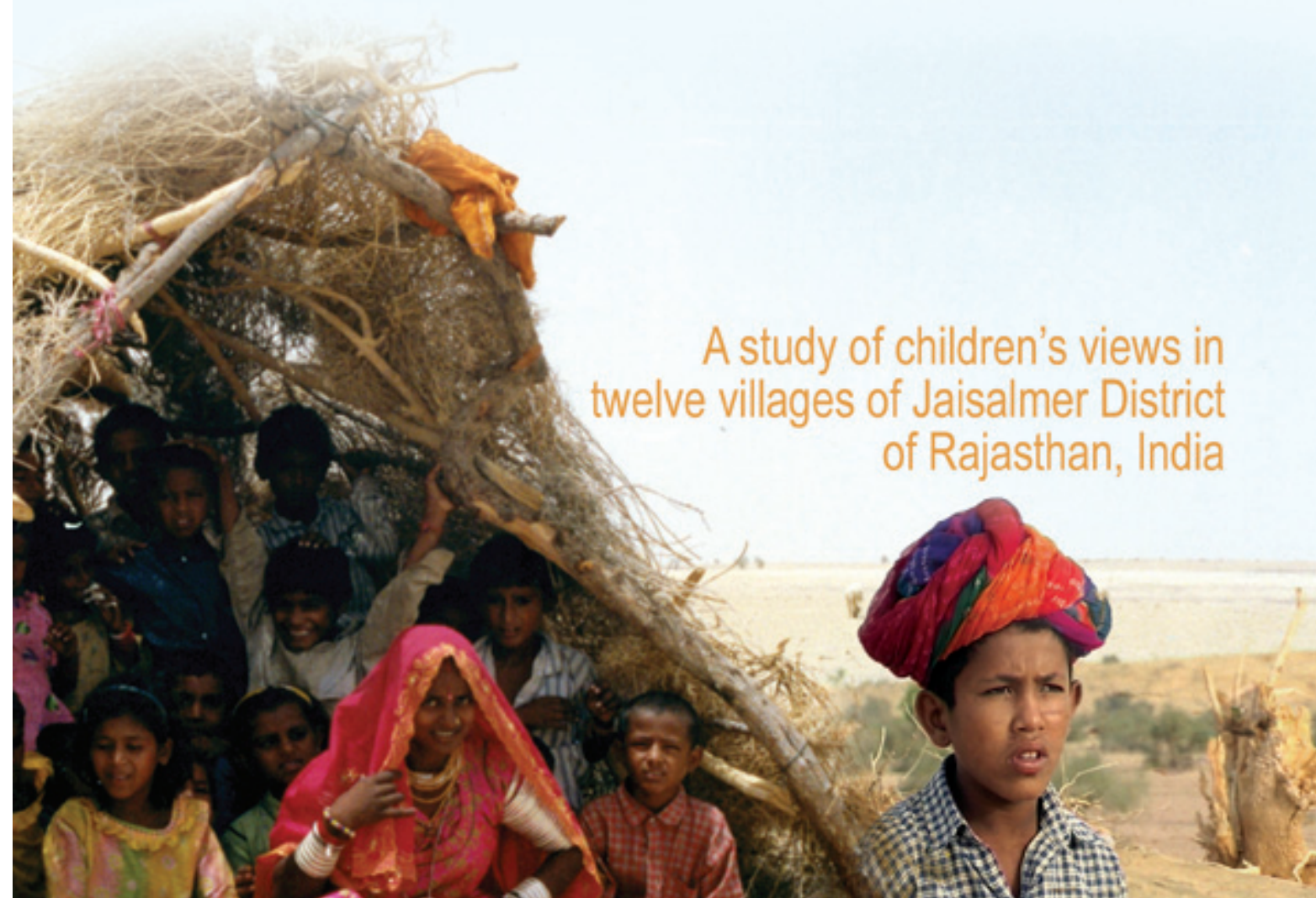


Barso Mhare Des...



Children's Perceptions of Drought

A study of children's views in
twelve villages of Jaisalmer District
of Rajasthan, India



About the title:

'Barso Mhare Des' is an expression in Hindi, which literally means inviting the clouds and rains to one's country. A child, who during his interview expressed a strong belief that the situation of drought would get better if it would rain, spoke these words. This was the most popular sentiment shared by the majority of the children who were a part of this study.

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Save the Children were keen to study the impact of drought on the lives of the children in the remote district of Jaisalmer, Rajasthan. Thus a grant was made to Mr. Sanjay Gupta, Director: Childhood enhancement through Training and Action CHETNA, to undertake, document and publish this study.

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Foreword

The chronic drought in Rajasthan affects everyone. But people are affected in different ways. This may be because of locality, form of livelihood, caste and class. Children are especially vulnerable, and generally girls more so than boys. The affect of nutritional hardship will affect the growth and development of children. Families see their livestock die. Furthermore in communities where challenges may already exist in enrolment and retention of children in schools, drought increases the difficulties families may face in keeping children in school. A chronic drought may cause irreparable damage on educational opportunities. Finally, family structures themselves are threatened as members may migrate and pressures and tensions build up in households. This may be emotionally demanding on children.

This report carries the voices of girls and boys who speak with great clarity and power about the impact of drought. They provide huge insights. They also speak with words of hope and trust. They understand their rights and they hold all us accountable.

Responses to the drought will benefit from making every effort to listen seriously to children. Indeed, emergency responses must take into account the special needs of children and are best able to do so by listening to what the children themselves say.

Martin Kelsey
Programme Director



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Executive Summary





Acknowledgement

To Children and People of the twelve villages of Jaisalmer District who participated in the study.

To URMUL TRUST, UMBVS, SURE, SRIJAMYAHAM, and SDS for providing support and guidance to conduct the study.

To The Business and Community Foundation for lending support in documentation work.

To our family members for their encouragement and understanding.

To Save the Children, UK and ECHO for providing financial support to conduct this study.

To the four child researchers who volunteered their time during holidays and showed a lot of enthusiasm and interest. We are grateful for the sincere effort that these children put into this study.



Highlights

- ❑ Out of a total of 96 children surveyed, 16 children reported having discontinued with school. 20% of girls surveyed are not currently going to school. However, 65% of them had dropped out only after completing class 5. Lack of secondary schools in most villages is the main reason for discontinuing with education.
- ❑ Children spend a lot of time in fetching water. Every third child reported spending more of its time in this activity than any other, with 77% respondents being girls. 65% of these girls belong to the Dalit caste group. Non-availability of drinking water was a problem shared by 6% boys from the Svarna caste group.
- ❑ Most children reported a decrease in their playtime when compared to time available earlier. The playtime of 56 children is 1-3 hours per day. 42% of girls surveyed reported either not playing at all or having no time to play.
- ❑ More girls as compared to boys take a bath daily. 23% children take a bath only three times a week, of which there were more boys reporting this than girls.
- ❑ Two among every three children take meals twice a day, a common occurrence among children from both Svarna and Dalit caste groups. However, the food intake of Dalit children is less nutritious comprising mainly of dry chapattis and chillies. Svarna children had greater access to milk and milk products, though not every day.



- 
- ☐ Every third child reported its parents to be more demanding during drought. Out of these children, 75% respondents were boys.
 - ☐ Almost half the children experience the feeling of sadness during drought due to loss of or separation from their beloved livestock. 14% children (mostly girls) feel fearful during drought owing to animal deaths, non-availability of food and sand storms.
 - ☐ The main responsibility of 35% of the children (mostly boys) is feeding animals, followed by fetching water, the main responsibility of 27% of children, more than half of whom were girls.
 - ☐ Most children hope for a miracle to improve their condition, and 30% try to cope with their difficulties by wishing for such a miracle. 21% of the children, more girls than boys, prefer to talk to someone and vent out their feelings as a way of dealing with the ill effects of drought.
 - ☐ Increased workload, lack of food and water were the most common things that children consider the worst effects of drought.
 - ☐ Out of 96 children, 22% children admitted to finding something good about drought. Among these things were mid-day meals provided in the school, distribution of free fodder and the 'food for work' scheme undertaken by the government and the local NGOs.
 - ☐ More girls than boys were optimistic about the future concerning drought. Two among every three children thought that the situation would get better.
 - ☐ The right to participation was found to be the most popular with children, with 38% reporting it as the most important to them. Of these, 53% were boys and 47% were girls with 77% belonging to the Svarna caste group and 35% belonging to the Dalit caste group.
 - ☐ The second favoured right was the right to development, with 27% children finding it the most important, out of which 70% were boys and 30% were girls. The percentage of children belonging to the Dalit caste group was 58% and Svarna caste group 42%.
 - ☐ For 24% children of the total 96 surveyed, the right to survival was the most important. Among these, 30% were boys and 70% were girls. Class wise distribution was 61% and 39% for Dalit and Svarna caste groups respectively.
 - ☐ The remaining 10% thought the right to protection as the most important, with 40% being boys and 60% being girls. An equal percentage of children belonged to the two caste categories.



