

Chapter 9

Evolution and Efficacy of Drought Management Policies and Programmes: The Case of Western Odisha, India

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ABSTRACT

The paper analyses the major role played by the institutional support system such as government safety nets, non-governmental and community based insurance mechanism in strengthening the coping capacity of rural households facing recurrent drought in Bolangir district of western Odisha. The gradual refinement of drought management policies and the role played by centre-state relationship and power equations in implementation of programmes for effective drought management have been critically examined. In addition to analysis of secondary data and literature, the primary survey data on 139 households have been analyzed to assess the role of institutional support system in building up their resilience. The institutional support system was found to be weak to withstand drought in effective manner in the study region. A gradual improvement to the drought management policies was observed and every major drought resulted in some qualitative improvement to the relief approach. However, the implementation of the development schemes was affected by the power politics.

INTRODUCTION

Drought is a slow onset natural calamity that affects more people concurrently than any other weather hazard. The impacts of drought on rural livelihood and agrarian economy are diverse and

complex. Drought results in extensive damage to crops and hydrological imbalances affecting different livelihood activities directly or indirectly. The rural households and their income generation activities exhibit a great deal of sensitivity to different drought risk factors such as insufficient

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and/or erratic rainfall, fodder unavailability, lower water table and less irrigation coverage. Their income, expenditure and savings and access to water resources are significantly affected. They endure several hardships on account of consumption shortfall and health related problems (Swain, 2010). To cope with the adverse effects and to reduce the level of their vulnerability, they adopt different strategies¹. However, drought is primarily a covariate risk and mitigating drought risks at individual level is a distant reality because of the fact that the cost of mitigation measures is relatively higher than the financial strength of majority of rural households in drought prone region where poverty and backwardness are common phenomena. Mitigating drought risks requires a multi-pronged attack with a participatory approach that requires institutional support (Pattnaik, 1998; GOI, 2010).

Government has an important role to play in terms of promotion of community-based disaster mitigation measures such as development and renovation of community based water harvesting structures (WHSs), developing common property resource base, strengthening rural socio-economic infrastructure like education, health and financial institutions etc. and supporting the long-term income and crop diversification process. There have been marked improvements over the years in government's approach to mitigate drought both in terms of policy formulation and action (Samal et al, 2003). However, the steps taken so far are not enough for mitigating the drought risks. Agarwal (2000) says it is possible to banish drought completely within a decade if government applies its mind. Thus the institutional approach to drought management needs to be refined further.

In this context, the study analyses the factors that led to gradual refinement of drought management policies and programmes with special reference to western Odisha. The role played by centre-state relationship and power equations in implementation of programmes for drought management has been critically examined. Fi-

nally, the major role played by the institutional support system such as government safety nets, non-governmental and community based insurance mechanism in mitigating the drought risk and vulnerability has been assessed in the context of Bolangir district of western Odisha.

The present paper is presented in seven sections. Next section discusses about the study area, data and methodology. The 3rd section briefly analyses the nature of drought vulnerability in the study region. The 4th section presents an account of gradual refinement of drought management policies that affected the study region. The 5th section critically analyses the political economy of drought. The 6th section examines the role of institutional support system in building households' resilience to drought in the study region. The 7th section concludes with some policy suggestions.

STUDY AREA, DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Bolangir district is one of the constituent districts of the undivided KBK (Kalahandi-Bolangir-Koraput) region in western Odisha², which has been at the limelight for prevalence of chronic poverty, malnutrition, hunger and starvation death and periodic out migration (Pattnaik, 1998). The geographical area of the district is 6,575 sq. km, and has a population of about 1.38 million (GOI, 2001). The proportion of rural population is much higher (88.46%) in the district and so also in the entire KBK region (about 90%). The proportion of scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribe (STs) in total population was around 16.9 percent and 20.6 percent respectively. About 2.01 lakh families comprising 61.1 per cent of total are below the poverty line (BPL) in the district as per BPL survey conducted in 1997 (GOO, 2002). The district also suffers from acute economic, social and gender disparities, and very adverse socioeconomic and human development indicators. Agriculture is the predominant source of livelihood for the people

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