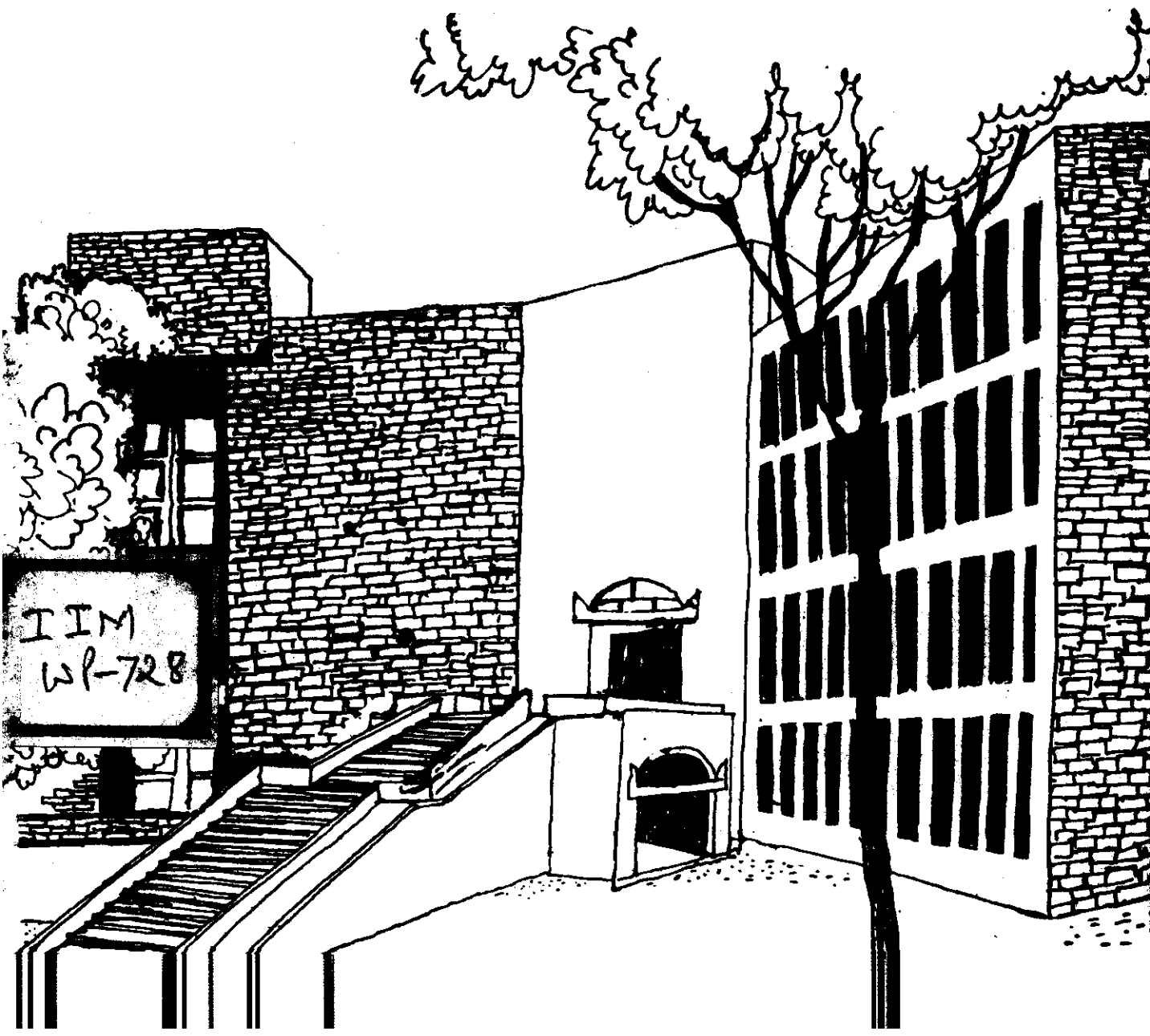




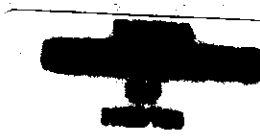
W. P. 728

Working Paper



**URGENT ISSUES IN DROUGHT MANAGEMENT
IS IT TOO LATE TO ACT ?**

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W P No. 728
February, 1988

The main objective of the working paper series of the IIMA is to help faculty members to test out their research findings at the pre-publication stage.

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INDIA

draft :only for discussion

Urgent Issues in Drought Management :is it too late to act ?

It is quite usual that at the time of crisis people try to think about finding the short term and occasionally, the long term solutions. Although there is a saying that "you do not dig well when the house is on fire". And yet how true it would be if we were to describe the drought management strategies partly as an ad hoc response to the crisis continuing in perpetuity.

