Centre for Environment and Food Security

Annual Report 2006-2007

Preface

2006-07 was an eventful year for the **Centre for Environment and Food Security (CEFS)** for many reasons. The overwhelming response to all our research and advocacy programmes carried out during 2006-2007 exceeded all our expectations. Our field experience in Orissa has completely transformed our perception of and approach to poverty, hunger and food security. We now firmly believe that without achieving freedom from corruption we can not achieve freedom from hunger. We have realized that corruption is the biggest killer in India and colonial bureaucracy of the country is the host and carrier of the virus of corruption. The "invisible virus of corruption" is killing about 40 lakh of Indians every year. It is high time we got rid of this deadly virus. We at CEFS have now resolved to do whatever it takes to get rid of the virus of corruption. To begin with, CEFS would strive to make key anti-poverty programmes like NREGS, PDS, ICDS and MDM corruption-free. Our back of the envelope calculations suggest that very few Indians would go to bed without food if these four anti-hunger programmes become free from corruption. NREGS is the biggest anti-hunger programme and it has the potential to transform the face and fate of rural India. Therefore, CEFS is currently focusing its entire energy, time and resources to make this historic scheme corruption-free.

In order to ensure effective implementation of the NREGS and to make it corruption-free, CEFS has invoked and utilised the powers and might of all the four major pillars of Indian democracy- Executive, Legislature, Judiciary and Press. The CEFS survey report on NREGS implementation has made an unprecedented impact on the ground and all the four players have been stirred into action. There are already about 100 news stories/articles (50 in English and 50 in Oriya) based on CEFS report. (Some of the News reports can be seen at: (http://www.cefsindia.org/cefsinmedia.html). Many more are in the pipeline. There are 5 official enquiries/ investigations already constituted on

Rs 500 crore NREGS scam uncovered by CEFS Survey. The Central Government was earlier stonewalling every demand of investigation/enquiry into irregularities and financial bunglings in the implementation of NREGS and was always dismissive about all these allegations. However, after the release of the CEFS report and a subsequent letter to the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) and its Central Employment Guarantee Council (CEGC) have been caught on the wrong foot. A number of official enquiries have been now ordered. The Central Government has instructed CAG (Comptroller and Auditor General of India) to investigate allegations of irregularities and financial bunglings in 69 districts from across the country. CAG has been directed to conduct a special enquiry into Rs 500 crore NREGS scam in Orissa uncovered by CEFS survey.

The Central Government has also asked the Government of Orissa to conduct an official enquiry into the allegations of CEFS report and submit it to the Central Government urgently. The Government of Orissa has ordered a thorough probe of the performance of NREGS by Hyderabad-based NIRD (National Institute of Rural Development). The Orissa Government has also appointed many research institutes and Universities to help it in evaluating NREGS and conduct social audits. The Central Employment Guarantee Council (CEGC) is also likely to visit Orissa and carry out its own enquiries/evaluations.

On 16th September 2007, the Chief Secretary of Orissa had called a meeting of all the district collectors to discuss the findings and allegations of CEFS report. On 17th -18th September 2007, the Union Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) had called a review meet of NREGS at Bhubaneswar and officials from 10 states participated, apart from the Cabinet Minister, both Ministers of State and all the senior officials of MORD. At the Press Conference after this meet in Bhubaneshwar, the Union Minister of Rural Development, Mr. Raghuvansh Prasad Singh admitted for the first time that the MORD had received large numbers of complaints of irregularities and financial bunglings from across the country. He also admitted in the Press conference that the Government of Orissa had failed on both counts, implementation as well as monitoring of NREGS. The

Minister announced at the Press Conference that he had asked the Chief Minister of Orissa to conduct a thorough probe in Rs 500 Crore NREGS Scam of Orissa unearthed by CEFS and submit the report to MORD urgently. The Minister warned of stern action against all the erring officials if the ongoing investigations confirm CEFS findings.

There has been already a question in the Lok Sabha on the CEFS survey findings and we hope there would be many more in the next session of the Parliament and next session of Orissa assembly too. Most of the Opposition parties of Orissa are demanding a special session of Orissa assembly to discuss the NREGS scam unearthed by CEFS study. A committee of the Orissa Assembly has also confirmed the CEFS findings and said that there had been serious irregularities and misappropriation of NREGS funds; and NREGS had no impact on the level of distress migration of Adivasis from Orissa's KBK region.

In the years ahead, we would strive to redefine activism and transform the contours of development discourse and ecological politics in India. We firmly believe that poverty is the worst form of violence and food is god to the hungry. We pledge ourselves to work towards a just,equitous and hunger-free India. We are prepared to take all the risks and to pay any price to achieve freedom from corruption and freedom from hunger.

Parshuram Ray
New Delhi

Introduction of Centre for Environment and Food Security

The Centre for Environment and Food Security (CEFS) was founded in April, 2001 by some eminent scholars, writers, environmentalists, scientists and activists like Prof. Ashis Nandy, Dr. Kamla Chowdhry, Dr. Pradipto Roy, Mr. Anupam Mishra, Prof. P. S. Ramakrishnan, Dr. T. N. Khoshoo, Mr. P. N. Singh and Mr. Parshuram Ray. CEFS was founded with the broad objective of knowledge-based activism on the issues of poverty, hunger, food security, sustainable livelihoods, sustainable development and ecological security. Research, Advocacy and Campaign on these issues is the core mandate of this NGO based in New Delhi. Parshuram Ray is the Founder Director of CEFS.

The main aims and objectives of the Centre for Environment and Food Security include:

- To promote study and research on environment and food security to create awareness and knowledge among the people.
- To disseminate environment and food security knowledge among the people by conducting training programs and holding lectures, workshops and seminars.
- To implement and encourage all kinds of projects, plans and programs for promoting ecological balance and food security.
- To build a resource centre on environment, food security and sustainable livelihoods.
- To mobilize people and build a network of grassroot organizations, civil society groups, NGOs, activists and experts for promoting sustainable development and food security.
- To publish books, research papers, monographs and occasional papers on environment and food security related issues.
- To carry out intensive campaign with media for covering and highlighting the issues of environment and food security.
- To promote strategies for conservation of natural and human-managed biodiversity, which have implications for food and human security for all sections of the society, especially societies living close to nature and natural resources.

