

THE HINDU

Date: 21/03/2005

URL: <http://www.thehindu.com/2005/03/21/stories/2005032112460500.htm>

Tamil Nadu

'Self-help group concept useful for South Africa'

By Our Staff Reporter



**Thoko Didiza, South African Minister for Agriculture and Land Affairs, interacting with members of a self -help group at Sadavaram in Kancheepuram on Sunday . —
Photo: A. Muralidharan**

KANCHEEPURAM, MARCH 20 . A five-member South African delegation today visited Kancheepuram to know how women's self-help groups functioned.

The delegation, including the Agriculture and Land Affairs Minister, Thoko Didiza, wanted to implement similar schemes in South Africa.

Impressed with performance

Ms. Didiza said the delegation visited India to take part in a G-20 meeting and came here to have a firsthand knowledge of the problems in agriculture and rural development. The delegation was impressed with by the activities of the self-help groups.

The Minister, accompanied by Masiphula M. Mbangwa, Deputy Director-General, Agriculture Economics and Business Development, and Thomas Cronje, First Secretary (Political), South Africa High Commission, New Delhi, visited a few units run by SHGs, supported by Hand in Hand, a non- governmental organisation.

Ms. Didiza said authorities in South Africa were considering various means of intervention, such as setting up of Bangladesh's Grameen Bank, to help the rural poor. A few experiments were under way to ensure that the poor had access to resources. She pointed out that South Africa did not support credit and subsidy as India did, as greater subsidies would affected the country's competitiveness in the world market. Yet, the delegation wanted to try out the SHG concept. "We will have to take into consideration our country's situation, and a lot of what we have seen can be used."

Reintroduction of subsidy

Mr. Mbangwa said the concept of subsidies was done away with in 1997. "Only now have we started thinking of bringing them back."

He said neither the Government nor the private financial institutions came forward to grant subsidies to the rural poor. Unlike in India, there was no government-people participation in rural development or poverty alleviation schemes.

Kalpana Shankar, Chief Executive Officer, Hand in Hand, said the Sweden-based NGO was focussing on eradication of child and bonded labour, enrolment of school dropouts and women empowerment. For the past one year, it was playing the role of a micro-finance institution, adopting the "best features of both the Grameen Bank and the SHG approach."

© Copyright 2000 - 2006 The Hindu