The capacity of bureaucracy to organize and deliver services with extra-ordinary efficiency during the period of crisis has been well known. It is not surprising therefore, that even during the present drought any large-scale distress, misery or deprivation has been avoided. But absence of misery does not necessarily prove presence of well being. It does not also provide any clue about the possibility of future recurrence of misery. Given this context it is important first to recognize who are the victims of the drought who cannot be reached through various relief measures going on at present.

How can these victims be enabled to not only recoup the losses they have already suffered but also generate capacity to withstand stress on their own in future?

Those who are being helped in the current system to varying degree may not in the process of being helped, generate a responsibility towards those who cannot be reached by the public programmes. How to generate this responsibility among the beneficiaries?

And finally those who have gained and gained enormously during this drought may not like the present structure to be modified in any strategic sense. And if so how would then one deal with the lobbying by these interests against some of the changes we should be concerned with?

This note is prepared by Prof Anil k Gupta ,Indian Institute of Management ,Ahmedabad and Mr Ajay kumar ,Academy of Young Scientists ,P O Box 1210,Chandigarh .This draws considerably upon the earlier work by the first author e.g. Impoverishment in Drought Prone Regions:a view from within ,IIM/SDC/NABARD,1983.

In this note we are not attempting to find a solution or suggest even ways of searching solutions. We are in fact only trying to draw up an agenda for discussion which might provide a basis for other concerned colleagues to contribute their insights and also possible commitment towards mitigation of the extra-ordinary stress caused by drought.

Unseen Victims

Soon after the on-set of stress the pressure starts building up on those who are most vulnerable from both labour market which get squeezed and product market which restricts opportunities of investments or production. One of the most effective (in the short-run) but debilitating effect (in the long run) is the disposal of assets particularly livestock. The signals on this account had started emerging right in the beginning of dry period in 1986 as well as in 1987. The disposal of cattle and bullocks at throw away prices meant (a) liquidation of the savings of pastoralists and (b) increase in the surplus generating potential of richer pastoralists and cultivators. Most of this damage has already been done.

Unless government and concerned agencies think of some urgent way of restoring the right to maintain animals even when the stress is so high there is no way in which this thing will not happen again. Every drought in that sense leads to deficit in the household budget which is followed by indebtedness resulting in dependency and deprivation. For several years afterwards these people who have lost their reserves would neither raise their voice in any political institution nor be able to utilise the facilities which are available in proportion to the livestock that one has. The issue therefore, is how does one help those who have already lost in this process and prevent possibilities of such loss in future. This is sadly an issue which both government and voluntary organizations have totally missed.

As Shri Sanat Mehta mentioned in a personal discussion on this subject that large number of poor people have abandoned their animals in the cattle camps. What should be done with this resource which has lot of potential .

At the same time it should not be forgotten that the managers of Panjarapole cum cattle camps do not always wish these cattle to survive and be claimed back by the original owners . If the cattle dies it fetches a few hundred rupees by way of the hides and skins . There are occasions when the abandoned animals are purchased by land owners at cheap price and thus the question of original owners claiming these does not arise . Can not some of the better of these animals become a part of national bullock and

animal herd to be distributed under IRDP in regions where these animals are already acclimatized? This is a question which concerned professionals are asking though not with much hopes.

Rehabilitation of Unseen Victims

Some other interventions which need to be discussed in this regard may include the following ideas:

- a) Programme for selection of good breeding bulls as well as male calves from cattle camps as well as from panjara poles for both draft and breeding purposes which could be provided as a part of drought relief to the victims for eventual rehabilitation after monsoon starts.
- b) A scheme for calf rearing, support prices and buy back assurance to generate stable market for calves of local breeds coupled with the fodder and the veterinary support.
- c) Given the fact that proportion of infant bovines is far higher in dry regions compared to the rest, one has to look at varying fodder and concentrate combinations which could be ideal for the young bovines through various local materials.
- d) A massive programme for grass seed collection and dispersal in the event of monsoon on common lands, public lands as well as other degraded lands through mass involvement of students and unemployed youth.
- e) Closing colleges and schools during the next sowing season soon after the rains start to initiate large-scale water conservation and seeding programmes for grass, shrubs and even trees (and crops particularly oilseeds & pulses).
- f) Starting special draft power development programme in each of the drought prone districts to regulate the market of bullocks such that poor pastoralists are not forced to sell their animals at distress prices. These may have to be bought by a new organization, say, Bullock Development Agency till it is able to sell it off to other consumers. Given extra-ordinary shortage of bullock power in the country marketing of such bullocks should not cause any problem. Relief programme Agencies of various other state governments in Western part of the country could coordinate their efforts in this direction.

g) Large number of households are headed by the women for part or the full year during the drought years because males migrate away. Whatever resources government has for women and child development should be exclusively utilised only for these households in dry regions so that programme can have discernible effects.

