Ex Officio Secretary to the Government of Andhra Pradesh, pointed out that "food availability is not a problem in India, it is food affordability." He cited statistical data to buttress his point. "In 1947, India's population was 35 crore and the food production was to the tune of 50 million tones. While the population has gone up by nearly four times now, the food production has also risen to 210 million tones

correspondingly," he said. So we have to aim for making food more affordable to the marginalized section of the society, he added.

Agreeing with Mr Jaju, **Dr Jayanto Roy, Principal Advisor, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)**, said that "the problem is not of foodgrain production but of distribution and marketing." But he expressed his concern at lack of good infrastructure and stagnant food productivity that could pose a problem in the future. "We have to go for pro-active policy on retail and storage of agricultural produce to address this problem along with emphasis on research and development, multi-crop system and better land and water management," Mr Roy added.

Ms Sudha Iyer, Chairperson and Managing Director, Srijana Group of Companies, moderated the discussion while pointing out that in terms of rising food prices and food security, the forecast is not good globally. "The forecast is that in next 10 years the world will see its worst commodity crisis," she said.

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