“My day starts at 5:00 AM. I wake up, cook breakfast and lunch, take a bath and go to school. Once I reach back home, I cook dinner, clean the house, wash up and go to sleep. Every day I have rice. I stay alone.” - Sushma (14) Prakasam district, Andhra Pradesh

Prakasam is one of the worst drought-affected districts in the state. Sushma’s parents, having lost their means to livelihood following successive crop failures, migrated to Hyderabad and are working as labourers in a construction site. She is just one among the thousands of children who go invisible in the 330 million people affected by drought in India this year. UNICEF reports that 160 million children are currently living in drought prone areas, mostly, Africa and Asia¹.

DROUGHT AND INDIA

A drought is an extended period - a season, a year, or several years - of deficient rainfall relative to the statistical multi-year average for a region, according to the United Nations². It is very different from other disasters since its onset is slow and visual damage, less. Nonetheless, the damage done by drought is huge to the tune of widening inequalities, perpetuating poverty and leaving lasting impact on the lives of children.

Drought³ is not just less rainfall, it also is inefficient use of water resources. The immediate effect that drought can have on people are crop failure, lack of employment opportunities in agricultural and allied sectors, losing livestock and migrating to other places to look for livelihood. The most obvious effect that drought has on the life people is lack of adequate access to food and water.

“A scarce natural resource, water is fundamental to life, livelihood, food security and sustainable development. India has more than 18% of the world’s population, but has only 4% of world’s renewable water resources and 2.4% of world’s land area. There are further


² There are different indicators and measured impacts for droughts, so there is scarcely a single universal definition for drought. The UN – SPIDER Knowledge Portal gives this general definition. [http://www.un-spider.org/risks-and-disasters/natural-hazards/drought](http://www.un-spider.org/risks-and-disasters/natural-hazards/drought)

³ Classification of drought: The National Commission on Agriculture in India classified three types of drought: meteorological, agricultural and hydrological. Meteorological drought is defined as a situation when there is significant decrease from normal precipitation over an area (i.e. more than 10%). Hydrological drought results from prolonged meteorological drought resulting in depletion of surface and sub-surface water resources. Agricultural drought is a situation when soil moisture and rainfall are inadequate to support healthy crop growth.
limits on utilizable quantities of water owing to uneven distribution over time and space. In addition, there are challenges of frequent floods and droughts in one or the other part of the country. With a growing population and rising needs of a fast developing nation as well as the given indications of the impact of climate change, availability of utilizable water will be under further strain in future with the possibility of deepening water conflicts among different user groups.

This excerpt from the Preamble of the National Water Policy clearly states how water management is critical for the country. The country’s National Water Mission has, as its main objective, “conservation of water, minimizing wastage and ensuring its more equitable distribution both across and within States through integrated water resources development and management.”

According to the Ministry of Water Resources, around 68% of India is prone to drought in varying degrees. 35% which receives rainfall between 750 mm and 1125 mm is considered drought prone while 33% receiving less than 750 mm is chronically drought prone. IPCC has been warning categorically in their reports over the past few years, the impending disaster looming large over the lives of those dependent on agriculture. Their most recent report in 2014, said that the lives of 200 million Indians from the Indo Gangetic plain will face adverse impact because of the 51% reduction in the yield due to heat stress. The predictions were not wrong.

In India, it has been reported that a total of 330 million people are affected by the drought this year. That is a quarter of the population of India – spread out across 2,55,923 villages in 266 districts in 11 states of the country. According to the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), almost 40% of India’s land is drought affected. Significantly reduced rainfall in the last two years and an already ailing agricultural sector have pushed people to despair. India faced a similar situation several times in the last 15 years. In 2002, 383 districts in 17 states were affected by a drought. In 2004, 223 districts in nine states suffered. In 2009, 388 districts in 15 states were hit. Over 600 million of India’s 1.2 billion people are dependent on agriculture and related means for livelihood. The agriculture sector has been performing at a chilling low for the past few years, with 41 farmers reportedly committing suicides every day on an average since 1995. Migration of the socio-economically deprived, from the largely-agrarian rural India to urban locations for survival had already touched 15 million eight years ago. The drought had magnified these issues a hundred times, with media reports suggesting MGNREGA failures also a key factor. Due to lack of funds to drought-hit states under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), the government released INR 12,230 crore to all states. The amount covered dues of INR 6,700 crore pending from last year as well as payments for the works undertaken in April 2016.

