

30th November 2020

Press Release

The “**State of Rural and Agrarian India Report 2020**” was released by Dr. V Ramgopal Rao, Director, IIT Delhi today in an online webinar organised by the Network of Rural and Agrarian Studies (NRAS). This report is being brought out by the NRAS, which is a pan-India network of scholars, researchers, practitioners, farmers, students, and activists engaged in issues concerning rural and agrarian India since 2010. IIT Delhi has supported the work of the NRAS in the past, especially in organising the Second NRAS Policy Conference in 2019 which formed the basis of the report released today.

This report is an attempt to provide a comprehensive and critical overview of the state of contemporary rural India, focusing on the key rural policies and trends that have driven rural India’s economic and ecological transitions. Releasing this report, Dr. Rao said that it is informative and lucidly written and must be translated into other languages so that it becomes an important resource for a wide range of stakeholders. He mentioned the important role technological solutions can play in addressing crucial rural problems. For example, IIT Delhi has a project in Punjab to recycle agricultural waste so that the problem of stubble burning is reduced. Dr. AR Vasavi, core member of the NRAS, said there is an urgent need to address the extant erasure of rural livelihoods, depletion of natural resources and the pauperization of rural citizens, which misplaced policies and outdated ideas continue to perpetuate. She said that the report highlights the problems with the mainstream model of agriculture and seeks to provide some pathways towards new alternatives. Shri PS Vijayshankar, Samaj Pragati Sahayog, Madhya Pradesh, reiterated the key messages of the report, which is to move beyond approaches based on productivity and populism and embrace agroecology as the core of the new rural policies.

In the panel discussion that followed, Prof. Satish Deshpande, Delhi University, said that the category of rural needs closer examination. He said the rural is usually seen as a residual, either to be eradicated or as an intermediate stage in transition to something final. He said the report is correct in emphasising the rural as a productive, positive space. He also emphasised the need to question the view of the “farmer” as a homogenous category. Shri

Siraj Hussain, ICRIER, said that for a country like India one type solution is not going to solve the problem. He said solutions needs to be developed through examination of factors specific to each location. However, he pointed out that the report could be more specific on practical proposals, rather than just principles. Dr. Sudha Narayanan, IGIDR, linked the dominant approaches in rural policies to the changes taking place in agricultural markets and specifically to the passage of the three new farm bills. She said that the demand for MSPs for all crops and all regions is an untenable agenda. She remarked that there are several examples of decentralised procurement in the country from states like Odisha and Chhattisgarh. Moving beyond MSPs or procurement, it is important to talk about the forms of state support that farmers need in our current context and while speaking of marketing, we must include markets for livestock products as well. Shri Srinivasan Iyer, Ford Foundation, spoke about three social groups currently neglected by the dominant approaches – forest dwellers, pastoralists and artisans. The new rural policies would have to find ways of addressing the issues of these social groups occupying difficult geographies. He specifically spoke of the importance of extending the MSP regime to Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFPs) in tribal regions, which potentially has a huge livelihood impact. Ms. Usha S spoke of the need to bring agroecology to the core of alternative rural policies and bring the leadership of women at the centre. She said the agricultural universities and their system of knowledge production are not tuned to the needs of rural areas and farming communities.

In the Q&A session that followed, Shri Bharat Bhushan Tyagi, renowned farmer from Bulandshahr, emphasised the need for changing our mindset towards farming and recognising the need for co-existence with nature. He emphasised that in farming, the labour is itself a value, not just something that generates value. Replying to another question, Shri Hussain said that farmer income is an important consideration and we cannot discuss anything with farmers if one evades this question. Ms. Usha also agreed with this view. At the close of the meeting, Dr. Richa Kumar, Associate Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Delhi emphasised the key message of the report i.e. that we cannot make agricultural policies without taking into consideration ecology and equity. She thanked those participating in the event and laid out plans for taking the key messages of the report forward. She mentioned that NRAS plans to translate the report into several regional languages and also bring out a farmer-friendly version of the report which can be widely disseminated. She called for the support and help of all those present in taking this venture forward.

The Report is available at: <http://www.ruralagrarianstudies.org/state-of-rural-and-agrarian-india-report-2020/>

A recording of the panel discussion is available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCyERitJ27I>