Introduction





The Indian state of Rajasthan is the western-most state of the country. The state has international borders on the west with Pakistan, and national borders in the north with Punjab, in the south with Gujarat, in the east with Haryana. The four districts of western Rajasthan, namely Barmer, Bikaner, Jodhpur and Jaisalmer have a large desert, which is called “Thar ka Marushtal” in Hindi. The area is thus drought prone. There are many international, national and local development agencies active in the area. Various development issues have received inputs, though drought relief and drought proofing have received priority.

Jaisalmer, the Western-most district of Rajasthan, extends from 26.01 North to 28.02 South latitude, and from 69.3 West to 72.2 East longitude. It is the largest district in Rajasthan, with a total area of 38,401 sq. km (11.22% of the state) and receives an average annual rainfall of just 165-mm, the lowest in the state. The population of the district is around 5.25 lakhs and there are a total of 550 villages.

It is commonly believed by the people that after every 5-7 years the area suffers from drought, which is also substantiated by climatic records and records of geophysical features. However, the present drought is one of the



most severe to be seen. 2002-2003 is the fifth consecutive year of drought, as is evident from the data available with the state authorities. 80% people of the state are dependent on agriculture and animal husbandry for their livelihood. The damage to crops has adversely affected the livelihoods of people, particularly of farmers, agricultural labourers and cattle rearers. Drought has also seriously affected the availability of fodder.

Land is not a very productive asset, and the landholding size has decreased in the last couple of decades due to poverty and increasing population. This has resulted in a decrease of available livelihood options, and has increasingly brought to fore migration as a coping mechanism. Migration, in the last couple of years, has also increased due to severe drought in the region. This phenomenon of migration not only leads to breaking up of traditional family structures but also burdens the weak and often floundering civic services available in the cities. Often the adults migrate, leaving behind children, the infirm and the old to cope with the harsh drought conditions.

The drought has been severe, and both flora and fauna have been affected. There has been vast media coverage of the drought and the people have used various, both long-term and short-term, coping mechanisms. Support has also been available from government agencies and NGOs. Yet, children who suffer along with families have not been covered in any detail. In this context, it was thought pertinent and timely to address and articulate the problems and perceptions of children regarding this calamity. Therefore, the present study has made an attempt to understand this from the children's perspective, and related their experiences in the present context.

It has been claimed that drought may have severely affected children in various ways. For example, scarcity of food and safe drinking water may have led to a severe impact on the health and nutritional status of children. Access to school may have become infrequent. Stress caused due to migration may have led to problems for children who are removed from their immediate and familiar surroundings, or in case left behind, may have led to erosion of emotional support at the family level. In general, the needs, rights and responsibilities of the children are never discussed or considered an issue to be addressed, which was thus chosen to be the focus of the present study.

The child rights perspective recognizes that children are individuals who can see, observe, think, feel, and behave like any other human being. To develop

On Records...

41,000 villages of 32 districts of the state are affected, 4.32 crore population and 5.42 crore cattle also. Against the available 129 Lakh hectares for Kharif crop, only 60.89 hectares have been sown. The total loss is estimated to be about 4,414 crores. (Government of Rajasthan relief department Jaipur, a note on drought situation in the state and its management (year 2002))



an understanding of their thought process, feelings, and actions vis-à-vis drought was the main objective of the study. Thus the study was planned to understand children's coping mechanisms vis-à-vis drought. The present study is an exploratory research and it is hoped that it would lead to designing and implementation of interventions, which would be more child-friendly. The research was participatory in nature, and children were involved at each stage of the research design, data collection, tabulation, analysis and presentation.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the physical and socioeconomic environment of the children affected by drought in Jaisalmer district of Rajasthan.
2. To find out the various impacts due to drought on child rights, categorized here as survival, protection, development, and participation.
3. To identify various coping mechanisms used by children and the way forward, as seen by the children in addressing these issues (both in the short-term and the long-term).

Methodology

This was a participatory research study, where children were involved in all stages of the research. Four children from the district of Jaisalmer were selected to be part of the research team. This also facilitated the data collection team in developing an understanding of the local sociocultural context.

A total of 96 children (8 - 18 years) were selected purposely on the basis of caste from 12 villages, and then random sampling technique was used to select the children (8 from each village - 50% boys, 50% girls) of Jaisalmer district. Mothers of children between 0 - 8 years, one from each of the 12 villages, were interviewed to understand the impact of drought on their children. Also, 12 in-depth case studies were collected (1 from each village) to reflect upon the most severe effects of drought on children.

The study was conducted using different tools (see annex) of Participatory Learning in Action (PLA). The main tools used were In-depth Interview, Focused Group Discussions (FGD), Problem and Solution Ranking, and Time Line Analysis. Besides these, the selected children were also interviewed with the help of an interview schedule (see annex) that consisted of 21 questions framed with the help of children. These questions addressed the issue of the four main child rights.

Limitations of the study

This study is limited to Jaisalmer district of Rajasthan and may not be representative of the entire state.

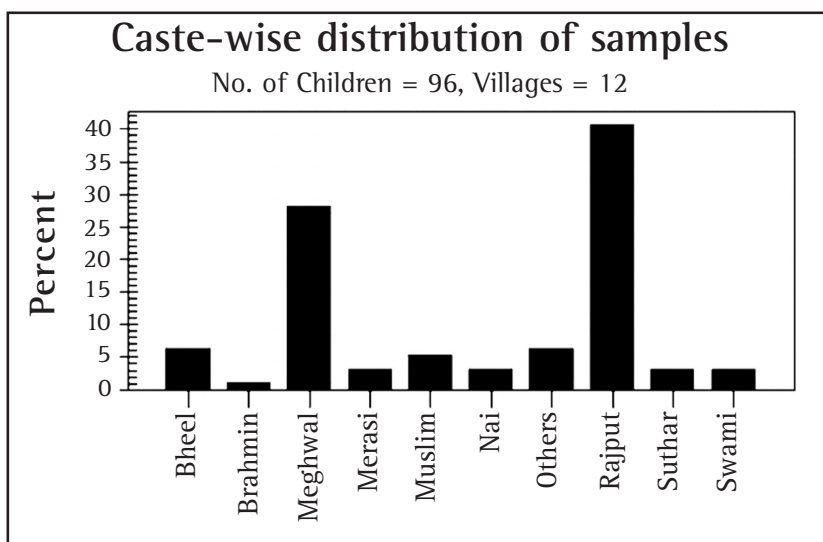
The selection of the villages was outside the control of the research team as this was done at random by participant NGOs.

The villages selected were those where the NGOs were working. Hence there were some developmental activities happening in these villages. Thus the perceptions of the children may have been biased by the work and interaction with the development workers, and they may have had some information that children in the other villages may not have had.

Though effort was made to understand the language with the help of the facilitators (who were children) the perceptual bias may have crept in due to non-familiarity with the socio-cultural context.

The caste-wise disaggregation of data was not possible due to the small sample. Hence two categories, namely Svarna and Dalit, were used to divide the data. The Svarna were the higher caste groups while the Dalit were the lower caste groups¹.

The small sample may not be indicative for all the children of the region.



Lay-out of the study

The present study is divided into five chapters. The next chapter talks about the socioeconomic profile of the region and has an annexe, which talks in detail about these 12 villages. The third chapter details the effect of drought on children, especially their health, and emotional and physical well being. The fourth chapter is about the coping mechanisms used by the children. The fifth chapter has made an attempt to link the effect of drought and coping mechanism used in the child rights framework.



