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Book Reviews

Droughts and Integrated Water Resource Management in South Asia, Edited by Jasveen Jairath and Vishwa Ballabh, Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2008. Pp. 356. Rs.695.00.

Drought produces a complex web of impacts that spans many sectors of the economy and reaches well beyond the area experiencing physical drought. Approximately 40 per cent of the world's poor live in South Asia which has a total population of over 1.4 billion people. Consequently droughts which are frequent visitors of these regions often result in complete devastation of the human life with tragic consequences. The available literature on the various aspects of drought is very limited and is always confined to the basic information and never covers the broader dimensions. This book is an effort to address the gaps in drought related studies.

The book discusses the drought and integrated water management in South Asia in a comparatively macro perspective. Part I has extensive coverage of defining and meaning of drought and related concepts focusing on various causes for drought, consequences and coping strategies for drought. Detailed history of drought in pre- and post-Independent India is precisely documented for easy comprehension. The chapter on gender and drought in South Asia along with the impacts on health, social, livelihood and economic aspects is a highly useful addition where documentation of the anti-drought movements and campaigns in India and some recent studies on impact on drought on women have been meticulously done. The responses of households, states and more specifically those of women to drought situations are assessed, clearly bringing out the differentials that are rooted in different perceptions of the impact of droughts.

However, the gender sensitive policy directives should be on the lines of gender balance rather than women empowerment plans/works. Discussions on the effects of drought on gender balance and some gender interventions in mitigating drought will make the chapter still strong. Interactions between gender sensitisation and drought management aspects are visibly missing. Strategically, interventions needed for facing the drought externalities in the near future could have been included.

Part 2 our Country Overview aims at a detailed analysis of drought policies, strategies and their implications in Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan in a comprehensive manner. It could have been elegant if these implications of drought had been given in all possible sections and aspects of human life and environment along with predicting some future implications.

Part 3 presents case studies which includes an apt success story of Tarun Bharat Sangh's of Rajasthan in mitigating drought. The other three case studies are not exemplary in understanding the management of drought.

Some of the weaknesses of this book are: (i) The definitions and concepts of drought have been given by all the authors in their respective chapters which leads to repetition and confusion. The editors should have given a consensus concept on drought at least for the South Asian situations. (ii) The entire book is focused only on drought and the role of integrated water resources management in addressing drought: country wise or region wise discussion is not adequately covered.

Inclusion of sustainable strategies in planning, implementation and monitoring of drought management programmes would have been very useful to researchers and policy makers. Nonetheless, this book has a value addition to the literature as it covers different regions and levels of droughts.

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Orissa's Economic Development: Experiences and Expectations, Raj Kishore Panda,
Serial Publications, New Delhi, 2009. Pp. xii + 327. Rs. 1195.00

Several researchers in development economics have analysed the causes of backwardness. While experiences of such cases shed light on the factors that contribute to backwardness, there are greater expectations, from such analysis, as to how does one overcome these causes and strive towards sustainable development, remain unfulfilled.

The book is a compilation of 17 independent articles covering multi sectoral aspects, historical and present as well. It appears that for understanding Orissa's potential for growth the book is a valuable addition. The wisdom the book provides is invaluable opportunities in the state are galore, while the present progress might appear rather tardy.

There is plethora of literature of low per capita income, higher poverty, lack of agricultural diversification, weak links between the institutional growth and its spread in the periphery, low human development index in India, etc. One of the concerns is that the gains from green revolution have been flat due to decline in land and factor productivity. The growth rate in production of agriculture has stagnated in recent years due to many constraints. There has been high level of instability in production of agricultural crops caused by inadequate use of technology, lower infrastructure facilities, and inadequate area under crop cultivation and also due to the vagaries of monsoon.

Progressive decline in public investment in agriculture, predominance of traditional and subsistent farming and other agrarian constraints are the major concerns. Unless agricultural production and productivity is improved and markets are integrated ensuring remunerative prices to the producers, large number of people living on agriculture will continue to live in poverty and distress. Therefore, the role of state is crucial in augmenting farm investment, spreading supporting institutions and farms, and non-farm linkages.

Credit absorption in agriculture has been low. About 50 per cent of the agricultural households in the state do not borrow for agricultural operations. This could be one of the reasons for slow take off in the venture for commercial agriculture. Various studies revealed that 20 to 40 per cent of the institutional borrowings for agricultural purposes were utilised for consumption of other non-productive activities. The recovery rate of agricultural credit of all the financial institutions was 68 per cent in 2006-07 which came down to 57 per cent during 2007-08.