Introduction of CEFS Founders and Board Members

1. **Prof. Ashis Nandy** is presently National Fellow of the ICSSR (Indian Council of Social Science Research) and Chairperson of the Committee for Cultural Choices and Global Futures. He has been Director of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (1992-1997); Woodrow Wilson Fellow, Woodrow Wilson International Center, Washington (1988); Charles Wallace Fellow, Department of Politics, University of Hull (Summer, 1990); Fellow, Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities, University of Edinburgh (Summer, 1991); UNESCO Professor, Centre for European Studies, University of Trier, Germany (Summer, 1994); and Regent's Fellow, University of California, Los Angeles. Trained as a sociologist and clinical psychologist, Nandy's research interests are political psychology, cultures of knowledge, utopias and visions, popular culture, and futures. Among Nandy's books are Alternative Sciences (1980,1995); At the Edge of Psychology (1980); The Intimate Enemy (1983); Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias (1987); The Tao of Cricket (1989); The Illegitimacy of Nationalism (1994); and The Savage Freud and Other Essays in Possible and Retrievable Selves (1995). He is also co-author of The Blinded Eye (1993) also published as Barbaric Others, and Creating a Nationality (1995). Nandy has edited two books, (ed), Science, Hegemony and Violence (1988); and The Secret Politics of our Desires; and co-edited The Multiverse of Democracy (1996). Oxford University Press is now bringing out an omnibus edition of all his works. Nandy's works have been translated into a number of languages, among them Bengali, Chinese, Finnish, French, German, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Malayalam, Marathi, Polish, Russian, Spanish and Tamil. He has also contributed to major human rights reports on ethnic and communal violence and democratic elections.

2. **Dr. Prodipto Roy** has an M. Sc and Ph. D. in Rural Sociology with a minor in Agricultural Economics from the Pennsylvania State University, USA and a B. Sc. in Agriculture from the Agricultural Institute of Allahabad University. He started his professional career as an Assistant Professor of sociology, Washington State University, (1957-61); Director (Sociology) National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad

(1961-68); Director and Executive Chairperson, Council for Social Development, New Delhi (1968-1979); Visiting Professor, Tribhuvan University (1979-81) and then Sociologist, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Kathmandu (1984-89). Important Assignments: UN Centre for Regional Development, Nagoya, Japan 1974; ILO Bangladesh 1975; UN Asian and Pacific Development Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (1981); IBRD Consultant (1982-83); Australian AID project on R & R of project affected people due to Coal-mining, Jharkhand, 1994-98; appraisal of a Tree-growing programme, Palamu, Jharkhand (1998-2000). Publications: *Manual for Block Level Planning* NIRD, Hyderabad, Macmillan, Delhi, 1977 with BR Patil; *Planning with People*: *Decentralization in Nepal*, with Sant B Gurung, Orient Longmans, New Delhi 1987; *Third World Surveys*: *Survey Research Methods in Developing Nations,* New Delhi, Macmillan 1976; *Ecological Responsibility* in Social Change, Vol 31 Nos 1 & 2, 2001.

3. **Prof. P. S. Ramakrishnan**, Professor Emeritus of Ecology at Jawaharlal Nehru University, is an internationally recognized ecologist working in the interphase areas of linking ecological processes with social processes, directed towards sustainable livelihood/development of traditional societies. For his work, involving over 350 research publications and 8 books in this area of study, he has received a variety of national and international recognitions. He is currently involved in networking with a large number of scientists through many national and international programmes.

4. **Dr. T. N. Khoshoo**, was (expired in July 2002) one of the foremost environmental scientists of the country. His environmental canvas widened considerably when he was secretary to the govt. of India in the dept. of Environment. He was fellow of all the major science academies in country, and had to his credit a number of prestigious medals, prizes and awards including the Padma Bhushan, Indira Gandhi Paryavaran Puraskar, Government of India (1993) and Sasakawa Award of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP-2002).

5. **Dr. Kamla Chowdhary**, was (expired in February 2006) Chairperson of the National Wasteland Dovelopment Board, Govt. of India, Director of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmedabad and, Chairperson of the Centre for Science and Environment. She was at the faculty of Harvard University and had worked with the World Bank and Ford Foundation too.

6. **Shri Anupam Mishra**, currently General Secretary of the Gandhi Peace Foundation, is a distinguished social and environmental activist of India. Mishra's contribution in popularizing and reinventing the role of traditional Water Harvesting Practices of India has earned him a special name in the country. He is author of the celebrated book on traditional tanks of India titled *Aaj Bhi Khare Hai Talab (Tanks are still alive)* which has been translated in many languages and the print - run of the original Hindi version is a record 75,000 copies till now.

7. **Shri B. P. Singh** is a distinguished scholar and civil servant. Over the past 40 years he has held a variety of important positions within Assam as well as in the Government of India including Additional Secretary, Ministry of Environment & Forests (1993-95), Culture Secretary (1995-97) and Home Secretary (1997-99). He was Executive Director and Ambassador at the World Bank (1999-2002) representing India, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. B. P. Singh has authored four books including the two widely acclaimed ones: "The Problem of Change: A Study of North-East India" and "India's Culture – the State, the Arts and Beyond" both published by Oxford University Press, New Delhi. He is also Chief Editor of the "Millennium Book on New Delhi" published by Oxford University Press, New Delhi in 2001. Currently, B. P. Singh is Chancellor of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarnath (a Deemed University). He is also Chief Editor of the South Asia Series on "Perspectives on Economics, Technology and Governance" of Oxford University Press, New York.

Shri Parshuram Ray, founder director of the Centre for Environment & Food Security, is an activist, researcher and writer based in New Delhi.

Programmes and Projects Implemented during 2006-2007

National Seminar on Interlinking of Rivers

Organised by

Centre for Environment & Food Security

In collaboration with

National committee of Civil Society on Interlinking of Rivers (NCSCILR)

Development Alternatives & WWF International

Date of Seminar: 15-16 January 2007

Venue: India International Centre Annexe, New Delhi

Programme

1st day (9:30 am – 5:00 pm)

Registration from 9:30 -10:00 am

1st Session (10-11 am- Conference Room 3-IIC Annexe)

Inaugural

Chair: Prof Y K Alagh

Welcome to Delegates: Parshuram Ray

Theme Address: Dr. Ashok Khosla

Keynote Address: Dr. S R Hashim,

Inaugural Address: Prof. Y K Alagh

Tea Break (11-11. 15 am)

2nd Session (11:15 am - 1:00 pm-Conference Room 3-IIC Annexe)

Defining Surplus and Deficit River Water Basins and their relationship with floods and droughts

Chair: Dr Nitin Desai

Background Paper: Dr. Dinesh Kumar Mishra

Panelists: Dr. S R Hashim, Prof. S Janakrajan, Shri Udaysinh Gaikwad

Lunch Break (1-2pm)

3rd Session (2:00 pm - 3. 30 pm-Conference Room 2-IIC Main)

(2 Technical Sessions simultaneously)

