

PREFACE

The Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP) and the Desert Development Programme (DDP) have been designed to restore ecological balance through soil and moisture conservation on watershed basis within the framework of area development plans. In practice, however, these Programmes have been implemented in a fragmented manner by different departments through rigid guidelines without any well-designed plans prepared on watershed basis by involving the inhabitants. Except in a few places, in most of the Programme areas the achievements have been dismal. Ecological degradation has been proceeding unabated in these areas with reduced forest cover, receding water table and shortage of drinking water, fodder and fuel-wood. Clearly, these Programmes have failed to neutralise the adverse impact of the overall processes of degradation on account of increased pressures on the fragile eco-systems from growing population, poverty and affluence. Inadequate attention to the development of infrastructure for generating income-earning opportunities by using indigenous resources and skills and the heavy subsidization of electricity resulting in pumping of water at a rate higher than the rate of recharge have also contributed significantly to the degradation of environment.

The Technical Committee is convinced that this process of degradation can be reversed by following appropriate strategies for the conservation of natural resources. The cases of outstanding success e.g. Ralegaon Sidhi and Adgaon in Maharashtra, certain tribal areas of Panchmahal in Gujarat, Mittemari in Karnataka and Jhabua in Madhya Pradesh, to mention only a few, reinforce this confidence. Planning on watershed basis through the participation of the people at all stages, active involvement of the voluntary organizations and coordinated effort by the administration have been critical in accounting for the success in such cases.

The Technical Committee has, therefore, recommended revamping of the strategy for the implementation of these Programmes. The works should hereafter be sanctioned on the basis of the action plans prepared on watershed basis instead of a fixed amount being allocated per block as at present. The beneficiaries in the watershed must be fully involved in the planning as well as implementation of the works through the Watershed Development Teams. Voluntarism in general should be encouraged within the framework of Panchayati Raj Institutions for undertaking these tasks and wherever voluntary organizations are forthcoming, the management of watershed development should be entrusted to them with the ultimate aim of handing over to them one-fourth of total number of watersheds for development. The resources for watershed development should be augmented substantially by pooling resources from other programmes being implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development e.g. Jawahar Rozgar

Yojana, Employment Assurance Scheme etc. and by integrating them with DPAP and DDP. The Committee has also recommended suitable institutional mechanism for bringing about coordination between different departments at the central and state levels with a view to ensuring uniformity of approach in implementing similar programmes for the conservation of land and water resources. The Committee would like to emphasize that these Programmes by themselves cannot succeed in achieving the objectives unless they are backed by appropriate area development plans to ease pressure on natural resources by generating income-earning opportunities, particularly in the non-farm sector, and through appropriate pricing policies to discourage the overdrawl of ground water.

The Technical Committee has suggested criteria for identifying the eligible districts in the country for the Programmes on the basis of the moisture-index— an internationally accepted criterion for the identification of aridity. The eligible Blocks in these districts should be selected on the basis of the level of irrigation and slope of the terrain as enumerated by the Committee. The Committee is of the view that for combating drought effectively, all the villages in the selected blocks should be covered by these Programmes over the next ten years.

Training in the preparation of watershed development plans for the peoples' representatives, activists of the voluntary organisations and for the functionaries from the administration at various levels is going to be critical for the successful implementation of this strategy. In the Committee's view, the Ministry of Rural Development has to play a pivotal role in initiating and funding the training programmes to be undertaken by the various reputed institutions equipped for the purpose. The Ministry should also support research in technology bearing on watershed development in addition to initiating and supporting evaluation studies to be undertaken periodically by the reputed institutions. The Ministry's leadership role would become extremely important in all such activities including administrative coordination at various levels. This is how effective decentralization of programmes at sub-state levels can be combined with overall guidance and leadership at the national level.

My colleagues on the Technical Committee made valuable contributions and actively participated at all stages of the work. Shri Shivraj Singh, Member-Secretary of the Technical Committee, shouldered the responsibility for organizing the work of the Committee. I would like to thank all of them for their cooperation.

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Chairman

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Technical Committee on DPAP and DDP