7 As reported in the New Indian Express, 20th April 2016, by Kanu Sarda on drought: http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/330000000-People-Drought-Hit-in-India/2016/04/20/article3389262.ece
Overt dependency on cash crops due to better returns has also been a significant factor in certain areas. For instance, farmers in the Vidarbha region in Maharashtra used to grow cotton, soybean and pulses in their fields. Gradually, cotton began taking over entire fields, adversely affecting the soil quality. If their crop failed, the farmers ended up suffering huge monetary loss. Cotton also consumed significantly large quantities of water, in an already parched land.

Experiencing consecutive droughts is a common phenomenon in India over the past many years, but what has happened in the last few years is the increase in its severity. Two consecutive droughts, lack of implementation of social security measures, poor Minimum Support Price (MSP) for products and landlessness have only complicated matters.

HOW DOES THE DROUGHT AFFECT CHILDREN?

Children are the most vulnerable to the effects of a slow-onset disaster like drought. In October 2002, the UN general assembly called for a special session on children where the members reaffirmed their commitment to create a world fit for Children. One of the commitments very clearly articulates, “Protect the Earth for children. We must safeguard our natural environment, with its diversity of life, its beauty and its resources, all of which enhance the quality of life, for present and future generations. We will give every assistance to protect children and minimize the impact of natural disasters and environmental degradation on them." 

The NDMA guidelines on management of drought (2010), Manual of Drought Management by Ministry of Agriculture (2009) and the Drought crisis Management plan have set clear plans on what has to be done during times like these, especially to protect the food, nutrition and protection needs of the people, the vulnerable, especially children. However, one cannot but question the scale and quality of implementation of these provisions set out.

Children get affected when communities get affected. The effect of drought on the poor and landless and marginalized communities is multidimensional. Lack of access to water (for drinking, domestic and irrigation purposes) or poor quality of water is the biggest problem, which spills over into most other aspects of life. Crop failure and inadequate seeds or poor quality seeds for the next harvest are key issues when it comes to farmers. From April to September, agricultural activities come to a standstill every year for the smaller farmers and labourers, severely impeding their income. The production had fallen from 40 bags of rice per acre to 25 bags this year in Andhra’s Prakasam district.

The loss of livelihood has resulted in immediate financial strain,


KEY IMPACTS ON CHILDREN

- Child labour
- Disruption in education
- Headed households
- Water borne diseases
- Trafficking/migration for cheap exploitative labour
- Malnutrition
- Homelessness (cities)
- Death due to heat strokes
- Diarrhoeal diseases
- Hunger

“Studies have shown that early life exposure to droughts have negative impacts on health, education, safety of children and livelihood opportunities."
causing debt and bondage. The inadequate access to credit in most of these locations mean that the affected population is further pushed into poverty. Subsequent migration in search of alternative income results in the breakdown of family as a unit. Communities are forced to migrate for their survival – it is by no means a guaranteed way out of poverty. The communities witness conflicts over minimal resources, and even basic essentials like nutritious food becomes a challenge. In Maharashtra’s Marathwada alone, reportedly more than 1430 farmers have committed suicide since January 1, 2015, leaving more than 3500 children at the mercy of fate\(^1\).

Though drought is a slow onset disaster, its impact on children’s life could be both immediate and prolonged. Studies have shown that early life exposure to droughts have negative impacts on health, education, safety of children and livelihood opportunities.

### IMPACT ON CHILDREN’S HEALTH

The Indian Meteorological Department had stated:

> Abnormally above normal temperatures can have devastating effects on human health, water resources and power generation and outage. There is a marked relationship between human mortality and thermal stress. During the summer of 2015, prolonged severe heat wave conditions prevailed over Andhra Pradesh and parts of Telangana which claimed more than 2500 lives\(^2\).

