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2014: International Year
of Family Farming

Feeding the world, Caring for the Earth



By Dr J. Maria Sasitha

The term “Family Farming” (also Family Agriculture) refers to a type of production that bears the imprint of the structural link between economic activity and family structure. It is a means of organising agricultural, forestry, fisheries, pastoral and aquaculture production which is managed and operated by a family and predominantly reliant on non-wage family labour, including both women’s and men’s. Thus, when we talk about Family Farming, we consider men and women farmers, artisan fishers, pastoralists, gatherers and landless peasants, as well as indigenous people. The family and the farm are linked, co-evolve and combine economic, environmental, reproductive, social and cultural functions. Both in developing and developed countries, family Farming is emerging as the predominant form of agriculture in the food production sector.

Family farms are very diverse, ranging from groups of hunter-gatherers practising agroforestry to totally mechanised farms where one person cultivates several hundred hectares of cereals. This wide variety gives rise to huge differences between family farms in terms of mechanisation, productivity and created wealth, and thus to divergent interests, particularly in regulating world trade.

At national level, there are a number of factors that are key for successful development of Family Farming, such as: agro-ecological conditions and territorial characteristics; policy environment; access to markets; access to land and natural resources; access to technology and extension services; access to finance; demographic, economic and socio-cultural conditions; and availability of specialized

education among others.

International Year of Family Farming

The UN has declared 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) with the aim of raising the profile of Family Farming and smallholder farming by focusing world attention on its significant role in eradicating hunger and poverty, providing food security and nutrition, improving livelihoods, managing natural resources, protecting the environment, and achieving sustainable development, in particular in rural areas.

This can be regarded as an extremely important step towards establishing a more egalitarian and secure world. This is because Family Farming yields multiple benefits that serve a wide range of areas - economic, social, cultural, ecological as well as developmental.

Benefits of Family Farming

First and foremost, Family Farming plays an extremely important role in rural development through the creation and maintenance of jobs. The World Bank estimates that in 2006, 1.5 billion people lived on a small farm (including 800 million workers). Moreover, at least 500 million non-landowning farmers had no access to land and were obliged to sell all or part of their working capacity, often to agribusinesses. Because of what they are, family farms make the best use of available family labour. Decisions made on the farm are taken to make best use of the workforce present. Thus, family farms contribute to slow rural exodus and help to combat mass unemployment. The massive unemployment or underemployment that

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exists in most developing countries leads to an opportunity cost of farm labour close to zero. So farming is a way of employing this abundant workforce, and this in turn helps in reducing poverty. At the same time, intensifying farm work leads to family solidarity.

Furthermore, small farms help in promoting fair economic development. The World Bank 2008 report which states that three quarters of the poor people in developing countries (883 million people) live in rural areas demonstrates how effective agriculture can be in reducing poverty. It shows that growth in this sector is two or three times as effective in reducing poverty as growth in other economic sectors. Lipton (2005) states that productivity increases in some Family Farming sectors, in Southeast Asian countries, played a crucial role in reducing mass poverty in the 1980s.

Family farms have been found to have made significant contributions to productive agriculture. From an economic standpoint, family farms, if they are supported, are more effective for development than agribusiness. The argument put forward for agribusiness is that it produces more per worker. This is possible using mechanisation or extensive farming techniques (e.g. ranching). But, of course, there are very few workers per hectare in this type of farm. Family farms, on the contrary, use the whole family workforce on the little land available. Land is rare, so it is put to maximum use. The per capita income is often low, but then the area farmed is also very small. The result is a very high productivity per hectare for these little farms using more intensive techniques and crops that are better adapted to the labour available.

Family farming is also an excellent way to combat food insecurity. To start with, family farms feed the farmer's family, and makes them self-sufficient, at least in part, for their food needs. This aspect is quite considerable in a world in which more than 820 million people were underfed in developing countries in 2006. It is not by encouraging smallholders to leave their fields and end up unemployed in cities that the food shortage will be reduced, but by giving them the means to produce enough food for their families and some over to produce some income too. In addition, family farming can contribute to the economic development of the country by supplying to local markets on one hand and on the other, by exporting their produce.