Socio - Economic Profile of the Region



Rajsathan is a state with a rich and varied heritage. The region is rich in crafts and handicraft, which have received patronage from the princely estates of the state. There are various caste and community groups particular to the state, that give it a distinguished flavour.

The carrying capacity of the land is low, so the population is sparse and population density is just 13 people/Sq. Km. The villages are also divided into smaller hamlets called "dhanis". The different castes and classes of the district follow different traditions and customs. As mentioned earlier the present research covered twelve villages of Jaisalmer. People residing in these villages constitute different caste groups, which are Rajputs, Meghwal, Bhil, Nai, Suthar, Swami, Muslims, Merasi, Brahmin, Rana Rajput, and others. The literacy rate among people of these twelve villages is approximately 36.42 per cent.

The social life of people is active and revolves around the central courtyard of the village. Often people gather around trees for long discussions. This was especially common when people had not migrated due to drought. Guests of marriage parties stayed in the village for 3 - 4 days, but now, due to constraints of drought, these activities have decreased drastically. The time available to talk to each other has reduced. This is primarily because people are busy trying to meet the daily requirements of food and water.





Children get little time to play. This is especially true for girls, who either do not get time to play due to household level chores or due to spatial restrictions. Festivals are celebrated with full enthusiasm and children enjoy the main festival of 'Akhateej'; 'Holi' and 'Diwali', Independence Day and Republic Day being the other days of festivity.

Approximately 53 bighas is the average land holding of the region. Mean number of families that are below the poverty line is 19 (approximately) per village. All the caste groups are involved mainly in agriculture and livestock rearing. Since the area has not received adequate rain for almost five years, many people are working as labourers on road works and at 'Nadis' organized by the government and NGOs as drought relief. The main source of living for Mirasi families in particular is singing. People belonging to the caste group 'Swami', 'Bania', and 'Nai' earn their living through performing rituals, doing business, and cutting hair respectively. The main economic activity of Rajputs is farming.

Bajra is the common crop, and the average productivity per bigha is 1 quintal (100 kilograms). Earlier, average animal holding size per village was 3000; it has now reduced to 300 - 400. People live in Kuccha (made of mud and hay) houses and a few have tin/aluminum roofs. Pucca houses are a very rare sight in these villages, schools are usually the only 'pucca' structure one would come across. Often the well to do Svarna community families live in Pucca houses, while the impoverished Dalits live in Kuccha houses.

Infrastructure

All the 12 villages covered have primary schools. Out of these, 4 villages also have secondary schools. Except for 2 or 3 that are linked through a pucca road, others can be approached only by a Kuccha road. Not even a single village has a PHC (Primary Health Centre) in the vicinity. In case of any health problem, the villagers have to travel several kilometers to avail the nearest medical facilities.

Every village has a 'Sabha Bhawan' where elder people (mainly men) of the village gather to meet or discuss issues. Where the village is not supplied by a tube well or a government pipeline, villagers get their drinking water through tankers on a collective basis. In some villages, these tankers of water are being provided by the government or by the particular NGOs working in these villages. There are some hand pumps and taps (if connected with pipelines from distant tubewells) in some villages. Nadis are being constructed in all the villages for water conservation under Drought Relief Programme. Working at these Nadis is one of the major sources of living for the poorest families of the village, where wages are paid as 50% cash and 50% food.

This chapter has made an attempt to paint the socioeconomic and sociocultural context of the villages, the details of which are available in the annexe ***.



Effects of Drought on Children



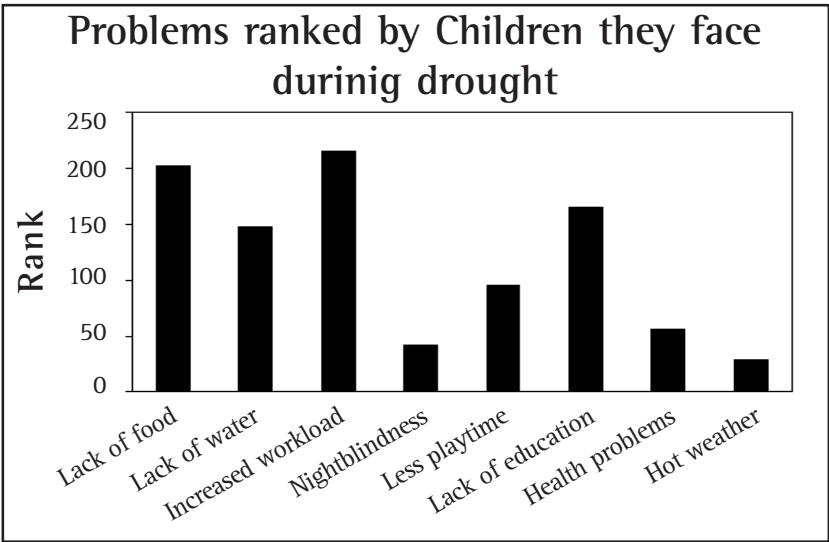


The developmental process of children requires healthy and emotionally conducive living conditions. Drought has challenged these very basic prerequisites and this has had a severe impact on the well-being of children. The present chapter makes an attempt to understand the nature and intensity of this impact on the physical, emotional and social well-being of the children. For the sake of analysis, the chapter is divided into 3 parts. Though it needs to be said that it is difficult, almost impossible, to draw such strict boundaries, as one kind of activity may affect the well-being in all the three categories.

Initially, a problem ranking exercise was undertaken and it was ascertained that children faced a lot of problems. This was to help them voice their difficulties in a playful and therefore a less stressful manner. A lot of problems became visible, and an effort was made to understand them from the children's own perspective. Children reported that their workload had increased due to the circumstances prevailing during drought. Most of their time is being spent in fetching water or feeding the animals. More girls are sent to fetch water as compared to boys. Many a times they get a scolding from their parents if they are not able to complete the tasks assigned to them. Although this was the case earlier, it has increased during the last 5 years of

drought. Many children feel burdened from the overload of daily chores. An interesting fact observed during the study was that the girls did not complain much about the increased workload; rather, they liked doing the work. This attitude could be due to the existing norms in their society that girls are primarily supposed to do household work. Girls are also rarely allowed to study after 5th class due to prevailing customs, but also because many villages do not have a secondary school

and parents are apprehensive about sending their girls to another village to study. Also, since many village schools have only male teachers a lot of the girls feel shy studying there. However, due to drought, girls drop out earlier from school now, as the parents are unable to afford education for both a male and a female child.



Drought and its Impact on the Physical Well-Being of Children

The children are facing the fifth consecutive year of hunger, a situation comparable to the worst the state has seen in the past 100 years. Cereal production this year will not exceed 30-lakh tons, compared to 110 lakh tons in a normal year. According to official estimates, 76 lakh landless households, in addition to small and marginal farmers and farmers with a single crop-holding, are faced with chronic hunger. (Times Of India, 21st March 2003). Not only cereals but also production of fruits and green vegetables is affected.

The low production and poor paying capacity of the villagers has affected the food intake of the families, especially children. A similar situation was also observed in the 12 study villages of Jaisalmer. The main meals of the day comprised of 'roti with mirchi' (Chapattis with chillies). Earlier, children used to

Teeja, a woman from village Kunda, said that of their 140 goats, only 10 were left now. In village Viramani, a man (Uda Ram) has suffered a loss of 95 goats out of their 100 goats, all of which died due to lack of fodder in drought. Not only goats, but also many cows have starved to death in almost all the villages.

