



26 November 2018

### Annexure: Responses to Specific Questions

Dear Mr. Saldanha and esteemed co-signatories,

In continuation of my general letter, these are our responses to your specific points.

#### Issues raised in the introductory paragraph

- *"Our concerns are about what the programme excludes"*

**We are staunch practitioners of agroecology principles, hence you can rest assured that this programme excludes only those practices that agroecology excludes (eg., chemical farming).**

The Government of AP's CRZBNF is one of the most inclusive programmes. Please refer my note on Principles governing the programme.

- The key principles are based on Sh. Subhash Palekar's pathbreaking work. These principles have evolved over several years of work in A.P and elsewhere and they will continue to evolve based on farmers' own experiences, best models within the State and the country. We have a very open and transparent consultation processes on the technical package of practices.
  - The Socio-economic principles of the programme are highly inclusive. The programme involves women farmers, landless, poorest of the poor, semi-literate or illiterate men and women and works with them to evolve their role in scaling up ZBNF.
  - Our Institutional Governance Principles believe in high level of transparency by all including Community Resource Persons, Women, Farmer institutions, NGOs and the department in planning, monitoring and learning in the programme.
- *"... and the secrecy of the MOU/Agreements concluded in advancing the programme."*

**No. There is no secrecy in our MoUs/Agreements. MoUs are signed in the public domain – maintaining high level of transparency.**

**The MoUs/Agreements are available for anyone who would like to see. All MoUs are on our website, and anyone can access them.**

- *"... Our concerns are also about what is not covered by CRZBNF, such as Walmart's entry into AP agriculture and the role being played by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF)."*

RySS 's focus is on CRZBNF and we are not involved in aspects that are not under our purview.

It may however be noted, as of now, Walmart and BMGF do not have any arrangements with RySS or the CRZBNF programme.

Having said this, RySS, and Government of AP will collaborate with a range of institutions for benefiting farmers, as long as such collaborations adhere to the core principles mentioned in my letter.

Further as clarified in my letter, the Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) are autonomous institutions and they decide where to sell, at what price to sell and to whom to sell.

## **1. Issues raised in "Why is ZBNF being promoted exclusively?"**

- 1.1 "... Is it that the AP Government is promoting a 'new' label (on an 'old wine bottle') and in so doing leaving out the wider community of Agroecology systems including Organic Farmers, permaculture, biodynamics, Jaivik Krishi, etc.? Should this be the case, then is not the AP government effectively discriminating against the diversity of time-tested and proven approaches to agroecology?"*

**No, GoAP is in neither discriminating any agroecology systems, nor opposing any of them. We are in favour of all sound agroecological practices.**

Government of AP preferred to promote CRZBNF based on its long 10 to 15 years, experience in Non chemical Pest Management (NPM) programme and Community managed sustainable agriculture (CMSA) programme. In CMSA we had already incorporated many principles of ZBNF. These programmes had reached lakhs of farmers in AP. Our experience has been that they were easy to disseminate to small and marginal farmers and to women farmers.

In AP, Zero Budget Natural Farming is very popular, thanks to the relentless efforts of Sh. Subhash Palekar. He has conducted many farmers trainings, in different districts of the state, even before the State Govt involved him in CRZBNF. His trainings have had a very good resonance with the farmers. Similar efforts have not been made by anyone else. Our community trainers and farmers are very familiar with the principles and practices of ZBNF.

To sum up, Government of AP is promoting CRZBNF because its principles are sound and time tested Agroecological principles. CRZBNF scores very well in its acceptance by farmers, particularly small and marginal farmers, it is highly affordable, and does not have any entry barriers. It scores well from the public financing implications, the ease of scaling up (systems and structures), etc. However, there is no discrimination whatsoever if a farmer does not intend to practice CRZBNF. The knowledge dissemination happens in equal measure to all farmers in a village. The prerogative of using CRZBNF depends on the farmer.

1.2 *"...The organic farming community has been alienated by Mr Palekar's rubbishing of Organic. There is real anger. But the much more serious issue is that no government agency may support and furthermore, promote such an 'exclusive notion', which clearly has no exclusivity."*

RySS and Government of AP cannot comment on the personal views or comments made by Dr Palekar on organic farming.

As explained in my letter and the para above, RySS and Government of AP are not promoting any exclusion. We think that CRZBNF is a significant choice available to farmers. Therefore, we are only providing a choice to the farmer to cultivate using practices that are farmer-friendly and nature-friendly. Farmers have a choice to continue their current practices or to modify/add to these practices towards natural farming. This is done in a highly democratic way – involving Women's Self-help Groups, and farmer field schools.

