

Marginal increase in agri-food production



Farmers carrying off silage and hay from a harvest. (File Photo)

Long-term drought action plan needed

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THE AGRICULTURE food production index for Dimapur shows a marginal – if not cynical – increase over the past three fiscal years. The small upturn is remarkable considering Dimapur district was pegged Nagaland's worst-hit, by the long spell of drought that swept across the coun-

try in 2008-2009.

The drought across the country in 2009 impacted India's agriculture economy in ways more than merely shrinking the stock index – it also set into motion an escalation in prices of agricultural produce and consumptions, and one which is still active. After the drought and the onset of reduced rainfall later, the agriculture sector was compelled to seek alternatives.

Also hit by a "drought-like" season, Nagaland state estimated her production losses to about Rs. 109 Crore, as estimated by the

Agriculture department in 2009 alone. The state depends on Dimapur for food production – or at least, as the supply base. And when the dry spell swept northern India, the condition of Nagaland's commercial hub was no gentler with the Agriculture department's periodical assessment throwing up disturbing figures.

For instance, the Agriculture department had told this reporter earlier that the "rice bowl" regions of Jalkie and Medziphema were entirely put to the monsoon's mercy. Sub-division Medziphema is one of the two largest rice and paddy production swathes in the contiguous Dimapur regions. A recent record made available accounts 37% of the Medziphema bowl to be under cultivation. The drought reduced the production areas' base to at least 67% of Dimapur's production. The delayed monsoon finally arrived but two-times lesser than the normal rainfall of 1504.7mm. The most affected of Dimapur's agriculture crop base was paddy. Other generic commercial crops (mustards etc) 'enjoyed' a comparatively remarkable run of production.

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Records show that the overall crop production – discounting paddy – enjoyed a small increase during a phase that landed Dimapur in an estimated 40,000 Metric Tonnes to 48,000 Metric Tonnes loss in production from April to December in 2009. During the phase of damage-assessment undertaken by the department of Agriculture in Dimapur, before the rains arrived, the total affected area already estimated at around 20,220 hectares.

Additional information on the level of production in Dimapur for the past three production years shows a slight uptrend. Discounting paddy, which was estimated at "80%" loss by agriculture officials in August, cereals and lentils and commercial crops fared relatively well but not good enough by average standards of yearly monsoons. Production of generic cereals in the district had a poor run however. During 2007-2008, cereal production over 461,100 hectares harvested at least 1,25,947 Lakh Metric Tonnes. But for the current phase of 2009-2010 the total areas of production is recorded at a mere 81,820 Metric Tonnes from 36,463 hectares.

Pulses increased slightly production from 1163 Metric Tonnes during 2007-2008 to 1796 Metric Tonnes in 2009-2010. Notwithstanding the estimated slight increase in generic commercial crop production, policy-makers have acknowledged the need for long-term action plans to check negative repercussions from seasonal exigencies such as delayed/reduced rainfall. With Nagaland still a rural agriculture economy, agriculture officials had earlier pointed to pooling government funds to meet local emergency-aids. The state government's appeal to the central government to grant funds for the drought in 2008-2009 could not be. As the central government's refusal demonstrated, the Nagaland government is expected of designing disaster-management action plans to tackle seasonal exigencies that the central government may not in future again assist.

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