

WATER POLICY FOR DROUGHT PROOFING CHHATTISGARH

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Smita Gupta

Hony. Project Director: Prof. Jayati Ghosh, Jawaharlal Nehru University



**INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
New Delhi**

Professor
Center for Economic Studies and Planning

This report is the outcome of a process of interdisciplinary research devoted to defining, assessing and suggesting policies for the mitigation of drought vulnerability in Chhattisgarh. It combines research and other inputs from geographers, geo-hydrologists, ecologists, economists, planners and a range of others. The study has been brought together and written up by Smita Gupta, who has been able to bring together these various inter-disciplinary strands to arrive at a comprehensive yet applicable methodology to identify the more important form of drought vulnerability. The study has also identified the major contours of a feasible water policy for Chhattisgarh, which takes into account the major findings that have emerged.

The most significant findings relate to the varying nature of drought vulnerability, which in turn require different interventions in order to achieve drought-proofing. Broadly speaking, there are three ecological and socio-economic situations of drought vulnerability that have been identified.

The first relates to areas with high rainfall but also high run-off in the drought-vulnerable hills, which are also characterised by a dominance of Scheduled Tribe population, more equitable land holding structure with poverty spread out more evenly among the tribal population. Lack of development constitutes a major cause of the vulnerability. Here the interventions that are required are dominantly in the form of public investment to labour-intensive rainwater harvesting measures. These would effectively check soil erosion and increase irrigation simultaneously, and provide more sustainable agriculture in the medium term. Some of the specific interventions that are possible have been identified and their costs assessed.

The second situation relates to the moderate rainfall in the drought-prone plains, which are characterised by greater land concentration and a higher proportion of landless labourers, many of whom belong to the Scheduled Castes. Here lack of assets emerges as the important factor behind the drought-vulnerability of these sections of society. The important government interventions that are required in such areas are programmes for employment generation and asset redistribution. Once again, the nature of possible employment generation programmes has been discussed and their costs assessed.

The third situation relates to the rainshadow areas in the hilly tribal tracts, which are marked by both high run-off and low and variable rainfall. In these areas, government intervention is required in the form of location-specific programmes for the conservation of groundwater and soil moisture. Some of the possible interventions have been described in detail.

In addition to a detailed mapping of soil type and hydrological resources in Chhattisgarh, which we believe has been achieved for the first time in this study, the

study also contains several other important sections. The attempt to define block level ecologies has been accompanied by a detailed analysis of the socio-economic and production conditions that prevail, with some blocks taken as the objects of special focus. A survey at the household level conducted in three blocks provides insights into the causes of, and the nature of household survival methods, in different situations of drought vulnerability. On a more macro level, there are analyses of the state's Water Policy and various other proposals, for the water policy of Chhattisgarh state. In addition to making both general and specific policy recommendations, the study also contains sections on the financial strategy for achieving such policies and the needs of training required for implementation of particular policies.

We hope that this study will constitute a useful contribution to the discussion on water policy and drought-proofing in Chhattisgarh, and provide applicable inputs for future policy.

New Delhi

JAYATI GHOSH
Hony. Project Director

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