Additional info: FAQs at <http://apzbnf.in/faq> and you may refer to Q1, Q2 and Q3.

1.3 *"...Therefore, it is somewhat implausible for any government to tag an 'exclusivity' to ZBNF, and spend thousands of crores, (currently Rs 17,000 crores ~ \$ 2.3 billion in Foreign Direct Investment), to promote it through 'outreach' programmes, for example, to recruit farmers to this new label? This is to disenfranchise the legitimate and decades-old organic farming system and all farmers in this system."*

I do not know on what basis you are saying thousands of crores have been spent. This is totally untrue. **The expenditure in A.P from 2016-17 till date has been Rs. 249.07 Cr.** The sources of funding for the programme are from two Government of India schemes – namely Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) and Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY).

The fund requirement for universalization of the programme to reach out to all farmers is estimated at Rs. 17,000 Crore (\$2.3 billion) over 8 to 10 years. This is required for scaling up the programme across the state, to cover all 60 lakh farmers, in 12924 GPs in a time bound manner by 2024, and to provide continuous handholding support of 3 to 5 years to each farmer till they transit to natural farming, and the transition to agroecology is irreversible. Thus, the programme will perhaps go on for about a decade. The cost per farmer and the cost per hectare is on par with the unit costs adopted by the Government of India PKVY scheme.

We are seriously working on how to raise the resources required for universalization. The source of funds is likely to be a mix of funds from Central Government schemes, development loans from bilateral and multilateral agencies, loans from banks and from the market, both domestic and international. The Government wishes to complete the programme in a time bound manner so that the benefits to farmers are maximized. The loan is taken by the Government and is meant to provide support to each farmer to a complete transition to agroecological farming. As far as raising of loans is concerned, the State Government will take a decision on a case to case basis. The Finance dept of the State Government is responsible for raising finances, following all due processes. The repayment of the loan is the responsibility of the State Government. This is not recovered from farmers.

The State Government is committed to universalize the programme and raise funds required for this agroecological transformation, since this is the best intervention for farmers' welfare, consumer welfare and the welfare of future generations. The direct benefit to each farmer is in the form of reduction in cost of cultivation, reduction in interest costs on borrowings, increased yields, and a slight premium in output prices. We have estimated that the cost benefit ratio, only in terms of direct benefits to farmers, is around 13 times the investment made by the State Government in the transformation process. In addition to the direct benefits to the farmers, there are huge benefits in the form of ecosystem benefits and health and nutritional security of citizens. Given these kind of multi-dimensional dividends, it is the best investment for any State Government. **We don't see why there should be any objection to this kind of investment in farmers' capabilities and why benefits to farmers should be delayed.**

It is not at all clear how this programme disenfranchises any farmer. As explained in my letter, the programme does not force any farmer. In the CRZBNF programme, there is enormous scope and respect for farmers' innovations. Given the fact that in the entire country there is less than 1% area under organic farming, I don't see how we are disenfranchising anyone. In villages where we are taking up CRZBNF, we have no plans to force any farmer following 'legitimate and decades – old organic farming system' to change his or her ways. In fact, if we find that these practices are yielding better benefits, at a lower cost, and are climate change resilient, then other farmers in these villages will be encouraged to adopt them. In case, these farmers find that the practices recommended under CRZBNF are better, they will be encouraged to incorporate them in their practices. In any case, 99% of the farmers need to transit to agroecology.

In fact, given your vast experience, we would welcome any recommendations from you for improving what we are doing. We are ready to adopt any innovation that will significantly add value to our work.

## **2. Issues raised in "The GMO Q"**

### *2.1 The stated standard required is Organic for the exclusion of and incompatibility with GMOs*

**GMO seeds are not promoted by GoAP's CRZBNF programme.**

### *2.2 We are similarly disconcerted when the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the socially discredited BNP Paribas Bank are to be involved in the financial arrangements to promote CRZBNF, and when the Niti Aayog, curiously, actively supports and promotes ZBNF nationwide. The BMGF has been discredited for funding and promoting GMOs into some parts of Africa, and states that its support for GMOs will stay in its own policy of financing agricultural initiatives globally.*

We do not subscribe to your description of Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and BNP Paribas Bank. We are clear that in the interest of the farmers and in reaching objectives of a state-wide roll-out, CRZBNF will collaborate with institutions agreeing with the core principles of the programme, mentioned in my letter.

With specific reference to BMGF, RySS does not have any institutional collaboration with BMGF as on date.

