

NOTE

Back from Bundelkhand

Bharat Dogra writes :

Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh is spread over about 29000 sq. km in seven districts—Jhansi, Jalaun, Lalitpur, Banda, Chitrakut, Mahoba and Hamirpur. During the last 3 years this region has suffered from drought like situation and adverse weather conditions. There is already a serious crisis with the prospects of the situation possibly getting much worse in the next six months. Already there are regular reports of starvation deaths and suicides related to economic distress and indebtedness. Water scarcity has appeared even in winter months.

The state government has not yet declared a drought situation. There have been press statements that drought situation can be declared only if the crop-loss is over 50%. However, when this correspondent asked a group of 25 social activists working in different rural areas of this region to raise their hands if the kharif loss was over 50 per cent in their area, all of them raised their hands immediately.

Gaya Prasad Gopal, widely considered to be the most experienced social activist of this area says, “The situation is very serious. Both the government and the voluntary sector should work in a well co-ordinated and planned way. Relief works and employment guarantee scheme should be used to generate large-scale livelihood opportunities in soil and water conservation work on the fields of the poor, enabling new allottees of land to improve their agricultural plots, and also to clean tanks and canals. Cleaning and deepening of tanks and cleaning of canals have been badly neglected in the past.”

Bhagwat Prasad, director of Akhil Bhartiya Samaj Seva Sanasthan (ABSSS) says, “Our understanding of the situation is that Bundelkhand should be declared a drought-affected area. The distress of the people has accumulated for over 3 years and now very pathetic situation exists in most places. Despite the existence of employment guarantee scheme in six out of seven districts, very large scale distress-related migration is taking place from most villages. There is a clear need for acknowledging the reality and starting adequate relief works.”

Shashi Nigam from Bara gaon block of Jhansi said that the situation of water scarcity is very grim. Tanks and wells have dried up. In Jarbo village people now depend on only one hand pump, and even this has to be stopped after every ten minutes or so. In Kolwa people have to fetch water from a locality 2 to 3 kms away. ~~del del del~~

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