h) Many of the women have unique skills such as in crafts, handloom or other such activities. The marketing and provision of raw-material as a part of drought relief has to be organised at a massive scale so that their exploitation through the middlemen could be reduced if not eliminated. Promotional exhibitions in the cities must be organized with the help of urban voluntary organizations which could link up with the rural voluntary organizations or public agencies to provide reliable market channels.

i) It is pity that raw wool from Gujarat often and on a large scale goes out to North India for processing and then is brought back for various value added products. If Gujarat Government would not take urgent steps to break the control of a few wool traders particularly in Kutch who have ensured the breakdown of wool processing machines in one or the other way, the unfortunate exchange will continue. Other value adding enterprises would need to be organized also in a manner that more and more relief fund is spent on building institutional capacities rather than on providing concurrent relief. Even if this means bearing little more stress in the short run it would be worthwhile in the long run.

j) There is no doubt that the small ruminants like sheep and goat and browsers like camels perhaps suffer more in the post monsoon phase. The organization of deworming and other such veterinary measures on mass scale is an urgent concern and cannot be delayed any further.

k) Any programme on livestock improvement will have to include strengthening of public distribution system (PDS) of fodder and medicines/vaccinations.

l) Large number of marginal farmers and landless tenants would need seeds in the next season for rainfed crops if rains are good. Adequate reserves of those seeds have to be urgently mobilised. Even if these means direct buying by state from neighbouring regions, the same has to be done. The decision must

be taken urgently so that before monsoon this year seed could be stocked at Taluka level.

m) The tendency to stop relief work soon after drought will have to be modified so that various activities requiring post monsoon rehabilitation are continued on the warfooting.

n) Various sources of opposition to these programmes will have to be anticipated and taken care of. For instance the employment of people on their own lands or on public lands would certainly affect the supply of labour for large landed farmers. The reduction of migration from Panchmahal would effect hybrid cotton producers in Baroda and other places who would thus be forced to pay more wages. Social tensions on this issue cannot be avoided. This has to be anticipated. Mobilisation of public support can help in containing social unrest before it assumes serious proportion as a sin-qua-non of any of these strategies.

o) The indebtedness which assumes serious proportion during drought year is another problem which has to be tackled carefully. The recoveries of the bank sometimes suffer even in those regions where government may have provided free water, electricity and grass seeds in the current rabi season. Unless government would ensure that financial institutions remain viable it will be very difficult to encourage these institutions to come to the help of drought victims. At the same time government may like to channelize some of the relief funds for subsidising the interest and the follow up cost of the banks for loan in dry regions. This is a suggestion on which several other alternatives are available which may be separately discussed.

Dealing with the Beneficiaries of Current Relief Programme

It is not our contention that most of the people who have come to the cattle camps are better off. Though many of them are certainly better off compared to those who have disposed of cattle before they could reach cattle camps. We don't have as yet sufficient data on this aspect. Therefore, various issues that are being mentioned below have to be looked at both from the point of view of those mentioned above and those who have reached cattle camp and received the government help. The idea is that if the provision of government help has led to increase in the capacity of some big maldharis to buy cattle of poor people at throw away prices then we should be concerned about it.

At the same time the cattle wealth which is available in concentrated form at one place also needs to be drawn upon for genetic upgradation.

- b) It is well known that many of the indigenous breeds of livestock in the state are under considerable pressure of genetic erosion. Urgent steps have to be taken to i) index and catalogue the good breeding bulls, ii) collect and preserve semen of these bulls for upgradation of cattle stock in the next breeding season, iii) to evaluate the herd performance of different bulls to develop a data base on the subject which can be used for cataloguing and breeding purposes, iv) selection of good calves for both breeding and/or bullock purposes.
- c) These cattle camps could be utilized for mass vaccination as well as popularisation of medication based on indigenous veterinary medicine as well as the other systems of livestock disease control.
- d) A monitoring system can be developed where by a cattle/bullock development cell in the secretariat would receive information about household and livestock consumption for the next one year from the families after they go back after the monsoon. This will improve the understanding of about the stress that pastoralists have to bear.
- e) The stress fuels are early indicators of the problems that are likely to come due to drought. Information about this stress fuel, fodder and foods could be collected from these people in the camps. The stress fodder implies those plant materials which would never be fed or eaten by the livestock in the normal times. Some of these fodders may have short or long term side effects about which livestock department may have already some information.
- f) The pastoralists who have purchased livestock during this drought need also to be identified and made conscious of the responsibility they have towards their less fortunate brethren. This might mean sharing some costs of rangeland improvement in the native villages. This might also suggest need for rotational grazing or prioritization of the poor in terms of distribution of fodder now or in future.
- g) Many of these households may have left their families behind with the result that either the education of the children or some other on-going activities must have been disrupted. The women would have been one of the most severe victims of this social and filial stress. Therefore, there is a need to understand this phenomenon better so that the activities could be started for reducing the problems of left-behind members of these families.
- h) Some of the families may have taken loans to arrange minimum foodgrain reserve for the family left behind. Government may

have to think of providing some way of relief from such stress induced loans.

