CHAPTER - 2
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Substantial areas of our country periodically experience droughts leading to considerable loss of agricultural production and livestock wealth, besides causing misery to people inhabiting these areas. Large sums have been spent by the Government for providing relief after the occurrence of droughts. But, such expenditure has not helped solve the basic problem of increasing the productivity of these areas by conserving soil and moisture and thereby reducing the impact of the severity of the droughts to the human and cattle population. Ecological degradation on account of denudation of forests and excessive grazing has resulted in soil erosion and decline in the productivity of the land. Because of the increase in population, both human and cattle, even the marginal lands unsuitable for cultivation have been brought under the plough. Mitigation of distress caused by droughts were mainly restricted to adhoc relief works to create employment for increasing the purchasing power of the people which provided some immediate relief. Systematic efforts at long-term ameliorative measures to tackle these problems of drought started only after planning for economic development was launched in the country.

2.2 The first step towards a systematic effort to tackle the problem of drought and desertification was the establishment of a Research Centre at Jodhpur in 1952 to carry out research on certain core needs of desert areas such as sand-dune stabilisation, shelter-belt plantation, afforestation etc. In 1959, the entire responsibility for Research on arid areas was entrusted to the Centre which was then designated as Central Arid Zone Research Institute (CAZRI). During the Second and Third Five Year Plans, the problem of drought-affected areas was mainly sought to be solved by launching Dry Farming Projects, which spread over a few areas with emphasis on moisture and water conservation measures.

2.3 The origin of the Drought Prone Areas Programme can be traced to the Rural Works Programme launched in 1970-71 with the object of creating assets designed to reduce the severity of drought in affected areas. The Programme spelt out long-term strategy in the context of the conditions and potentials of the drought prone districts. In all, 54 districts in the country together with parts of another 18 districts contiguous to them were identified as drought-prone for purposes of the Programme. The Programme covered 12% of the country's population and nearly one-fifth of the area in the country. Labour-intensive schemes such as medium and minor irrigation, road construction, soil conservation and afforestation were taken up under this Programme. The Mid-Term Appraisal of the Fourth Plan redesignated the Programme as the Drought Prone Areas Programme.
2.4 The Fourth Plan continued to lay emphasis on dryland farming technology. For this purpose, All India Coordinated Research Project for Dryland Agriculture, later renamed as the Central Research Institute for Dryland Agriculture (CRIDA), was set up. 24 pilot projects were started to serve as training-cum-demonstration centres for application of technology relating to soil management, water harvesting, improved agronomic practices, drought-resistant crops etc.

2.5 The Programme in the Fifth Five Year Plan followed the strategy and approach of integrated area development laid down by the Task Force constituted by the Planning Commission in 1971 under the Chairmanship of Dr. B.S. Minhas, then Member, Planning Commission. The Task Force recommended that the Programme should be based on resource endowment analysis and potential for development of the project areas. It recommended that the Programme should aim at integrated development of agriculture with focus on conservation, development and utilisation of land, water, livestock and human resources in an optimum manner. The need to provide more stable income and employment to the weaker sections of the rural society was also emphasised.

2.6 In the Interim Report of the National Commission on Agriculture (1974) the hot desert areas were identified and it was suggested that a development programme consisting mainly of afforestation and livestock development should be taken up. In its final Report, the National Commission has suggested that the problem of the cold desert areas of Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh should be studied in depth. The Desert Development Programme (DDP) was started in 1977-78.

2.7 The Drought Prone Areas Programmes and the Desert Development Programme were reviewed by the Task Force set up by the Ministry of Rural Development under the Chairmanship of Dr. M.S. Swaminathan. The Task Force in its Report in January '82, recommended certain modifications in the coverage of these programmes based on certain objective criteria evolved by it. While the on-going approach and strategy were reiterated, the scope and the objectives of the Programmes were re-defined. Emphasis was laid more on productive agriculture, dryland as well as irrigated, and vegetal cover. Infrastructure oriented schemes such as chilling plants, dairy units etc. were excluded from the purview of the Programme and greater stress was given on the strengthening of the land-based infrastructure including pasture and fodder resources. The DPAP was withdrawn from areas covered under DDP as the Programmes have similar objectives and contents. It emphasised the need for planning the Programmes on a watershed basis in an integrated manner. Thus, the objective of ecological restoration through proper land and water management was
emphasised in the Programmes. Instead of beneficiary oriented schemes, the Task Force recommended the provision of subsidy on predominantly area development schemes irrespective of the size of the holding and for schemes involving community participation such as farm forestry, water harvesting etc. The Task Force, however, suggested a general rate of subsidy, the larger holdings getting somewhat less than the smaller ones. For income generating schemes such as minor irrigation and land development, the Task Force recommended assistance to be limited to small and marginal farmers. Inter-sectoral priorities were also laid down.