Technical Session-A

Ownership and Equity in River Water Usage

Chair: Shri B P Singh

Background Paper: Dr. Suhas Paranjape

Panelists: Prof. S. Janakrajan, Shri S C Behar, Prof. Jayprakash Rao Polsani

Technical Session –B Conference Room 3--- IIC Annexe

Ecological Costs and Benefits

Chair: Dr Ashok Khosla

Background Paper: Prof. Jayanta Bandyopadhyay

Panelists: Prof P S Ramakrishnan, Prof V Rajamani, Prof Vijay Paranjpye, Shri R K Khanna (CWC), Dr Biksham Gujja

Tea Break (3. 30-3. 45pm

IVth Session (3. 45-5 pm)

(2 Technical Sessions simultaneously)

Technical Session-C --- Conference Room 2- IIC Main

Financial Viability of River Linking

Chair: Prof Kanchan Chopra

Background Paper:Prof Vijay Paranjapye

Panelists:Shri A D Mohile, Shri B G Verghese

Technical Session-D---- Conference Room 3-IIC Annexe

Technical Feasibility of River Linking

Chair: Shri A D Bhardwaj (D G- NWDA)

Background Paper: Dr T Prasad

Panelists:Shri N K Bhandari (Chief Engineer-NWDA, HQ) Shri Dunu Roy, Dr. Biksham Gujja

2nd Day (9. 30 am – 4.00 pm)

Vth Session (9. 30am-11am) Conference Room 3- IIC Annexe

Displacement, Resettlement and Rehabilitation

Chair: Prof Amitabh Kundu

Background Paper: Shri Himanshu Thakkar

Panelists: Ms Medha Patkar, Shri Ramaswamy R Iyer, Shri Prashant Bhushan, Shri S C Behar

Tea Break (11-11. 30pm)

Vith Session (11. 30am-1pm) Conference Room 3- IIC Annexe

Alternatives of Riverlinking

Chair: Dr Kirit Parikh

Background Paper: Prof A Vaidyanathan

Panelists: Dr Vandana Shiva, Shri Anupam Mishra, Shri Rajender Singh, AVM S Sahni, Dr H M Desarda

Lunch

VIIth Session (2-4pm) Conference Room 3-IIC Annexe

Valedictory Session

Chair: Dr Ashok Khosla

Report Presentation of four Technical Sessions by Respective Chairpersons

Open Discussion on Basic Rationale for Interlinking of Rivers

Valedictory Address : Prof Y K Alagh

Vote of Thanks: Parshuram Ray

4.00 pm: **Press Conference**

Welcome Address by Parshuram Ray

Prof Y K Alagh, Dr Ashok Khosla, Dr S R Hashim, ladies, gentlemen, execellencies and friends. On this biting cold morning, it is a great pleasure and privilege for me to extend a hearty and warm welcome to all of you at this National Seminar on Interlinking of Rivers. This seminar is essentially an attempt to identify the main assumptions behind riverlinking and to explore their validity or otherwise. The ultimate objective of this seminar is to promote and add value to the public discourse on Interlinking of Rivers as well as to build a bridge of communication between Government, Civil Society and Experts.

During the time of Ardhkumbh when millions and millions of Indians are going to take a holy dip at the sacred Sangam at Prayag which is the confluence of holy Ganga, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati, we have assembled here to take a dip in this Gyan Sangam of Government, Civil Society and mythical experts, which will hopefully lead us from darkness to light, from inertia to activity and more importantly from conflict to cooperation.

The Sangam at Allahabad was the first act of riverlinking but it was an act of God while the riverlinking we are here to discuss is an idea and act of Government. You may wonder if an act of Parbhu is so sacred, then why the same act by Suresh Prabhu is not

so sacred? Well, this entire seminar is designed to get an answer to this seminal question and all of you have your own set of answers and you are most welcome to share the same in this National Public fora. However, the fundamental right of free speech and expression has an accompanying duty of listening to opposing and others' point of view with same respect and dignity that you expect for yours. To be meaningful and fruitful, this Gyan Sangam has to be used more for self learning and less for teaching others, more for identifying the areas of agreement and less for creating zones of conflict and finally more as a forum for cooperation in the Nation Building and less for constructing the high walls of division and confrontation.

Culture of debate and dialogue is lifeblood of democracy. We must agree to disagree with due respect for the opposite view. Any dialogue on riverlinking is bound to prove infructious without linking up the hearts and minds of the people of India. Therefore, Let us participate in this seminar with an open mind, sensitive heart and with the spirit of comradery and cooperation rather than with the sense of conflict and confrontation.

The outgoing Chief Justice of the Supreme court, Justice Sabbarwal said the other day that some amount of conflict and tension is good for the health of democracy. I am sure that the apparent conflict and confrontation between the Pro-Riverlinking People and Anti-Riverlinking People will make the discourse on riverlinking more just, equitable, transparent, inclusive and sane.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had rightly said that the story of the Ganga is the story of the rise and fall of the Indian Civilisation. The same can be said about all other rivers of India. Rivers are not just volumes of water to be weighed in Cubic meters and then to be transferred or sold to the highest bidders. Rivers are inextricably linked to the lives, livelihoods and lifestyles of communities and playing with the fate and fortunes of the rivers is really playing with the fate, fortune and future of communities of the country.

What Is The Rationale For Linking Up India's Rivers?

THEME ADDRESS

ASHOK KHOSLA

The word Rationale is crucial in what I am going to say. It is about rational decision making. Rationale is about weighing the pros and cons based on good, the best available scientific evidence on objectivity of the kind that scientists like to espouse. Your objectivity is my subjectivity, so we know that objectivity itself is a concept that has problems. But to the extent possible, what I would like to present to you just now is a journey that we are going to take together, people of very widely different backgrounds and of almost diametrically opposite views sitting together across the table to look at how better decisions can be made for the benefit of all in our country. The concept of sustainability was very much in our minds and sustainability includes not just efficient use of resources, which it certainly does but an environmentally sound use of those resources and much more equitable outcome of the use of these resources for the benefit of society as a whole. So the question we kept asking each other is: are these processes likely to give us the optimal outcomes? In my case, I did not start out necessarily with any preconceptions whether interlinking was good or bad. I knew that large projects of that type can have unintended consequences, which we want to bring into the fold of our decision making. But otherwise basically, many of us came to the table with experiences of various types, some leading us to believe that such projects are inimical to the future of our country and some believing that this is the only way to take care of a rapidly growing population with growing aspirations, with an economy that needs resources. So rationale is a process where decision making is required in a rational manner.