Children are much more susceptible to heat strokes during droughts, as dehydration plays a key role in causing fatigue. There have been multiple media reports on children losing their lives to heat strokes.

A 12-year-old girl died of heat stroke at Sablikhed village in Maharashtra’s drought-hit Beed district on Tuesday afternoon, after repeated trips to a hand pump to fetch water. An NDTV report said Yogita Ashok Desai, a Class 5 student, was dehydrated after making her fifth trip to the pump at the request of family members. “As the schools were closed, she went to the nearby hand pump to fetch water for us. We are facing extreme water scarcity,” Ishwar, the girl’s uncle, told ANI. “But she fell unconscious on her way. We took her to the nearest hospital, where doctors declared her dead on arrival\(^3\).”

There are other significant ways in which water scarcity affects children’s health as well. Food insecurity, rise in food price and less nutritious food have a lasting impact on the health of children. India still has the second-highest estimated number of undernourished people in the world. According to FAO’s State of Food Insecurity in the World Report, 2015, India has 194.6 million undernourished people\(^4\).

As per the Rapid Survey On Children (RSOC), more than 40% of rural Indian children are stunted and more than 30%, underweight.

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Malnutrition is the underlying cause of around 50% of child deaths in the country. Drought conditions and extreme heat increase the risk that these children already face.

India as a country has made significant progress in improving the nutrition status of children as reported in the RSOC data. As per the data, the rates of undernutrition in many of the drought-affected states are already above the national average. In a drought context, the risk of undoing the good work done is extremely high.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Stunted (National Average: 38.7)</th>
<th>Wasted (National Average: 15.1)</th>
<th>Underweight (National Average: 29.4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>34.2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
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<td>18.6</td>
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<td>Madhya Pradesh</td>
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<td>17.5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Nutritional status of children in drought-affected states as per RSOC

The 2015 Lancet Commission on Health and Climate Change\(^4\) says some population groups are particularly vulnerable to the health effects of climate change, because of existing socio-economic inequalities, cultural norms, or intrinsic physiological factors. These groups include women, young children and older people, people with existing health problems or disabilities, and poor and marginalised communities.

A study in rural India has shown that when pregnant women are exposed to drought there are detrimental effects on the nutritional status for children, especially on children from lower caste groups, and children exposed to drought in the first trimester\(^{15}\). Much had been talked about the irreversible damage caused by malnutrition during the first 1000 days which has its impact on the health, education and the livelihood options of the child later.

During Focus Group Discussions at Kati village of the Aundh tribe in Maharashtra, it was observed that most households mixed tree leaves like mahui, ambari, phandu etc. with flour and make rotis of it. They would consume it with red chilli pickles during drought season.

However, the Government has clearly chalked out plans to address this. The Drought Management Guidelines of NDMA clearly states that the nutritional aspects of food security will be addressed by the Government\(^{16}\). Considering the nutritional needs of children during drought and the fact that many children drop out of school to

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supplement household income, the guidelines state that Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and the Mid Day Meal (MDM) Scheme in schools will be expanded to cover even children not in school. And that the Public Distribution System (PDS) should also cover the non-target group distributing essential commodities like grains, pulses and oil.

Functional ICDS, MDM and PDS are important buffers which prevent the ill effects of drought in terms of access to food. But the implementation of the NFSA has been dismal in most drought affected districts. Communities have not got their share of pulses for many months through PDS and children survive on plain rice/rotis and pickles for all the three meals and occasionally vegetables.

Inadequate access to and availability of nutritious food would mean that children go to bed hungry and are susceptible to major health risks. Young mothers would be deprived of giving the best start to their babies. This can also intensify the effects of water borne diseases on children.

In 20 villages in Bundelkhand, the functionality of the ICDS centres differed vastly. Cooked food was not provided in all the centres. The supply of supplementary nutrition (sattu) was irregular. The Anganwadi workers were absent in many locations, and the attendance levels of children were also dismal. But, for children in Palukur, eggs vegetables, pulses and grains are provided through ICDS and MDM. These were the only sources of nutritious food for them.

