

Third Party Evaluator's Opinion on Upper Indravati Irrigation Project

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Relevance

The National Policy on Agriculture¹ (for India) 'seeks to strengthen rural infrastructure to support faster agricultural development, create employment in rural areas, secure a fair standard of living for the farmers and agricultural workers and their families and discourage migration to urban areas', amongst others. The Government of India has been laying emphasis on developing irrigation infrastructure to alleviate the condition of extreme poverty in rural areas and attaining the goal of food self-sufficiency. The Government of Orissa's Agricultural Policy² objectives include 'doubling production of food grains and oil seed crops, providing irrigation facilities to 50% of cultivable land through completion of incomplete irrigation projects, generate adequate employment opportunities in agriculture, and make agriculture the main route for poverty eradication', amongst others. The poorest in the state of Orissa are the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Increasing their incomes, improving their standard of living and achieving food self-sufficiency are the stated objectives of the Upper Indravati Irrigation Project, which is consistent with the national and state policies. The project provides the farmers in the region an opportunity to do farming during dry periods, which would not have been possible without irrigation. The project, therefore, has great relevance to the region and the country.

Impact

The project has had a positive impact on the income and living standards of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of the region. They have been able to increase their incomes much higher than the planned target levels. The production of rice has increased significantly after the implementation of the scheme. However, crop diversification has not been fully achieved yet. This will take time, as the farmers will have to be educated on crop diversification. Irrigation has helped dry season farming which provides employment opportunities to tenant farmers and small-scale farmers. This has also helped in arresting migration to other areas during dry season. The secondary impact of the project is that the water from the irrigation canal is also being used by the households for their domestic use. Increased incomes have made it possible for the children to go to school and the family to buy consumer durables. The formation of Irrigation Associations, though the process is slow and many are still unregistered, provides a forum for the farmers to come together for maintaining the infrastructure. The government is also providing training to the association members on skills and knowledge necessary for irrigation farming and also on crop diversification.

The delay in the completion of the project has delayed the benefits of the project to the region and increased the cost considerably. However, despite the delay, the project is now benefiting the region. In order for the region to continue to be benefit from the project, the infrastructure created must be maintained in good order. For this there has to be full participation, in maintenance, from the water users of the region.

¹ From Internet

² From Internet