Third Party Evaluator's Opinion on
Upper Kolab Irrigation Project

Dr. Milindo Chakrabarti
Head, Department of Economics
St. Joseph's College, Darjeeling, India

Relevance

The relevance of an irrigation project in Koraput district of Orissa that is characterized by

- high incidence of poverty (85.11% in 1999-2000 lying below a consumption level of 1US$ a day per capita, compared to 57.24% in the state),
- high dependence on agriculture for livelihood and employment (72.95% of total workers being agricultural labourers as per 2001 census, compared to 64.73% in the state),
- high instability in agricultural production due to frequent drought (coefficient of variation being 15.30 in terms of area under foodgrains during 1978-98, compared to 4.30 for the state),
- high concentration of people belonging to the vulnerable sections of scheduled tribes,
- declining cropping intensity (from 146 in 1985 to 139 in 1998) and
- reported starvation deaths during the last couple of decades

cannot be overemphasized.

Impact

About 35% of the net sown area of the Koraput district has potential for irrigation. 80% of such irrigation potential in the four blocks lying in the command area of Upper Kolab Irrigation Project has been created by the project under review. Thus the potential impact of the project is considerable. Ex-post evaluation report on the project also notes 92.3% of the targeted irrigation potential were achieved during the wet season in 2000, the corresponding figure for the dry season being 59%. Actual area irrigated during dry season, however, has been declining marginally but steadily since 2001 and 2003. It is evident that the planted acreage and yield per hectare received a positive boost from the project. Household income — both in real and nominal terms — has increased considerably compared to that recorded at the beginning of the project, a slight downward slide in real income during the late nineties notwithstanding. Increased in-farm employment opportunities reduced incidence of out-migration during dry season. However, problems exists in terms of

- distribution of water to the fields lying at the tail ends of the canals and
- lack of funds to maintain and repair the existing channels;

Sustainability

Sustainability of a project is conditioned by the capability — both economic and social — of its users in maintaining the assets and thus calls for a sound system for their operation and management. Relevant institutional mechanisms are necessary to ensure the sustainability of the assets generated. The O&M costs, as of now, appear to be a bit too high to be covered from out of the incremental income of the existing users. More funds are necessary to be pumped in from outside towards O&M as a short term measure. Over a longer term perspective, strategies aimed at steady supply of other complementary inputs like credit, fertilizers, extension services, post-harvest storage and marketing facilities are necessary to ensure a higher rate of return on agriculture to the farmers. Adjoining forests also supply complementary inputs to sustain the livelihoods of the potential users. The colour of water flowing through the canals indicate a rapid rate of soil erosion. Unless complementary soil conservation projects are taken up, heavy siltation along the canals may nullify the primary objective of irrigation. Line departments delivering such complementary inputs are to be roped in towards the institution building process. Their participation will help establish

and subsequently, add to the income generation and consequent social capabilities of the “Irrigation Associations” to sustainably manage the assets generated out of project under review.