There are major links being proposed under the interlinking of rivers project. They are under consideration and the question is why? Well, we have floods in all kinds of places and we have various kinds of droughts in various places and essentially the thought

occurs to people, if you have so many floods and so many droughts, surely there must be surpluses and deficits, and if you have surpluses and deficits why not have a map on which you could transfer the resources from one area to another, to even it out and to make it equally available. It is an intelligent enough question; so the question is why not connect them? Nothing wrong with that question but one has to look at it in the broader context. The concept of interlinking of rivers has a very long history. In fact, some British engineers in the earlier part of the 20th century had proposed such a thing and then Dr. K. L. Rao in 1972 seriously mooted the idea of Ganga-Cauvery canal. Captain Dastur who was flying all over the countryside came to conclusion that it was right for a Garland Canal system, which would allow waters to be transferred.

The government set up the National Water Development Agency as an authority, which essentially was set up to do feasibility studies of this kind and there was a national water policy, the first one in 1987, which reaffirmed the need for such transfers through links. In 2002, on the basis of a PIL, the Supreme Court went into action and said this has got to be done and set a deadline, on the basis of which the Government of India at that time set up a task force under Suresh Prabhu, to do some really serious work on the economics and technology of doing this.

Ministry of Water Resources set up a committee under the present government to look at these issues in more detail and they have been focusing mainly so far on the Ken-Betwa study. We as a Civil Society Committee on the interlinking of rivers, which is basically organizing this event was set up in 2003. In this very room, we had a phenomenal expression of interest by Civil Society, we came together here and subsequently we met 14 times. We wrote papers, we consulted people, we have developed certain number of concepts, we visited the field area, particularly related to Ken- Betwa and produced a book of studies on the Ken-Betwa link.

The uniqueness of this committee is that it is trying to find the best possible solution to the water problems of our nation, not necessarily starting out with any preconception as to whether it should be by linking of rivers or anything else. So as a consequence of that,

we made a commitment that first of all, the solution should be equitable and environmentally sound and highly efficient, should be based on good science etc., and they should basically be done in a way that brings in participation of the people who will be affected. This is not a committee that excludes other affiliations. Medha Patekar, for example, continues her protest movements of various types and many of us have professional commitments either for Civil Society or otherwise. There are two important findings of our Committee. The first is that the program and project appraisal methods need to be improved. They were actually written originally about 20 years ago by one of our committee members, Dr Nitin Desai. In fact, we asked him to take active role in updating them.

Our second constant refrain is that we have to now look at much holistic systemic approaches that need to be developed to incorporate these other social and environmental issues. Basically, in developing river-water systems sustainably, there are a number of issues that we have to look at. There are issues basically of an economic nature and financial; there are issues of legal and policy; there are social issues; there are technical issues; and there are environmental issues. I will go very quickly through many of these.

The economic issues include things like the energy cost of delivering water. Many of these projects fall by the wayside simply because it is too costly to do it, not just in economic terms, but in natural resource terms. They are not often based on the calculation of the full economic value of water, the productivity of the water, or the cost of transporting the water, or indeed of the losses on the way. Often we have never adequately taken care of these issues.

Then there are of course, the financing issues. Projects of this type which need huge amount of financing, imply a certain approach to raising finance, sometimes from public-private partnerships and there may be other forms through public agencies and so on.

Then of course there is a whole question of mega projects. What their impacts are on poverty reduction, on economic growth and environment. Economic issue, well the core one to me is what is the pricing signals that we need in order to match up the right application with the right resources. How is it that so many parts of India which suffer from water shortage, are growing sugar and rice and have water-guzzling industries? Why did people put the Coca Cola factory where there was no water? What is the pricing signal that was behind these decisions? Now we know that this is not just a pricing issue, it is also a political issue. If you talk to the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh and tell him, you should not be growing rice in this delta, he will say, well, that is where his votes come from or that is where the money for his party comes from. So, he is not basically interested in changing it. We know there are other issues in addition to the economic one but we feel that at least the pricing signals should be right.

We need water to grow food, for industry, for life, for basically the ecosystem management. We need water for managing the mangroves. The paradoxes of our current economic tools unfortunately are that if it is not quantified, it is often not counted and unfortunately while we are quite ready to depreciate machine capital and physical engineering capital, we do not depreciate natural capital. So these are two fundamental problems that need to be incorporated in these decision making systems.

Then there are the legal and policy issues like interstate issues and ownership of water, and we are going to be spending a little time during the course of the next two days, looking at these more fundamental issues. What are the rights of displaced persons? What are the possible public private partnerships? What are the international and national riparian rights and other things like that? And of course, appraisal methodologies.

Then there are social issues, like equity, who benefits from this project and who pays the cost. Often they are different and the re-distributive issues are really quite important. Resettlement and rehabilitation of course are issues. Then the issues about decision making systems. How do we ensure consultation, participation, transparency and

oversight in these? And of course, what are the fundamental cultural issues in the politics?

Water is the basic need and it is pretty sad what we have done to it. It is a need for body and the spirit. There are lots of technical issues that we need to deal with. What are the assumptions that we have? What is the mix of uses? What are the crops? What are the water efficiency systems? What are the technologies available? Why should not we be able to do something else, which is better and then the questions that one of our committee members constantly reminds us about, which is, is a flood the same as having surplus water? Is a drought the same as having deficit? And indeed, he has pointed out that it is this that we need to watch out for because our decisions can go awfully wrong if we mix the two up. Then there are questions of channel stability.

Now we have to get into how do we do water management? What are we doing to our rivers with pesticides, chemicals, fertilizers and sewage? What are we doing with alien species and with exotic weeds? These are also matters of huge concern because we are going to transfer large amounts of water and if we are going to lose in this way, there is no point. On the contrary, by cleaning up these things, we may well have enough water because we have actually destroyed our water system. The kinds of agriculture we do and the kinds of cash crops we produce require enormous amounts of water and we have to really look at the fundamentals.

Then of course, there are the environmental issues, water logging, salinization, diseases, aquatic biomes, loss of species in habitat like the dolphin or the death of fish or treatment of waste. Here is a little quote that we got from the Asian Developmental Bank about four years ago, “it seems high time to shift away from our supply driven investment paradigm that is aimed primarily at asset creation towards a demand-driven alternative that encourages holistic integrated investments, which promote the efficient and productive use of water.”

Water is a basic need but it is also a fundamental need for other basic needs. You cannot get your food, your fuel, your fodder, your fiber, your medicines without water and you cannot clean up your sanitation or anything. So, these are all issues that we have got to recognize. These are very, very important and they cannot be just solved by a knee-jerk solution like, well let us transfer from here to there. You have to create livelihoods. You have to produce all kinds of other things, like recreation and ecotourism. So the question is how do we evaluate the ecological services that rivers provide? How big are these? What are their values? For whom and what are their priorities? So nature has these systems.

