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## Programme to rid poverty from agro biodiversity hotspots

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University of Alberta, Canada and Chennai-based MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) launched a research-cum-development programme to alleviate poverty and malnutrition from the agro-biodiversity hotspots in the country.

□ "Scientists from University of Alberta and MSSRF will work with small and medium farmers in Kolli Hills of Namakkal in Tamil Nadu, Koraput in Orissa and Meenangadi in Wayanadu district of Kerala for the next 42 months. They will guide farmers and rural folk to use agriculture and other interventions to address poverty and malnutrition in these three regions which are known for their rich agro-biodiversity," said Prof MS Swaminathan, eminent agricultural scientist and chairman, MSSRF.

He said the project would be extended to the whole country depending on the success of the intervention to be carried out by the scientists. "Farmers in Kolli Hills were masters in the cultivation of millets which is more nutritious than rice or wheat. It was the staple food of the region till 300 years ago. But over the years production economy became unfavourable and farmers switched over to other less nutritious crops," said Prof Swaminathan.

Kalinga Kalajeera of Koraput and the Njavara variety of rice cultivated in Wayanadu too gave way to other crops for similar reasons. "We want to make use of the expertise of the Canadian scientists in making a turn-around in the fortunes of the Indian farmers," he said.

Mihir Shah, member, Planning Commission, said the Koraput-Kolli Hills-Meenangadi experiment should be extended to all over the country. "It should not be confined to smaller areas. These should not end up as a few oasis of development dotting the landscapes. The Planning Commission is willing to help you extend the same throughout the country," he said.

S Bala Ravi, project director, MSSRF, said that the scheme was taken up following the 3rd National Family Health Survey which threw some 'disturbing findings'.

Credit:DNA Correspondent

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