India is facing a critical situation for its Agrarian future: MS Swaminathan

BW Business world's Prabodh Krishna spoke to MS Swaminathan, the father of India's Green Revolution on his take on the current situation.

You have drafted the recommendations that are termed as India's agrarian policy bible, did you ever thought about the current situation? The National Policy for Farmers is a comprehensive one, covering both favourable and unfavourable situations, such as those expected in the era of climate change. There are detailed suggestions on anticipatory research and action.

How do you look at the current situation from the perspective of a scientist and a policy maker?

The present situation is partly due to global conditions. Nevertheless, there are ample pathways of minimizing damage. Education is particularly important in order to promote containment.

How to mitigate from the impact of pandemic on agrarian India?

Currently, the problem is one of labour, both for agriculture and post-harvest operations. A massive skill training programme will have to be undertaken and landless labour and women farmers in particular would need advanced assistance to take care of their immediate needs.

Pricing and marketing, as well as storage and value addition, are important components of a revival plan.

How do you look at the migration of labour back to their hometowns?

It is unfortunate that labour had to return to their hometowns due to the loss of jobs and livelihoods. Agriculture promotes job-led economic growth and we should start preparing for the rehabilitation of those who are currently leaving agriculture due to the extraordinary circumstances.

Every situation has both good and bad impacts, can India turn this migration into positive results?

It is true that every calamity also provides an opportunity for strengthening the ecological base of agriculture. There are a number of studies coming today on how the negative impact on production can be alleviated, particularly with reference to procurement and marketing.

What kind of techno scientific interventions you suggest for such unprecedented situation?

The most important intervention we need is in the field of post-harvest technology – storage, processing, value addition and marketing are important components of intervention. While production technology has advanced, post-harvest technology as well as infrastructure are inadequate. We should pay attention to all aspects of agriculture from seed to seed.

You are the father of nation’s green revolution, what are your suggestions to common people, businessmen and policy makers in current situation?

My advice is to develop greater pride and confidence in our farmers and farming, based on how they converted a ‘ship to mouth’ existence into a legal ‘right to food’. Farmers and farming were given low prestige in the past. This situation should change and we should regard every farmer as a scientist.