Emerging Sikkim – Pathways to a green future

Sikkim is on course to unearthing new horizons of progress. Most remarkable achievement of the State is its green initiative. Here's a look at the CM who turned into reality the efforts to make Sikkim an Organic State.

Pawan Kumar Chamling – Chief Minister Sikkim – the man at the helm of affairs

Sikkim, generally known as a small Himalayan state of India with just 7096

sq kms geographical area and 6 lakhs plus population, is one of the most beautiful states of India in the lap of Mount Kanchenjunga with mountains, hills, valleys, rivers, forests and lush green fields everywhere. This mystic land, which was once blessed by Guru Padma Sambhava, is bestowed with abundant natural resources and rich biodiversity with thousands of varieties of flora and fauna. The varied agro climatic condition of the state gives scope for cultivation of crops suitable in subtropical to temperate climate. The farming system adopted since ages is an integrated farming system with mixed cropping which is successful in the hills. Farming is done under rainfed condition due to lack of assured irrigation facility. Therefore, emphasis is given to high value low volume crops which gives good economic return. Since the climate is humid with good vegetation the soil is rich in organic carbon leading to good nitrogen availability. Traditionally farmers practiced organic system of

farming and the fertiliser consumption was as low as 7 kgs per hectare when organic farming policy was introduced as a novel initiative by the dynamic Chief Minister of Sikkim – Pawan Chamling. The policy for adoption of organic farming was brought in the state when no other state of India had thought about it. In a little more than a decade, Sikkim got on course to become the first total organic farming state of India. This endeavour has been helped by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi who played the role of Brand Ambassador of Organic Sikkim and applauded the initiative taken up by Government of Sikkim in his speeches within and outside the country. Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan too gave a great boost to the organic farming initiative of the Government of Sikkim by telecasting it in his Satyamewa Jayate series.

It was a historic moment for Sikkim when Hon'ble Chief Minister of Sikkim brought a much-needed policy initiative in the State Assembly in the year 2003 for transforming the state into a "Total Organic State" by adopting certain policy interventions. This meant that the use of chemical fertilizers was to be gradually done away with. Aim eventually was to protect and enrich biodiversity and to pass on the land inherited from our forefathers to our future generations in its pristine and pure state. In due course of time, Sikkim Organic Mission has become a flagship programme of the State Government with the aim to protect the soil, environment and the ecology from bad effects of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, thereby resulting in healthy living of the people.

In keeping with his Government's concern for preservation of sensitive ecology and environment, Pawan Chamling launched and implemented several programmes and policies in a mission mode which included adoption of bio village, subsidization of rural and vermi organic manures, converting State Government's farms into "Organic Centres of Excellence" for conducting organic farming demonstration and trials. In course, Sikkim Organic Mission was launched to implement the programmes of organic farming and to introduce, promote and adopt appropriate technologies for organic crop production, protection, processing, branding and marketing of organic products of the state.

There is no doubt that Sikkim's Organic Mission has been a story of one of India's great successes. This great public policy success story has been led by the dynamic Chief Minister of the State – Pawan Chamling – who despite stiff initial opposition and without any fiscal support from the Union Government, moved ahead relentlessly.

Sikkim is the first state of India to officially announce adoption of Organic Farming and the only State of India to convert entire state into organic. A total of about 74.000 hectares of agricultural land covering the whole state has been certified as organic and anything grown in Sikkim will be certified as organic produce.

In view of long term sustenance of soil fertility, protection of environment and ecology, healthy living and decreasing the risk of health ailments and many other indirect benefits the decision for adoption of Organic Farming has been welcomed by all. Today, Sikkim is well known as an Organic state not only in the country but at international level also. His efforts have now been lauded and recognized by Prime Minister Narendra Modi as something that the rest of India must emulate.

Today, Sikkim is known all over India and abroad as an organic farming state. Chief Minister Pawan Chamling's efforts are being disseminated to the rest of Indian states. His untiring efforts have even held the attention of the world which is grappling with the problems of Climate Change. Now the immediate need is to produce commodities to match the demand, establish processing units for different commodities, brand the commodities and export them to earn foreign exchange. A good marketing strategy needs to be developed and infrastructure built to suit the market requirements.

Stage is set to implement the post mission target which would be to market these quality products well and fetch a premium price for them. It has to be taken up in an organized and aggressive way by including all stakeholders and ensuring that the produce sold should be ultimately benefitting the producers, rural and industrious farmers. Impact of the certified organic status will be felt on the ground level when

the farmers will see the encashment of the status achieved and generating income of farmers by organised marketing of produces to national and international markets. The state also plans to have its own accredited certification agency for long term continuity and sustenance for which the process is already underway.