2.8 The main thrust of the Programmes in the successive Plans continued to be income generating and infrastructure oriented schemes and the scope of the activities taken up under the Programmes became sufficiently wide to cover expenditures on staff and establishment, feed mixing plants, liquid nitrogen plants, veterinary hospitals and dispensaries, construction of road for transportation of milk, cross-breeding programmes, establishment of livestock and poultry farms, silk rearing units, ground water survey, purchase of rigs etc. In the process, it was observed that the Programmes deviated considerably from the avowed objective of ecologically integrated development of drought-prone and desert areas through drought-proofing and control of desertification.

2.9 The implementation of the Programmes were closely reviewed in June’87 by the Central Sanctioning Committee (CSC). The inadequate impact of these Programmes was attributed to the undertaking of wider range of activities which were neither properly integrated nor necessarily related to the core objectives of the Programmes. It was also felt that the low levels of investment in widely dispersed areas, implementation of schemes without proper feasibility studies, diversion of funds to un-approved schemes, high administrative expenditure etc. had diluted the focus of the Programmes. It was, therefore, decided to narrow down the range of activities under DPAP and DDP so as to sharpen the focus of the objectives to be achieved. It was decided that the main thrust of the Programmes should be on activities relating to soil conservation, land shaping and development, water resources conservation and development, and afforestation and pasture development. Since these activities are not only harmoniously related to each other, but together have the capability of making an impact on environment, it was decided that at least 75% of the annual allocation should be earmarked for these activities, while 15% of the funds were allocated for activities in minor sectors like animal husbandry, dairy development, sericulture, horticulture etc. which directly contributes to the basic objectives of the Programmes. A maximum of 10% of the annual allocation has been earmarked for project administration. A list of eligible and in-eligible activities was also prepared and used in the identification of programme works by the State Governments.

2.10 As regards the unit of planning and development, micro-watershed
was considered to be the most scientific basis for optimum utilisation of available resources, inspite of several operational problems. It was felt that earnest efforts should be made to implement programme activities in identified micro-watersheds.

2.11 The Annual Plans of the district under the DPAP/DDP were being approved by the Government of India till 1986-87. To quicken the process of clearance of these Plans from 1987-88 onwards, the authority to approve the district annual action plans has been delegated to the concerned State Governments. Accordingly, the district annual action plans are now being approved by the State Level Sanctioning Committee (SLSC) which is assisted by a Technical Sub-Committee which accords technical clearance to the sectoral schemes before the annual action plans are put up to the SLSC for approval.

2.12 At the time of taking a decision on the Report of the Task Force on DPAP & DDP, headed by Dr. M. S. Swaminathan. Government had indicated that the coverage of the two Programmes would be reviewed at quinquennial intervals. Various State Governments also made representations requesting inclusion of certain additional areas under these Programmes. Accordingly, a decision was taken in December '85, in principle, to set up a Committee to recommend inclusion and deletion of areas, appraise the work that is being done for drought-proofing and to suggest improvement in the content of these Programmes. However, it was only in May, '88, that a formal Resolution constituting the National Committee on DPAP & DDP was issued under the Chairmanship of Dr. Y. K. Alagh, the then Member (Agriculture), Planning Commission. It was later on re-constituted with Shri L. C. Jain, Member (RD), Planning Commission, as its Chairman.

2.13 The Committee reviewed the Programmes and identified deficiencies in their planning and implementation. In the light of the past experience of these Programmes, the Committee discussed future strategy of the Programmes and emphasised the need for new approach based on conceptual clarity of the goals to be pursued, capability of planning, methodology of implementation and involvement of people's representatives. The Committee also emphasised the approach of the Planning Commission under the Eighth Five Year Plan to provide greater scope for the people as well as Voluntary Organisations to articulate and stress their needs. The importance of decentralisation was highlighted. The Committee finally recommended the transfer of DPAP & DDP to the State Governments and suitable merger of these schemes with the State Plans. It was recommended that the Centre should continue to assist the States financially for the development of drought prone and desert areas in the Eighth Five Year Plan and funds for the purpose would be allocated to States directly by the Planning Commission for their annual plan outlays either in the form of a special area plan or as an additive to concerned sectoral outlays.
2.14 The Report of the Committee was examined by the Government and the recommendations about the transfer of the Programmes to the State Governments was considered carefully. In view of the decision of the Cabinet on the proposal made by the Planning Commission that the recommendations of the Narasimha Rao Committee, which suggested that DPAP & DDP will continue as Centrally Sponsored Schemes, should be accepted, the recommendations of the Jain Committee that DPAP/DPD may be transferred to the States was not agreed to. Thus the DPAP & DDP were continued as Centrally Sponsored Schemes.

