WATER: THE DISAPPEARING LIFELINE

In our country, survival of a large number of rural communities has historically depended on their access to and use of Natural Resources. The significance of land for agriculture and related occupations as an important natural resource for survival of the rural poor has been widely analysed, documented and accepted. Likewise, in the last decade, greater recognition of forests as a natural resource for the livelihood of tribals and other communities has also been documented, analysed and accepted. Besides land and forests, water constitutes a major natural resource critical for the survival of rural poor. While water is important for the sheer continuity of life, it is also in certain communities and occupations an important and basic source of livelihood. A large number of fisherfolk, boatmen and other ancillary occupations have historically depended on their access to water as a natural resource needed for their survival.

The development policies and programmes adopted by the government since independence have significantly altered the use pattern of various natural resources like land and forest. One of the consequences of these policies and programmes has been declining access to and control over land and forests as natural resources by the poor. Likewise, the same model of development and its attendant policies and programmes have resulted in eroding access to and control over water as a source of livelihood for many poor communities in this country.

While the impact of dominant development policies and programmes was visible on these communities dependent on water as a source of livelihood during the past couple of decades, this has not been made a major issue for social action or policy reform (unlike the type of attention which has been given to land and forests). However, in recent years, with changing global and national priorities, extensive commercialisation of natural resources for private gain has intensified. Private investment for exploitation of water resources is another new facet of this issue. The crisis of water, in general, and as a resource for livelihood, in particular, as currently experienced throughout the country is a direct result of these trends. Like land and forests, it is becoming increasingly clear that remote and distant commercial exploitation of water for private profit is also resulting in large scale degradation and pollution of this resource as well as having detrimental consequences on the surrounding habitat and ecology.

The recent debate on the Chilika lake is a reflection of this concern. Yet very little understanding of people’s customary rights over water and its sustainable utilisation based on traditional wisdom by those communities currently exists. In this issue we raise some of these questions and hope that water as a source of livelihood will become an equally important agenda for social action and policy reform.
Palamau district of Bihar is reeling under an ever-worsening drought, culminating in starvation and death. The government is seeking a long term solution, whereas Palamau is already on the very edge of collapse. If anything has to be done, it should be now or never.

The drought has adversely affected not only the landless labourer but also the small farmers and well-to-do peasants, due to the paucity of rains. Landless labourers are rendered jobless, as even the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana is unable to provide them work. Their very survival is at stake. The Malay Dam, another weak effort of the government, is not irrigating the fields as it is lying in a state of sheer neglect. Hence, there is neither any irrigational facility nor any source of employment for the poor of Palamau.

Harvest at Palamau is directly proportional to the rainfall. The year 1992 witnessed the least rainfall in the last 30 years. Statistics reveal a continuous downward trend in terms of rainfall over the years. This inadequate and irregular rainfall has damaged all the crops. Rice, the main staple crop, has suffered a devastating damage of 80 percent. Even the "Hathia rains" have failed causing severe damage to the Rabi crops in 1992. In fact, 1992 has been the fourth successive year of crop failure in Palamau. All this has made the local people acquire a psychology of defeat, which could only be converted into a psychology of success by an immediate and appropriate intervention by the State.

The state government which had declared the entire state of Bihar as drought affected in October 1992, has not taken any measures in trying to alleviate this problem or provide systematic relief to the people. This is illustrated by the fact that the state government has yet to release the funds (Rs 103 crores) for building check dams to provide relief to drought victims. This is inspite of designing a detailed blue print of a few hundred check dams, which are supposed to function within the next 5-6 months. Even the Public Distribution System is inadequate to supply the requisite quantum of foodgrains. It is vital to enhance the present quota of a meagre 1.42 kg. of wheat and 1.09 kg of rice per person - immediately.

Stating healthwise, people of Palamau are suffering from various diseases due to malnutrition and unhygienic living conditions. This vicious cycle of poverty and malnutrition has given rise to epidemics like cholera and malaria. The irony of the situation is that the District Health Administration can not cope with such a situation as about half of its total quota (of 175 sanctioned posts for doctors) is lying vacant. Same is the story of the water table which is rapidly going down. An immediate programme to stop this downward trend has to be floated by the government in order to avoid the total disappearance of all the water sources.
The recent tirades by the media and environmentalists over the problems besetting Chilika, one of Asia’s largest and finest wetlands, are quite well founded. The importance of wetlands as valuable community resources cannot be underestimated. Apart from the most question of the environmental parameters of this ecosystem, uncertainty also prevails on the nearly 25,000 fisher folk who are dependent for their livelihood on the lake. Rightfully, there is much consternation in certain quarters, in cluding NGO’s, now that major business interests are in the fray.

