

Module C: Environmental Crisis, Conflict, Resources and Displacement

Parched Districts fuels Migration to Cities: Drought Situations in Satara, Maharashtra

Drought is a perennial and recurring feature in many parts of India. According to Government of India reports, about 68% of the country is prone to drought in varying degrees. The 1987 drought was one of the worst droughts of the century, with an overall rainfall deficiency of 19%. It affected 59-60% of the crop area and a population of 285 millionⁱ.

Even in Maharashtra, one of India's most prosperous states, recurring drought has crippled the state's economy, caused a fall in agricultural and non-agricultural wages, and severely affected the livelihoods of millions, led to crop damage and death or incapacitation of livestock. It also leads to large-scale migration in search of alternative livelihoods, loss of human life due to stress, suicide, starvation or unhygienic conditions, and increased social conflict. While a 'most severe' drought was witnessed in the state in 1972 and 1987, 'moderate' to 'slight' drought is a recurrent feature.

This year of 2012, the Maharashtra Government has declared drought-like-situation in 154 talukas of 15 districts in the State. As many as 6201 villages have been reeling under water scarcity, severe fodder shortage and lack of employment opportunities for people. Almost all wells, tanks and ponds have dried up in these areas. Currently, the State Government is supplying drinking water to people in 909 villages and 4526 hamlets through tanker and initiated schemes under EGS to provide temporary jobs to people in rural areas. Still it has been observed that these initiatives are not sufficient enough to cater the needs of some of the severely drought affected areas.

Satara is one of the worst drought affected districts. Satara is located in the western part of Maharashtra. According to census, the dry plateau regions of Satara have been witnessing a slow but steady migration. Many youth in the Khatav and Mann talukas, two of the worst drought-hit talukas in Satara's 11, have already shifted to Pune, Thane and Mumbai in search of livelihoodⁱⁱ. These two talukas are located in the shadow of the Mahabaleshwar hills, which receive annual rainfall of around 6, 000 mm but water does not flow eastwards. Climatic factors appear to be playing an increasing role in this migration. The increasingly erratic nature of rainfall leading to depletion of groundwater levels and rise in temperature reducing moisture retention in the soil aggravates the situation.

The union government has approved an assistance of Rs 575 crore to Maharashtra towards drought relief work. The current state of affairs seems ironic, given that Maharashtra was the first Indian state to initiate drought relief back in 1972. It started an employment guarantee scheme providing cash and food to people in affected areas. Reports by the Controller and Auditor General of India shows that the funds earmarked for drought relief have not been efficiently used and irrigation schemes are being mismanaged. People from Khatav and Maan are finding daily wages of Rs 131ⁱⁱⁱ under employment guarantee scheme too inadequate and are moving towards the cities. Thus, migration has become more of livelihood necessity than choice.

With this backdrop, I would like to analyze the current drought situation in Satara district as environmental and resource crisis leading to involuntary migration to cities.

ⁱ Drought in India: Challenges & initiatives, PACS, 2008, New Delhi

ⁱⁱ DNA, Thursday, May 17, 2012

ⁱⁱⁱ Alertnet//Darryl D'Monte