

Mr Ajay Shriram was a speaker at the Informal Interactive Hearings of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly for the Millennium Development Goals 2015 summit held in New York

- Farming has to come first to achieve the MDGs

- Increase Agricultural Productivity Sustainably

13th July 2010, New Delhi: Mr Ajay Shriram, Chairman & Sr Managing Director, DCM Shriram Consolidated Ltd. and President, International Fertilizer Industry Association (IFA) was a speaker at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly Informal Interactive hearings for the Millennium Development Goals 2015 summit held in New York.

Mr Ajay Shriram, Chairman & Sr Managing Director, DCM Shriram Consolidated Ltd. regarding the focus of his speech said, "A necessary component of meeting the MDGs by 2015 in many parts of the world is a more productive, profitable and sustainable agricultural sector. For most of the rural poor, who constitute a large proportion of the developing world's population, agricultural is critical to attaining the MDGs."

He suggested some routes which are innovative and easily replicable ways to increase agricultural productivity sustainably, reach this last mile, and improve conditions for farmers through new business models and public-private partnership.

First, to bridge the gap in last-mile delivery of services, we need to work with farmer throughout the crop lifecycle, with regards to all agricultural inputs, and concentrate on crop needs.

Second, the man power currently deployed by the public and private sectors is inadequate to reach the millions of farmers worldwide. Farmers' main point of contact for inputs and advice remains agri-inputs dealers. Including dealers in the extension system and equipping them with sufficient knowledge would go a long way towards improving knowledge transfer.

Third, cellular phone penetration has reached unprecedented levels, even in rural areas. ICT provides a robust platform for providing numerous services that can supplement other efforts to deliver knowledge and information to farmers. The Indian Farmers Fertilizer Cooperative Limited (IFFCO) has undertaken a joint-venture with Bharti Airtel, India's largest integrated telecom services provider to design new ICT services for farmers. When farmers sign up for the IFFCO Kisan Sanchar Limited (IKSL) service, they obtain access to five daily messages in their local language with crop and area specific information, a help line and interactive information services, all free of charge. Messages include information on agricultural market prices and arrivals, availability of fertilizers, electricity timings, early disaster warning systems, best farming practices, prevention of plant and veterinary diseases, and financing and insurance services.

Fourth, any effective delivery system must take into account the need to “get local” and engage on an ongoing basis. This is particularly important in countries where regional differences are acute and there are different languages, diets and agronomic practices. In 2002, DCM Shriram Consolidated Ltd established the Hariyali Kisaan Bazaar, an innovative chain of rural agricultural super markets, in India. The chain offers quality inputs, agronomic services, financial products, commodity training and agricultural information. One element in the success of such a business model is that it is tailored to local need and customs. Hariyali provides not only agricultural input, but also the knowledge that goes with them. Agronomics, who speak local languages, are available in stores to answer farmers’ question.

Fifth, innovative partnerships can lead to tremendous strides being taken in relation to food and nutrition security and public health. The fertilizer and zinc industries are working jointly on last-mile delivery of innovation to alleviate zinc deficiency in soils, crops and humans. Zinc deficiency is one of the leading risk factor for disease in the developing world.

Sixth, most of the world’s farmers cultivate plots of less than two hectares and live below the poverty level. These farmers need to be organised into groups and partnership establish with the corporate sector in order to achieve economies of scale, improve income levels and respond better to market needs.

In a world where population and consumption are growing, working towards food security for all, including the availability, accessibility and affordability of sufficient food with the required nutrient value, is a responsibility shared by farmers, business, governments and other representatives of society.

Mr Ajay Shriram ended his speech by adding, “Central to the solution are the millions of farmers around the world who produce all the food that we all eat. Many of these farmers are trapped in a cycle of poverty. By improving their incomes through last-mile delivery of better tools, knowledge, partnership and market access, we cannot only create a sustainable solution to poverty, but also help address the key challenges of food and nutrition security. “

About DSCL:

DSCL is an integrated business group, with extensive and growing presence across the fields of Agriculture, Infrastructure and Chemicals & Polymers business. The high-value and knowledge based business being incubated by DSCL include Hariyali Kisaan Bazaar, Fenesta Building Systems and Hybrid Seeds (Bioseed).

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