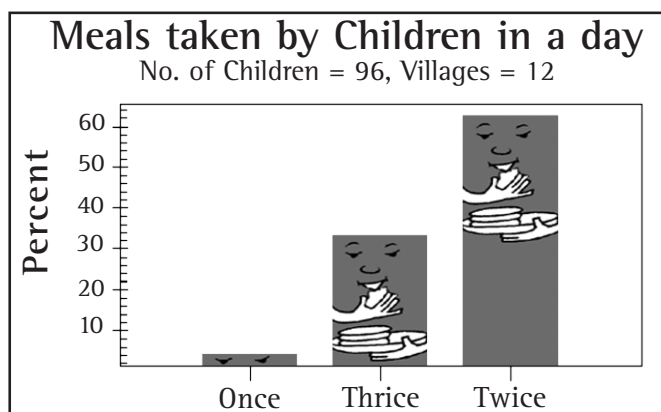


A child in a group discussion in village Kita quoted,
"Mirch roti khayenge toh pait dard hoga hi".
 (If I eat chillies and chapattis, then stomachache is inevitable).

get vegetables with their meals, and 'chhaachh' (buttermilk) was a regular feature of their diet. With scarcity of water, farming has been affected and thus no greens are grown at the household level. Consumption of milk and other milk products has decreased drastically among children, the reason being death of animals (cows, goats, sheep etc.) because of starvation, and lower milk yields given by under-nourished animals. Almost every household reported animal deaths due to drought.

In many households children used to have 4 meals in a day, with two smaller ones and two major ones. Now the smaller meals have all but disappeared and food is available only for two major meals. Children of four families also reported taking only one meal a day. Mothers of children below 8 years of age were of the opinion that children have become weak and look more malnourished as they get only chapattis and chillies to eat, and there is little or no intake of milk and milk products in their diet. Children do not like this diet but, as this is the only food available, they eat it. A lot of children frequently suffer from diarrhea and stomachaches due to daily intake of chillies in their meals.

Anand Singh, an 11-year-old child of village Tota has been suffering from 'night blindness' for the past two years. His meal consists of 'sukhi roti' with 'mirchi' and he has no memory of having green vegetables in his diet since a long time. Due to the poor financial conditions of the family, Anand's condition has remained untreated. He says, "I will become a laborer, work hard, earn lots of money, and will get this problem of Night Blindness treated." Having a strong belief that rains will solve his problems, Anand is quite hopeful and is waiting eagerly for the arrival of the monsoons.



also for animals, as was reported by children and NGO staff deployed in the area.

Jaisalmer also has a low population density and villages are often far from the nearest cities and towns. The villages covered in the sample were in the interior, and the people had difficulty in accessing resources like vegetables and fruits, even for those who had the paying capacity. As a consequence of drought, children's diet is often lacking green leafy vegetables and milk and milk products leading to vitamin A deficiency. This is leading to an increase in the reported cases of night blindness. This is common not only for children but



Lack of food is taking a toll on children’s physical well-being, and may be leading to exploitation. For food, children feel that they could do anything. Two among every three children have food twice a day, while earlier this was as frequent as four times a day, and this is common among any caste and gender. The food consumed by Dalit children is of poorer quality as compared to that of Svarna caste groups.

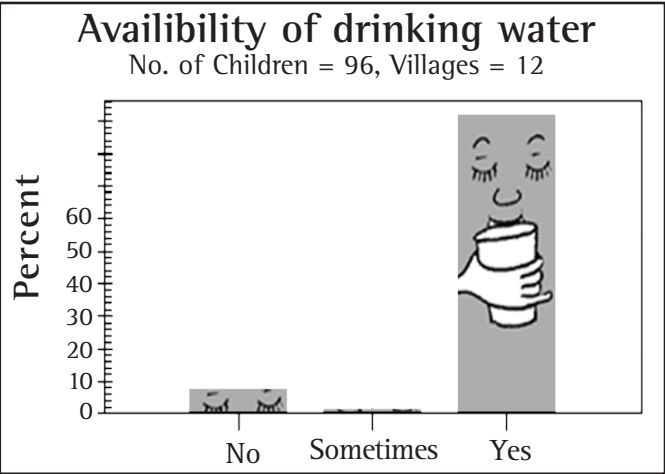
According to a height-weight analysis for boys, 30 (24 Svarna, 6 Dalit) out of 47 boys i.e. 63. 8 % fall in the under-nourished category. Out of these 30, 3 were borderline and could be cases that require monitoring, as slipping into malnutrition would be easy for these children. 16 (6 Svarna, 10 Dalit) boys fall below the average category and only one boy (Dalit) was above average in terms of weight for age percentiles.

Magan khan, a 10-year-old child in 'Meway ki dhani' of village Khuiyala said,
"Mujhe din mein ek baar khaana de do, mein koi bhi kaam kar loonga." .
(If you provide me with even one meal in a day, I will do any work).

This quote from a child of such young age throws light upon the severe lack of food faced by many children.

According to the height weight analysis for girls, 20 out of 47 girls i.e. 42.5 % fall in the under nourished category, and 5 are cases with a higher vulnerability of becoming malnourished. Out of these 20, 11 are Svarna and 9 are Dalit. 18 (11 Dalit, 7 Svarna) girls lie below the average category while only 4 (3 Dalit, 1 Svarna) are above average in terms of weight for age percentile.

The above data implies that Dalit children are better nourished than the Svarna and girls are better than boys. This finding contradicts the basic assumptions of many NGOs. Therefore, more in-depth research may be done in this area.



This indicates that although mal-nourishment is low, the majority of children in Jaisalmer is not getting proper nutrients and is poor in health. The reason behind this is the persistent drought since the past 5 years. The results of the graph can be related to the long time span for which

the children have been facing lack of nutrition.





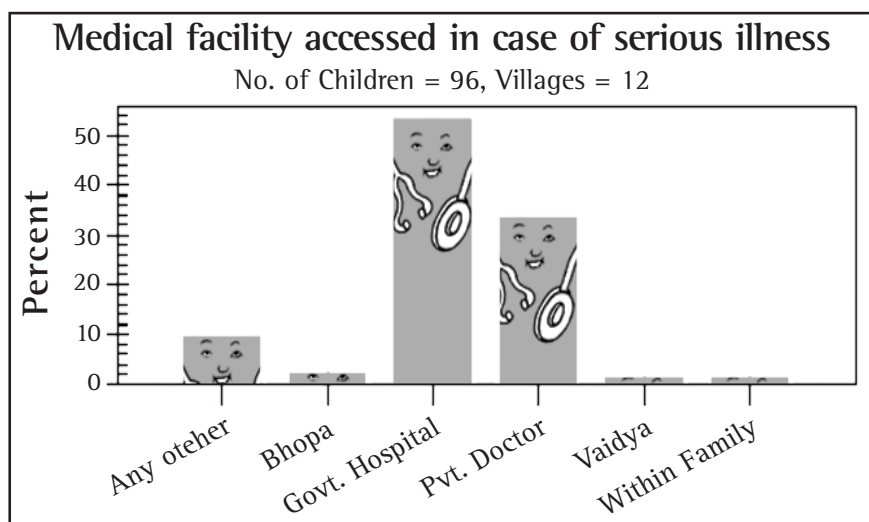
Meway ki Dhani, a Muslim hamlet of village Khuiyala, was one village where the conditions relating to availability and quality of water were very bad. People belonging to this hamlet have to travel a distance of 12 - 13 kilometers to fetch water and the water they get to drink is brown and muddy (same water was given to the researchers to drink). Therefore, the inhabitants of Meway ki Dhani have to control their thirst and other needs in order to save water.

Lack of water resources has led to poor hygiene, as many children are not able to take a bath daily. Usually girls are responsible for fetching water, and have to travel distances ranging from 500 meters to 5 kilometers. The average number of rounds each girl has to take in a day to fulfill the day's requirement of water is 5 - 6. 10 -15 litres is the average quantity they carry in each round. In some villages, access to water is a big problem, as there are no nearby water resources. Consequently, people have to control their thirst or have to postpone other activities that require water in order to save it for emergency use.

It was not physically possible to test available drinking water for its portability. However, the ground water of Jaisalmer is known to be salty in places. In the absence of physical and chemical testing, comments upon the quality of drinking water for the study villages are a question of perception. Children assessed the water consumed as per the taste of the water drunk by them. They often found the drinking water sweet though the research team found the same water brackish and salty.

Shagna Kanwar, a Rajput female of village Odhanian said that she has to share the water with animals for drinking and other purposes also. Dogs take bath in this water. She has no choice but to use that same water to bathe her children. As a result, her children get skin rashes and small blisters pop up on their bodies.