Counteracting the Lobby of Gainers/Beneficiaries of Drought:

It is well known from the history that whenever droughts have occurred certain classes of society have gained precisely because of the loss of others. It is also to be expected that these classes would not let major reform in policies effecting their interest, come about easily. However, when these classes themselves are not very well organized the possibility of such lobbies preventing government from implementing more poor oriented policies are weak. It is with this assumption that various suggestions are being given below:

- a) All the schools and colleges in dry areas may have to be closed during the first few showers/monsoon so that land preparation, seeding of grass on the common property resource land etc. could be done on massive scale in these areas. If there is any resistance from teachers or other such section of society then public opinion must be built right from now. It may be useful to advise colleges and schools even in non-drought prone part of the state to mobilise camps in the dry regions for the purposes of afforestation, grass seeding etc.
- b) The trenches may have to be dug around the pasture plots for rotational grazing purpose and employment programme should include such activities in addition to desiltation of tanks, construction of percolation tanks, deepening of wells etc.
- c) Undoubtedly the industrial capital would never gravitate towards the sector and space of low or dispersed demand. Alternatives for generating agro-industrial units based on livestock and or crop products must also be included as a part of relief expenditure. It appears that some thinking on this line already exists in the minds of some enlightened policy makers in the state government. Their hands need to be strengthened.
- d) The elite in the cities like Ahmedabad must be made to forego some of the privileges such as uninterrupted power and water supply immediately. This must be done through appeal to the popular sentiments and through organization of demand from the people for such curtailment of power and water supply. Any other approach might generate popular resentment.
- e) Gujarat has several institutions of national importance which have skills otherwise in scarce supply. Likewise Gujarat also has some of the best entrepreneurs in the private sector who have transformed the industrial environment of the country. Government must bring a select group of these people together to generate further ideas for short and long term solutions to the drought in this State. Unfortunately the Government has given far more importance to resource mobilisation in form of capital and material. The skill mobilisation has been considerably neglected. Government must give urgent importance to the mobilisation of the skills from various professionals in their

private or public capacity. The association of various such bodies may also be asked to provide their suggestions in time-bound manner to galvanise action on this issue. The inventory of seed fertilizer and other such inputs at local level would need to be carefully monitored so that in the next monsoon season the rainfed agriculture receives sufficient support. Banks will have to be geared to provide working capital support to institutions, agencies and private traders operating in dry regions. At the same time monitoring would have to be done to ensure that people gain access to the resources in time and at fair price. The marketing support will be the next logical step if farmers do not have to be penalised for improving productivity in the event of good rain.

It may also be necessary to mobilise tractors and other means of craft power to provide short term relief for timely sowing in extremely drought prone regions as a part of relief expenditure.

In those areas where food-for-work programme are being undertaken a fertilizer for work programme may be started for those farmers who have marginal landholdings and may not otherwise be able to apply the fertilizers. This may be in addition to the food-for-work. The advantage will be that in case the rains are good in the next season basal application of fertilizer would ensure greater drought tolerance at the later crop stages. Adequate technical guidance for this programme can be easily mobilised from ICAR and Regional Research institutions.

Buffer stock of dry fodder with provision for periodic renewal needs to be established. The beneficiaries of the drought relief should be expected to contribute a portion of dry fodder into this stock as a token payment of their dues to the State. Government should insist that larger farmers pay their land revenue in dry regions in the form of dry fodder. It is pity that the national programmes on dairy development have not given sufficient attention on the issue of dry fodder.

It is important that documentation of indigenous knowledge regarding crop, livestock, trees and other enterprises is taken up urgently especially to find out indigenous but less well known strategies of risk adjustments.

- k) There is also a need to link the academic research resource allocation with the regional resource management problems. It will be useful if all the post-graduate academic institutions receiving support from State or Central Government are asked to provide information about the research that they are doing on the problem of drought related aspects.

There are many other issues which deserve rethinking be it the distribution of foodgrains or fertilizer aspects of public work employment programmes. Crisis provides the best opportunity for asking the better off section of society to make sacrifices. It is time that government asks the high and middle income group people to forego their claims on public distribution system. This will imply that available stocks from central or state pool could be moved to the rural areas and leaving supply of food in urban areas to private sector. Without necessarily depending upon Centre for more resources the State Government has to set example of mobilising internal resources and generating new opportunities which will reduce drought induced stress. This State offers so much of privileges to professionals and industrialists as evident in the growth of service and industrial sector. It is time that the beneficiaries of various policies pay some bit of their share, long overdue, to the people in drought-prone regions.