The large growth in population in most developing countries and their gradual urbanisation pose the question of the capacity of family farms to meet the increased demand for food. In fact, family farms have proved that they can increase their production to meet the demand, firstly by increasing the areas farmed, and then by choosing more intensive techniques. For example, over the last twenty years, the landlocked countries of the Sahel (where family farms are predominant) have increased their cereal production to keep abreast of the population growth, and have remained self-sufficient in cereals. For ECOWAS countries, food production increased from 59 million tonnes in 1980 to 212 million tonnes in 2006.

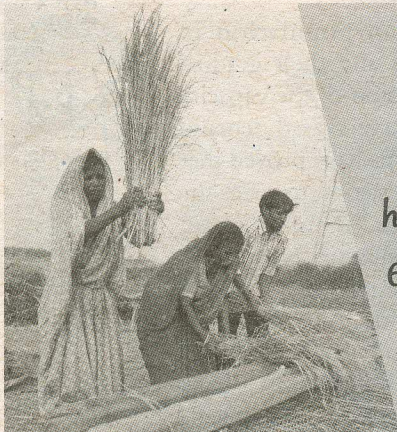
In addition, the governments of developing countries often see agriculture as a source of foreign currency, and so encourage export cultures. Because they are flexible and can easily alternate between growing staples and cash crops, small farms are able to supply international markets.

From an ecological perspective, Family Farming goes a long way in managing resources, the environment and land sustainably. It conserves natural resources and helps renew the soil. Investments granted to agribusinesses encourage specialised production to optimise the capital immobilised, using economies of scale (a single large investment on a large area rather than several small investment on small areas). This leads to a trend for monocultures over very large areas or immense intensive stock raising units. This type of practice means there is little exchange between crops and stock raising (crop residue for animal feed and manure for fertilising) and has negative effects on the environment, such as poorer topsoil, polluted rivers (by stock effluent and soil bleaching), poor biodiversity and more harmful crop pathogens and pests. Family farms, on the other hand, maintain a strong link with the land, thus have a major preoccupation to preserve fertility and natural resources, and to manage sustainably biodiversity.

Nevertheless, population pressure and dismantled traditional farming systems can induce over-exploitation of natural resources and deterioration of soil. However, Mary Tiffen, Georges Rossi and Esther Boserup, among others, have shown that if small farms received enough financial support, they could cope with crises caused by large population growth by



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increasing their productivity thanks to large investments (like terrace construction). The dynamism of Fouta Djallon, in Guinea, coping with demographic pressure and conserving the environment by new cultural techniques, is a good illustration of this argument. In addition, traditional culture practices are adopted in family farms by following organic and natural forming practices. These culture practices results in the maintenance of soil fertility, environment and reduction in the emission of Green House Gases (GHG) and effects of climate change.

The sustainability of Family Farming and its role in promoting social solidarity can be substantiated through an example of the practice of Family Farming in Norway. To start with, the Marxist inspired branch of theorists expected that capitalist forces would hamper small farmers' ability to control the means of production – their land. Other versions opined that capital interest would end up controlling farmers through contracts or capitalisation of agricultural industries. However, Norwegian farming has disproved the political economic theories of structural dominance of family farming by capitalist forces. Analysis shows that the premium placed by Norwegian culture on family values could provide a satisfactory explanation. Handing the farm over to a new generation of family members is a very strong incentive for investing in and developing Norwegian farms. The family connection to farms as places and property has also previously been found to be a constraint for sales of farm properties, including those that have closed production (e.g. Flemsæter, 2009). Families keep the properties as a source of maintenance of traditions and emotions. Having future successors in sight encourage development of the farm as a productive unit. It is, however,

noteworthy that maintaining and developing farms for future successors are not necessarily taking place when the successor is ready to take over; rather it takes place when the transferor has entered agriculture and has started his or her own family reproduction.

Current status of Family Farming in India

Family Farms constitute 81% of total agricultural holdings in the country. 60% of the production comes from these family farms. These farms not only provide food security to the nation but also contribute to its economy directly and indirectly in the form of taxes and foreign currency through exports. Agriculture exports constitute 12.2% of the total national exports.

The Need for widespread Family Farming

In the light of the benefits cited above, large-scale practice of Family Farming seems to be the need of the hour in India. A discussion on the poverty, nutrition, and GHG Emission situation of India will help make the point clearer.

