

## **Proceedings of the Pre-launching Meeting of the scheme- Replanting & Rejuvenation held on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2013**

A Pre-launching meeting of the scheme-Replanting and Rejuvenation was held on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2013 at Kochi to evolve strategies for implementing the scheme during 2013-14. In the absence of Sri. Subrato Biswas IAS, Agricultural Production Commissioner, Shri T.K.Jose, IAS, Chairman, Coconut Development Board chaired the meeting. Shri Varkala B Ravikumar and Shri. K Dharmarajan, Board members , CDB, Sugata Ghose, Chief Coconut Development Officer,CDB Shri. R Ajith Kumar, Director of Agriculture, Shri. Siva Prasad, Additional Director of Agriculture, Representatives from KAU and CPCRI, Principal Agricultural Officers/representatives of PAO's all the districts and Senior Officers of the Board attended the meeting. The list of participants in the meeting is given in annexure I.

- 1.1 The meeting started at 11.00 AM with the introductory remarks by Shri.T K Jose IAS, Chairman, CDB. He welcomed all the participants from Govt. of Kerala, CPCRI and KAU. He briefed about the background and genesis of the pilot scheme of R & R which was sanctioned with a total financial outlay of Rs.2260.863 crores and Central subsidy of Rs.474.514 crores for implementation in the districts of TVM, KLM and TSR during 2009-10 to 2011-12 of the XI FYP. The major purpose of the scheme is to cut and remove the root wilt affected, old and senile palms and to replant with sufficient seedlings of good quality and to rejuvenate the remaining palms in the garden by following scientific management practices for 2 years. He mentioned that the allocation for this scheme was the single largest allocation for a single crop in the country and this demonstrates the fact that the crop is more vital to the economy of the state than any other crop. So far more than 16.50 lakh palms were cut and removed and an amount of Rs. 143.18 crores utilized for implementing the component programmes under the pilot scheme. Although the period of implementation is over, the scheme is running into its fifth calendar year due to late sanction of projects and paucity of funds. The Board conducted an evaluation study and the results are quite encouraging. He emphasized that with the active cooperation of Krishi Bhavans and Local Self Governing Institutions, some of the major problems in coconut sector in the remaining districts of Kerala can be tackled. The programme was successful in the panchayaths where there was active support of the Local Self Government Institutions. Therefore, the role of Department of Agriculture especially the Asstt. Director of Agriculture and Agricultural Officers are very crucial for the success of the scheme and he solicited concerted efforts of the implementing officers while scaling up the programme in all

the remaining districts of Kerala. We have to use the lessons learnt from the pilot scheme in an effective manner.

- 1.2 Chairman detailed about the shortcomings of the pilot project from the experience of the previous years. The very slow progress in replanting is mainly due to absence of advance strategy for seedling production. Against the 16.50 lakh palms cut and removed, only 4.06 lakh seedlings were replanted which is not even 50 % of the cut and removed palms. When an intensive programme having wide coverage is implemented, all the implementing agencies shall clearly finalize a strategy for meeting the seedling requirement for replanting. The delay in supply of seedlings will have adverse impact on the replanting programme. All the facilities of the Department of Agriculture, CDB, KAU and CPCRI shall be put into force for enhanced production and if even after that there will be a gap for meeting the requirement, the role of CPS/CPF become relevant. The farmer collectives can pool their resources and join hands with the implementing agencies for production of quality seedlings.
- 1.3 Chairman, CDB emphasize that the need of the hour is to dovetail the project at field level so that convergence with the schemes of other agencies can be made possible. Based on the agro climatic areas, we can go for maximum intercrops by utilizing the services of VFPC and NHM. We can also converge the schemes of Micro irrigation in the coconut field which will help in increasing the productivity by over 50% from the present level. The pests/diseases can be managed through the collective approach of the farmers and by utilizing the services of the Friends of coconut Tree (FoCT). Providing an opportunity to converge all the schemes will help to revive or improve the productivity of coconut in the state. He stressed the need to make a structural change in the coconut plantations/home stead gardens by planting high yielding dwarf tender nut varieties and hybrids. He invited all the participants for a fruitful discussion. Implementation of the scheme through farmer collectives will enhance the dissemination of technology since majority of pest /disease management followed at present in a scattered manner has limited success.
- 1.4 Another major initiative that can be incorporated is to bring all the farmers to a inclusive banking system. Chairman highlighted the difficulties faced by the Board for issuing the account payee cheques during the pilot scheme implementation in the three districts. The cheque payment will also burden the Krishi Bhavans and a significant portion is often returned for revalidation and correction mainly due to the 3 month validity of cheques. This type of clerical job can be easily solved by facilitating no frill accounts in the banks having online money transfer facility. Moreover, GOI has already