2.15 Since the Jain Committee did not give any advice on the content of the programmes, and inclusion of additional areas which have been pending for a long time, it was decided to constitute a Technical Committee consisting of experts to go into the technical parameters, requests from the States for inclusion and exclusion of areas and modification, if any, in the programmes and their implementation.

2.16 While going through the evaluation of these Programmes, one can observe a lack of conceptual clarity about objectives to be achieved by these Programmes which probably led to shifts in the focus of the Programmes. Initially, the Programmes were confined to generation of employment and remunerative work, particularly during the Third Five Year Plan. In the Fourth Five Year Plan, while the focus continued on the provision of remunerative work to rural labourers, mitigation of scarcity conditions in drought-prone areas in the long-run also got added as an objective. The Mid-term Appraisal of the Fourth Plan shifted the emphasis from generation of employment to creation of durable assets. However, a major turning point in the objectives of the Programmes came through the recommendations of the Task Force headed by Dr. Minhas which concluded that DPAP as conceived and implemented was not likely to contribute to mitigation of drought and recommended the integrated development of drought affected areas. Thus, during the Fifth Five Year Plan, restoration of ecological balance through an integrated development on watershed basis with a view to insulating drought prone areas from the effects of recurring drought, became a goal. Later, the Task Force headed by Dr. Swaminathan reiterated and sharpened the emphasis on ecologically sustainable development as the objective of these Programmes. Some refinements were also made through the exclusion of infrastructure-oriented works from the purview of the Programmes. There was greater conceptual clarity in the Seventh Five Year Plan as far as objectives of the Programmes were concerned and the Mid-term Appraisal of the Seventh Plan (1988) which was influenced by the decisions taken by the Central Sanctioning Committee (CSC) in 1987, clearly spelt out drought proofing and control of desertification as the main objectives of the DPAP & DDP.
2.17 It would be seen from the above account that although the restoration of ecological balance continued to be the main objective of these Programmes, especially during the later years, a sharp and clear focus on achieving drought-proofing and controlling desertification was not properly articulated and enunciated, as a number of other objectives were also laid down along with restoration of ecological balance. Even the Task Forces headed by Dr. Minhas and Dr. Swaminathan, while spelling out clearer strategies and various elements of drought-proofing and ecological restoration, left ample scope for activities not directly contributing to drought mitigation. As a result, the direction of the Programmes got diluted depending upon various factors such as the perception of the State Governments, spending capabilities of sectoral departments and pressures exerted by different interest groups. Even deep bore-wells taken up for the benefit of individual farmers, pipelines laid out for supplying drinking water and rural electrification were justified as contributing to drought-proofing.

2.18 In the process, each activity under the Programme began to be implemented in an isolated and segmented manner and watershed as a unit of area development was completely lost sight of. The sectoral autonomy, devised for the purpose of overall development, slowly became an independent area of operation and completely diluted the concept of integrated watershed development as the key to restoration of ecological balance.

2.19 DPAP & DDP are additive to the normal developmental efforts in the Programme areas. With the limited allocation made available to the districts under DPAP/DDP, it could not be expected that these Programme would wholly cater to the developmental efforts of the district. Therefore, the programme guidelines stipulated that all other developmental programmes operating in DPAP/DDP areas both in the Central sector/State sector with their main focus on drought-proofing/control of desertification should be suitably dovetailed and integrated in the preparation of integrated watershed plans. But, in almost all the Programme areas, DPAP & DDP continued to be implemented independent of other developmental programmes leading to duplication of efforts and wastage of scarce resources. In some cases, it was even observed that the State Governments squeezed the normal allocation from the State Plan for DDP areas.

2.20 Besides the lack of adequate conceptual clarity and the consequent shifts in the objectives to be pursued under the Programmes, low priority assigned to these Programmes by implementing bureaucracy accounted for the dismal progress of the Programmes. DPAP/DDP were perceived to be against the immediate or short-term gains almost at every level and pulled away from the integrated approach to long-term drought-proofing of the area. The poor achievements of these Programmes show that even a well conceptualised development programme encounters difficulties unless concerted efforts are made for its proper implementation.