Chilika supports a unique habitat of which the avifauna (birds) are the most-visible example. More importantly, it is the human settlement around the brackish water lake, that is directly dependent for sustenance on it, as are the numerous cattle which graze the surrounding areas. Traditionally the local fishermen had free access to this water body. But now with the growing state control and privatisation, the economy of more than 200 adjoining villages is being shattered.

The Orissa government along with the House of Tatas has set up the Chilika Aquatic Farms Ltd. (CAFL) for prawn culture. With the onset of a strong public protest, the firm engaged M/S Water And Power Consultancy Services (India) (WAPCOS) to undertake an environmental impact assessment. Conveniently the WAPCOS report states that there would be no adverse impact on the ecological and environmental aspects of the lake. This is not true since there will be pollution by the waste and toxic effluents that will be drained out through high power pumps and treatment plants. Add to this the construction of the six enclosed ponds (bunds), 50 hectares each, within the lake, complete with embankments, along with a 4 km road leading up to them. One should also take into consideration the ensuing problem of water-logging. The two member team from the Ministry of Environment which surveyed the area recently, had reservations about the height of the embankments and the resultant salinity problems.

Of more serious concern is the plight of the couple of thousands of fisherfolk. The WAPCOS report blatantly states, “the project area is totally free of any human habitation …there will be no displacement of any of the inhabitants.” This is only partially true. While there may not be any physical displacement of the people but there is definitely going to be a displacement from their traditional source of livelihood. The project would give employment to some of them but as mere wage laborers. The issue is not simply displacement of traditional occupation. It is a question of user rights and traditional ownership of these vast water bodies. The increasing influence of market forces and the current trend to make easy profits by export of shrimps and prawns has proved catastrophic for the fishermen. The traditional way by which local fishing communities had managed the lake’s resources for ages, has been tossed aside in a quest for quick profits. And in the process it is fisherfolk who will lose their rightful source of livelihood. With the state government hand-in-glove with private entrepreneurs, it is the local inhabitant who is losing access to the lake and his livelihood. A people-controlled way of life is being compromised by the government, in letting big business houses take over, to rake in more profits.

Prawn export is a lucrative trade and the demand in the International market is ever increasing. Of the estimated 13,76,900 hectares of brackish water areas in ten states of India, already 65,100 hectares are under cultivation. The wetlands are beginning to show signs of stress and degradation. By allotting areas to large industrial establishments the ravage would be complete. This has been proved correct in countries like Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia etc. Sea food companies from these countries are now trying to base operations in India? Will the government waken up?

If these trends are allowed to continue, the poor fisherfolk will get all the more marginalised. Already there is deep resentment and indignation on this count from the fishermen and others committed to the cause. But their pleas and protests fall on deaf ears. The Utkal university students had been jailed for their demonstrations. The recent media flak made a stir, but the government remains unconcerned. Is this the way development is to continue in our country? Are the resources of the defenceless people going to be usurped by the use of financial and political clout?

The government should put an end to this money-muscle nexus and retreat with dignity. The peoples movement should gain ground primarily by taking up the management and control in their hands, with a view to exercising environmental discipline for conservation of wetlands. It has become clear that
unless people participate in regaining their access to and control over this natural resource, it will be outsiders who would stand to gain. Therefore, the local community of fisherfolk should become empowered in order to become rightful owners once again.

**ANGLERS APLENTY**

Chilika Aquatic Farms Limited is not the only company engaged in prawn farming at Chilika, although it remains under media spotlight, due to the fact that the state government itself is lending a helping hand. Apart from CAFL, others involved at Chilika are Aditya Udyog, and Surya Foods & Industries Ltd, among others.

It is also to be noted that while Chilika in Orissa has been in focus for aqua-culture activities, business houses have been spreading their tentacles in brackish water areas even in other states, at an alarming pace. The following are a few examples of the trend catching on.

1. Surya Chakra Sea Foods Ltd. in Andhra Pradesh is investing Rs. 14.46 crores in a prawn farming project for export. A Dutch firm is providing technical support. The company has purchased 300 hectares of land at Bharalavanka in East Godavari district.

2. Suvarna Aqua Farm & Export, a hundred percent export oriented firm is being set up in Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh, at a cost of Rs. 36 crores. It will be located in the backwaters of Kavali in Nellore district A.P. Technical assistance will be provided by Gold Coin Limited of Singapore.