favoring such a system among the farmers. A massive campaign for opening of accounts in the 11 districts can be facilitated through lead banks in each district.

- 2.0 Shri. R Ajith Kumar, Director of Agriculture expressed thanks to CDB for convening the pre-launching meeting of the senior officer of the Department of Agriculture and for providing a platform for sharing the experience of the pilot scheme implemented in the 3 districts since 2009-10. In general, Director of Agriculture highlighted the low rate of replanting under the scheme. This low rate is mainly due to lack of sufficient quantity of dwarf and hybrid seedlings with the department. In fact, this scheme has prompted the Department for going for large scale identification of dwarf mother palms in farmer's field. He informed that more than 30,000 dwarf palms has been already identified as potential mother palms and further screening for its quality is under progress. The Department is planning for a hybridization programme in the districts where the dwarf palms are maximum. He also called for distributing the inputs through the co-operative societies. Farmers are favoring the straight fertilizers rather than coconut mixtures. The SLMC has given the option of selection of inputs to the cluster convenors. He supported the decision of the Board to transfer the assistance for cutting and removal of palms through direct bank transfer facility and requested the Board to include the co-operative banks under the system since majority of the farmers are having accounts with co-operative banks.
- 3.0 Dr. Remya Gopalakrishnan, Deputy Director presented the status of implementation of the pilot scheme in the 3 districts covering 1.37 lakh hectares comprising 42 ADA blocks and 272 Krishi Bhavans. She informed that the pilot scheme was implemented in 3 phases and detailed the various stages involved in the implementation of the scheme. Prior to implementation of the scheme, workshops to sensitize various stake holders at various levels viz, district, block, panchayath & ward need to be conducted. After constituting the ward level farmer collectives, a baseline survey will be carried out for identification and marking of diseased/advanced, senile and unproductive palms. The Area Development Committee constituted at Panchayath level will recommend the project to the district level and the consolidated projects at district level will be presented before the State Level monitoring Committee (SLMC) headed by APC of Kerala for final recommendation of the project to the Board for approval. The Board will communicate the approval based on SLMC recommendation and the implementation of the project will be monitored at various levels. All the data will be entered in the online soft ware developed for the scheme and the Board will facilitate the panchayath / district level project preparation for final clearance by SLMC.