“Children come here every day, as they get food regularly in the Anganwadi. They are given egg four days a week, and rice and vegetable curry on other days.”

Out-of-pocket expenditure for health pushes 63 million Indians below poverty line\(^\text{17}\). In a drought condition, this can get a family into a cycle of debt and leave them without even the little money they earn. The effective functioning of health care systems, especially in drought-affected districts need to be ensured and strengthened by additional funds.

My husband is a daily wage labourer. My eighteen-month-old son Yeshua suffered repeated bouts of dengue. We had to borrow INR 100,000 to cover the medical costs. We borrowed from a money lender at the interest of 5%. I don’t have a job and my husband’s income is used mostly to repay our debts. The food ration from PDS is the only source that keeps us from starvation.

“Aruna (27), Palukur, Andhra Pradesh

Children are entitled to uninterrupted supply of mid-day meals. A
Supreme Court order dated 20 April 2004 makes it mandatory to provide midday meals during summer vacations in “drought-affected areas”.

The crisis to food security after this drought condition poses more threats to children. Families have migrated and many do not have hopes of returning home. Communities have already used up their stock of seed for daily consumption. Unless the government steps up the food security in these areas, children could face difficult times in the coming years too, even if there is a good monsoon.

In the place we live, we have a single bore well which gives drinking water to more than 150 families. The water we get from it is salty, and has fluoride. When we cook rice with it, the rice turns yellow in colour.
- Ruthamma (50), Palukur, Andhra Pradesh

In many drought-affected villages, drinking water is the most pressing concern. In another village in Palukur, around 8000 people depend on one well. In many locations, water is being distributed in trucks. Kandukur, with its 21 villages and around 9000 children, bears the brunt of water scarcity in different ways. In Uttar Pradesh’s Lalitpur district, the only water source is a stone quarry in one of the Sahariya villages. After the activities in the quarry are finished, people wait till midnight for the dust to settle down, so that they could scoop out the relatively clean water for drinking purposes. Consumption of food cooked in contaminated water – sometimes chemically contaminated – poses a major threat to children’s health. Dehydration can be fatal to infants.

A UNICEF note on El Nino’s impact on children says that infants are at a higher risk of heat stroke and easily contract diarrhoea from drinking contaminated water, further aggravating dehydration.

**IMPACT ON CHILD PROTECTION**

Distress migration due to drought situation is one of the biggest threats to children’s safety in both rural and urban India. While seasonal migration provides temporary income relief, it also makes them more vulnerable. Most often, younger children migrate along with the parents. It is estimated that 4 – 6 million children are involved in seasonal migration in India.

Children’s safety during migration is of critical importance, with their protection in the drought-affected site, during transit, and destination – in the context of migration – all peppered with potential dangers to their well-being. Crop failure, lack of livelihood opportunities, drop in income, debts, food insecurity, absence of adequate water sources and high food prices result in families finding other means of livelihood in nearby cities. The drought in 2001 had close to 60,000 people from Bolangir District alone migrating to neighbouring cities.

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and in some other districts, around 15% of the migrants were children below 14 years of age.

According to an IHD - UNICEF working paper, the income from MGNREGA made very significant contribution to children’s well-being, such as reduction in hunger, improvement in health and education. The programme has demonstrated varying degrees of success across the country\(^2\). In spite of a legal guarantee for employment through MGNREGA for 150 days during drought situation; it has not been properly implemented. The increased number of days did not reflect in the budget allocation of the scheme. Data from the drought affected districts have shown that only 1.8% had worked for 150 days. Usually, it takes 30-45 days for the wages to reach the villagers, who struggle due to the delay. “I am waiting for my MGNREGA wages, for the work I finished last year,” says a tired old man at a community meeting in Mopadu Ambedkar Nagar, Prakasam district. For a provision that aims at “enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas”, MGNREGA is yet to realize its potential.