We have destroyed our wetlands and now we say we do not have water. You will not have water if you do not have wetlands. So there are many other things like mitigation of floods and droughts and storm protection, and what we fear is that the way it has been done in the past, we have not been taking count of many of these. At the same time, one must recognize they are very complex and it is understandable that they could not be taken into account in the past. Even in the future, it would be very difficult to imagine a system of decision-making calculations, which could include all of these and do them right. But that is where our ingenuity has to come in, that is where we have to now start setting priorities.

Then of course there are some emerging issues that will completely change the basis of our calculations. Climate change of course is one, which is going to have a huge impact on the availability of water in different parts of our country. Biodiversity is another issue. Technology change is another issue. Population growth, which is now taking very different directions in different parts of the country and differential of the economic growth are also very important issues. All of these issues together with human rights and equity are important. So our committee was very concerned that we try to figure out ways in which to take account of these issues; climate change will change glacial and rainfall patterns, vector-borne diseases and variety of other things.

So now we have got to look at alternatives. How do we protect the health of our water resources without simply taking a kind of simplistic solution? Well, you have to improve your watersheds, you have got to use much more water efficient technologies, you have to use less water-intensive crops, and you have got to use revived water management systems including wetlands, reservoirs and local water sharing systems. So we think there are other ways to do things, just not the only one.

In this National Seminar we have to address many issues. We need your help in looking at whether we can define water surplus and deficit, whether we can figure out a way to define surplus and deficit, and how do they relate to floods and droughts? We need to look at the ownership and equity in river water usage. We need to look at the ecological costs and benefits, very much more carefully than we have done in the past. We also need to look at the financial viability of river linking and the technical feasibility, which in some senses includes the natural resource, the energy and other resource use. Displacement, resettlement and rehabilitation have come into focus already quite a lot but need to be dealt with and then what are the alternatives. Surely, we cannot get into one alternative without having rejected the others. What is not only the opportunity cost, what are the opportunity benefits?

We would like your help in prioritizing what are the most important issues, because no decision-making system is going to work if it tries to cover all the things. It obviously has to be done in such a way that we do not get paralysis by analysis. We do need essentially to figure out what are most important issues that go into a decision making process? How accurate have earlier feasibility reports been? I think this is an important issue. We need to know what our economists and engineers have been able to do to refine the process by which they do this. Because, without that we will fall into same threats. We also need to know as to how can consultative processes be made more responsive and efficient?

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

S. R. HASHIM

The very idea of inter-basin transfer of water emerges from the perception that there is enormous amount of water in certain basin, much more than what the basin can utilize and there are other basins, other areas where water is very short. This perception is sometimes strengthened by popular vision of floods taking place and enormous amount of water flowing in certain areas, causing havoc and then at the same time sometimes or maybe even with time difference other areas where drought causes even a greater havoc. Therefore, the popular perception is, if all that water could be used in this area then we could have an optimum utilization of available water at the national level.

The National Commission of Integrated Water Resources Development, which was set up sometime in 1996 and submitted its report in September 1999, had put together a lot of data and analyzed data basically available from government sources, WTA, CWC, and also from outside scholars and researchers. They had analyzed the data particularly from this perspective of inter-basin transfer of water. I will try to remind ourselves of some of those basic figures and particularly the assumptions on which they were based. Explicitly, I would not say anything against or for inter-linkage of the rivers but those assumptions need to be looked at. In fact, the National Commission had very clearly stated in the report itself that there are a set of results which are available on basis of assumptions, but every 5 to 10 years, these assumptions need to be reviewed or even these figures need to be reviewed.

Now it is nearly 9 years since the report was submitted and more than 10 years since the work had started. There was time to do a more detailed work on this again but somehow that report has been dumped in some corner and is not largely available to those who would like to study these things. So I will just try to remind ourselves some of the basic figures and the assumptions on which they were based.

Basically, the report had dealt with the estimates of water availability in the country and estimates of water requirement in future. The landmark years were 2010, 2025 and 2050. Water resource development takes a lot of time and therefore a longer perspective of more than 50 years was considered to be desirable. The Commission came to the conclusion taking into account rainfalls in different parts of the country, evapotransportation needs, taking into account the storage capacities available or storage capacities which could be created. The estimates of utilizable water flows worked out to 1086 cubic meters, while total water resources were 1953 cubic meters. But utilizable flows which will depend on all these conditions, were estimated at 1086 cubic meters. This was on the availability side. Most of the factors were technical; rainfall or evapotransportation and so on. So I think that can be taken as all right. But storage or feasibility of inter-linkage is something which needs review from time to time and it is a big assumption of availability. If less storage capacities were available, the availability would be less. If more were available, the availability would be more. It is in this context that one has to look at the floods.

During floods, in a short period of time, enormous amount of water flows; but there cannot be any conceivable storage capacity to store even a part of that water and therefore, even with all the careful calculations, it is allowed to flow. On the water requirement side, water is required for irrigation, for domestic use, for animal usage, for industrial usage and even for environment and ecological purposes or maintaining a minimum flow in the river, for health reasons and for sanitation reasons. In fact, already that is not happening in Yamuna just close by and therefore all the problems we face here.

The largest use is irrigation water. At that time, it was estimated that 83% of the water utilization was for irrigation purpose. Drinking water and municipal usage took away 4. 5% of the total water, energy development about 3.5%, industries about 3% and all other usage put together about 6%. So irrigation use was the largest, 83%. Figures might have changed slightly but I do not think irrigation has increased substantially during the last one decade. In fact the progress on that front has been very slow. When

we are looking at the future perspective, we have to estimate the irrigation requirement in the context of the future. Therefore, what is taken into account is the requirement for food production, which has always been regarded as very important as we considered that India being a very large country has to be more or less self sufficient for purposes of food security.

Going into the details of what food requirements will be in future, again a variety of assumptions come into picture; the assumptions about poverty alleviation, removal of poverty, assumptions about level of nutrition and so on and so forth. So a series of assumptions were made about the projection of food requirement. At that time, the total population was projected to be 1146 million in 2010, which would be almost correct because it is very close in time; 1333 million in 2025, and 1581 million, little short of 1600 million in 2050. There are a lot of other population projections, but they all more or less converge together, there is not much of variation. Similarly, there was projection of urban and rural population. It was projected that by 2010, the country will have 34% of urban population, by 2025, 45%, and in the perspective of 2050, more than 60% of the people will live in urban India. On this basis, the food requirements were projected for 2010, a high projection of 224 million tons of food grains and a low projection of 222 million tons. In fact there is not much difference from 222 to 224. These projections were done by some of the very eminent economists like Dr. Bhalla, Dr. Ravi Radhakrishna and a number of other people.