3. Thaper Water Base is taking up brackish water farming in a big way in Nellore district of A.P.

4. Sharat Sea Foods a Madras based company is starting a shrimp farm over an area of 60 hectares at Nellore district at a cost of Rs. 35 crores. Collaboration is to be provided by a Singapore based firm.

5. Aqua Marine Food Products Limited is going to set up a 170 hectares shrimp farming project near Nellore district at a cost of Rs. 18.60 crores.

6. The West Bengal Government has signed a MOU with three private sector units to set up a Rs. 16 crore shrimp export project in the joint sector. Named the Sunderban Aquatic Farm Limited, it will be based off the Bakasbari coast at Henry’s Island, and is negotiating with American and indonesian collaborators.

7. The Poddar group is setting up a brackish water fish farm in Raigad district of Maharashtra and is currently engaged in land procurement.

8. M/S Pancham Aqua-culture in Thane district, of Maharashtra is taking up brackish water shrimp farming.

9. The Korala government has announced a major prawn farming scheme with assistance from Kuwait, at an estimated cost of Rs. 134 crores.

10. The Karnataka government has handed over 300 hectares of brackish water land from the revenue department to the fisheries department.

**FOCUSING ON FISHERFOLK**

It should be the intention of the government in the wake of its new found love for fisheries management and development to assist the traditional fishing communities rather than toe the line for big business houses interested in fisheries export. A variety of factors have contributed to such neglect. This may have been due to the fact that the numbers involved may have been much less than small scale agriculturists. Moreover fishing communities are often dispersed over extensive coastlines and along remote rivers and lakes. Sealdum are they organised to the same extent as farmers, nor do they share an equivalent degree of social recognition. Finally, traditional fisheries have been generally characterized by unstable incomes and relatively low productivity, although these account for the major supply of fish for human consumption.

It is time the government paid closer attention to the special nature, needs and potential of the small-scale fishery sector. The traditional fisheries sector can no longer be treated in isolation, to the unforgivable extent that ‘outsiders’ be allowed to sink their teeth in so lucrative a bait.

For starters, the government should not give mere lip service, but do something tangible for the fisherfolk. Firstly they need to be assured of an equitable
share of the fisheries resources. Traditional fisherfolk need access to affordable technology and training that will permit them to maintain and enhance their role in national fisheries development. These communities, so often isolated from the main currents of national development, can respond effectively to such efforts, if only they are involved in the planning process.

SARDAR SAROVAR PROJECT GOES ON

The recent decision by the Government of India to discontinue further World Bank assistance for the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) has been wrongly interpreted as admirable and self-respecting. India has not administered a shock to the World Bank, as has been attributed, by terminating the remaining part of the loan for the SSP. The government's determination to carry the project forward seems to have been largely guided by the desire to avoid the periodic reviews and qualitative checks by the international agencies. Even if the Indian government had not refused the loan, it would most likely have been suspended by the World Bank itself, since the time-bound environmental and rehabilitation targets had not been met.

These targets or benchmark surveys were set on the basis of the report of an independent review by the Moise Commission. The Commission itself was set up by the World Bank after intensive lobbying by environment and human rights groups internationally.

The question of prime importance is what the affected people want and what are their viewpoints. The local people were never consulted and they never had any say in the planning process. Especially with the resettlement and rehabilitation schemes, the government should have consulted and discussed the pros and cons with the local people and NGOs. India was to fulfill certain mutually agreed upon targets by March 31, 1999. It should have demonstrated that it was working and improving information-collection practices relating to the people affected by the project, their resettlement needs, that it was actually consulting people who were likely to be affected by the SSP. A World Bank team was scheduled to review the progress made by the Indian government in this regard, in April 1999.

As this date began to draw closer, panic slowly became evident. To begin with, during January and the government tried to evict the people of Anjarwara village, one of the villages in Madhya Pradesh, to be surveyed by the 21-member World Bank team. The people refused to budge from their lands and were fired upon and even physically assaulted by the accompanying police forces. This, of course, drew a lot of sharp criticism. The atrocities continued and even several activists in the area were arrested. Finally, the police cordoned off a press conference in Indore given use to a strident media protest.

Sensing trouble on this front, the government has now changed tactics by announcing the cancellation of the rest of the loan. The government has preempted the scheduled review by the World Bank. The IWRP would have been suspended had the review found that the benchmark tests had failed substantially. Such a move would have shown India's commitment to people's concerns, relating to one of the largest irrigation and power projects in the world. And it would have caused tremendous embarrassment as the issue has already got highly internationalised.

