

in panchayat Gurhasia of Narani block (Banda district). This village is almost entirely dependent on rains with hardly any irrigation. The rain-fed crops are grown on sandy, one-crop-in-a-year land (if winter crop is grown in one field, then summer crop is not taken in that field). Shankar, a farmer, says that during the last four years or so, there has been adverse weather of one kind or the other but this year has been the worst.

The main winter crops are pulses - gram and arhar - and mustard oilseeds while the main summer crops are millet, jowar and bajra, moong pulse and til oilseed. This year both the summer and the winter crops were wiped out - the winter crop by excessive, untimely rains and hailstorms and later the kharif crop by drought. Due to continuing drought, the recent rabi crop also could not be planted. Hence now people here have become utterly dependent on market purchased grain.

But at a time when the rural employment guarantee scheme is most needed, people have not got any employment opportunity under MGNREGA. There has also been very little compensation for the ruined rabi crop and none so far for the lost kharif crop. There is no hope of any rabi sowing as the village's time for rabi sowing is already over.

Again at a time when nutri-

tion programmes are most needed, the performance of ICDS has deteriorated further. Adolescent girls have not received nutritious food (panjiri) for several months. Mid-day meals are of poor quality and diluted with water. Milk is served very rarely while vegetables have excess water.

In this situation to keep away the pangs of hunger many people are migrating in large numbers to Delhi, Surat, Ahmedabad and Punjab. Others intend to leave soon after the Panchayat elections. Many of the elderly, ill, destitute and physically challenged persons are left to be helped for their survival by other village families who are themselves very poor. If migrant workers can get an advance payment, they leave this for the old family members but this is not always possible.

On top of all this are the marriage expenses. Siya Dulari says, "I had already taken loan to marry one daughter earlier, and now marriage of another daughter is due. Please tell me how can I make arrangements for this marriage."

Mothers of daughters appear to be on the verge of breakdown when they talk about marriage-related problems, particularly when the date of marriage has already been fixed but there is no sign yet of how any money can become available at a time

when there is a severe scarcity of daily food needs. Some are in the process of losing their land as they go to private money lenders for loans, borrowing at high compound interest rates of 3 to 7 per cent per month, depending on the circumstances in which the loan is taken. In most cases these days it is very difficult to pay back the interest, leave alone the principal amount. In addition most people are indebted to banks as well.

But it is not just parents who worry about daughters; daughters also worry about parents. Keshkali, a 16-year-old girl from a kumhar prajapati (potter) family suddenly emerged from the group discussion to confront me and said in an emotion-choked voice, "All you people will somehow push me into marriage, but do you know all the time I worry about my parents. I don't have any brother. When I was a child I was injured and my father incurred debts for my treatment. Now his health is bad. My mother also cannot do any rigorous work. I worry all the time about who will look after them after my marriage."

In this distressing situation a voluntary organisation Vidyadham Samiti (VS) has provided a ray of hope by starting a grain bank (anaaj bank) and bhusa bank (fodder bank). These have so far been started in 30 villages including Ghasraut. They

villagers who are facing threat of starvation. I also participated in the door-to-door collection in this village. The collected grain, to which the grain brought by Vidyadham Samiti was added, was then distributed among the most needy villagers, particularly the destitute, elderly persons.

This village faces a serious drinking water problem as very little water is available from the single distant working hand pump forcing villagers to obtain drinking water from Bagain river which is not fit for drinking. Animals also drink water from this river.

Nawapura hamlet of Balataal Jaitpur panchayat (located in Mahoba district) is inhabited mainly by people of Dhemar caste who work mostly as small farmers and fisherfolk. This year the water tank has little water and fish. The drought has destroyed the kharif crop and there are very little prospects of getting anything from the current rabi crop. Hence people are migrating in large numbers mostly to work in brick kilns in Rajasthan and elsewhere. Many others will go soon for construction work in Delhi.

No grain or pulses from the farmers' own fields are now left and they have to depend entirely on stocks bought from the market. This in turn depends on their ability to get local employment which is very scarce. No

remain, people say that only about 10 per cent are able to fill their stomachs. Pulses are out of the question. A cheap vegetable like potato may be available once in a while but mostly people subsist on chutney made from chilly and salt mixed with small quantity of coriander leaves and tomato, if available. Many of these people are also now planning to leave the village. They have to go, as due to lack of work, their debts go on mounting.

To check the fast aggravating distress in Bundelkhand before it is too late, the government should start MGNREGA and/or drought relief work on a large scale. This region has already been officially declared as drought-affected. Hence recovery of loans should stop and no interest should be added to the loans during the drought period. A loan-waiver scheme should be considered. From a longer term perspective, ecologically protective alternative development policies should be implemented with honesty so that the increasing problems of this phase of climate change do not prove too overwhelming for people.

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