

Annual Report 2001-2002

Introduction to the 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. The 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. **Ashis Nandy** is presently Senior Fellow of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and Chairperson of the Committee for Cultural Choices and Global Futures, both in Delhi. 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**, is 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**, currently heading the Vikram Sarabhai Foundation, is former Chairperson of the National Wastelands Development Board, Govt. of India, former Director of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, former Chairperson of the Central for Science and Environment. She was faculty at Harvard University and has 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.

Programmes and Projects Implemented during 2001-2002

The Centre for Environment and Food Security (CEFS) was founded in April 2001. Since this was the first year of CEFS, a lot of time, energy and resources were required to conceptualize and execute the issues and ideas for which it was founded. In the first year of our formal existence, we decided to devote our limited time and resources to the issue of agrarian distress and farmers' suicides in the country. Initially, we carried out a comprehensive survey of existing literature and information-base on this subject. We visited many libraries, research institutes and prominent NGOs working on this issue. We held wide ranging discussions with many experts, economists, agricultural scientists and social activists of India to enrich our understanding on this issue. After this preliminary documentation and desk research, CEFS decided to carry out a random field research in the state of Andhra Pradesh. We selected Anantpur, Guntur, Mahabubnagar and Warangal districts of Andhra Pradesh for our field investigation because these districts had become hotspots of farmers' suicides. The field survey was conducted by CEFS director Parshuram Ray during August- November 2001 with the help of some local NGOs and activists of Andhra Pradesh.

Field Report on Farmers' suicides in Andhra Pradesh

Farmers' Suicides in Anantapur

Anantapur district of Andhara pradesh has become a classic case of ecological disaster, economic backwardness, and social breakdown. Most of the agricultural land is fast turning into desert. Though drought is the most obvious reason for the miseries of Anantapur, the wrong development policies and callous Government response are no less responsible for the unfolding human tragedy in the district. The district has faced the onslaught of drought for decades and centuries but never before have people felt so impoverished and helpless as in recent years. The recurring drought for many years has seen the ground water table falling down at an alarming pace making farmers tube wells run dry. There are innumerable cases of bore well failure forcing farmers to commit

Suicides. The farmers of Anantapur are trapped in a vicious circle of recurring droughts, drying bore wells and mounting debt-burden besides the decreasing market price of ground nut, the main farm produce, have taken a heavy toll on the lives and livelihoods of Anantapur farmers. Fluctuating market prices of farm produce like groundnut are a direct result of liberalisation and globalization of Indian Agriculture under W.T.O dictates. The farmers Suicides at an unprecedented scale can not be explained away just as “the victims of vagaries of nature” The “vagaries of market economy” and callous indifference of a cyber-savvy and fast globalising govt policy regime are equally responsible for farmers suicides and acute poverty in Anantapur.

The farming Community of Anantapur is very poor. The district has been facing droughts and famines for decades and centuries. In recent years peoples suffering has become unbearable. They see Suicide as the only escape root from the deadly trap. According to the “Farmers Commission of experts on agriculture in Andhra Pradesh” 730 farmers committed suicide in 1999 and 482 in 2001 in Anantapur. Large no of people migrated from the district in search of livelihoods. Poverty and hunger is all - pervasive in Anantapur. This author was a witness to most terrible and tragic tales of human suffering and farmers suicides being narrated before justice P.A. Chowdhary Commission investigating farmers suicides and problems on September 26th 2001 in Anantapur. In a single day we met over 40 victim family members of farmers suicides. But most of the stories had a definite pattern.

The low yields and crop failures are a direct result of lack of irrigation in the district. The wells have completely dried. In desperation farmers are drilling more and more bore wells. The ground water table is going down very fast due to recurring droughts and over-exploitation of ground water. The watershed programs implemented in the district have hardly helped. The farmers debt-trap is a direct consequence of the bore-well failures in their fields. This has completely ruined their economy and forced the farmers to commit suicides as they have invested heavy amounts in bore-wells after borrowing money at high interest rates. The government help is almost zero in extending technical assistance in locating water potential zones and water potential points.

Justice Chowdhary Commission visited Linganpalle, Ramnepalle and Chinnampalle villages of Anantapur district on 26th September,2001. Parshuram Ray of CEFS also accompanied the commission during its field visits and public hearing in Anantapur.

Musala Reddy of Lingampalle village told the commission that he borrowed about Rs. 3 lakhs and got nearly 19 bore-wells dug in a single month but none of them was successful. All the wells in the village got dried up and even drinking water bore-wells had to be deepened to get potable water.

