



ABSTRACT

Degraded lands and marginalized people: What future for our forests, farms, and farmers?

by Dr C.T.S. Nair¹

Forests, farms and farmers, the very foundation of a society's existence, are facing multiple threats. There are some 608 million farms of which 90 percent are family farms, producing 80 percent of our food in value terms. Notwithstanding their vital importance, we have created a socio-economic system that has made farming the most unattractive and unremunerative occupation. Survival as a small farmer these days is extremely challenging, and it is not surprising that farmer suicides have become widespread. The decline of farms and forests and the marginalization of farmers are symptomatic of the larger crisis that the world is confronting. There are two broad related trends that have been operating for the last few decades namely:

- A shift away from dependence on natural systems and processes and increased reliance on fossil fuel-dependent technologies; and
- Increasing concentration of production in the hands of a few, especially corporate interests.

The development paradigms pursued in the last many decades, emphasizing on economic growth, and building an urban industrial society relying on non-renewable resources, have bled all the three – the farms, the forests, and the farmers. In the name of enhancing productivity a host of technologies have been introduced resulting in the environmental crises like land degradation, desertification, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, depletion, and pollution of water, and above all climate change with all its multiple manifestations. The scenarios that may emerge from what is being done now is just the opposite of what was envisaged to be accomplished under the SDGs. This presentation discusses some of the critical issues in rebuilding a prosperous, healthy, and vibrant economy bringing forests, farms, and farmers to the centre-stage of development agenda.