

Watershed or Command Area?: An Evaluation of Watershed Project in Maharashtra*

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This study evaluates the impact of a watershed development project on different parameters using the field data collected from Gaosud watershed located in Osmanabad district in Maharashtra. This project was implemented under the scheme of National Watershed Development Project for Rainfed Areas (NWDPR). The study compares a sample of beneficiaries of the project with that of non-beneficiaries (i.e., farmers with lands in contiguous areas outside the watershed) with respect to different parameters. The results of the study show that the watershed programme, besides changing the cropping pattern from low value crops to high value crops, also made remarkable improvement in water level of the wells, irrigated area, adoption of improved farming practices, productivity of different crops, gross income, assets position and availability of fodder and fuel wood for the land owning households. This programme has also markedly improved the employment days, fodder and fuel wood availability for the landless labour households. The study suggests that watershed development programme can be taken up wherever possible not only for improving the performance of rainfed agriculture but also as a permanent remedy for the drinking water problem of the rural areas.

I Introduction

Rainfed farming has been traditionally practiced in Indian agriculture. It accounts for over 63 per cent of the cultivated area and contributes substantially to the total production of foodgrains, oilseeds and cotton. In spite of this fact, the level of poverty is very high in rainfed regions mainly due to strong constraint of water availability and inadequate capital formation both from private and public sectors. The people living in the rainfed areas are unable to actively participate in market activities both as producers and consumers due to poor performance of agriculture. The Green Revolution introduced in the mid-sixties also could not bring about any discernible improvement in the rainfed areas. This has created serious concern among the policy makers and forced them to

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