The bereaved families members who deposed before the commission stated that the main reason for farmers suicides in Anantapur was their inability to repay their huge debts and the consequent harassment and humiliation meted at the hands of money-lenders. In her deposition before commission, Narayanamma, widow of Thimmanna of Chinnampalli village said that her husband borrowed money and got bore-wells dug at six places in their 8 acres of land but all of them failed. While the debt-burden of their family was increasing on one hand, the crops had been failing for the past three years on the other, making their lives miserable. Meanwhile the bankers and landlords forced her husband to clear his debts. Unable to bear their pressure and humiliation he committed suicide by consuming pesticide. Golla Subbaiah of the same village told the commission that he received only Rs. 14,000 in his hand while he was sanctioned Rs. 18,000 loan by the bank. Though he had already paid Rs. 28,000 by then to the bank, he is still receiving demand notices from the bank asking him to pay another Rs. 18,000 to clear the loan.

Justice Chowdhary commission in its observations about the farmer's problems in Anantapur has said "Poverty is the major cause for all the woes and sufferings of the people in the district. Although droughts and famines are the recurring phenomenon in this district, the people are mentally prepared to co-exist with them as a routine matter since generations. The rural people have been living under the conditions of abject poverty and facing starvation. Water is so scarce not only for drinking but also for other purposes such as bathing, cleaning utensils, washing etc. The people are half naked

with torn clothes. The famines and poverty have made the lives of the rural people miserable. Despite these, the people in the district never lost their hearts and courage in the past. However in recent years the poorer people are unable to continue their living under the poverty conditions and have resorted to suicides.....

...Monocropping of groundnut has been ruining the district in the recent years. Unfortunately no other crop gives as much income to the farmers as groundnut. However, this monocropping is not a good practice. Successive groundnut crop failures, accumulating debts and avaricious money lenders were responsible for the farmers' suicides."

In Anantapur farm laborers are also facing acute poverty and starvation. The food for work program exists only in the government records. Even if some small work like road repair or watershed work is done under food for-work program, the contractors engage proclain (machine) instead of engaging labors. After talking to dozens of farm laborers, it became clear that daily wage is as low as Rs. 15-20 and they hardly get 5-10 days work in a month. Those people have not even heard about any poverty alleviation program of the government. Starvation and hunger seem to be only companion of these helpless poor.

During Justice Chowdhary commission's hearing, Akkamma and Lakshmidēvi of Kalyandurg village narrated the tragic tale of their husbands' suicides. Their husbands were agricultural laborers. But they could not get any work for many days due to drought and crop failure. Since they could not bear the sight of their starving children they borrowed money from private moneylenders but could not repay it. They saw death as the only exit route and committed suicide. Even after their deaths, the moneylenders are harassing their starving wives for failing to clear their debts.

The Plight of Warangal Farmers

Warangal has become synonymous with farmers' suicides, crop failures and sale of spurious pesticides and seeds. In fact agri-input dealers and commission agents are the most prosperous and happy community in this district. This community's prosperity has a lot to do with agrarian crises and farmers' distress in Warangal. With pest resistance growing up by 600times, the total sales of pesticides in Warangal went upto Rs. 90-100 crores in 2001. It was 70 crores for 1999 and 75 crores in 1977, which was a peak year in terms of helicoverpa infestation. According to Dr. Jalapati Rao regional director at the agricultural research station of Warangal, sales of pesticides were of around 20 to 30 crores in the early 1980s. Of all pesticide use in the district 85% is applied to cotton, 10% to chilli and about 5% to rice. This percentage share for rice was expected to increase due to heavy infestation of brown grass hoper this year (2001). There are over 600 pesticide dealers in the district. Farmers do not listen to agricultural scientists and extension officials. Pesticide dealer is the only source of information and guidance for helpless farmers. The farmer goes by the words of pesticide dealer alone. Dealers have a total grip over farmers. Which pesticide is to be used for which crop and pest in what quantity is decided not by extension officers or agricultural scientists of Warangal but pesticide dealer alone. Guided by the sole motive of profiteering, pesticide dealers quite often misguide, befool and cheat the ignorant farmers. Says Dr. Jalapati Rao " We need a more effective regulatory mechanism for pesticide industry. Dealers cheat farmers and prescribe wrong pesticides and more than required dozes. Many times pesticide is spurious and made locally. There are many dealers who sale ordinary wheat purchased from the farmers with fictitious brand name and sleek packaging. There have been many instances where farmer buys his own wheat in package form paying a price that is 5-6 times higher than he himself sold at. The liberalization of trade and industry should not be allowed to the extent that dealers start playing with the lives and livelihoods of the farmers. The current regulatory mechanisms are totally ineffective in checking the malpractices of agri-input dealers."