It is a common site in villages to see children bathing at the same place where animals drink water. This may have led to an increase in the incidence of skin disease, which was also the opinion of NGO workers, but no data was collected to substantiate this fact.



Access to health care facilities is also poor. None of the villages has a Primary Health Center (PHC) and villagers have to travel approximately 45 - 50 kilometers to access the nearest health facility. Due to the distances villagers rely a great deal on home remedies for treating any illness. Quite a few people go to a 'BHOPA' (the local witch doctor), courtesy traditional beliefs that are prevailing in the vil-



lages, for treatment of medical problems. People take their children to government hospitals if financial resources are available. Lack of resources compels the villagers to avoid treatment, resulting in endless suffering on the part of the children. The common diseases are water-borne ones like Cholera and Malaria. Tract Infections like pneumonia and tuberculosis were claimed to be common diseases of the villages.

Drought and its Impact on the Emotional Well-Being of the Children.

Emotional support at childhood often determines the emotional well-being of an individual as she/he grows up. Though difficult to generalize, adults may have a tendency to overlook how children feel about a particular issue or if children are going through any emotional difficulty. In the present section, an attempt has been made to understand how drought has impacted the emotional well-being of children. Young girls often help in the household chores and act as surrogate mothers for their younger siblings. This is primarily due to the adults - men and women alike - having to work as labourers or migrant labourers. As a result, children do not receive the care they require from their parents, who stay out the whole day and come back only in the evening. Though not examined thoroughly, the perception is that this scenario has worsened due to the persistent drought.

The access to education has always been a problematic area as there is often only one teacher in the village. However this problem has aggravated now, and cannot be blamed on the lack of teachers alone. There are many parents who could earlier afford education for their children but are now unable to do so due to the financial burden that has befallen their families attributing to drought. Another reason could be that children are now required to fetch water and fodder, act as surrogate parents and seek employment on a daily basis if available. Consequently, many children have dropped out from school. For many children, getting to eat a bit of 'ghooghri' (a combination of wheat and jaggery) is the only reason for attending school. It has been observed that the children in these villages are very keen to get educated, but due to financial crisis in the family, they are forced to suppress this desire.

Gopi is a 35-year-old female and a mother of 8 children living in village Netsi. She reported that two of her sons who used to study in school, had to get their names cut off from there because of lack of financial resources, and have now started working to earn more money for the family.

Loss of livelihood options has led to migration of adult family members and elder children to urban centers in Rajasthan and to nearby states, namely Gujarat,





Beerbal Ram, a 14-year-old boy studying in class 9, says that one of his childhood friends had to leave the village with his family to escape from the persistent drought. Even after two years he misses him greatly and says that his new friends can never take his old friend's place.

Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. Lack of complete family for extended periods of time has led to emotional deprivation for children, which has also been reported by children. The children miss the family that has migrated and may feel lonely and insecure without them. If adults from the immediate family do not migrate, then their friends and other family members migrate, which is also an emotional loss for the children. Not only do children have to face

separation from their family members, but also many miss their friends, who along with their families, have had to leave the village. It was reported by children that though they have made new friends, nobody could take the place of those, parting from whom was inevitable under given circumstances.

Many people in Rajasthan depend upon livestock as a source of living. Hence, one finds domestic animals like goats, sheep, cows etc. in almost every household. A lot of emotional attachment can be seen between these animals and people, especially children.

Every child always has a favorite animal, which he/she treats as special, and is attached to most of all. Separation from their beloved animal also causes distress and loneliness. In the last 4-5 years, a large number of animals has died because of lack of fodder, leading to starvation and eventually death. Sadness and fear has seeped into children due to witnessing such disturbing phenomenon as death. When asked to share their most upsetting experience in the last one year, many children reported the death of animals.

Sometimes, people migrate with their livestock to neighbouring states in search of fodder. Though migration of livestock may prove to be beneficial for the family, it may lead to loss of emotional ties that the children form with some of their favourite animals, not to mention family members. During Focused Group Discussions, the children often reported that the loss of favourite animals to play with makes them sad and depressed.

Children are individuals and have their own opinions, which are seldom sought. Like adults they too have to deal with many social, emotional and physical problems during a drought, but do not generally get enough encouragement to share their difficulties.

Rakhu, a 10-year-old girl of village Virmani, has been taken out of school as she has completed class 5. Since Rakhu's parents have to go for work, the sole responsibility of the house is on her shoulders. She has to cook for the family and has to fetch water from about 1 km, due to which she gets blisters on her hand. If she is not able to finish these tasks on time, her parents abuse her and beat her. Education is very important to her, and she wants to go back to school but her parents do not permit her.

Different thoughts that a person has regarding a particular situation never occur in isolation. Always accompanying them are feelings that arise from those thoughts, and are attached to the situation by an individual. Similarly, children in these

villages have many different feelings associated with drought. A large percentage of children feel very unhappy during a drought because of the increased workload, scarcity of food and water, and also due to unhappiness of their parents. Many children feel fearful when they see animals dying with hunger or by the eerie sounds of the sandstorms. Punishment that would be inflicted upon them by their parents due to non-completion of work is another reason that contributes to the fear felt by these children. The never-ending drought and long wait for the monsoon has made a few of the children absolutely hopeless about a better future, rainfall and getting to eat fruits and green vegetables.

“Aandhi ki aawaz se darr lagta hai.”

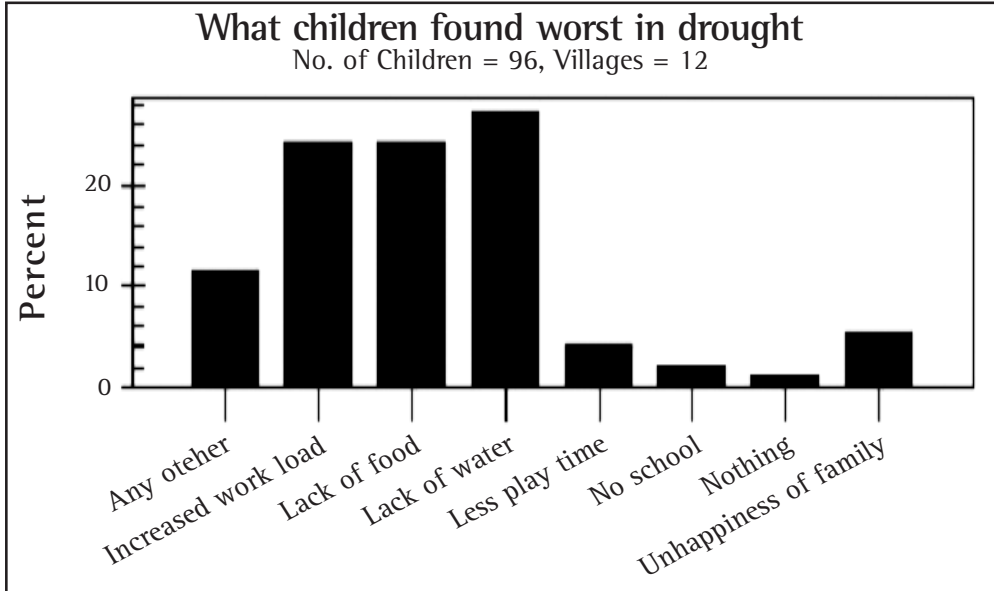
(The sound of the sandstorms scares me).

This was told by Rakhu, a 10-year-old girl belonging to village Virmani.

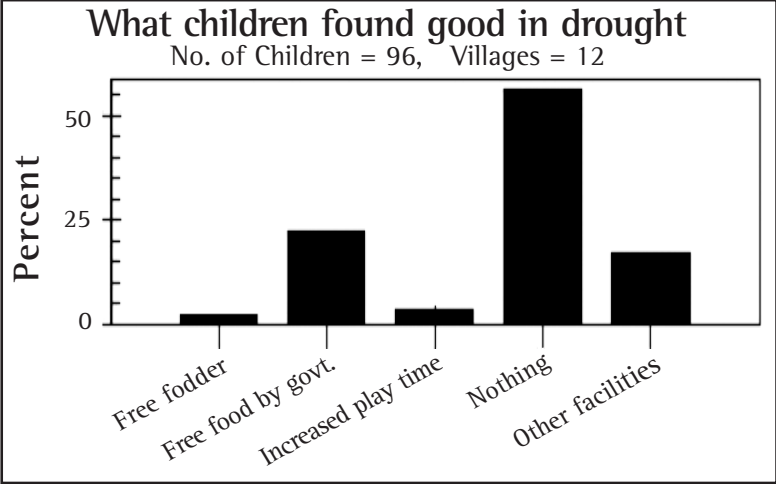
Salma, a 10-year-old Muslim girl of village Kailawa said

“Pashu marte hain aakaal mein, isliye darr lagta hai.”