With reference to BNP Paribas bank, RySS is in the process of engaging BNPP as a financial advisor. BNPP has been requested to advise RySS on raising funds on best terms from various sources including, domestic, international, etc. In the matter of resource mobilization for the programme, the State Government Finance department vets all proposals and only on their clearance, we take them forward.

Additional info: FAQs at <http://apzbnf.in/faq> and you may refer to Q5 for seeds.

*2.3 Niti Aayog in its agri policy document has stated boldly, without evidence or data in support, that GMOs are required in Indian agriculture for food security. Its exclusively favoured status for ZBNF in Andhra Pradesh is quite simply wrong and worrying in itself, but, and furthermore, does not square with its GMO policy. So we may be forgiven for wondering -- "What is the catch"?*

We are greatly encouraged by the support of NITI Ayog for AP's CRZBNF programme and we are fully with them in recommending CRZBNF programme to be adopted by other states in India.

RySS cannot comment on behalf of Niti Aayog, on other points that you have raised.

### **3. Issues raised in "The Financials and Financing"**

*3.1 Consequently, in the public interest, this information should be in the public domain, as the entire programme is based on and being leveraged through a Government Scheme.*

RySS is committed to place all MoUs in public domain. The concept note that includes financials is available on the website. Recently, we have also published a section on "Frequently Asked Questions" that addresses many concerns.

*3.2 The objective is to ensure that alternative agri/agro-ecology/organic/ZBNF is not manipulated/steered/hijacked into wrong arrangements and corporate influence, commodification, control and above all erosion of food sovereignty. These matters are not negotiable. Sooner or later, if these matters are brushed under the carpet there will be scams. It is our fervent hope and request that the scheme is made 'inclusive', for the advancement of agroecology/organic farming systems.*

**None of these apprehensions is applicable to the A.P Govt's CRZBNF programme. CRZBNF is one of the most inclusive programmes in the country. GoAP's core principles - technological, social, economic and governance - are very inclusive. (These have already been described in detail in my letter).**

We want to reach out and cover all farmers by 2024. Our strategy is to saturate a given village in 5-7 years and handover the programme to the farmers' institutions as soon as possible. Our strategy includes special programmes for Poorest of Poor, landless tenants and single women.

At the current rate of funding from the ongoing Government of India schemes, this will take a very long time. The crisis that the farmers are facing is so acute that a proper solution cannot

be delayed. The AP Government has developed a methodology that can ensure the expansion of the programme in an exponential manner by the farmers themselves. The A.P Govt strategy is based on three core pillars – farmer trainers, Women SHGs and a facilitating Government system.

To take this transformation forward, the State Government has decided to access funds, on best possible terms. Government will repay these loans and not the farmers.

We are transparent and will remain transparent.

Additional info: FAQs at <http://apzbnf.in/fag> and you may refer to Q14 for information on strategic collaborations.

Finally, let me reiterate our extreme unhappiness that you chose to circulate the 'concerns' and 'research' without talking to us and without checking the facts. We even now, would like you to correct the factual mistakes in your communication. We would be happy if you can talk to us and our farmers and get a complete understanding of our work. We would be happy if you can undertake a field visit to see for yourself the participatory agricultural transformation that is taking place in AP; and after the field visit and interaction with the farmers, if you need any further clarifications we would be happy to oblige.

The farmers of AP, the Rythu Sadhikara Samstha, and the Government of A.P have, in a very short period of time triggered a massive agroecological transformation programme. At present, 5,00,000 farmers, amounting to 8% of the farmers in the State are practising natural farming. In the next 5 years, we plan to enroll all 60 lakh farmers in the natural farming programme. And, each farmer will be supported for 3 – 5 years to make this transition a permanent transition.

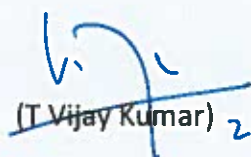
When the entire country is languishing at 1% area under organic farming, we frankly don't understand why any serious proponent of agroecology should be upset with the efforts of A.P Govt. We will be very happy to be enlightened by you whether there is any agroecological transformation effort in the country that has reached the number of farmers that our effort has achieved in 3 and a half years.

We would also like to know whether any other State Govt has articulated the vision for an agroecological transformation of the whole State.

We would definitely like to learn from all efforts in the country and elsewhere which have achieved respectable scale.

If you can suggest to us any improvement in what we are doing, based on your work, we will be glad to examine your specific suggestions.

Yours sincerely,

  
(T. Vijay Kumar) 20/11/18