Moreover, the World Bank itself would have become a target of attack by environmental and human rights groups if it would have continued funding.

It has been a convenient way out. Now the SSP can proceed without any interference from the World Bank or international environmental groups, lobbying to force certain rehabilitation and resettlement standards. Now it will have to contend with only Indian NGOs and activists. Whether the people's will is going to prevail remains a moot question, as is the question of how the government will acquire the kind of funds needed to bring the project to its completion.

LAND & PEOPLE
CPR NATIONAL WORKSHOP

During 12-14 November 1992, PRIA organised a national workshop on "Declining Trends in Access To Common Lands and Tanks". The workshop was attended by 22 participants from Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Orissa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashatra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi. The three day workshop deliberated over the present state of the common property resources (CPRs) in our country. Basic questions regarding CPRs - what they are, what has happened to CPRs - what is their status at present, and what are the causes for their decline and degradation were raised and answers sought for the same. Participants tried to develop a collective understanding on these issues, in order to develop a perspective on CPRs.

WORKSHOP ON "MAWA NATE MAWA RAJ"

During January 6-8, 1993 at ASSEFA Training Centre, Dattapur, Wardha, PRIA in collaboration with Vikshinitra, organised a workshop on "Mawa Nata Mawa Raj" ("Our government in our village"), the concept of local government. 30 participants including 9 women, representing various grassroots level organisations from five states (Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar) and Delhi took part in the proceedings. One of the objectives, among others, was to invite individuals and organisations who were thinking and working on similar lines and include their active participation. Experiences of successful experimentation of the theme were shared. The workshop ended with the decision to promote the understanding of a truly people's government with a view to widen the reach and spread of the maxim.

For more information, please contact:

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654, Indira Nagar, Phase - II
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Dehradun - 248 006

PR ORIENTATION ON THE STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

During January 21-23, 1993, at Tenughat, district Bokaro, Bihar, PRIA conducted an orientation programme on Participatory Research for the activists of Chotanagpur Yuva Chetna. The region is adversely affected due to the various developmental activities, viz. open-cast mining, coal washery, explosive factory, thermal power plants etc. All this has created water and air pollution, as also degradation of forest lands. The focus of this orientation programme was to collectively understand these problems and develop a framework for participatory study on the issues. The second phase of the programme will be held during May.
TRAINING ON ALTERNATIVE LAND AND WATER MANAGEMENT

During 17-20 February, 1993, PRIA organised a workshop on "Alternative Land and Water Management", for Ekta Parishad activists at Jeevan Vikas Shikshan Kendra, Maigaon, Katni. The workshop attempted to understand the various aspects of alternative processes, along with the concept of watershed area, soil type and its characteristics, fertility and moisture rates of soil, species identification and compost preparations. Participants welcomed the usefulness of the information generated and felt that it should be made applicable at the field level. An agenda was prepared for the following five months.

CONFERENCE IN JHADOL: "OUR DEVELOPMENT - OUR VIEWS"

The "Chandreshwar Kisan Sangharsh Samiti" has been opposing the construction of the proposed Mansai Wakal dam which would submerge the adjoining forests, lands, and villages of Chandvas, Mundavali, Talai, Malpur, Goujariyas, Chechalya in Udaipur district. The Samiti is also fighting against the declaration of about 511 km of dense forest lands in Ghadel and Kotra tehsils as a game sanctuary, whereby 116 adivasi villages would be under forest department governance. Apart from this the Samiti is also protesting against the cement factory located in Kotra tehsil, as also against the Kalibhhor dam.

Many other similar issues are making the lives of the inhabitants miserable. They have begun to question the validity of these development projects. Increasingly the people are now realising that development projects in their area should be according to their needs, priorities and opinions. They want sustainable use of their resources and not mere exploitation. With this in mind a conference was held in Jhadoil on February 10, 1993, the theme of which was, "Our Development - Our Views."

PRIA attended this programme. It was decided in the meeting that people would continue their struggle to hold back their resource base. Further, people’s organisations and the local groups would get involved in the environmental impact assessment of the projects.

