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# Revisiting Drought-Prone Districts in India

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The Drought-Prone Areas Programme and the Desert Development Programme launched by the Government of India during the 1970s used rainfall and irrigation as the two criteria to ameliorate the impact of drought in the targeted districts. This article revisits the eligibility criteria in light of the recent climatic classification and irrigation statistics.

Indian agriculture continues to be a gamble with the monsoon as more than half of the sown area does not have any access to irrigation. The incidence of drought remains a threat to the country's agricultural production at macro level and to the livelihoods of people dependent on agriculture at micro level. The adverse impacts of the incidence of drought are particularly high where rain-fed agriculture is predominant and in the areas where the incidence of drought is more frequent. Equity and inclusive growth have always been the mantras of planning in India, either explicitly or implicitly. With a view to support farming in these areas, the Government of India (GoI) in 1973-74 launched a special programme called Drought-Prone Areas Programme (DPAP), to address the special problems faced by dryland areas, which suffer frequent droughts. The basic objectives of the programme are to minimise the adverse effects of droughts on the production of crops and livestock as well as to improve natural resources like land and water thereby leading to drought-proofing of the affected areas. This programme aims at promoting overall economic development and improving the socio-economic conditions of the resource-poor people inhabiting these areas, through creation, widening and equitable distribution of the resource base and increased employment opportunities. The objectives of the programme are being addressed by taking up development works through watershed approach for land development, water resource augmentation and afforestation/pasture development.

Another special programme, viz, Desert Development Programme (DDP) was started in 1977-78 in the arid areas

the cold deserts of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and Himachal Pradesh. From 1995-96, the coverage has been extended to a few more districts in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Major interventions under this programme included sand dune stabilisation and shelter belt plantations in hot arid regions, and water resources development by construction of channels for diversion of water flow from the glaciers and springs to the fields and lift irrigation works in the cold desert areas. The programme has been conceived as a long-term measure for restoration of ecological balance by conserving, developing and harnessing land, water, livestock and human resources.

## Review of the Programmes

During late 1980s it was expected that DPAP and DDP would have made an appreciable impact at least in some areas in terms of a spread of irrigation and completed drought-proofing/control of desertification as was desired and that these districts would not need any external assistance through these programmes. However, several state governments were pressing for inclusion of more areas under DPAP and DDP, in addition to the areas already covered under the programme. To sort out the issues a national committee on DPAP and DDP was set up under the chairmanship of Y K Alagh, the then member of Planning Commission, to review the programmes. Later, L C Jain, who was a Planning Commission member took charge of the subject. The report was submitted in 1990. The committee, however, did not go into the specific terms of reference and recommended that the centrally-sponsored schemes of DPAP/DDP may be transferred to the state governments and merged with the state plan and funds may be allotted in the annual plan outlay of the states. The GoI, however, did not agree to the recommendation of the committee and decided to continue these two programmes as centrally-sponsored schemes. It, therefore, became necessary to have a committee to go into