

**National Human Rights Commission  
(PRP&P Division) - Director (A) Unit**

**Subject: Report of S. Jalaja, Special Rapporteur, NHRC on her visit to four drought- affected districts in Maharashtra namely Aurangabad, Jalna, Beed and Ahmednagar from 15-21 May, 2016.**

Smt S. Jalaja Special Rapporteur NHRC visited to drought- affected districts in Maharashtra namely Aurangabad, Jalna, Beed and Ahmednagar to determine the condition of farmers of the area. The visit report of Smt S. Jalaja Special Rapporteur is placed at (**Annexure 'A'**)

**The Important Observations/recommendations of the Special Rapporteur in respect of all these districts are as under**

**Tackling the Water Crisis**

- Water is the most precious resource in water-starved Marathwada. To the credit of the State Government, it has, by and large, been able to provide most of the habitations with water supplies through tankers and requisition of wells. Only in some of the distant and difficult areas, there is still a problem. But it remains a fact that apart from the minimum supplies being made by the administration, **those habitations/families which are cut off or need more water are forced to buy water from private contractors at high prices. More sustainable measures, therefore, ought to be adopted in coming years.**

**Preservation of Ground Water**

- **Experts point out that the region suffers from lack of water management policy and that regulations are needed for curbing sugarcane production and introduction of crops which require less irrigation:** Further, social awareness needs to be created along with watershed development and enhancement of underground water resources.
- **It is estimated that all over Marathwada about 10,000 bore wells per month are being sunk. This coupled with irrigation to crops like sugarcane has severely affected water security. As a first step, unregulated expansion and extraction of groundwater should be stopped. Perhaps it has decided to ban drilling of bore wells below 200 feet; but a complete ban on drilling bore wells needs to be implemented, except with specific permission of authorities concerned for reasons to be given in writing.**
- Provisions of the Maharashtra Groundwater Development and Management Act, 2009 need to be implemented strictly. They need to be further strengthened and violators given stringent punishments. **Experts have suggested that registration of machines used for drilling ought to be made compulsory. Closure of boreholes left behind in unused bore wells, on permanent basis, needs to be strictly implemented and action taken against violators.**

**Agriculture**

- **The State Government is already aware of the need for more investments in agriculture, support price for crops, procurement of commodities from farmers in the event of a glut, making available inputs on time, at reasonable prices etc.**
- **Crop loss compensation**
- **In the districts visited it was reported that in 70% cases grants for crop losses during last kharif have been disbursed to farmers on the basis of 50% Paisewari. But Rabi losses are yet to be compensated. Grants on the basis of 33% paisewari announced by the state Government is perhaps yet to be implemented. This needs to be looked into.**

**Crop Loans**

- **Farmers in the area are fully dependent on crop loans for their agricultural operations during the next Kharif season in 2016. During field visits it was pointed out by farmers that with the banks having made the provisions of sanction of loans stricter now, they are worried about their loan applications being rejected. Although announcements have been made by the State Government regarding restructuring of loans taken earlier and easing some of the provisions in the sanction of new loans, it appears that the instructions are yet to reach the lower levels of administration. Those announcements have come perhaps too late. Small and medium level farmers will be facing considerable hardship in the absence of timely availability of credit.**
- **It was learned that loans are sanctioned not on the basis of land, but on the value of crops and total cost of cultivation. Credit worthiness of a farmer is therefore the most risky factor because the output depends mostly on environmental factors.**

**Role of Banks**

- **District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCB) which normally disburse crop loans to farmers are stated to be in poor financial condition. Out of the eight DCC banks in this region, five are stated to be financially weak. Some farmers pointed out that DCCs lends at 6% interest, whereas, they were to charge only 0% interest for a loan not exceeding Rs. one lakh. Moreover, apart from lending they do not provide any other service to farmers.**
- **Along with the District Central Cooperative Banks, the Gramin Bank is a major player in disbursement of crop loans in the rural areas of Marathwada. It is reported that the bank also will not be in a position to disburse during the next kharif season. The share of nationalized banks for crop loan targets has, therefore, been increased. Whether nationalized banks alone will be able to meet the responsibility is a problem to be tackled by the administration.**
- **Keeping in view the difficulties pointed out above, the State Government ought have a close look at the availability of credit to farmers during the coming Kharif season and track the credit that has actually been made available to farmers, especially small and medium farmers.**

Crop insurance helps farmers defray risks associated with uncertainties in farming. It is learned that only 30 per cent of farmers are presently covered under crop insurance scheme. Cultivators feel that the insurance they get for crop damage does not even cover the cost of cultivation, as the sum paid out as insurance is low, while premiums are high.

- Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna (PMPBY) launched recently, assures a lower premium and higher payouts.. One of the complaints received was that people in rural areas do not get to know of schemes announced by the government. Awareness generation and hand holding of farmers are essential for the success of the scheme.

### Cropping Pattern

- **It has been pointed out that economic value of traditional crops of Maharashtra like Sorghum (jowar), pearl millet (bajra) and finger millet (ragi) currently does not provide incentives to farmers to grow them.** Market needs to be created and appropriate incentives and institutional support need to be provided. Further, horticulture which also has good potential requires supporting infrastructure for risk reduction and value addition.

### Food Security

- As already mentioned Maharashtra is implementing the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013. The grains being supplied under NFSA form the lifeline of the people living in drought affected areas. It is seen that by and large PDS is able to provide food security to the people, though there were some complaints about non issue of ration cards, non availability of food grains, over charging, vacancies of dealers etc. Implementation of the Act ought to be closely monitored at panchayat levels.

### Jal Yukth Shivar

- Jal Yukth Shivar (JYS), the flagship program of the State Government, is a popular program enthusiastically being implemented, with public participation. However, concerns about the safety and technical quality of these works were shared with the District Collectors. Deepening of rivers and channels have been taken up in a big way; **but caution should be exercised that during heavy rains the rivers and channels do not change their course and that the side walls of these structures do not cave in, as there is no pitching on side walls . It is also for consideration whether officials of Agriculture department alone can provide adequate technical support for the schemes, as apparently they have not received any technical training.**
- The quality of JYS works need to be ensured. Moreover, very little employment is generated as most works are done with the help of machines. Whether part of the work could be covered under **MNREGS needs to be explored. Sustainability of these works also needs to be ensured. Social audit and independent evaluation which are already envisaged under the scheme** ought to be strictly implemented.

**MNREGS**

- Implementation of the scheme is ideal under drought conditions, as it provides guaranteed employment to those below the poverty line. **However, on visit to rural areas of the districts reveal that it has not provided the intended benefits to those who were to benefit from it due to a variety of reasons.** Maharashtra being a state far more industrialized than other states, many families and individuals choose to work in nearby or distant cities or migrate to other areas for sugarcane-cutting.
- **Some important constraints in the operation of MGNREGS include cumbersome procedures/ higher labor payments made by private employers/delayed payments unlike ready payments received from private employers/ inadequate number of Rozgar Sevak (Village Employment Officer) under the Panchayat for execution and oversight of schemes/ political interference/leakages etc.**
- **It is, therefore, seen that in panchayats there are hardly any takers for the scheme. Those who work in MNREGS are mostly women and older men who are usually left behind in the villages.** On account of these problems quality of assets created suffers. It is, therefore, imperative that the scheme is suitably modified by combining it with JYS or with horticulture on community basis ( e .g. combining the plots of marginal/small farmers and taking up works of common good-wages paid under MNREGS) or tree-planting work in waste lands/government lands.
- **Innovations are necessary, if funds under MNREGS are to be used for drought relief.** The Forest Department ought to take up social forestry work in a big way wherein JYS and MNREGS schemes have already been completed.

**Fodder Scarcity**

- All panchayats visited were facing scarcity of fodder. I could see a number of cattle camps all along the wayside, both in Beed and Ahmednagar districts where the problem is more acute. No doubt, the cattle camps have provided much needed relief to farmers. However, farmers from villages located in distant and difficult areas may find it difficult to bring their cattle to these camps and stay with their animals. Although it could be considered that this time there was no other option but to organize these camps, the State Government ought to find more sustainable solutions to the problem in coming years.

**Mid-Day Meal Scheme**

- Mid day meal distribution only in Aurangabad district. Although it was stated that the scheme is being implemented during summer holidays in Jalna and Beed districts, I could not visit any school. As mentioned media had reported that mid day meals are not being provided to children during summer vacation in Jalna and other districts, as directed by the Supreme Court. It was confirmed by authorities in Ahmednagar that the same is not being implemented in the district, since there was no demand for it. It was learned that in Aurangabad district the materials for preparing food under MDM have almost exhausted. Supplies ought to be continuous.

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It must however, be pointed out that relief measures being monitored by the district administration ought to necessarily involve both health care and nutrition of children.

