

Climatic Variability and Drought in Rajasthan

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As the elusive southwest monsoon in India played truant around the country, many states of India have faced a gloomy harvest and a year of food shortages and drought. One such noteworthy state is Rajasthan. In the year 2002, the Government of India acknowledged severe drought and scarcity in all 32 districts of Rajasthan. It recognized large number of deaths in Baran district as a result of this situation. This is surprising as Baran district has 213.1 ('000 hectares) of total forest area and is considered as one of the 'Green Belt of Rajasthan'. This paper presents a case study of severe drought in Baran district, as resulting from climatic variability in southeast part of Rajasthan. It further evaluates the post-drought impact on the livelihood security of Saharia tribes, Rajasthan's only primitive tribe. The population of district of Baran is 10,21,653 (2001). It has a dry climate except in the monsoon season. It received 255.4mm of rainfall as against the normal rainfall of 868.1mm in 2002, a total -68.9% deviation from the normal rainfall. The inhabitants of Baran are engaged in agricultural activities (producing crops like wheat, pulses, maize, rice, groundnut, sesasum, sugarcane amongst others), growing livestock, and industries. There are a total of 119 agricultural based industries. Livestock contribute more than 50 per cent of the GDP in these areas. Since agricultural production is a gamble of monsoon, livestock provides a more sustained income to the farmers. The nature has endowed these areas with some of the best breeds of cattle, sheep, goats and other species of livestock. It is also endowed with nutritious perennial grasses. Failure of rain affects directly the growth of these grasses as well as water resource for the livestock. Shortage of feed resources and drinking water results in high mortality.