For more information contact:
Chandreshwar Kisan Sangharsh Samiti,
Post - Gourana, Tehsil - Jhadoil,
District, Udaipur - Rajasthan

WORKSHOP ON DROUGHT

During March 17-18, 1993 Priia in collaboration with Khedi Vikas Mandal, Latur organised a workshop on ‘Drought in the Marathwada Region’ at Latur, Maharashtra. The focus of the workshop was on developing a collective understanding about the causes of drought in the region, and its impact on the various sections of the people. The focus was also on the feedback of the NGO’s and the government - response to drought mitigation. It was decided that participants would study the above aspects in detail in their respective field areas. Then, during mid-June, the group would sit together to analyse the data and prepare a plan of action.

For details write to:
Ganpat Patil
Khedi Vikas Mandal
Vill - P.O. Deoni
Via. - Udigi, Dist. Latur
Maharashtra
PEOPLE AND FOREST: A Participatory Study

This study was conducted in 1989-90 by Mohan Hirabai Hirale and Savita Tare of Vikash Khet, Gadchiroli (Maharashtra) as a part of their ongoing involvement with the local tribal communities in support of their struggles for retaining and regaining access to and control over natural resources. This booklet is based on the text prepared by them and is intended to highlight the participatory study methodology used as a contribution to ongoing conscientization and organizing of the tribals themselves. The purpose of this study was to generate a thinking process about such problems at the village level with the emphasis on pooling information. The booklet hopes to share these experiences. Please contact PRIA for the English and Hindi versions of this publication.

WOMEN AND SOCIAL FORESTRY - VOL 1 & II

The Institute for Socio Economic Development has brought out this report. The publication is a study on the role and participation of women in social forestry programmes in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh.

Though women are the key actors in the forestry sector, recognition of this fact is of recent origin. Until the mid-seventies even women activists, scholars and the policy makers failed to look at this aspect. It is only now that they started to view the social forestry programme with a gender perspective. This study aims to enquire the extent and nature of women's participation in social forestry and the benefits accruing to them. This study should prove beneficial for the implementing agencies in formulating future strategies for afforestation. PRIA was involved in the conceptualization of the study and in organizing some workshops. For copies please contact: The Institute for Socio Economic Development, N/6 - 39, Jaydev Vihar, Bhubaneswar - 751 015, Orissa

"DALI JAMIN SODNAR MAI" - WE WILL NOT SURRENDER OUR DALI LAND

This publication on the issue of 'dali' lands in Raigad district of Maharashtra, is a research report of a survey conducted by Savahara Jan Andolan. Utkar Mahajan explains in the introduction that getting ownership of the 13000 hectares of 'dali' lands is one of the steps towards a better life for the adivasi cultivators. The Khekars (an adivasi community) used to cultivate these plots which are now owned by the forest department. In 1970 it was decided to give ownership to cultivator adivasis on record, but this has as yet to be implemented. The booklet is an eye-opener to the games the government has played with the impoverished tribals. A brief note on the history of their struggles and formation of the Savahara Jan Andolan is also part of the booklet. The booklet hopes to strengthen

This is a well-researched and informative booklet and has been jointly brought out by Sarvahara Jan Andolan and PRIA, in Marathi and English respectively. For the English version please write to PRIA and for Marathi copies, write to: Savahara Jan Andolan, Nizampur Road, Tambdi Chawli Mangeon, District Raigad - 402 104, Maharashtra.

TURNING DISASTERS INTO DEVELOPMENT - A GLIMPSE OF INDIAN VOLUNTARY ACTION.

Prepared on the eve of the fourth session of Scientific and Technical Committee of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) held at New Delhi in February 1993, this dossier was the outcome of the joint effort of a number of voluntary organisations.

"If we cannot turn disasters into development let us at least not turn our developmental work into disasters." On this sound advice, the dossier covers almost every aspect of disasters and disaster mitigation. This is an interesting and useful document especially for groups and activists working on drought issues. For copies please contact: Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI), 401, Institutional Area, (Near Goutab Hotel), New Delhi - 110 016

FLOODS IN SOUTH ASIA - A Report on the Ganga Brahmaputra Region.

Bharat Dogra

The Ganga Brahmaputra river basin is spread across five nations - India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet. Nearly half a billion people live in this region. This extremely fertile region of the past is now rife with poverty and hunger. The aim of this booklet is to prepare a perspective on the recurring problem of floods and related disasters in the region. The publication is dedicated to the anonymous struggles of unnamed heroes, who struggle at the village level against floods and its causes in South Asia. Year of publication - 1993, Price Rs. 50.00. For copies write to: South Asian Peoples Environmental Network, A-60, Hauz Khas, New Delhi - 110016

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