For year 2025, the projections would have been 291 million tons on the higher side and 280 million on the lower side. For 2050, it would have been 449, almost 450 million tons on the upper side and 382 million tons on the lower side. It is very difficult to judge these numbers in the perspective of 50 years. But the projection for 2010 which is nearer in time, even the lower projection was 222 million tons. I remember in those days even Planning Commission used to project. We had made a projection in 8th five-year plan for food requirement in the year 2001, and it was 212 million tons. In fact that was the target of production in 2001 or near about that. So far, the highest production that the country has achieved is about 213 million tons in 2001-02. It became 174 tons in 2002-

03. There was drought and there was certain fall. Again 212 million tons in about 2003-04 and about same production was expected for 2004-05 and later years.

What we see in the prospective is that whenever the production has exceeded 210 million or has been around 210 million, we have surpluses and we are filling the godowns. We exhausted those surpluses only when production fell to 174 million from 213 million. In fact in last 10 years or so, production has not gone beyond 210, 212, or 213. We did not have major food grain shortages seen in the market. We did not have major food grain imports. Every 5 to 10 years, we need to look at these assumptions in the light of the latest experience. I think there is a need to do that.

There has been a trend that calorie consumption and particularly the cereal consumption, food grain consumption has been declining with increase in income. This has been observed in the state like Punjab, where income levels have been high and food grain production has been abundant and there have been large surpluses and that state produces the surpluses. Even there the cereal consumption and the food grain consumption has been declining. Because the food basket is diversifying and other items are increasing like milk products, vegetables and fruits. They are entering the food basket; particularly fruits and vegetables in much larger quantities. Therefore, projections need to be re-looked. A serious work needs to be done in respect of these projections. Yes, there is poverty and when their income improves, a certain amount of increased consumption will be required. But at the same time, when the overall trend is following, the consumption for upper income level of people will go down, and one needs to look at these assumptions once again.

Now, given these assumptions, the Commission had projected water requirements for irrigation, which came to by 2010 at higher level of 557 cubic meters and in 2050, 807 cubic meters. I would not get into these details, but all these separate categories of requirements need to be looked at this stage. There is requirement for domestic use, requirement for metropolitan cities where the norms of domestic use are higher, other cities where norms are lower, rural areas where norms are still lower. I will skip the

details. The total requirement of water, taking into account all the different categories of requirements, came to at higher level of 710 cubic meters in 2010 and 1180 cubic meters in 2050.

Now let us talk of 2050. As I said earlier, availability was estimated at 1086 cubic meters and requirement at the national level was 1180 at higher level and 973 at lower level, which means that requirement more or less met the availability. But there were also implicit assumptions in the perspective of 2050 that water will be used very efficiently and irrigation system efficiency will go up from 35% to about 60%. But I do not think that improvement has taken place. Then we will be just meeting the requirement with availability. But the biggest assumption in this, which is not explicitly stated, is that since we have estimated the requirement at national level and availability at national level, we are assuming that there is a national pool of water. Water is available in one single pool at the national level, which is the biggest assumption. Water is available in different basins. In some of the basins, because there is enough water for usage, it gets wasted at very large scale. In some basins, there is deficit. In fact, this idea of there being a national pool has always been behind the idea of inter-linkage of rivers. Let us think it is a pool, let us create a national pool by interlinking.

Then, there are these other questions, which Dr. Khosla has already elaborated in his theme speech; question of principle of ownership, principles of sharing of water and political development. We should also take into account for 50 years the assumptions about political developments, how we mediate, how we come to agreement, how we implement the agreement. I think we should undergo a revision in our own perceptions. We have agreements between states which have not been implemented and there is no authority which can implement those agreements. Transfer of water from Punjab to Haryana under an agreement has not been implemented and we do not see any institution which can implement it. We are aware of the problem between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. So over time, the states have become more assertive of their independent federal rights and ownership of water has been implicitly assumed. We do not seem to be thinking about institutions which can solve this problem. And in that context, this

inter-basin transfer of water becomes even more difficult. Even data and information is not freely shared between the states.

We have Central Water Commission but it is not that they can get all the data from all the states about what they want, about the flows in the rivers, about the measurement, about the rainfalls. The states do keep something in their sleeves. Because in the long run, that will impinge on their right to ownership of water and so forth. These are a few of the things we should keep in mind while talking about inter-basin transfers of water. Inter-basin transfer of water is not absolutely impossible. It is possible, but these assumptions need to be looked at in great detail again.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Water, Land and Man: Need for a New Paradigm

Yoginder K. Alagh

This Seminar has been organized to request for the systemic and factual basis of water development and use policies to be reexamined in India. The ILR Civil Society Review Committee has done interesting exercises on examining projects and policies (see for example, Yoginder. K. Alagh, A. Khosla and B. Gujja, 2006), but it was felt that overarching paradigm questions needed to be raised and if possible resolved. Otherwise project level thinking remains incomplete. It is the argument of this paper that most of the received facts and so called solutions to India's water problems, big dams, small projects, conjunctive use are given recent developments, incomplete and do not address the crisis India faces in water and agriculture. We describe this 'crisis', attempt to look at certain recent developments generally ignored both by policy makers and the quantitative basis of ongoing discussion and then look at consequences of these developments. We purposely show the empirically invalid basis to some existing paradigms, so that alternates can be thought of. (Full address is very long)

(All the Commissioned papers and seminar proceedings would be published as a book)

Contributors' Introduction

Prof Y K Alagh: Former Union Minister, Ex V C of JNU and Chairman of NCSCILR (National Civil Society Committee on Interlinking of Rivers in India)

Dr Ashok Khosla: Chairman of Development Alternatives and Co-chairperson of NCSCILR

Dr S R Hashim: formerly, Chairperson-Union Public Service Commission, the Ambassador of India to Republic of Kazakhstan from 2000 to 2002, Member, Planning Commission (1996-2000), Member-Secretary, Planning Commission (1998-99), Adviser & Principal Adviser, Planning Commission (1986-1995), Director, Institute of Economic Growth (1995-96).

Dr Nitin Desai: Former Under Secretary General of the United Nations and currently Visiting Fellow at the London School of Economics & Political Science

Dr Dinesh Kumar Mishra:Convenor of Barh Mukti Abhiyan, Bihar

Prof S Janakrajan: Professor at the Madras Institute of Development Studies

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Shri S C Behar : Ex Chief Secretary, Government of Madhya Pradesh

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Prof Vijay Paranjpye: Economist working on Sustainable Development issues

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Shri B G Verghese: Noted Columnist, Author and formerly Editor of The Hindustan Times, The Indian Express and Advisor to the Prime Minister

Dr T Prasad: Retired as Head of the Civil Engineering Department of Patna University, formerly a Research Fellow at the Harvard University, USA

Shri N K Bhandari: Chief Engineer-NWDA, Headquarters, New Delhi

Shri Dunu Roy: Noted Social activist and Director, Hazard Centre, New Delhi

Shri Himanshu Thakkar: Coordinator of South Asian Network on Dams, Rivers and People

Ms Medha Patkar: Eminent Social activist and leader of Narmada Bachao Andolan

Shri Ramaswamy R. Iyer: Formerly Union Secretary, Water Resources, currently Honorary Research Professor- Centre for Policy Research

Shri Prashant Bhushan: Noted Public Interest Lawyer, Supreme Court

Dr Kirit Parikh: Member - Planning Commission, Professor Emeritus and Former (Founder) Director (Vice Chancellor) Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR) - An Advanced Research Institute.