CM Pawan Chamling's efforts were highlighted in the national conference on sustainable agriculture, wherein all state agriculture ministers, central and state agriculture officials and other technical experts were present to discuss various challenges posed to the farm sector. The conference identified initiatives to transform agriculture based on sustainable and efficient use of resources like soil and water, higher per unit yields, remunerative prices on produce, risk coverage and mitigation of potential negative impact of climate change. Sustainability through organic farming and soil health management, national agriculture market and APMC reforms, crop insurance and credit flow to farm sector, convergence of schemes like MGNREGA, Pradhan Mantril Krishi Sichai Yojana and other state plan scheme, ways and means to enhance investment in agriculture and land lease, were discussed in detail amidst examples from the Sikkim model, which was talked about in detail.

As a major fillip to organic farming in Sikkim, top Indian agro-based companies have announced to undertake a slew of agro-ventures in the State. Various companies have announced to bring in major inbound investments and expertise in the field of produces namely spices, fruits, vegetables, cereals-pulses and flowers. During one such buyer-seller meet, organized recently, representatives of the export companies participating in the meet showed great interest in the organic produce of the State.

Moreover, the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare has released two new mobile applications aimed at providing relevant and timely information to farmers. “Crop Insurance” app helps the farmers discover complete details of insurance cover available in their area and also calculate the insurance premium for notified crops, coverage amount and loan amount in case of a loaned farmer. The other app – “AgriMarket Mobile” can be used by the farmers to get the market prices of crops in the mandi within 50 km radius of the device and other mandis in the country. These apps have been developed on the mKisan portal as part of the National e-Governance Plan in Agriculture (NeGP-A).

The time has come for us to reap the fruits of labour. The state is now ready to reap the rewards of years of toil and hard work by producing commodities as per requirements of the market and sell them as pure, branded organic produce of Sikkim. Sikkim is now being projected as the place where quality and genuine organic commodities are available. The State is on road to capture the market for commodities like cardamom, ginger, turmeric, buckwheat, urd, soybean, cymbidium orchids and medicinal plants. The stage is also set to focus attention on capturing markets beyond the State’s territorial limits and look at the global market as the ultimate destination in the days to come.

Honours and glories

Sikkim bagged top five honours in a prestigious award function held in Delhi recently, viz. the annual State of the States (SoS) awards, which were based on various findings of the 2015 SoS survey done by Nielsen’s Indicus Analytics. Initiated in

2003, this SoS survey is an occasion for States to compare their performance across the board with that of other States. As the biggest gainer among small States, Sikkim jumped seven spots to the No. 1 spot and improved in governance, investment and macro economy.

Several other initiatives are being rolled by the State under the dynamic leadership of Pawan Chamling. One such initiative is the establishment of livelihood schools, wherein educated unemployed youth are trained and employed with various service providers as field supervisors. These trained youth are further helping in uninterrupted moving ahead of organic conversion and certification programmes.

Also, the Rural Management & Development Department, Government of Sikkim was conferred two prestigious national awards for Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) namely "Skoch Order of Merit" for qualifying amongst India's Best – 2015 in Smart Technology and the prestigious "Skoch Award" conferred as India's highest independent Honor by Skoch Group, New Delhi. The award was conferred after a rigorous selection procedure where more than thousand entries from different parts of the country and various state governments participated in the first selection round.

PM Modi has elucidated about the three 'S's viz. Skill, Speed and Scale, which are being put to action in Gangtok. Sikkim is developing fast to partner with the rest of the country in expediting growth. This significant transition and the success of CM's vision and mission has been possible due to full-hearted support of Sikkim's young farmers and entrepreneurs. It is they who are giving the much needed speed and scale to the mission so that the passion and determination with which the Chief Minister conceptualized this mission can be carried

forward for future generations to benefit. The farmers, the panchayats, the grass-root SDF political leaders, the administrators and managers – all are playing the tune in harmony for symphony to emerge.

Gram Panchayat

Chief Minister Pawan Chamling's path-breaking initiative of covering 74,190 hectares of land under holding of 64,726 farming families under organic farming would not have fructified without full-fledged participation of farmers and rural public. It was difficult to move forward without holding meetings of the farmers. Farmers were to be made aware of what organic farming meant, what were the benefits and why was the State going into organic. Without this, farmers may not have supported the move so wholeheartedly.

For this, the CM strengthened the Panchayati system extensively. Presence of area public representatives – gram panchayat or zilla panchayat – gave strong support to the move. Village meetings and orientation were organised and awareness programmes initiated in presence of field officials, officers and public representatives. These activities went a long way in bring farmers into confidence to go for organic system of farming.

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