



# **Sustainable Agriculture for Livelihoods Promotion in the North Eastern Region of India (NER)**

*21 September, 2024*

*Bharat Mandapam Held as part of  
World Food India 2024*



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## Introduction

The Ministry of Food Processing Industries organised the third edition of World Food India, which was held in Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, from 19th September to 22nd September, 2024. In this regard, a thematic session on Sustainable Agriculture for Livelihoods Promotion in the North Eastern Region of India (NER) was conducted under the aegis of Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, which was supported by North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation and Centre for Responsible Business as partners.

The NER is abundant in natural resources given its agro-climatic conditions. However, there are some challenges in enabling sustainable use of much of the resource, in the interest of the local populace. Firstly, there is scope for higher levels of adoption of sustainable agriculture in the NER, given that the region has the potential to increase its farm income and enhance its food and nutrition security. Secondly, given that the population to a certain extent engages in agricultural activities across the region, it is pertinent to make agriculture economically and ecologically sustainable. Thirdly, there are practical challenges related to the road network especially first mile connectivity, logistics and infrastructure facilities, and finally, limited investments in processing and in situ value addition. In spite of these factors, there is growing interest among buyers, brands, investors and the international community in NER agriculture value chain(s). One of the areas of increasing interest among these players is information related to sustainability parameters in the supply/value chains of agricultural commodities, and their role in it.

The session at World Food India 2024 was hosted by North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation with support from Centre for Responsible Business. In addition to leveraging the opportunity provided by the World Food India platform, it was a means to showcase how the agricultural value chain can be used as a means to advance sustainable development. Farmers and FPOs as integral stakeholders, have a significant role to play from the point of view of the agricultural sector, which can be further enhanced by ensuring access to capacity development and market linkages. Thereby, benefiting the local communities and the economy.

## Overview Of Proceedings

### Keynote Address

Shri Chanchal Kumar, IAS, Secretary, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) provided the Keynote Address, which set the context ahead of the Panel Discussion. In his Keynote Address remarks, he highlighted CSR expenditure in the NER and called for increasing the private sector investment flows into the region. In addition, he mentioned the policy-level institutional arrangements that benefit the NER from the agricultural perspective. In this regard, he mentioned the scheme for organizing farmers into FPOs, namely the central sector scheme titled Formation and Promotion of 10,000 Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs). He also highlighted the importance of an approach to agriculture in the region that lays emphasis on sustainable development.



**Shri Chanchal Kumar, IAS**, Secretary, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) addressing the Participants, alongside the Panelists at the World Food India 2024 Session, via his Keynote Address

In addition, Shri Chanchal Kumar, IAS shared the following insights in his Keynote which can be found in list form below:

- Emphasised on the importance of post-harvest technologies including primary processing, storage and logistics
- Underlined the advantage farmers can have by focusing more on high value products, through organic agriculture and natural farming
- Emphasised the imperatives for strong market linkages
- Prioritisation of sustainable water management
- Invited attention of businesses towards Sustainable
- Agriculture and livelihoods through CSR projects

## Panel Discussion



From Left to Right: **Nitya Chhiber**, Senior Programme Officer, Centre for Responsible Business; **Rijit Sengupta**, CEO, Centre for Responsible Business; Commodore **Rajiv Ashok (Retd.)**, Managing Director, NERAMAC; **Shri Chanchal Kumar**, IAS, Secretary, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER); **Shri Angshuman Dey**, IFS, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) and Secretary, North Eastern Council (NEC); **Dipanwita Chakraborty**, Regional Director- Corporate Responsibility and Sustainable Development, Asia Pacific, Cargill; **Alay Barah**, Executive Director, ICCo

A Panel Discussion that constituted policy, private sector and practitioner perspectives, respectively was convened to discuss the following:

- Create visibility about some of the 'good practices' (model) from among FPOs, FPCs, Agri-entrepreneurs in the NER
- Highlight enabling policy elements (supporting factors) – and possible ways for further strengthening them
- Explore potential solutions to existing (and now well-known impediments) to agri value chain development in the NER

- Identify opportunities for long-term investments in developing agri value chain in the NER, and ensuring sustainable livelihoods for the youth

The moderated Panel Discussion provided enriching insights on the dynamic nature of the agricultural value chain in the NER. In addition, the Panelists discussed ways in which to

advance the agricultural value chain in the region by taking an economy-centric approach that considers local communities and the environment.

