

# **EVALUATION REPORT ON WESTERN GHATS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME IN MAHARASHTRA (A JOINT STUDY)**

## **1. The Study**

The hill areas of the country especially the Himalayan and the Western Ghats Regions, were recognised as areas which required to be given special attention for restoration of ecological balance. In pursuance of the policy of accelerating the development of hill areas in the country and at the suggestion of the National Development Council (1972) the centrally sponsored Western Ghats Development Programme (WGDP) was introduced in 1974-75 for integrated development of Western Ghats Region.

At the instance of Planning Commission, the Programme Evaluation Organisation and the Directorate of Economics and Statistics Maharashtra undertook a joint Evaluation study of WGDP in the state of Maharashtra to assess the performance, implementation and impact of the WGDP in the State.

## **2. Objectives of the Study**

The main objectives of the study were as follows:

- i) to examine the implementation of the programme in general and specifically in respect of schemes relating to soil Conservation, Irrigation, Forestry including Social Forestry and Horticulture in terms of adoption of Integrated Watershed approach, prioritisation of watersheds and schemes and their physical and financial achievements and assets created,
- ii) to analyse the extent to which the various sectoral schemes have been dovetailed and integrated with the State Plan Programme,
- iii) to ascertain the extent to which the WGDP funds have been utilised as an 'additionality' to the State Plan Schemes,
- iv) to assess the impact of the various Schemes on changes in the pattern of land utilisation, cropping pattern and crop intensity, agricultural production and productivity, irrigation intensity, rainfall, water table, availability of fodder and fuel and income of the people,

- v) to ascertain the extent of degradation of land and damages caused to ecology over a period as also to examine the extent of restoration of ecological balance as a result of the implementation of the programme,
- vi) to examine the operational problems including those of coordination and monitoring the implementation of the programme and to explore measures to overcome them,
- vii) to examine whether forward and backward linkages, if any, for the beneficiaries have been taken care of in the programme; and
- viii) to study the nature and extent of awareness created under the programme among the population and Voluntary Institutions and their participation in formulation and implementation of the scheme.

### **3. Sample Size/Criteria for Sample Selection**

A sample of 4 districts two each from 'ghat' and 'coastal' regions, 8 talukas, 36 watersheds, 59 works, 266 beneficiary and 65 non- beneficiary households were selected for the study.

### **4. Reference Period**

The study was conducted in November-December, 1993 and the data were collected for the years 1974-75 to 1992-93.

### **5. Main Findings**

1. The utilisation of WGDG funds were satisfactory as about cent percent of the fund allocated had been utilised. However, some project level officers reported inadequacy and delay in receipt of funds.
2. The performance of WGDG in Maharashtra as observed by physical achievements against targets seemed satisfactory for all the major activities. In the thirty two selected watersheds ,minor irrigation sector was absent in twenty nine and forestry in twenty one.
3. It was observed that the scope and contents of WGDG had undergone changes. WGDG was now transferred into an integrated watershed development programme with emphasis on restoration and preservation of ecology of the Western Ghats area.

4. During the period 1985-86 to 1992-93, Rs. 528 crore were spent in 62 (WGDP) talukas identified under WGDP. Of this about 83 percent of the financial resources came from normal State Plan funds and the rest from WGDP funds. About 78 percent of WGDP funds was utilised in two core sector activities, viz. soil conservation and forestry. Minor irrigation sector had received another 10 percent of WGDP funds. In almost all the sectors the share of State Plan resources was larger than that of WGDP funds.
5. The Department of Planning, Government of Maharashtra was the nodal agency for implementation of WGDP in the State. At the district level, the heads of line departments reviewed the progress of both the State Plan and WGDP schemes and sent monthly/quarterly returns to the concerned regional heads and state headquarters.
6. There was reduction in cultivable waste lands in the area and a marked change in cropping pattern which had moved in favour of cash crops like sugarcane, groundnut and horticulture.
7. There was a significant increase in areas irrigated by wells.
8. The annual household income of an average beneficiary cultivator during 1992-93 was more than Rs. 23,000/- as against about Rs. 14,000/- of a non-beneficiary cultivation. The impact was more favourable for those households who derived a larger part of their income from non-agricultural activities.
9. It was observed that WGDP scheme were, in general, labour intensive. In particular, the labour component of soil conservation schemes was as high as 90 percent.
10. It was reported by many households that pasture development activities were not upto the mark, though growth of live stock population in WGDP areas was higher than that of the state as a whole.
11. It was reported that households have stopped indiscriminate felling of trees, reduced their dependence on firewood to 45 percent, confining grazing to only common grazing lands, and participated in the social forestry programme to preserve ecological balance.

12. It was observed that in most of the 32 watersheds selected for the study, had only one or two activities of the core sectors. It was reported by the beneficiaries under the commands of several watersheds that there was lack of access to support services like delivery of agricultural inputs, veterinary aid centre, marketing facilities, PHCs etc. However, access to cooperative credit societies, was reported by a large number of beneficiaries.

## **6. Major Suggestions**

1. In order to achieve the full potential of sustainable development, the approach of integrated watershed development as envisaged in the central guidelines should be followed
2. Monitoring of WGDP needs improvement. The nomination of a Nodal Officer at the Taluka level may also be kept in view.
3. It was reported by some watershed level officers that the delay in receipt of funds and transfer of funds from one expenditure head to another may be looked into and addressed.
4. It was suggested that the technical staff may be deployed at nursery level.
5. It was observed that the procedure for maintenance of data and records need improvement.
6. It was reported that the feasibility of providing support services like marketing facilities or buy –back arrangement through cooperatives should be worked out to ensure greater participation in the social forestry sector.
7. In view of the high growth in the livestock population, support services and activities like Veterinary Centres, expansion of pasture lands and market infrastructure for sustenance of this growth may be provided.