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Patna, August 28. A webinar titled "The impact of Covid-19 on small-holder farmers in India and the way forward" was organized by Asian Development Research Institute and International Growth Center today. The panelists featured in the discussion were Shree N. Saravana Kumar, Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Bihar, Ms. J. V. Meenakshi, Professor of Economics at Delhi School of Economics and S. Mahendra Dev, Director and Vice-Chancellor, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research. It was moderated by Shree Anjani Kumar, Senior Research Fellow, IFPRI.

Professor Meenakshi presented a study on agriculture markets in five states and said that wheat prices remained steady even after withdrawal of support operations by the central government in UP and Haryana. They fell in the other 3 states. She concluded that there was not much of an impact on prices but there was an impact on market arrivals due to the Covid-19. She also mentioned that adoption of market reforms matters more for perishables products than for staples.

Shree Saravana Kumar said that the pandemic had increased the vulnerability of small farmers in Bihar even more. Small farmers in Bihar who were producing tomatoes could not market their perishable product as the demand had come down and they could not be helped much. On the other hand, states like Tamil Nadu had a marketing wing and could help their small farmers find markets. He sketched out three things that were going to be the new normal after the pandemic. Farmer producer companies would play a bigger role as they managed to market Bihari mangoes and litchis successfully during the pandemic period. The government has to get small farmers to tackle climate change successfully by extending climate resilient programs to all the districts of Bihar. Also, technologies like CBT will also be used more often. He also stated "Marginal & small-holder farmers are more vulnerable in this pandemic & at the same time, we are experiencing climate change (locust attack). Government initiatives like Climate Resilient Program which started with 8 districts now are extended to 38

Mahendra Dev opined that small farmers need a level-playing field with big farmers. They need aggregation of their output so that they can get the right prices by organizing them in women self-help groups, etc. The agriculture sector is going to record a growth while manufacturing and services will decline in the near future. He stated that Output of aggregation from small farm is critical since it will impact getting the right prices for farmers during this pandemic. Hence organizing and efficiency of SHGs and FPOs becomes more important.

While commencing this webinar Dr Anjani Kumar said that the vulnerabilities in agricultural supply chains and depleted workforces caused by the COVID-19 crisis have hurt farms of all sizes in India, especially the marginal and smallholder farmers are more vulnerable.

In this webinar, Professor Prabhat P Ghosh, Director, ADRI said that the ongoing COVID-19 as a health catastrophe has affected all ways of life. In this pandemic, protecting people's lives as well as the frontline facilities is now the current priority for both the State Governments and the Central Government. Both the Governments have rolled-up their sleeves for getting into actions to tackle this health disaster which also led to imposing a nation-wide lockdown to limit virus transmission. In this context, the panelist will explore - "how does small-holder farmers respond to this crisis and how do government measures affect millions of farm households across the country?" and suggest the possible mitigation strategy. Kumar Das and Bijeta Mohanty of IGC also participated in the event.



(Anjani K Verma)