Prof A Vaidyanathan: Formerly Member, Planning Commission, President, Society of Agricultural Economics, Chairperson, Centre for Development Studies and Professor at MIDS

Dr Vandana Shiva:Author of highly acclaimed books, Eminent Environmentalist and Eco-feminist,Director of Research Foundation for Science, Technology & Ecology

Shri Anupam Mishra:Author of Highly acclaimed books on water, Distinguished Water Philosopher and Ex Secretary, Gandhi Peace Foundation

Shri Rajender Singh : Noted Water activist and President of Tarun Bharat Sangh

AVM S Sahni: Retired as Air Vice Marshal from Indian Air Force and for over 20 years working on water and land issues in Bundelkhand region

Dr H M Desarda: Retired Professor of Economics and Ex Member, State Planning Board, Maharashtra

Shri Parshuram Ray: Organiser of the seminar and Director of Delhi-based Centre for Environment & Food Security

Freedom From Hunger Campaign

The Centre for Environment and Food Security (CEFS) has launched a Freedom from Hunger Campaign to make India a 'Hunger-Free Country'. This Campaign was launched on 10th February 2005 at India International Centre, New Delhi in the presence of over 200 activists, scientists, intellectuals, government officials, policy makers, farmers' leaders, members of diplomatic missions and various international and UN agencies. The Campaign was jointly launched by Magsaysay Awardee Social activist **Aruna Roy** and **Susan George** (author of landmark book on hunger "**How the Other Half Dies**"). To mark the launch of Freedom from Hunger Campaign, Aruna Roy delivered the First Freedom from Hunger Lecture.

As part of Freedom from Hunger Campaign, CEFS in collaboration with India International Centre (New Delhi) hosted 12 bi-monthly Freedom from Hunger Lectures during 2005-2006. As stated above, the inaugural Freedom from Hunger Lecture was given by Ms Aruna Roy on 10th February 2005. The second Freedom from Hunger lecture was delivered by Prof. Utsa Patnaik on 12th April 2005, third lecture was delivered by Dr Kirit Parikh on 10th June 2005, fourth by Dr Vandana Shiva on 10th August 2005, fifth by Prof C. Douglas Lummis on 14th October 2005, sixth by Prof Jayati Ghosh on December 9th 2005, seventh by Dr Ashok Khosla on 20th January 2006 and the eighth lecture in this series was delivered by Dr Devinder Sharma on 17th March 2006.

Ninth Freedom from Hunger Lecture

Ninth Freedom from Hunger Lecture titled “Water: Understanding the Crisis” was delivered by Shri Ramaswamy R Iyer (Former Union Secretary, Water Resources) on 10th May 2006.

Tenth Freedom from Hunger Lecture

Tenth Freedom from Hunger Lecture titled "Genetic Engineering and Future of Indian Farmers" was delivered by Dr. Suman Sahai (President, Gene Campaign) on 20th July 2006.

Eleventh Freedom from Hunger Lecture

Eleventh Freedom from Hunger Lecture was delivered by eminent financial journalist Shri Premshankar Jha on 8th September 2006. Shri Jha spoke on "Political Economy of Agrarian Distress".

Twelvth Freedom from Hunger lecture

Twelvth Freedom from Hunger Lecture titled "Redefining Poverty" was delivered by Mr. Mohan Guruswamy (Former Advisor to Finance Minister) on 22nd November 2006.

The copies of some Freedom from Hunger Lectures are posted on CEFS Website (http://www.cefsindia.org/index.asp). We plan to publish all the lectures delivered in this series as a book. This lecture series became a popular intellectual event of the Capital and was attended by a large number of activists, scientists, intellectuals, government officials, policy makers, farmers' leaders and members of diplomatic missions and various international agencies.

Survey Research and Advocacy for the Effective Implementation of the NREGA

As part of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, CEFS decided to start a research and advocacy programme for the effective implementation of NREGS (National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) across the country. Since NREGS is the biggest anti-poverty and anti-hunger programme in the history of India, we decided to devote our substantive time, energy and resources to ensure that this radical rural employment scheme is implemented in letter and spirit. CEFS has realized that it is impossible to achieve freedom from hunger without achieving freedom from corruption. Therefore, we have now launched a Freedom from Corruption Campaign.

More than 340 million of Indians still go to bed without food every night. Over 10,000 Indians die of hunger every day and about 40 lakh every year. **In other words, every 18 months we are inflicting an "invisible genocide" of Nazi scale on our poor and hungry compatriots.** Every third hungry person in the world is an Indian and every third Indian goes to bed without food. The number of hungry people in India is always more than the number of people below official poverty line. While around 37% of rural households were below the poverty line in 1993-94, 80% of households suffered undernutrition. Evidence on the consumption of food, on calorie-intake and on nutritional outcomes clearly prove that chronic hunger persists on a mass scale in India.

Shall we still call it hunger deaths or "invisible genocide" of poor Indians? This scale of hunger and abject poverty is unconscionable in a fast growing economy with rising number of dollor millionaires. What are the main reasons behind this dehumanizing level of poverty? After 10 years of our research and activism on the issue of hunger and poverty, we find the traditional explanation of poverty in terms of income poverty and poor economy becoming increasingly irrelevant. We find it difficult to disagree with Lord Meghnath Desai when he says that economic poverty in India in inextricably linked to the poverty of politics (bad governance and corruption).

We have done some back of the envelope calculations about the amount of money required to prevent any Indian going to bed without food. The required amount is not huge. In fact, no Indian should go to bed without food even at the current level of budgetary allocations made under heads of various anti-poverty programmes, if we could just ensure the leakage-proof delivery of the allocated funds to the targeted population.

There are currently four major schemes in operation that essentially aim at fighting hunger and food insecurity; namely, PDS (public distribution system), ICDS (integrated child development scheme), MDM (mid-day meal scheme) and most importantly NREGS (national rural employment guarantee scheme). There would be very few

Indians who would have to skip meals if we could just make these four schemes corruption- free. Therefore, now it is not the poor state of economy or lack of funds that is killing about 40 lakh Indians every year, it is the cancer of corruption that is killing and crippling millions of our compatriots every year. The colonial character of Indian bureaucracy is the single biggest factor behind the epidemic of poverty. The Indian bureaucracy is virtually accountable to none, especially when it comes to the implementation of anti-poverty programmes.