B. Sudhir Reddy, head of the Warangal branch of Aruna fertilizer depot, which was established in 1971 and is now one of the most prominent dealers in the district. At the back of his business card is a list of all the major companies for which Aruna acts as distributors - BASF India E.I. Dupont India, RPG Life sciences Aventis crop sciences, New Chemi Industries, Rallis India, Parry Chemicals, Karnataka Antibiotics and Pharmaceuticals. Interestingly, B.S. Reddy is also vice-president of the "Warangal district fertilizers, pesticides and seed dealers welfare association." Aruna alone has a market share of over 10% in the total pesticide sale in Warangal. The main market of pesticides and other inputs is located on the busy and bustling station road of Warangal. There are over 100 shops located on the either side of the road and dozens of emaciated, impoverished and desperate farmers could be seen jostling with one another outside these shops to buy the "latest and most effective cocktail of pesticides" on sale.

Until 5-6 years ago, most of the pesticides sold in Warangal market were organo-phosphates, such as Endosulfan, chloropyrifos, monocrotophos, Quinalphos. Their price ranges between Rs. 150-600 per litre. Dozes for spraying vary between ½ and 2 litres per acre and they are applied every 10 to 15 days. But actually many farmers spray much more than the recommended dozes. Many times they do so out of sheer desperation to control the pest but quite often they do so under the wrong advice of pesticide dealers. In the last 5 years a new generation of pesticides known as synthetic pyrethroids have come in the market. This new 'weapon in the armoury of pesticide industry' was effective in pest control for initial 2-3 years but now pests have developed resistance to it and this latest weapon is now killing more farmers and less of pests.

Farmers say that when they started spraying organo-phosphate pesticides, there was a sharp decline in the population of natural predators of these pests, such as insects (dragon flies, praying monthas, ants...) birds and frogs. Certain pesticides are more deadly than others to 'friendly' pests. One farmer said that once Cypermethrin - one of the most widely used pesticides - is sprayed the pesticides that are less harmful to non-damaging pests stop being effective. In fact, the government applied some

restrictions on the use of cypermethrin in 2000, stating that it was prohibited to use it in the initial 80-90 days of the plant's growth. Farmers said that Cypermethrin itself failed to control *Helicoverpa* this year, despite an increase in the doses applied. " No matter what pesticide is sprayed and how much is applied, the pest can not be controlled this year, " This was a comment repeatedly made by farmers of Warangal. According to two different sources(the joint Director of agriculture and agricultural officer in Warangal) *Helicoverpa* has developed a 600 fold resistance to pesticides over the last ten years.

One of the newly released pesticides is Avaunt, advertised by its manufacturing company Dupont as an "IPM product". It is manufactured in the US and packed in Gujarat. According to a local pesticide dealer, it was commercialized for the first time in 2000 in Warangal. Its price is Rs. 3350 per litre, the recommended dose is 200ml per acre(costing Rs. 670). It is supposed to control only *Helicoverpa*(even large sized caterpillars), for a period of 8-15 days. A dealer of Arepalle village (about 10Km from Warangal town) took us to a field where Avaunt had been sprayed three times and where plants had many more flowers and bolls than adjacent field. The farmer seemed to suggest that this was the effect of spraying Avaunt.

Another new release is Tracer by Dow Agrosience costing Rs. 10,000 per litre. A dose of 100ml is said to be sufficient to cover 1.5 acres. One farmer from Warangal who had already spent some Rs. 6000 per acre on his cotton crop with no success in terms of controlling *Helicoverpa*, said he would readily buy Tracer if he had the cash in hand. That some pesticide dealer from Arepalle said that farmers were lining up at his shop in the morning as this was the first day of the release of Tracer.

The situation on the seed front is no better. Last year (2000) there was a problem with the Excel - 35 cotton seed. It is a long duration (180 days) variety sold by Excel industries Limited, which has been in the pesticide business for the last 30-35 years. It entered the seed sector later. Farmers growing Excel 35 in Hanamkonda, Parvathagiri and Sangam mandals faced germination problem (bad mixture seed). A field inspection took place and farmers were advised to wait as this was a long duration variety. But

farmers organized dharnas and some went to hunger strike, which forced the company to negotiate. Some 2.25 crores of Rupees were distributed to farmers through the district collector and Joint Director of agriculture. Our informant (Agriculture officer) insisted on the fact that this is a good company, that out of a turnover of Rs. 600 crores a year, dedicates 5-6 crores to charity. He concluded by misinforming us that in the end the variety matured and farmers harvested 10-12 quintals per acre. It was shocking to find this agriculture officer so set against farmers and defending the indefensible case of seed industry. But this is a typical attitude found in most of the government officials who are paid by taxpayers money to “protect agriculture and farmers.” After seeing how farmers are misled by dealers and dirt treatment received by them at the hands of Commission Agents in the market yards of Warangal, Extension officials promoting industry’s interests rather than protecting farmers, it is difficult to believe that these farmers are the citizens of the largest democracy on earth. It is no wonder why many of them find “Suicide as the only honorable escape” from the tightening noose of pests, pesticides and pesticide mafia. Are these really suicides or the “Unpronounced death sentence” by “Powers that be” in Warangal ?