While older children in the age group 10 – 14 are left behind in the village to take care of the old grandparents, younger children often migrate with the parents who are mostly employed in construction work or at brick kilns. These young children are exposed to hazards that the adults are exposed to. The May 2009 report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants declares that “States should recognize that migrant children, especially those unaccompanied, are most exposed to the worst forms of child labour\(^2\).” According to the report, most child migrants work in domestic work, construction labour and other urban informal economy and are often exposed to severe exploitation. The proposed Amendments to the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act have an extremely exploitative effect on children especially in times like drought. The desperate need of families to have a source of income when every other source has failed, has led to more children contributing to family income.

“Both my sons Vamsi (17) and Chitti Babu (15) are working as construction labourers in Hyderabad. They tell me that work is very tough in the city.”

- Koteswara Rao (37), Prakasam district, Andhra Pradesh

Children left behind by parents are juggling between managing the household work, care for elderly and school. In many instances, children become either breadwinners or homemakers or both, in the absence of adults at home.

“I now live with my grandfather, my brother and sister – both younger to me. My parents migrated last month to Hyderabad in search of jobs. I bring water home as soon as I get up, cook

\(^1\) http://www.ihdindia.org/pdf/mahendradev_new.pdf
\(^2\) http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/11session/A.HRC.11.7.pdf
“Every morning as I wake up, I am hit by the fact that we are living a life of debt. My father committed suicide in 2013 by taking poison.”

“Women and children from SC and ST households are often employed on the worst terms and are the most vulnerable to exploitation.”

“Every morning as I wake up, I am hit by the fact that we are living a life of debt. My father committed suicide in 2013 by taking poison. All I can remember about my father is him being stressed, due to all the debts and irregular monsoon. I was 16 then, and I dropped out of school and started working in the fields to support my family and repay the loans. Currently our debt stands at INR 250,000 to a money lender and INR 100,000 to the bank. Only God can help us get through another year of drought.”

- Pankaj (24), Vidarbha, Maharashtra

An ODI paper on Migration, Remote Rural Areas and Chronic Poverty in India says that when chronically poor people migrate they are usually in lowest paid jobs, characterised by poor employment conditions, debt bondage and recruiting agents, limited personal freedom, restricted access to information and violation of human rights. According to the paper:

“... focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews show that, for many chronically poor households, migration provides a way of ‘coping’ without graduating out of poverty altogether. Such migrants are usually in the lowest paid 3D jobs (dirty, dangerous and degrading), characterised by poor employment conditions, debt bondage and recruiting agents, limited personal freedom, restricted access to information and violation of human rights. Women and children from SC and ST households are often employed on the worst terms and are the most vulnerable to exploitation.”

Social discrimination is also at play in different ways in many of the rural villages. Even in the context of a humanitarian emergency like drought, casteism and discrimination keep the most vulnerable away from access to amenities and services.

Caste discrimination plays a key role in preventing lower caste children from accessing water. In one of the areas I visited in Bundelkhand, the only water source installed by the government was in an upper caste village. Children from scheduled caste communities were not allowed to take water from this source. In another village close by, the upper caste community members strongly opposed the idea of Dalits cleaning up the common well as part of...

food, give to all at home and then go to school. Once I come back, I wash, clean up and go to bed late.”

- Mounika (13) Prakasam district, Andhra Pradesh

Some children face situations that are worse off. In India, 41 farmers reportedly commit suicide every day on an average, since 1995. This also means that older children take up the burden of repaying the loan.

“Every morning as I wake up, I am hit by the fact that we are living a life of debt. My father committed suicide in 2013 by taking poison. All I can remember about my father is him being stressed, due to all the debts and irregular monsoon. I was 16 then, and I dropped out of school and started working in the fields to support my family and repay the loans. Currently our debt stands at INR 250,000 to a money lender and INR 100,000 to the bank. Only God can help us get through another year of drought.”

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a ‘cash for work’ program. They did not want the Dalits to touch the water, as they believed it would contaminate it.

- Franklin Jones, Aid Worker, World Vision India

The National Policy for Children 2013, commits to taking special protection measures to secure the rights and entitlements of children affected by disasters. In spite of these provisions, children in disaster contexts continue to suffer under these threats which jeopardize their well being.

