

STUDY OF DESERT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

1. The Study

The desert areas of the country had remained backward in many respects due to difficult physiography varying agro-climatic conditions and distinct socio cultural features. Since the people living in these areas were facing hardships owing to geo-climatic conditions, the desert development programme was introduced as a centrally sponsored scheme in 1977-78. The objective of the programme is to control the desertification and restoration of ecological balance in the desert areas for development. The Evaluation study on Desert Development Programme was taken up by the Programme Evaluation Organisation at the instance of Planning Commission in 1988.

2. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the evaluation study were:

- i) to study different schemes taken-up to check desertification, restoration of ecological balance, etc. under the DDP and to assess overall impact on the programme,
- ii) to study the effectiveness of the strategy adopted in terms of area development approach and their linkage with other related programme,
- iii) to study the administrative and monitoring arrangements at different levels in implementing the programme,
- iv) to study the difficulties encountered and the extent of people's participation in implementing the programmes and suggest measures for improvement,
- v) to study how the schemes under DDP are formulated and whether they contain measures for short-term and long-term integrated development of desert areas on the basis of watershed development and management. Also, as to how far the information obtained through soil and topographic surveys, hydrological surveys, aerial photo-interpretation of the satellite imageries, etc. have been utilised for preparing development schemes, and
- vi) to study the status of maintenance of assets created under the programme.

3. Sample Size/Criteria for Sample Selection

Five States were selected, where the programme was in operation. A sample of 9 districts (7 from hot arid zone and 2 from cold arid zone) was selected from both the hot and cold desert areas, i.e. 4 in Rajasthan, 2 in Haryana, 1 in Gujarat, 1 in J&K and 1 in Himachal Pradesh. Besides this, 125 knowledgeable persons were selected for the study.

4. Reference Period

The field work was conducted in August, 1988 and other secondary data were collected for the year 1986-87 and 1987-88.

5. Main Findings

1. The main reasons for depletion of vegetable cover and degradation of environment in the desert areas was due to an uncontrolled and overgrazing of livestock, growing demand for fuel and fodder arising out of the increased human and live stock population.
2. In all the States, the programme at State level and district level was looked after by the Department of Rural Development and DRDA, respectively
3. It was observed that the visits of Senior Officers were very few which had no desired impact on the programme.
4. The monitoring of the programme was so weak that it could not do justice to quantitative or qualitative aspects of the programme for implementation.
5. There was no voluntary agency or peoples involvement in the identification of the areas or the formulation and implementation of schemes of the DDP.
6. In J&K no soil, topographic or hydrological surveys were undertaken by any agency for deciding the areas of thrust and in formulation of the area based schemes.
7. The progress of integrated micro-watershed approach to area development planning in the desert areas was limited.
8. The pattern of expenditure in cold desert States was somewhat different. In both the hot arid zone and the cold arid zone states, the highest weightage was given to irrigation in order to make the afforestation programme successful.

9. In the selected districts of Rajasthan, it was found that most of the expenditure on key sectors was met through DDP funds. The proportionate expenditure under the DDP was even higher in the selected districts as compared to the total state picture.
10. It was found that in Himachal Pradesh, soil conservation and land development activities for improving the desert economy were not taken up mostly due to unawareness of the programme among the officers responsible for implementation of the programme.
11. No systematic arrangements were noticed for monitoring the process of desertification/deforestation in Gujarat except the usual regulatory measures adopted by the Forest Department in the reserve forest areas.
12. It was observed that no study on seepage losses/evaporation losses, etc. was taken up either by a Government agency or by the Gujarat Agriculture University.
13. The officers of the Forest Department in Haryana reported that due to non-availability of sufficient land for community plantation, non-applicability of Forest Act to panchayat areas, lack of sufficient manpower and sufficient funds etc. they could not implement the work smoothly.
14. It was found that the soil conservation and land development measures taken up in the desert areas of Rajasthan had helped in conserving moisture, checking soil erosion and growing of Kharif/Rabi crop in certain areas where no crops were grown earlier.
15. In view of the revised guidelines, less weightage was given to the animal husbandry and dairy sector. The states were unhappy with this change brought out by the Central Ministry. Moreover felt that the withdrawal of such important schemes could have bad impact on the programme.
16. Since there was little scope for having wells/tubewells in Himachal Pradesh, no ground water survey had been carried out. However, it was roughly estimated that seepage losses were around 25 percent.
17. In J&K also, no study on seepage and evaporation losses of irrigation water was conducted. However, it was reported that due to loose soil and poor construction works, the seepage losses were 40 percent in some cases.

18. It was observed that afforestation programme in hot desert areas had no discernible impact at least on the quantum of rainfall received. However, there was some improvement in rainfall on account of the afforestation programme taken up under DDP, by the Spiti Desert Development Agency.
19. No separate funds for maintenance of assets under the DDP were allotted. In Haryana, it was pointed out that at times some of the line departments faced serious difficulties when assets were transferred to them due to paucity of funds. In Rajasthan also, the assets created were not being maintained properly as no funds were separately earmarked for this purpose.
20. It was reported that the cold deserts States of Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir were experiencing difficulty in maintaining the assets from their own funds.

6. Major Suggestions

1. In order to reduce the consumption of firewood, the non-conventional sources of energy like bio-gas plants and Solar Energy may be introduced
2. Block Agency should be effectively involved especially in the schemes under agriculture, forestry and pasture development.
3. It was reported that a thorough study into the working of the two agencies in J&K should be undertaken to see as to how far the staffing pattern adopted was justified.
4. Attractive financial incentives, adequate accommodation, educational and medical facilities should be provided to the staff posted in difficult desert areas. Besides this, promotional avenues may be kept in view for the staff serving in such areas.
5. It was suggested that village people should be permitted to take fuel wood from the common land where the plantation was done under the DDP. Moreover, a sale depot near the village should be opened instead of auctioning the produce.
6. The State Government may be given powers to incur expenditure on schemes as per the felt needs of the people and the area.
7. The Village Panchayats and Voluntary agencies should be involved in the execution of work as recommended by the National Committee on DPAP/DDP.

8. There should be coordination between Field Research Laboratory at Leh, State Agricultural Department and J&K Agricultural University in respect of research work carried out by them.
9. DDP funds should be a part of the district plan. It was essential to see in cold desert areas whether independent projects were justified or this work could be entrusted to the line departments with some extra staff, wherever necessary.
10. There should be a clear cut policy in granting the funds for proper maintenance of the assets created under the DDP.