- 3.1 She highlighted that out of the 23.77 lakh palms identified for cutting and removal, 16.50 lakhs palms were removed so far, thereby registering an achievement of 69.46 %. An amount of Rs 74.38 crores is utilized for releasing the assistance to more than 4.15 lakh farmers under cutting and removal. Kollam district has recorded a maximum of 80.86% achievement in the cutting and removal of palms followed by Thrissur -68% and Thiruvananthapuram-62%. She informed that an average of 15-17 palms was removed per hectare in the pilot districts. Under the Rejuvenation component, lime, green manure seeds and chemical inputs were supplied and an amount of Rs.65.92 crores is utilized. Implementation of the Rejuvenation component is continuing in the project areas selected in second and third phases. She pointed out that the major reason for low intake of replanting is the non availability of dwarf and hybrid seedlings which was preferred by the farmers. Moreover, in majority of the first phase areas, the planting density was more than 200 palms per ha. However, efforts are on to replant atleast 50% of the palms removed in the field.
- 4.0 Shri.Sugata Ghose, Chief Coconut Development Officer presented the results of the Evaluation Report of the pilot scheme of Replanting and Rejuvenation Scheme. He informed that Board has entrusted the study to Institute of Small Enterprises and Development (ISED) they submitted the report during March'2013. The study recommended for extending the scheme to remaining districts of Kerala. One of the major weak spot identified is problems related to Information, Education & Communication (IEC). He therefore emphasized the need for an effective communication and information dissemination system between the implementing agencies and farmers for achieving the goals while extending the scheme to new areas.
- 5.0 Dr. Remya Gopalakrishnan, Deputy Director presented a general outline of the scheme for the 11 districts. She emphasized the need to have a district wise focus based on disease intensity while extending the scheme to new areas. The 11 districts can be categorized in to three zones viz, the disease hot spot areas like Alappuzha, Kottayam, Pathanamthitta and Ernakulam, the districts like Wyanad and Idukki where coconut areas are less and the major districts (disease moderate areas) like Kozhikode, Malapuram, Palakkad, Kasargod and Kannur. The scheme can be covered in a single year in the disease hot spot and in the districts where coconut area is smaller, while the implementation can be planned in 2 phases in the bigger districts. The areas where fresh cases of root wilt reported from the major districts like Palakkad and Kasargod, shall be invariably included in the first year itself so as to remove all the root wilt disease affected palms on a war footing basis. She informed that the Government already approved the extension of the project and allocated Rs 75.00 crores for the

scheme. Board submitted a project proposal for Rs.1971.90.crores for implementing the project in these 11 districts. Board has proposed some changes in the proposal such as providing a uniform subsidy of Rs.500/- for all the palms cut and removed limited to 32 palms per hectare, revising the rejuvenation subsidy to Rs.17500/-per ha from Rs. 15000/- considering the increased input cost and seedling subsidy to Rs 40/- per seedling. She presented the district wise /block wise area of coconut cultivation in each district.

- 6.0 Shri.S. Siva Prasad, Additional Director, Directorate of Agriculture, Smt C.O Hemalatha, PAO, Kollam and Shri.C. Jose Varghese, Deputy Director, Thrissur shared their experiences in the implementation of the scheme on pilot districts. They informed that the delay in providing assistance under the cutting and removal has created problems at local level offices. Major problems noticed were insufficient quantity of seedlings and the delay from the farmer's level to accept the cheques after it reaches Krishi Bhavan. While intervening in the discussion, Chairman reiterated that the assistance under the scheme will be through the online transfer facility while extending the scheme to new districts. The Additional Director of Agriculture, TVM enquired whether co-operative societies can also be included as the agency for input supply. Chairman, CDB replied that Board entrusted the supply to public sector cooperative federations at a competitive price which is lower than the price of the primary agricultural co-operative societies. Moreover, the inputs were delivered at cluster points rather than every farmer/cluster collecting inputs from a single stocking point of a society.
- 7.0 Dr. Reji J Thomas, Sr. Scientist CPCRI stated that supply of quality seedlings and its management holds the key for success of the scheme. The cut and removed palms that are abandoned in the farmer fields harbors the pests and these palms shall have to be removed. In the seedling production strategy, we should utilize the potential of all the agencies like Dept. of Agriculture, KVK, KAU, CPCRI and CDB. The strategy shall be to replant the seedlings in the ratio of 60% tall and 40 % Dwarf/Hybrids. He also briefed about the status of the tissue culture experiments on coconut conducted by CPCRI.
- 8.0 Dr.B Jayaprakash Naik, Associate Director of Research, KAU informed about the willingness of the university to collaborate for producing quality seedlings. The Regional Research Centers in different districts can associate for seedling production. He informed that incidence of Tanjore wilt is reported in coconut tracts in Kannur and

Kasargod and the same may be included under the purview of the disease affected palms while identifying palms for cutting and removal.