**IMPACT ON CHILDREN’S EDUCATION**

The most obvious impact of drought on the lives of children is on their education. Education is one of the main routes to get out of the cycle of poverty but is unfortunately one of the most-affected during a drought. Adolescent children are withdrawn from school to move out of their village to work in other places to supplement family income. In a report by IRRI titled ‘Economic costs of drought and rice farmers’ coping mechanisms: a cross-country comparative analysis’ which included India reported that more than 50% of farmers had to pull out their children out of school due to three reasons – inability to meet the cost of schooling, supplement family income or migrate along with parents24.

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) framework for implementation based on RTE Act acknowledges that the needs of children from migrant families and children affected by disasters have not been adequately dealt with. According to the document:

> Special strategies to enable their participation will have to be developed. Support in developing these strategies, advocating for them and monitoring the continued participation of these children will be important elements of SSA’s focus in the context of implementation of the RTE Act25.

A study done in India stated that children who were exposed to drought while they were in their mothers’ womb performed worse on literacy and numeracy skills than their peers. The study also says that they are less likely to be on track in school and less likely to ever enrol26. Since nutrition is the most important aspect of development in this period of the child, it is necessary to ensure that the vast majority of children in rural India do not lose out on this. ICDS is the single most important programme to ensure nutrition for pregnant / lactating women and also children below 5 years of age.

Recognizing the importance of retaining children in schools and ensuring children enrolled in schools and Anganwadi do not drop out, the Manual of Drought Management 2009, by the Ministry of Agriculture has directed that wherever required, the Government should sanction additional Anganwadis temporarily and provide

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24 [http://books.irri.org/9789712202124_content.pdf](http://books.irri.org/9789712202124_content.pdf)
finance through relief fund. However, in the most-affected Bundelkhand region, in Lalitpur district, many villages did not even have functional Anganwadis. Even if there were few, the Anganwadi teachers were not present and the ‘sattu’ supply was not regular.

However, in many areas children were in school and the Mid-day Meal provided was one of the main sources of food, often the only complete meal for the child. 10.45 crore children have been fed through Mid-day meals in schools during 2013-14 and this remains one of the most important safety nets for children during times of drought. But in a drought situation, what happens to learning? Though enrolled in school, their life is no less than of a child labourer.

‘Soon after we come from school, we go to clean chilli in the yard. We get Rs 12 for cleaning 25 kg of chilli. Our hands will burn. We buy ice from the money we earned to cool our palms. The burning sensation is there till we go to bed,”

- Nagalakshmi(13), Kondamudusupallam, Andhra Pradesh

The children do not have any time to learn or play till they go to bed and begin their work early next morning to bring water from distant places for domestic usage. Of all children enrolled in class 5, about half cannot read at Class 2 level and more than 80% cannot read sentences, according to the 2014 ASER report. Learning disruptions due to seasonal migration, work after school or being left alone by migrating families will continue to add to this number.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The National Water Policy 2012 states that the land, soil, energy and water management with scientific inputs from local, research and scientific institutions should be used to evolve different agricultural strategies and improve soil and water productivity to manage droughts. Integrated farming systems and non-agricultural developments may also be considered for livelihood support and poverty alleviation. According to a release from the Ministry of Agriculture on 30th April 2016, the measures to mitigate the effects of drought included supply of drinking water, food provision, relief assistance to distressed farmers, employment assistance, livelihood diversification and water security and drought proofing.

Climate change is a reality, and droughts and other natural calamities are inevitable in the years to come. Mitigating effects of climate change is something that requires concerted international efforts. On the other hand, what could be done as a country, is to ensure that the precious human capital of the country is allowed to grow and thrive. When children are affected and stunted in multiple aspects of growth, it propagates opportunities for furthering inequalities in an already unfair environment for the underprivileged. Considering that droughts affect children much longer and more severe as compared to adults, it is imperative that its impact on children be taken note of, and acted upon. Unless political will, bureaucratic efficiency and grass root implementation gather momentum in the right direction, India’s generations will continue to suffer year after year during droughts.

