

XII.A.8. Soil Salinity and Sustainable Agricultural Development in Sugarcane Belt of Western Maharashtra

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Over the past 10-15 years the soil of the fertile land area in the Western Zone of Maharashtra is becoming saline resulting less productive or zero productive. More than half of Lift Command of the region is facing the problem of Soil Salinity. No necessary efforts to arrest this trend and restore the degraded land are taken up on a large scale through collective action, even when there is widespread network of Co-operative enterprises. (Vertical & Horizontal links) in the region. Misuse of water resources and unscientific land management techniques of the farm community in the region has created the problem of sustainable development. The loss of productivity and cost of desalinisation is going beyond imagination of the common farmers. It is estimated that the loss of yield due to salinity, is around Rs. 10 billion only in Sagli and Kolhapur district for the last 10 years. The cost of desalinisation of one acre at the present market price is around one lakh. More than 75 thousand cultivable land area is affected by salinity in Krishna river basin in Maharashtra. It means the cost will reach up to Rs. 7-5 billion. How to recover this loss is the common problem generally raised by the farmers. How to recover and restore the productivity of the saline soil. Today's saline soil was the most fertile land in the region. Government's irrigation policy water management pattern of the lift irrigation schemes and farmers' reluctance in sustainable agricultural development are equally responsible for growing soil salinity in the region. Sugar Co-operatives in the region are the main culprits of soil salinity. They are making the farmers to undertake sugarcane cultivation for the benefit of them.

Protection of common natural resources (PCNR) through collective action is the only alternative left to overcome the problem of soil salinity. Separate institutional and legislative arrangements are urged to overcome this problem. Financial arrangements be made to do-away the problem, farmer's awakening by extension education such as Jal Saksharta (irrigation literacy) Abhiyan (JSA) is suggested. The role of Government in PCNR is more significant. The Command Area Development Act (CADA) be made applicable to lift irrigation commands in the region. River water has been polluted by growing urbanisation and industrialisation in the region. Availability of drinking water even to the people living nearby the river basins will be a grave problem in near future. Health, nutrition, spread of diseases in rural area will weaken the productive power of the human resource, and this has direct implication on the growth pattern of the region. Most of the problems are originating the process of development irrespective of its sustainability, the use and management of water resources could be traced by lack of well defined property rights. Follow up of the proper cropping pattern based on the regional conditions with appropriate institutions and legislative provisions is required for restoring the sustainability.