(I feel fearful as animals die during drought).



3 out of every 4 children were aware about drought and felt sad during the drought. 14% of children, mainly girls, expressed that they feel fearful thinking about the death of animals, non availability of food and the sand storms. 30% of the children said that only a miracle could make things better (they hope for a miracle to happen). 21%, mainly girls, had expressed that they cope with the situation by talking to someone else (friends, parents, sarpanch). Almost half the children expressed they feel sad due to the loss of cattle/livestock because of drought during the last one year.



Although half the children expressed that they didn't find anything good during drought, 22% children appreciated the provision of mid-day meal (Ghooghri), free fodder, food for work provided by the Government during drought

Drought is a very tough and difficult situation that the children have to deal with. Though difficult to generalize, often people from rural India find something good in the most adverse of circumstances, which is true even in the present case. Although most children do not like anything about drought, there were children who admitted finding something positive in it. For example, some said they like droughts due to the free food and free fodder provided by the government and NGOs. A few even said that they get more time to play, so they liked the drought. This was primarily as they

had little responsibility of going to school, and in families where animals had migrated, collection of fodder was no longer a job that required doing.

The emotional well-being of the children is thus getting adversely affected by the drought. Children often fear drought, especially the sight of dead animals, and find drought very disturbing. The decrease in adult and peer support is also reported by children, which may have long-term impact on lives of children.

Drought and Social Well-Being of Children

The society teaches the social customs to children and prescribes and proscribes accepted patterns of behaviour. Children start to understand these at a young age and then try to emulate them. This behaviour is often influenced by the socio-cultural and socioeconomic contexts. Drought, as a predominant feature in the lives of the people of this area for the past 4-5 years, has thus

Rekha, a 12-year-old girl studying in class 4, belongs to the Meghwal community of village Khuiyala. Every day she wakes up at 7:00a.m., freshens up and takes her tea, after which she mops the house. Around 10:30a.m., Rekha goes to school from where she comes back at 4:00p.m. and immediately goes to fetch water. During holidays she goes to fetch water in the morning, which takes her about 3 hours, then she takes her afternoon nap and again in the evening goes to fetch water. Then she prepares dinner for the whole family at 7:00p.m. and takes her meal at 8:00p.m. Around 9:00p.m. she goes to bed, and starts with the same routine the next morning.



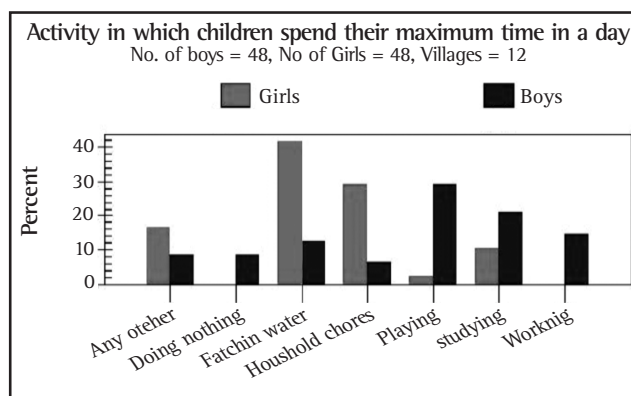
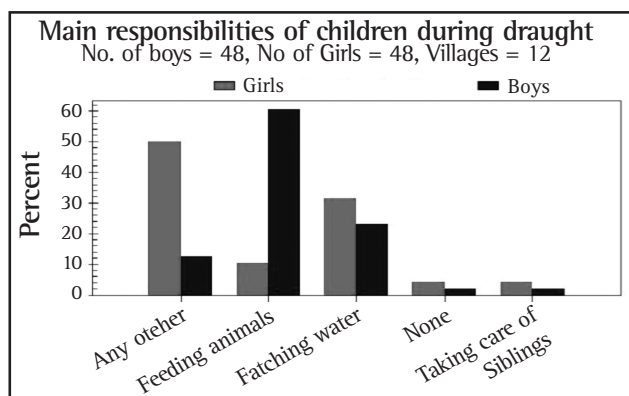
created patterns of behaviour which lay stress on increased workload even for very young children. This is one of the survival strategies that the people have adopted at the family level. These strategies, though, are having an effect on the lives of the children.

The daily routines differ for the girls and boys. For example, not many boys go to fetch water. Similarly, the load of work is more on girls as compared to boys. Where, on one hand, girls have to help in household chores and in looking after their younger siblings, very few boys undertake such activities. Boys spend most time either in playing or feeding the animals. This gender bias exists at the time of good rains too. However, the situation has deteriorated owing to the almost perpetual presence of drought. While boys can go out to work and provide monetary support to the family, girls are expected to stay at home and do household chores.

More children from the Svarna caste groups said that their workload has increased due to drought. The main reason for this could be that Svarna caste group children earlier did not have a heavy workload, and now in times of drought this has increased to a certain extent.

Jagmal Singh, of village Didu, is a 12-year-old boy studying in class 6. He wakes up at 5:00 in the morning, freshens up and takes his morning tea. Around 6:00a.m., he takes his sheep and goats for grazing and leaves them there. This task takes an hour to finish, and by 7:00a.m. Jagmal Singh is off to his school, where he stays till 12:00 noon. 12:00p.m. to 2:00p.m. is his resting time, after which he goes to play for almost two hours. At around 4:00p.m. he takes his cows to the cattle camps for fodder. After bringing the cows back, he goes to get the sheep from the grazing place, where he had left them in the morning. Almost two hours pass away till all the animals are back at home. He then again goes to play for an hour or so. After coming back home, he fetches water, takes his dinner by 8:00p.m. and goes to bed at 9:00pm. Jagmal Singh follows the same routine almost every day.

Financial crisis in families has forced many children to work in exchange for money or food. Sheep rearing, working on road construction work, and at 'Nadi' (an earthen embankment for conserving soil and water) are some of the jobs children have taken up to lessen the burden on their families. This



Every third child expressed that she/he is spending most of her/his time in fetching water. 77% of all children fetching water were girl children, of which 65% belong to the Dalit caste. And interestingly, around 6% Svarna children expressed that they don't have availability of drinking water whenever required.



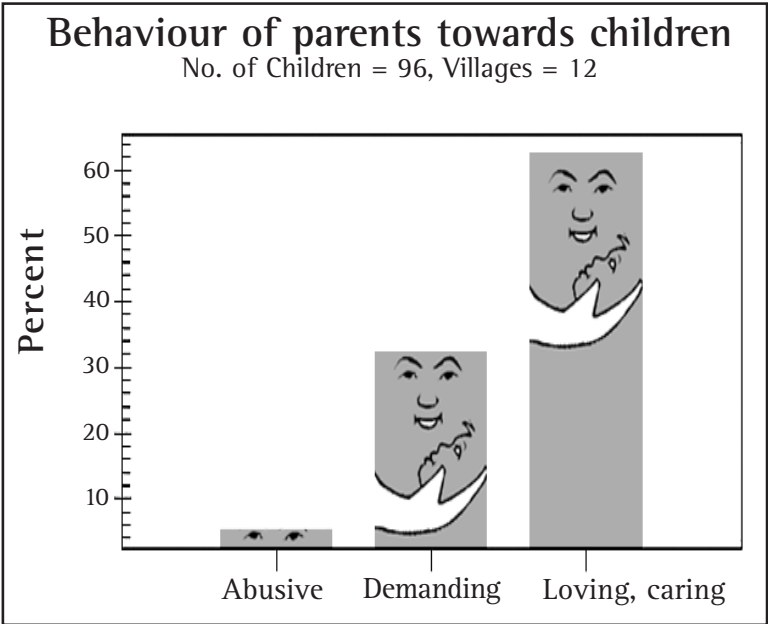


tends to affect their education as children have to drop out from schools to undertake work on a full time basis.