While acceleration of growth in the country has reduced poverty substantially at the national level, and in some states, Orissa has remained backward in terms of growth performance, agricultural development, poverty reduction, occupational diversity and human development. It is argued that the growth could have been higher with the reduction in poverty. The setback in agricultural growth and rural employment during 1990s seems to have pushed many poor households into distress. As a result, Orissa share of absolute and relative poverty, is disproportionately high.

A greater clarity and incisiveness into how broad based the growth is found from the study of *Manoj Panda*. There has certainly been a turning point in the state growth in the last few years and the economy has witnessed acceleration in terms of gross domestic product (GDP). Almost all the sectors of the economy—agriculture, manufacturing and the service sectors have clocked remarkable growth at par with national growth. However, on the poverty dimension, the state growth does not seem to have benefited, the size of reduction of poverty ratio has been slow. Technically, it has been paraphrased as growth without inclusion.

The elasticity of poverty with respect to change in per capita income has been estimated at 0.084 implying very little percolation of growth to the poor. Effect on poverty reduction among the SC & ST population has further been slower compared to state average. In terms of different regions, coastal region which is relatively a better off region has experienced biggest reduction in the poverty ratio while there has been no reduction in poverty in the southern zone, endowed with mineral resources. On a similar line, the northern region has experienced higher incidence in poverty in 2004-05 compared to 1993-94. These observations clearly show growth can not be meaningful without being broad based.

Rising per capita income and deepening poverty are the two worst contradictions that Orissa economy has been experiencing over the years. This paradox could warrant concurrent policy intervention in the economic and social sectors.

One of the factors that could explain low efficiency of irrigation water use and less than desired effect in impacting agricultural growth is the absence of effective governance mechanism in enhancing efficiency of the irrigation systems. Governance of irrigation water is a complex phenomenon due to existence of multiplicity of institutions, differential structure and organisational behaviour of different systems. There are evidences which suggest that the farmers groups enable greater efficiency of irrigation water, increasing crop yield, farm incomes and ensuring equity in distribution of irrigation water.

The reference to various studies and their association with the backwardness through climate related factors are significant. Climate change has emerged as a threat to sustainable development. Frequent floods, droughts as also super cyclone impede growth of the state on a sustainable basis. The variability in climate has negatively impacted agriculture by causing decline in crop production, increasing agricultural risk and production stability, decreasing farm income and causing greater food insecurity. The poor and vulnerable sections of the society are the most affected as they do not have the means to mitigate climate induced adversities.

The Orissa experiences show that the family centric entrepreneur development projects do not involve much investment, skills are imparted through appropriate vocation and if suitably implemented these could support family incomes significantly.

According to a recent Planning Commission study covering 14 districts in seven states relating to the period of January 2008 and May 2010, better connectivity has pushed up agricultural income in rural India by 17.6 per cent and income from non-farm activities by 12.11 per cent. Improved connectivity has also helped improve the socio-economic life of the rural habitants, increased healthcare delivery and accessibility to medical facilities, employment opportunities, empowering rural women economically and socially and enhancing both direct and indirect employment in the rural areas. It is therefore critical that the state focuses on improving the development of rural infrastructure for fostering rural prosperity.

The states that have taken the path of industrialisation have also achieved faster GDP growth in agriculture (Punjab, Haryana, Maharashtra and Gujarat). Since 2001 Orissa announced new industrial policy welcoming private sector to develop value adding industries and initiate public private partnership for infrastructure. It is a fact that vast mineral resources of the state are not used for creation of value, but the share of value addition is unlimited. The civil society, social and public institutions arrive at a consensus to create conditions for large industrial investment utilising the local resources and creating value for the society.

High drop outs at the primary level, low median years of education for girls, inadequate infrastructure in the schools, lack of female teachers, low public expenditure in elementary education - on all these fronts the progress is far from satisfactory.

Economic development cannot and need not be viewed as purely an economic phenomenon; without effective and adequate health care facilities human health is likely to impede development particularly for majority of the population depending on public health care services provided through the state machineries.

Orissa's development paradigm could not have been better understood but for the excellent compilation and thoughtful discussions in this book covering a wide spectrum of socio-economic dimensions including health, infrastructure and public finance. The editor is to be commended for providing almost everything for development understanding under one book. However, there may be over-emphasis on the poverty issues but they are important for getting the right perspective.

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