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Andhra Pradesh Pursuing Natural Farming to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals

Davos (25 January 2018) – Scaling up Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) to all six million farm families in the state could help Andhra Pradesh make significant progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), according to an independent study released by Andhra Pradesh’s Chief Minister, Shri N. Chandrababu Naidu, and UN Environment’s Executive Director, Mr Erik Solheim, on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos today. The study published by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) maps the potential social, economic, and environmental impacts of the Government of Andhra Pradesh’s (GoAP) ZBNF programme vis-à-vis specific targets under each of the SDGs.

Since 2015, ZBNF has been rolled out to 138,000 farmers across all 13 districts of Andhra Pradesh, bringing almost 150,000 acres of agricultural land under the ZBNF model of agriculture. The ZBNF programme will be scaled across the state with support from the Sustainable India Finance Facility (SIFF), a collaborative initiative of UN Environment, World Agroforestry Centre, and BNP Paribas. CEEW is a research partner of SIFF.

By adopting the natural farming practices, ZBNF farmers in Andhra Pradesh have eliminated the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Instead they use low-cost locally-sourced natural concoctions, inoculums and decoctions based on cow dung, cow urine, jaggery, lilac, green chillies, and many other such natural ingredients.

Shri N. Chandrababu Naidu said, “The success of Andhra Pradesh’s Zero Budget Natural farming experiment will not only help India to meet its SDGs but will also inspire and transform the lives of millions of farmers across the developing world. Hence, the GoAP has announced 2018 as the ‘Natural Farming Year’. Once scaled to six million farm-lands across Andhra Pradesh, the ZBNF programme would generate millions of rural employment opportunities across the agricultural value chain including the production, distribution, retail of natural mixtures and market linkages for ZBNF produce.”

Dr Arunabha Ghosh, CEO, CEEW, added, “Adopting Zero Budget Natural Farming holds the potential to reinvigorate rural economies, reduce credit risks for farmers, and help agricultural families to allocate greater resources for education, health, and financial security. Andhra Pradesh’s ZBNF experiment could become a role model for low-carbon and climate resilient agriculture, generating livelihood opportunities while safeguarding our natural ecosystems.”

Erik Solheim emphasised, “The need to design sustainable agriculture and forestry in a way that solves the climate crisis, rather than contributing to it. Right now, more than 30 per cent of the climate crisis could be solved through sustainable land use, yet less than 3 per cent of climate finance, public or private, goes towards it. We need a ten-fold increase in climate finance that goes to sustainable land-use and agriculture. The largest untapped potential for climate action is in the way we manage our land and soil, and it requires visionary leadership of the kind demonstrated by Mr. Naidu. The partnership between Sustainable India Finance Facility and the Government of Andhra Pradesh serves to actualise the empowering vision of turning Andhra Pradesh into the natural farming hub of India.”

Satya S. Tripathi, Chairperson, Sustainable India Finance Facility, stated that ZBNF activities are impact-focused ensuring there is improvement in the well-being of marginalized communities, including women and vulnerable populations, resulting in large-scale positive change across the social value chain. ZBNF practices are also supporting biodiversity conservation and regenerating ecosystem services. There is an observable increase in the numbers of birds, reptiles, bees and other wild animals that are finding habitats on the farms. He complimented CEEW for the excellent study and cited it as a positive example of the collaborative effort being undertaken by numerous stakeholders in advancing the ZBNF programme championed by the Government of Andhra Pradesh.

Zero Budget Natural Farming techniques have shown preliminary evidence of improving resilience of farmlands and crops against extreme weather events. During a bout of cyclonic winds in Vishakhapatnam in 2017, anecdotal records from farmers show that ZBNF paddy withstood the winds and water-logging better than the adjacent non-ZBNF paddy fields. Some ZBNF farmers have also reported a reduction in their yield loss during droughts, owing to improved soil fertility and strength. Thus, ZBNF could help meet SDG 13, focused on taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

ZBNF could also support multiple SDG targets aimed at ending poverty, achieving food security and improved nutrition, and reducing inequality. Andhra Pradesh's ZBNF programme offers 50 per cent financial support to small and marginal farmers for adopting ZBNF. The practice of intercropping - growing multiple crops in proximity to each other - is also encouraged under ZBNF. This ensures that vulnerable communities have access to a suite of nutritional sources and income-generating crops throughout the year. By reducing input costs, small farmers under ZBNF could potentially minimise their exposure to credit risks, freeing them from the perpetual cycle of debt.

The programme could also accelerate progress towards SDG 4, focusing on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. GoAP has identified, mobilised and trained over a thousand 'master farmers' to institute a unique community-based dissemination of ZBNF in a decentralised cluster model. In January 2018, GoAP and RySS organised a nine-day workshop for over 7,000 farmers to impart training on the nature of the farming ecosystem and agricultural practices followed under ZBNF. The programme has also created farmer-friendly video content on the process of ZBNF, with examples of master farmers to guide other farmers to acquire skills to promote sustainable development.

About CEEW

The Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) is one of South Asia's leading not-for-profit policy research institutions. The Council uses data, integrated analysis, and strategic outreach to explain - and change - the use, reuse, and misuse of resources. The Council addresses pressing global challenges through an integrated and internationally focused approach. It prides itself on the independence of its high-quality research, develops partnerships with public and private institutions, and engages with wider public.

In 2018, CEEW once again featured extensively across nine categories in the '2017 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report', including being ranked as South Asia's top think tank (14th globally) with an annual operating budget of less than USD 5 million for the fifth year in a row. In 2016, CEEW was also ranked 2nd in India, 4th outside Europe and North America, and 20th globally out of 240 think tanks as per the ICCG Climate Think Tank's standardised rankings. In 2013 and 2014, CEEW was rated as India's top climate change think-tank as per the ICCG standardised rankings.