There are Dalit communities like Mirasi in the study area who are internationally renowned for their cultural performances. These families represent India and Rajasthan during the festivals abroad. Children, being the main stakeholders in performances, enjoy the status of celebrities during performances. These families survive on the social invitations they get during marriages and similar occasions. Due to

drought, the invitations have stopped coming now and they do not enjoy the same status any more. Having been reduced to begging for their survival, drought has damaged the self-esteem of these children. The confusion on these children’s faces because of this dual status was evident during focused group discussions.

In villages an interesting finding that came out during this study was that parents are more loving and caring towards girls. This was a sentiment that required contextualization as girls do not expect parents to be loving and caring in a gender-biased society. Therefore even a little concern was seen as care and concern. This also needs further investigation by more studies in the area. Boys reported sharing more abusive and demanding relationships with their parents. This is because many parents ask their boys to earn money for the family. Every third child expressed that their parents are more demanding during drought, out of which 75% respondents were boys and most of them were school going. Caste was not seen to be playing any role.

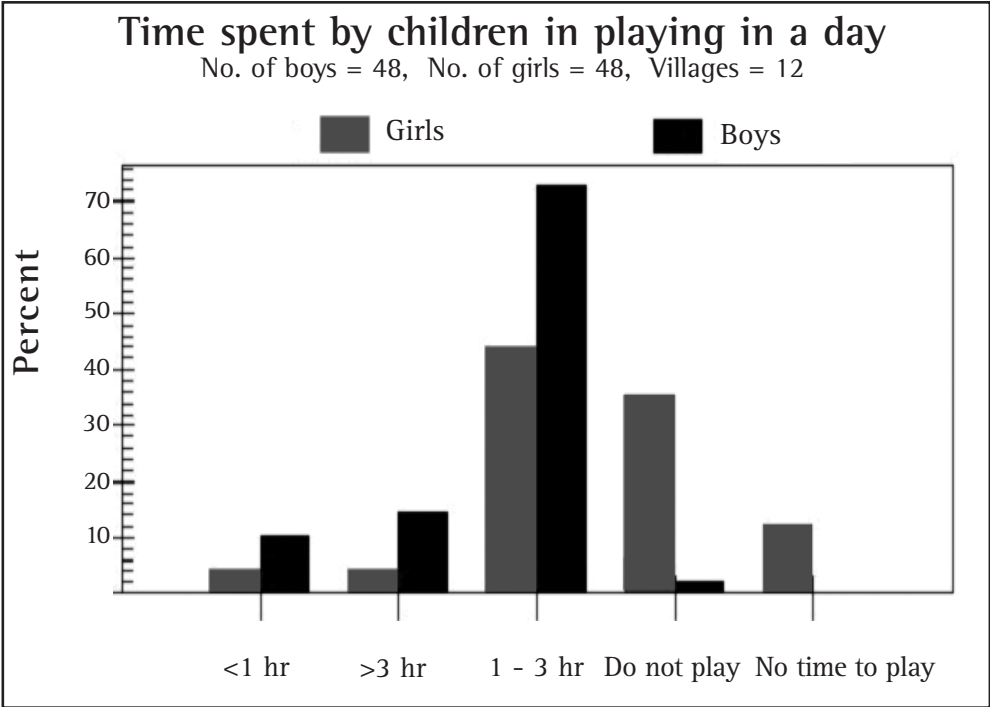




Many a time due to small age or lack of employment opportunities, they do not get work and hence become victims of punishment inflicted upon them by their non-empathetic parents.

Children’s playtime has been greatly affected due to increased workload upon them. Traditionally, girls do not play much. Even if they play, it is mostly indoors, and the game they play is called ‘Gittey’ (a game played with small stones). Out of those who do play, many shared that nowadays they are left with no time to play, as they have to take care of the house, their younger siblings, and have to help in household chores. Boys reported that the number of games has reduced, ‘Kabaddi’ and cricket being the only main outdoor games they play now.

Festival time, marriages, and national holidays (26th January, 15th August) are the few occasions that are eagerly looked forward to by the children. This is the time when the whole village gathers to celebrate, and there is enthusiasm and excitement all around. Children love to attend these functions. However, time that was traditionally devoted to these occasions has now decreased. During marriages, the groom’s marriage party used to stay at the bride’s village for three to four days. But now people try to leave the village on that very day, as taking a holiday from work means no wage for the day and hence less food to eat. Also, the brides’ parents find it difficult to entertain many guests over 2-3 days. The number of invitations sent to people has also reduced due to the host’s inability to feed a large party (as reported by the old people of different villages).



56 children expressed that they play between 1-3 hours per day. Children shared that the time has reduced during drought as they used to play more during the rainy season.





Thus it is seen that children are getting fewer occasions to interact with people from other villages. This may have an impact on their ability to build interpersonal relationships at later stages, especially given that quite a few no longer have the support of their parents or peer groups.

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that the well-being of children is under threat due to drought. They are facing problems at physical, emotional and social level. The nutritional status of the children has been affected with nearly 50 per cent of the children being afflicted with malnourishment. Migration of both adults and livestock has become common. This has reduced available adult support and intake of milk and milk products has also decreased. Drought has had an emotional impact on children, with younger children reporting that they are scared of strong winds, sights of dying or dead animals and noise made by sand storms. The drought has had maximum impact on girl children from the Dalit caste groups. School going children have also been victimized as this meager opportunity (though now a fundamental right), is also no longer available to them. The way these different issues have had an impact on over all rights of the child is discussed in detail in the next chapter.



Coping Mechanisms of Children Affected by Drought





Children as individuals have made attempts to cope with the calamity of drought both personally and at the family level. These coping mechanisms have had a detrimental effect on the well-being of the children, as the chapter further investigates.

Much as drought has brought with itself problems and issues of concern, human beings have also devised coping mechanisms to tackle them. These

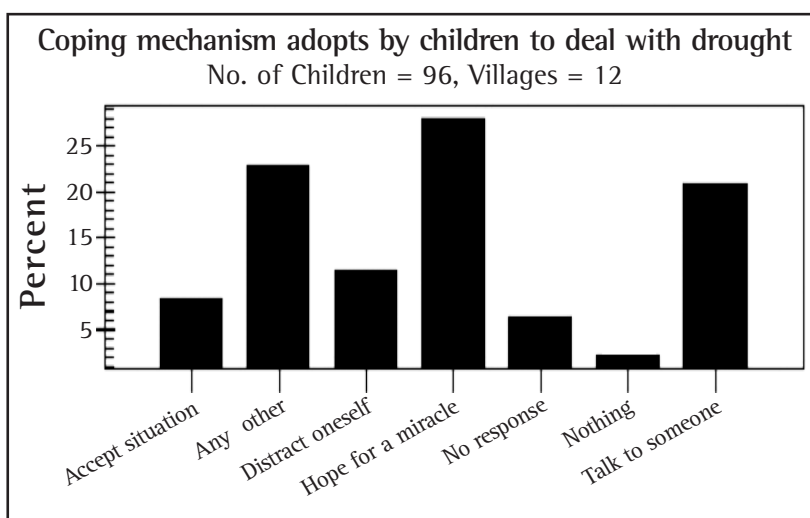
"Bhookh lagti hai toh chakkar bhi aate hain, fir main so jaata hoon. Jab bhi bhookh lagti hai, main aise hi karta hoon".

(Hunger makes me feel dizzy, and I go to sleep. This is what I do when ever I feel hungry, as said by a boy of village Tota).

attempts are not confined to adults alone, even children have made an attempt to cope with this calamity. The present chapter thus makes an attempt to understand the coping mechanisms used by children.