In the past, now and in future, it is the children whose lives are threatened. It is too tough to stop the effects of climate change. But it is possible to make decisions today that will secure a life of safety for every child, especially those living in the most vulnerable contexts. The effect climate change has on children today and the potential damage that it can do to children in future, demands an urgency of action.

1. Water is life. As a fundamental right, the government needs to ensure free, regular access to quality drinking water for drought-affected communities. The National
Rural Drinking Water Programme needs strengthening, especially in the context of ensuring regular supply of clean drinking water to schools and anganwadis. Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) need to be strengthened to manage rural water supply schemes and ensure sustainability. Judicious consumption, conservation and regeneration of water resources as an approach implicit in any form of development is mandatory. Measures need to be taken for guaranteeing equitable access to water sources. Higher allocations are needed for the drinking water component in the budget of the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation. Water conservation through ground water recharge, rainwater harvesting and integrated water resource management needs to be implemented with the active involvement of communities and under the supervision of State water resource departments and their subordinate offices. Indiscriminate exploitation of water resources for commercial purposes in drought-prone areas must be prohibited.

2. Meet the nutritional and hunger needs of children, pregnant and lactating mothers so that they do not have to face the consequences of the drought. As suggested by evidences, special focus must be on the nutritional needs during the first 1000 days. Anganwadi centres are the single most important point of prevention of hunger and malnutrition and the only safe guard for children during drought. The government needs to expand the provisions in Anganwadi centres during drought. Match it with essential budgetary allocations. Ensure its functioning with uninterrupted supply of food stock.

3. Since the Mid-day Meals are often the lifeline for many children in drought hit areas, a higher allocation for Mid-Day Meals is required. Expand the provision of Mid-day Meals in schools and include more nutritious food and eggs. Follow the guidelines to include children out of school and provide food during holidays in all drought affected States. Ensuring food security of people is a primary duty of the Government. The NFSA guarantees this, and if executed, would have created food supply even during droughts, and avoided starvation. Implementation of National Food Security Act in all states and universal access in drought-affected states with expanded provisions is urgent.

4. The most crucial safety net programme to ensure life with dignity during times of drought is the MGNREGA. This ensures that children are not left behind alone or left to take care of older grandparents or younger siblings. MGNREGA is also an important tool to ensure protection of children by reducing migration, providing crèche facility at work place, enabling food security at home, enabling children to continue in school and preventing child labour. Additional work-days in all affected districts backed by timely release of funds and increased allocation to meet the delayed payment and additional work-days are essential.

5. Due to internal migration children, especially the youngest (pre-school) and the older ones, miss out on basic entitlements, and development opportunities and also face risks. Extend the services of Anganwadi centres to provide care for migrant children, especially during drought times in migration-prone areas. This needs to be supported by budget and human resources. Ensure migrant children access basic services like Mid-day Meals and other opportunities to continue school. Establish Child Line services in all drought affected districts and migration-prone districts. School Management Committees should track seasonal migrant children to enable their continuing education.

6. There should be active presence of District Child Protection Units to implement the provisions for migrant children in the ICPS and this should be backed adequately by budget and skilled human resource. Strict action should be taken against contractors who engage in exploitative child labour practices either directly or in the supply chain. Addressing issues of migrant children and child labour should be an important part of Drought Management response.

7. Education disruption during seasonal migrations has its own effect on human capital and leaves the children with fewer options for better livelihood. During drought, children drop out of school to migrate with parents or work in their own communities to add to family income or work soon after school without any time for learning. Ensure measures are taken so that children’s educational needs are not disrupted during disasters. Facilities need to be set up so that children continue their schooling even during seasonal migration. Remedial Education needs to be provided for children who temporarily drop out of school.

8. According to NDMA, local authorities are mandated to ensure resources relating to disaster management are so maintained as to be readily available for use and carry out relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities in the affected area in accordance with the State and District Plans. The capacity of the Panchayats should be built on disaster mitigation, especially in water conservation. Panchayats need to play a major role in ensuring that during drought conditions Anganwadis, Mid-day meals, PDS and MGNREGA function effectively.