### Farmer's Suicide

- As already mentioned 1130 farmers have committed suicide in Marathwada region last year alone. The State Government sanctions Rs one lakh as ex-gratia to their families which are eligible for assistance. On visiting some of these families it is seen that the farmers mostly belonged to small and medium categories and have no assets other than a small piece of land.
- Social security pension has been provided at least to some of the eligible family members. Priority is stated to be given in the sanction of schemes to eligible families. But on the ground, apart from the ex-gratia assistance of Rs one lakh or sanctioning of social security pension in some cases, no other assistance to the bereaved families is visible.
- **Payment of Rs one lakh has no immediate effect as 70% of it is deposited in FD for later use. The family is left with just Rs.30, 000/- for immediate expenses.**
- **It would be desirable to raise the level of assistance at least to Rs 2 lakh per family.**
- It is also seen that even after the death of the farmer, the loan burden continues to remain on the family. Although general restructuring of loan is announced by the government, the same is not yet seen implemented in farmer's suicide cases. Therefore, specific instruction for restructuring or cancellation of the loan in deserving cases ought to be issued.
- Educational support for their children needs to be provided.
- A source of irrigation along with credit and inputs need to be provided to enable them to cultivate lands owned by the family.
- Tracking of status of families of farmers who committed suicide ought to be undertaken.
- Preventing farmer's suicide is a challenge before the administration. Although it was claimed that counseling centers have been set up, but Special Rapporteur did not come across any. **It is important to have Primary Agriculture Cooperatives (PACs) which can take care of every need of the farmer as originally envisaged. They could inter- alia provide effective counseling to farmers in distress.** With Central Cooperative banks in the red, it is a difficult prospect. Nevertheless, NABARD has to come forward with alternate ways of financing the PACs under specific projects.

### ICDS

- In the scheme of things Anganwadis are to play a pivotal role in improving the nutritional status of women and children. However, on a visit to some of the Anganwadis in the four districts, it is seen that sufficient attention is not being paid by the higher authorities in the proper running of these centers, especially at the time of drought. Low attendance of children, supply of poor quality food, lack of efforts in creating awareness about nutrition, etc are observed. Monitoring of underweight and children suffering from malnutrition is important.

Primary Health Centers have no facility at present, for taking care of child malnutrition.

- ICDS programs also need to be reviewed as a part of drought relief work both at the state/district levels.

**Healthcare**

- **On visits to some of the panchayats people complained about the absence of doctors, shortage of doctors and staff, non availability of medicines etc. The State Government ought to have posted adequate number doctors and staff to Marathwada and made available adequate quantity of medicines, keeping in view the prevailing drought conditions.**

**Rights of SC/ST**

- SC/ST forms the most vulnerable section of our society. Therefore, assessing the status of those who belong to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes assumes importance, especially under drought conditions.
- I visited some of the Dalit colonies in the districts. It is seen that the colonies do get water supply through tankers. They get food grains and kerosene under the PDS. By and large there were no complaints. The only point which needs to be considered is whether per head water supply could be increased in view of larger number of members per family.
- **As far as their general status is considered, it is seen that they still remain backward in the fields of education, health, employment, housing etc despite many schemes taken up for their benefit. Almost all families belong to the BPL. All were landless. Most men work in private farms or sugar cane fields. They readily work. Children do go to school, but there were no graduates among the community.**
- Welfare schemes are implemented in a piece meal fashion-sometimes an approach road, at times a community hall, without having a holistic vision of their development. Their health and nutritional status is paid least attention. Bringing about behavioral and social changes is a challenge. **It is desirable to enlist the use of reputed voluntary institutions and agencies in implementing schemes on a need basis, with community participation.**

**Role of Civil Society**

- They ought to work in partnerships with the State Government, as far as relief work is concerned, concentrating mainly in areas which are difficult for governments.
- Maharashtra has no dearth of reputed voluntary agencies and institutions doing social work. It is understood that a number of them are engaged in relief work. But it appears doubtful whether their engagement is channelized in an organized manner, except in a few cases, by the district administrations. Their activities need to be up- scaled so that their experience and expertise could be utilized effectively by the administration.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

- Effective monitoring and independent evaluation are essential for assessing the impact of any scheme. It also helps to learn from mistakes. Leakages cannot be plugged without regular and effective monitoring. Deployment of water tankers, running of cattle camps, execution of schemes under JYS and MNREGS need to be carefully monitored to prevent leakages.