PDS and NREGS are two most important schemes to fight hunger and ensure food security. But, what is the actual performance of these schemes on the ground? According to a recent report of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, "In the last three years, Rs 31,585.98 crore worth of wheat and rice meant for the poorest of the poor was siphoned off from the public distribution system (PDS). Last year alone, Rs 11,336.98 crore worth of food grain that the government is supposed to distribute to the needy at subsidised prices found its way into the market illegally. Every year, India's poor are cheated out of 53. 3% of wheat and 39% of rice meant for them. . . There is largescale diversion of PDS grain across India… Exceptions apart, the poor in India simply can't trust the government to deliver them food supplies. " (Times of India, Sept. 17, 2007)

In January 2007, CEFS started doing secondary research on the implementation of the NREGS. During our secondary research we realized that NREGS too was becoming another money minting machine for corrupt bureaucracy. Therefore, we decided to carry out some field study to assess and evaluate the performance of NREGS. Since Orissa is one of the poorest states with large number of hungry people, we decided to undertake first study in this state.

CEFS carried out a survey in 100 villages of Orissa and found that of Rs 733 crore spent under NREGS during 2006-07, over Rs 500 crore has been siphoned off and misappropriated by the government officials of executing agencies. Moreover, as against the claims of Orissa Government that no needy household in 19 NREGS

districts of the state was denied wage employment and each needy household was given an average 57 days of wage employment under NREGS, CEFS study has revealed that large number of needy households were denied not only jobs but even job cards, and not more than 5 days of average wage employment has been given to each needy family in these 19 NREGS districts. We have found that more than 75 per cent of the NREGS funds spent during last year have been siphoned off. However, we are absolutely certain that there are thousands of villages in Orissa where scale of misappropriation is 80-90 per cent. It is distressing to note that there has been open and participatory loot of NREGS funds in Orissa. We have reasons to believe that the entire state administration is party to this loot. The full survey report can be downloaded from CEFS website (www.cefsindia.org).

Impact of CEFS Survey Report on NREGS

In order to ensure effective implementation of the NREGS and to make it corruption-free, CEFS has invoked and utilised the powers and might of all the four major pillars of Indian democracy- Executive, Legislature, Judiciary and Press. The CEFS survey report on NREGS implementation has made an unprecedented impact on the ground and all the four players have been stirred into action. There are already about 100 news stories/articles (50 in English and 50 in Oriya) based on CEFS report. (Some of the News reports can be seen at: (http://www.cefsindia.org/cefsinmedia.html). Many more are in the pipeline. There are 5 official enquiries/ investigations already constituted on Rs 500 crore NREGS scam uncovered by CEFS Survey. The Central Government was earlier stonewalling every demand of investigation/enquiry into irregularities and financial bunglings in the implementation of NREGS and was always dismissive about all these allegations. However, after the release of the CEFS report and a subsequent letter to the Prime Minister, a number of official enquiries have been now ordered. The Central Government has instructed CAG (Comptroller and Auditor General of India) to investigate allegations of irregularities and financial bunglings in 69 districts from across the country. CAG has been directed to conduct a special enquiry into Rs 500 crore NREGS scam in Orissa uncovered by CEFS survey.

The Central Government has also asked the Government of Orissa to conduct an official enquiry into the allegations of CEFS report and submit it to the Central Government urgently. The Government of Orissa has ordered a thorough probe of the performance of NREGS by Hyderabad-based NIRD (National Institute of Rural Development). The Orissa Government has also appointed many research institutes and Universities to help it in evaluating NREGS and conduct social audits. The Central Employment Guarantee Council (CEGC) is also likely to visit Orissa and carry out its own enquiries/evaluations.

On 16th September 2007, the Chief Secretary of Orissa had called a meeting of all the district collectors to discuss the findings and allegations of CEFS report. On 17th -18th September 2007, the Union Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) had called a review meet of NREGS at Bhubaneswar and officials from 10 states participated, apart from the Cabinet Minister, both Ministers of State and all the senior officials of MORD. At the Press Conference after this meet in Bhubaneshwar, the Union Minister of Rural Development, Mr Raghuvansh Prasad Singh admitted for the first time that the MORD had received large numbers of complaints of irregularities and financial bunglings from across the country. He also admitted in the Press conference that the Government of Orissa had failed on both counts, implementation as well as monitoring of NREGS. The Minister announced at the Press Conference that he had asked the Chief Minister of Orissa to conduct a thorough probe in Rs 500 Crore NREGS Scam of Orissa unearthed by CEFS and submit the report to MORD urgently. The Minister warned of stern action against all the erring officials if the ongoing investigations confirm CEFS findings.

There has been already a question in the Lok Sabha on the CEFS survey findings and we hope there would be many more in the next session of the Parliament and next session of Orissa assembly too. Most of the Opposition parties of Orissa are demanding a special session of Orissa assembly to discuss the NREGS scam unearthed by CEFS study. A committee of the Orissa Assembly has also confirmed the CEFS findings and said that there had been serious irregularities and misappropriation of NREGS funds;

and NREGS had no impact on the level of distress migration of Adivasis from Orissa's KBK region.

Proposed Programmes for 2007-2008

Programmes on Hunger and Food Security

Freedom from Hunger Campaign:-

1-Research and Advocacy programme for the effective implementation of NREGS

2-Research Study on the Political Economy of Hunger in Adivasi Areas of Orissa, Chattisgarh and Maharashtra.

3-Citizens' Report on Hunger in Adivasi Areas of India

4-Survey Research on the state of hunger and food security among Dalits of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh

5-Comparative Research Study on the livelihood crises and distress migration in Sitamarhi district of Bihar and Mahbubnagar district of Andhra Pradesh

6-Citizens' Report on Agrarian distress& Farmers' suicides in India

7-Research Study on the political economy of agrarian distress& farmers' suicides

8-Seeds of Evergreen Revolution :
A Research Study on the emerging organic farming movement in India

9-Lectures,workshops, seminars,conferences and public hearings on hunger, food insecurity and deprivation

Programmes on Environment and Ecological Security

1-Seminar on development and ecological Crises:Implications for poor and rural livelihoods

2-International conference/seminar on the interface between economic growth and ecological security

3-Socio-economic&ecological audit of mining in Jharkhand& Rajasthan: A Research and Advocacy Project

4-Research Study on Development, Deforestation and livelihood crises in Adivasi areas of India

5-Seeds of Sustainable Development :
A Research Study on the initiatives, efforts, success stories, case studies and innovative experiments on sustainable development