### Challenges

- Areas for consideration that need to be addressed, include high cost of production, sparse population, limited processing facilities, prone to natural disasters
- There is an element of risk for business-related development to occur in the region, which may be constraining the operations of private sector and hence there is scope for improved data collection to inform decision-making
- Engagement of private sector can be further improved in the region
- There is a need for further involvement of the private sector viz fulfilling requirements of investment, CSR, appropriate technology, access to finance/capital
- Climate change is an issue that needs to be considered when considering interventions in this region
- From the perspective of the agricultural value chain, there is scope for intervention in relation to market linkages, the purchase of inputs, access to capital

### Opportunities

- There is a need to develop an action-oriented agenda and take it forward in a collaborative fashion
- Combine traditional knowledge with modern practices to advance the agricultural value chain in the region
- Solution of the region must incorporate an approach that emphasises traditional knowledge of agriculture
- CSR flows into the region is low as compared to its potential and this needs to change
- There is further scope for knowledge sharing within the agricultural sector as well as sharing of good practices
- It was shared that collectivisation of FPOs has its advantages and that the role of Cluster-Based Business Organizations (CBBOs) can be leveraged to collectively ensure advancement of the agricultural value chain in the region
- When working with farmers, trust-building is imperative
- There is a trend among farmers transitioning away from carrying out jhum cultivation as there is a growing awareness of the importance of a sustainable approach in agriculture.
- Ensure that the agricultural value chain considers local, cultural sensitivities
- Accelerate growth in agriculture in by collaboration and by inclusivity of youth and women
- There is presence of good markets in neighbouring countries, and it is a region where there is promise of potential from GI-tagged products

### Policy Innovations

- It is important that schemes promote an approach that emphasise sustainability and realise their potential with joint government and private sector collaboration
- The role of capacity building can be further leveraged via training and acting as a link between government and FPOs

- Clusterisation of FPOs facilitates collaboration easily and capacity building also becomes simpler to operationalise if there is collectivisation
- One approach that is encouraged in agriculture is to ensure diversification of crops to ensure regeneration of soil
- Imperative for government schemes to be tailored for women, especially given their requirements for capital and land vary from men
- The example of backyard poultry as adopted in Odisha was mentioned to demonstrate how to contribute to livelihoods security
- High yielding varieties of crops was highlighted to enable farmers to earn higher returns but this requires investment
- Requirement of infrastructure such as processing was mentioned to support the advancement of the agricultural value chains and in this regard, Bamboo as an example was mentioned as it requires first mile connectivity
- Schemes were highlighted, which can be further leveraged to provide support from the perspectives of Digital agriculture, income support, crop diversification



From Left to Right (Clockwise): Shri Chanchal Kumar, IAS, Secretary, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) providing the Keynote Address; Panelists on Stage while the Keynote Address is being made; Commodore Rajiv Ashok (Retd.) felicitating Shri Chanchal Kumar, IAS, Secretary, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER)

## Way Forward

Summing up, the Session emphasizes that an approach that considers all three pillars: environment, economy and society must be applied in relation to advancing sustainable agricultural value chain in the NER. In this regard, five broad areas were highlighted that can inform a Call to Action. These include Procurement; Investment; appropriate technology; Digital infrastructure; Finance, including CSR expenditure.

It was evident from the response to the Session that the topic of advancing agricultural value chains in the North Eastern Region is one that is of contemporary interest given alignment with entrepreneurship, livelihoods and Industry 4.0 to name just a few, which were mentioned during the course of the session. It is with renewed vigor the organizers of the session continue to spearhead sustainable agriculture in this region in the spirit of collaboration.



Commodore Rajiv Ashok (Retd.), Managing Director, NERAMAC felicitating the panelists



	SPEAKER	AGENDA ITEM
<b>INAUGURAL SESSION</b>		
1000-1010hrs	Commodore Rajiv Ashok (Retd.), Managing Director, NEARAMAC	Welcome Remarks
1010-1025hrs	Shri. Chanchal Kumar, Secretary, Ministry of DoNER & Secretary, North Eastern Council (NEC), Government of India (TBC)	Keynote Address
<b>PANEL DISCUSSION</b>		
1025-1110hrs	<p><b>MODERATOR</b> Rijit Sengupta, Chief Executive Officer, Centre for Responsible Business</p> <p><b>PANELLISTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Angshuman Dey, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Development of the North East Region (MoDoNER)</li> <li>• Commodore Rajiv Ashok (Retd.), Managing Director, NEARAMAC</li> <li>• Dipanwita Chakraborty, Regional Director- Corporate Responsibility and Sustainable Development, Asia Pacific, Cargill</li> <li>• Mr. Alay Barah, Executive Director, ICCo India</li> </ul>	Panel Discussion
<b>Q &amp; A SESSION (1110-1120HRS)</b>		
<b>CLOSING REMARKS (10 MINS)</b>		
1120-1130hrs	Rijit Sengupta, Chief Executive Officer, CRB	Summary & Closing Remarks

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