

## Foreword

Twenty second day of March 2004 was a milestone for the Assam Regional Office of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). It had the rare privilege of playing host to His Excellency, the Hon'ble Governor of Assam Lt. Gen. (Rtd) Ajay Singh. The Hon'ble Governor showed keen interest in understanding the critical role of NABARD, vis-a-vis rural development of Assam. From his intense discussions with the senior officials of NABARD we could discern his healthy anxiety for economic amelioration of rural masses of Assam. He also requested NABARD, Assam RO to prepare a 'roadmap' for development of agriculture in Assam with specific focus on horticulture.

In the coming years, if Assam has to emerge as a leader in terms of modern agriculture, it must address a number of issues that need to be sequentially synergised with man, material and management. First and foremost would be a comprehensive policy document from the State Government on agriculture. It is heartening to note that the Government of Assam [GoA] has come out recently with its Agricultural Policy, which need to be further fine-tuned and broad-based.

In Assam, the foodgrains production especially paddy dominates to ensure food security. However, food security should be viewed in terms of "food" rather than merely "food grains". If it is measured in terms of, for instance, nutritional requirements, the shift towards horticultural crops should be welcomed. Future of Assam agriculture and allied sector lies more in commercialization of the sector, particularly, in view of the fast changing economic scenario, following from WTO, trade liberalization and emergence of globally integrated market forces.

Another area of concern is rural infrastructure. Sir Arthur Lewis won the Nobel prize for explaining how poor countries could develop quickly the requisite infrastructure facilities by employing the surplus labour they have. On the same analogy, Dr. Abdul Kalam, Hon'ble President of India, in his India Vision 2010, has given a blue print through his programme of 'Provision of Urban Amenities in Rural Areas' (PURA). It starts with the construction of a ring road linking a loop of villages which enables farmers to have better market access. Here again, GoA has already initiated measures to ground a pilot project in Rangia, Kamrup. NABARD is keen to associate in implementing the PURA.

In this context, NABARD has been continuously playing the role of a facilitator in improving the quality of life of the farming community through various developmental initiatives using credit and non-credit instruments and ensuring efficient credit delivery for a wide array of provisions including infrastructure in rural India. NABARD has been addressing to the needs of a variety of financial services for development of rural sector in India. NABARD has given to the rural India, the concept of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) bank linkage which started as a pilot initiative in the early 90s and has grown today, as a people's movement, in a number of States and is recognized as one of the internationally acclaimed rural women empowerment

initiatives. Many such initiatives have to be taken, which have been delineated in ***the Road Map for an Agrarian Prosperity in Assam.***

A road map is not a specific plan to be followed but a series of guideposts to keep one headed in an economically chosen direction. As one takes to the road, however, new diversions and missing links may open up which may have to be bridged over in response to rising demand.

This document has been prepared by bringing in the perceptions of eminent experts, knowledge of technical experts and developmental banking insights of some of my colleagues. We claim no originality to the ideas used in preparing this document as many of these ideas have been experimented in the recent past in and outside the country. Needless to mention, therefore, that NABARD as an organisation does not own any responsibility for the views expressed in the document. Views are purely personal and, therefore, the errors that remain in the text are solely due to me and my colleagues. Nonetheless, if this document can enhance understanding about how the agriculture and horticulture sectors in Assam could develop in the coming years, its purpose would be largely served.

Dr. Arun K. Bandyopadhyay  
Chief General Manager  
National Bank for Agriculture  
and Rural Development  
Assam RO, Guwahati

28 May 2004