9.0 Shri. Varkala B Ravikumar shared his views on the scheme implementation. He highlighted the fact that the disease affected palms identified in the base line survey need to be completely removed. In the pilot scheme, disease advanced palms marked are still remaining in the field. More so in Thrissur district and remaining diseased palms are creating an alarming situation since the district is one of the border areas of RW disease zone. The farmers should be motivated for the complete removal of all the root wilt disease affected palms. The Coconut Producer Societies and Federation of the CPS's shall have to be involved for better implementation in the 11 districts. This will provide necessary farmer participation and in a transparent manner. He recommended for including the newly reported areas of Root wilt Disease in Palakkad in the first year itself. He concluded that the present system of supply of inputs through the public sector agencies is far better than the primary co-operative societies.

After detailed discussion the following decisions were taken in the meeting.

- (i) In order to sensitize the farmers and all implementing agencies, District level workshops shall be conducted in the month of July. The Block level and ward level workshops shall be done simultaneously.
- (ii) The email address of all the Agricultural officers, Assistant Directors of Agriculture and PAO's of the new districts shall be informed to the Board for speedy communication of information's related to the scheme.
- (iii) The Block wise area of coconut and the name of the krishi bhavans in each block shall be informed by the respective Principal Agricultural Officer to the Board. The postal address of each Krishi Bhavan with pin code, office telephone/mobile numbers may also be informed.
- (iv) A handbook in Malayalam incorporating all the information about the scheme shall be published for distribution to the farmers.
- (v) A special issue regarding the extension of the scheme to the 11 districts shall be brought out through Kerala Karshakan Magazine.
- (vi) Special broadcast of the scheme can be aired through AIR in the 'Vayalum Veedum' programme.
- (vii) Special district wise press releases shall be published. The publicity division of the Board will provide the material for press release and the concerned PAO

- should incorporate the relevant details of the district and give wide publicity through all the media with the help of District Information Officers of PRD.
- (viii) The meeting to discuss the seedling production strategy will be convened and CPCRI, KAU and the Department may provide the production and potential of seedling production to APC and CDB separately.
  - (ix) The newly reported Root Wilt disease areas in Palakkad and Kasargod shall be included in the first phase of implementation.
  - (x) R & R scheme will be implemented irrespective of areas where Idukki and Kuttanad Packages are being implemented. However, the assistance shall be limited to those components that are not in these packages. In Kuttanad package areas, the disease advanced palms in excess of 10 palms/ha could be removed under R & R.
  - (xi) The R & R components will be implemented in all the districts irrespective of topography/elevation of its cultivation. (Idukki, Wayanad & Kozhikode)
  - (xii) All the farmers shall be brought under the universal financial inclusive scheme for opening savings account with Nationalized/Scheduled Commercial banks.
  - (xiii) The co-operative banks with NEFT facility will also be considered or opening of accounts of stakeholder farmers.
  - (xiv) The farmers in all the coconut areas will be motivated to form Coconut Producer Societies (CPS) prior to scheme implementation. The Agricultural Officers may seek the help of charge officers of the Board designated for each district for CPS formation. Agriculture Department may give suitable instructions to the AOs and ADs.
  - (xv) A Horticultural Assistant will be provided in each Krishi Bhavan for assisting the Agricultural officer in the scheme related works. The PAO's may also explore the possibility of appointing 1-3 apprentice HA's in the new areas in each KB.
  - (xvi) Necessary training on software developed for the scheme will be imparted by CDB to the implementing officers.

10.0 In the concluding remarks Chairman requested the Officers for a concerted effort for the timely and successful implementation of the programme. He briefed about the FOCT programme and the initiatives of the Board for promoting processing and value addition through farmer collectives, CPF's and Coconut Producer Companies. The

current situation of neera and policy reforms required was also explained. The prospects of Neera as a nutritious health drink, nutritional benefits of coconut jaggery and coconut palm sugar, its low Glycemic Index (GI) value and the export potential and the world scenario were also detailed. He once again called for utilizing this scheme as a platform for converging all the schemes to increase the productivity and production of coconut in Kerala.

The meeting was concluded at 5.30 PM.

*Approved by Chairman*

Sd/-  
Deputy Director

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