Poverty Situation: Poverty in India is widespread, with the nation estimated to have a third of the world's poor. In 2010, the World Bank reported that 32.7% of the total Indian people fall below the international poverty line of US\$ 1.25 per day (PPP) while 68.7% live on less than US\$ 2 per day. According to 2010 data from the United Nations Development Programme, an estimated 29.8% of Indians live below the country's national poverty line. A 2010 report by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) states that 8 Indian states have more poor people than 26 poorest African nations combined which totals to more than 410 million poor in the poorest African countries. A 2013 UN report stated that a third of the world's poorest people live in India.

Nutrition Situation: Malnutrition in India continues to be at a high level with 42.5% children being underweight and almost 70% being anaemic. 22% children are born with low birth weight.

GHG Emission Situation: The total amount of GHGs emitted in India has been estimated at 1228 million tonnes, which accounted for only 3 per cent of the total global emissions, and of which 63 per cent was emitted as CO₂, 33 per cent as CH₄, and the rest 4 per cent as N₂O. The GHG emissions in the years 1990, 1994 and 2000 increased from 988 to



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1228 to 1484 million tonnes respectively and the compounded annual growth rate of these emissions between 1990 and 2000 has been 4.2 per cent. Emissions from the industrial sector registered the highest rate of growth per annum within this period. A comparison of the Indian emissions with some of the largest global emitters indicates that the absolute value of Indian emissions is 24% of the US emissions, 31% of China and 80% of the USSR in 2000. The Indian per capita emissions are only 7% of the US, 13% of Germany, 14% of UK, 15% of Japan, 45% of China and 38% of global average in 2000.

Challenges to Family Farming in India

The practice of Family Farming in India is currently faced with a number of challenges. As per the National Sample Survey Report, 40% of Indian farmers are ready to switch to other forms of livelihood if an opportunity presents itself, since farming is not remunerative to them. Furthermore, incomes of Family Farm farmers are not in tune with price rises of agricultural inputs. At present, not even 1/3rd of the price paid by consumers reaches the farmer. Factors such as inadequate access to natural and basis resources for production, markets, value addition and processing can be held responsible.

In addition, the government and donors continue to fund agriculture that they believe to be "modern," that is, agribusiness (large areas, effectiveness, highly mechanised) which they presume to be the driving force behind long-term development. But the inbuilt inequalities in this type of development have also to be taken into account. The increased productivity in such a system of production benefits only the landowner and not the local work force, a phenomenon that further accentuates social inequality. What is more, these productivity gains are mainly the result of government subsidies. It is to be regretted that subsidies make a small part of the population richer, instead of being used for the majority, i.e. family farmers.

Initiatives to address these problems

Consortium of Indian Farmers Associations (CIFA) has already initiated Farm Development Programmes particularly farmers' welfare programmes for empowering them by organising Farmers Groups (FGs), Commodity Interest Groups (CIGs) in order to create awareness on the deficiencies in Agriculture Extension Services, rural infrastructure, Training Programmes on soil health, crop management, integrated pest

management, pre and post-harvest technologies, processing, value addition and marketing. Farmers groups are also creating awareness on the innovative and modern technologies viz., space technology for development of agriculture and food security etc. CIFA also engages in sensitisation programmes for Parliamentarians, Legislators and Policy Makers on the problems confronted by the Farm Sector particularly small farmers.

It is high time we recognised the multifarious benefits of Family Farming and focussed on adopting measures to strengthen the agriculture infrastructure of our country at the grass root level by encouraging Family Farming farmers. This could be achieved by taking up programmes intended for soil health improvement as well as for rectifying and retaining soil health so that productivity can be increased. Specific action plans should be evolved for 100% seed replacement and timely supply of quality fertilizers, especially for small holders. Public investment in the agriculture sector, particularly on research, should be increased along with encouragement for organic farming. Strengthening agriculture infrastructure under Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) to tap private sector ability to work across value chains so that food stocks position can be improved and introducing innovative instruments for risk management and crop insurance, especially for small farmers, when crops are affected by natural calamities, which facilitate continuous production of food crops, will also go a long way in this regard. Long term export policies should be evolved to ensure continuous supply of food grains. Studies reveal that technology missions constituted by the Government for evolving strategies to increase productivity of food crops could not produce anticipated results and we are lagging behind when compared with yields of other major food producing countries. NGOs, like CIFA are already supplementing the efforts of the Government to increase productivity of food crops. More support and technology transfer are needed by Indian NGOs as well as foreign donors to accelerate productivity increase programmes and meet the challenges under WTO.

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