As children are dependent on adults for their well-being and survival, stress on the providers also reflects as stress on children. This strain further gets magnified in case of mass scale migration of adults at the village level. This is also related to the increase in workload and meager, poor quality and irregular nutrition. Prior to drought, daily nutrition included green vegetables, milk and

milk products and cereals. Severe drought has led to decrease in livestock and availability of edible greens. Thus the daily intake is now often restricted to cereals and chillies. Earlier food was consumed as two major and two minor meals every day. Now it is often restricted to two major meals, while the minor meals are dependent upon availability of food at the household level. When children feel very hungry and food is not available, they may go to sleep to avoid the hunger pangs.



Gender disparities in allocation of food nutrition at household level have become more severe with drought. The eating order usually starts with elderly male members, followed by boys, then girl children and lastly the women of the house. Children who are below 8 years old are dependent upon their mothers to a great

A 12-year-old girl of village Khuiyala said,
"Pehle maa hamare bhaiyon ko khana deti hain, fir mujhe khaana milta hai, aur sabse aakhri main meri maa khaana khaati hain".

(My mother gives food to my brothers first and then I get to eat. My mother takes food at the end).

extent. Their mothers reported that sometimes they have to remain hungry in order to feed the children. While earlier, sufficient food was available and the family

members in the lower eating order had enough to eat, this was not universally true now. Sometimes families faced a problem when there was nothing in the house to eat. Then attempts were made to borrow from the local grocer or neighbours. Drought being a time of constraints for everyone, borrowing was not an easy option. The local grocer evaluated the repayment capability before loaning, and the neighbours measured their household needs on a priority. Thus, in case of shortage of food, sometimes families had to rely on water as the only source of nutrition for up to two days.

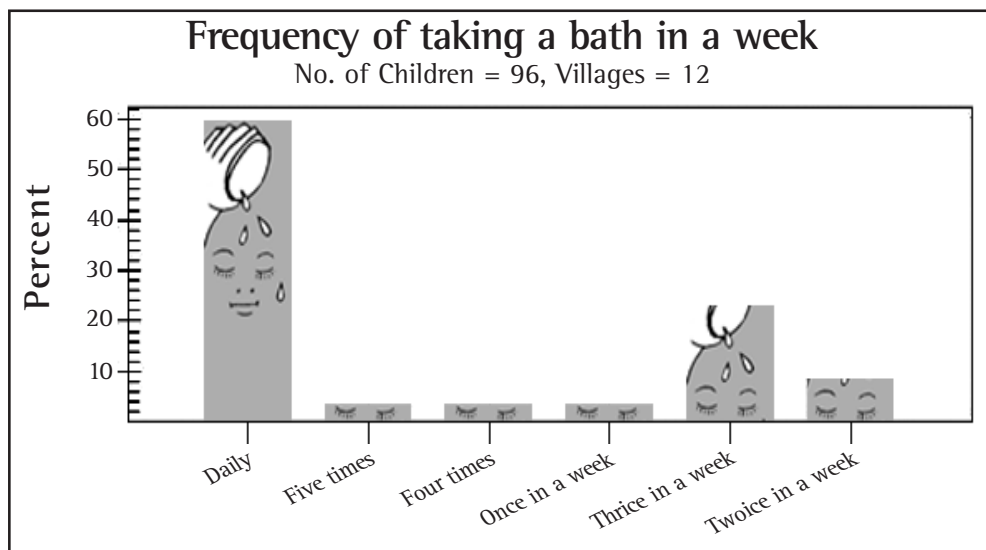
Many of the children also consider working for money or food a good option to deal with the problem of hunger. Government 'Nadi' and road

A 14-year-old boy of village Kita said,
"Kaam nahin karenge toh khayenge kahan se?"
(If I do not work, from where will I get to eat?)



construction are the options where children get work informally, while the NGO sponsored work does not encourage child labour. Children feel that if they do not work, they will not have enough to eat, and therefore work is a viable option for them to eat enough. However, many children cannot contribute to the family income in this manner due to their age. Relief works are not permitted to employ children, and those who do secure government employment are often ejected during supervisory visits. Thus young children have no option but to depend on the family for their nutritional requirements.

Affecting the children most is the problem of lack of water. To cope with this, children don't take a bath daily, which they used to earlier. Out of 96 children interviewed, 41 per cent do not take bath daily. Frequency of bath, however, ranges from five times a week to once a week for different children. Many children, especially boys from the Svarna caste groups, shared the fact that they do not drink water freely as mothers also keep a check on their consumption. As girls are more closely associated with fetching water, they more commonly take a daily bath, which is often at the source of collection of water. Lack of water for daily bathing purposes may have led to an increase in skin diseases. Though this was outside the purview of the present research study, it may require investigation and programmatic support.



59% children take a bath daily, out of which there were more girls as compared to boys. 23% children bathe thrice a week, with equal number of Dalit and Svarna. More boys than girls fall into this category. The main reason cited was that girls are mainly involved in fetching water, hence they take bath at the site of collection of water according to their convenience.

As adults get work at construction sites, children have to share an increased workload at home. To ensure availability of grain and crop in the house, the women go to work to earn and be able to provide food to their children. The most common work done by children at home is to fetch water. With drought, the resources of water

have become scarce, and children have to travel longer distances to collect water. This increase in workload with decreased nutrition is an additional burden for the children.

Drought has also taken an emotional toll on children. Lack of regular food and emotional support at the household level and constant atmosphere of restriction on intake has made children restless with the situation. Almost all children feel emotionally deprived. Feelings like sadness, fear, anxiety, anger, and hopelessness grip the children. This is the time when children need adults

to understand them, care for them, and protect them, yet they are not available because either they have migrated, or are working during the daytime, or even when available, are worried about the survival of the family and hence are irritable. Many children share these feelings with friends and peers. Sadly, quite a few children reported discussing these emotions for the first time, and that too with the researchers who were complete strangers for them. However, after talking to someone, the children felt better (as reported by some children in their introspective report taken at the end of the interview schedule). Some children reported that they articulated their problems with

the local leaders, thus the drought may have had a positive impact by making them bold enough to share their feelings with local governing and political authorities.

"Hum apni pareshaniyan sarpanch ko bata sakte hain taaki woh aage sarkaar aur fir sanstha tak pahuncha sake".

(We can tell our problems to the village Sarpanch so that he can forward them to the organization and the government).

The older children, who understand the issues better but feel helpless about the situation, feel upset and often vent their anger on inanimate objects. The situation is out of their control and hence they feel incapable of handling the problems. The younger ones try distracting themselves by indulging in play. Playing with their friends, taking their goats or sheep to the jungle etc. are the kinds of activities children immerse themselves into to avoid the disturbing drought-related thoughts. This does not help them much as the thoughts return to their minds as soon as they come back home.

Children also resort to praying to Gods for rains and a change in the situation. They are eagerly waiting for rains this year - and hope that the Almighty will grant their wish. The rains are linked with good times, as is also evident from the fact that more than 70 percent children preferred monsoon time to other seasons.

"Kabhi - kabhi paani nahin milta toh dusre gaon bhi jaana parta hai."

(Sometimes if we do not get water, we have to go to another village, as told by a girl in village Lakhmana).

Beerbal Ram, aged 14, feels especially angry during the time of drought when he sees his mother and father unhappy. To overcome his anger, he locks himself in his room and hits his pillow with his fists as hard as he can. This helps him in venting his angry feelings.



Anand Singh of village Tota, aged 11, said,
"Yadi jamano ayego, to paisa ayega, to sab theek hoga"

(If rains will come, there will be money and everything will become alright).

Lalu of village Kunda, aged 12 years said,
"Ab toh sirf jamano ke aane pe hi sab theek ho sakta hao."

(Only rainfall can make things better).

Children thus accept the situation as they feel helpless, and this is by far the most common strategy to cope with drought. Long periods of drought have made these children accept the hardships and they have now become used to these tough conditions. They often feel that accepting the situation is the best that they can do. According to them this is the best way to survive. It was found that, as compared to boys, girls were more optimistic and hopeful about the situation getting better. Though the study has not made an attempt to

understand gender disparities in emotional strength, it may be a n issue requiring further research.

The preceding paragraphs, data, and case studies have shown how children have made a deliberate attempt to cope with the problem of drought. The coping mechanisms have made them emotionally vulnerable. They

are trying to shoulder problems, both emotional and physical, which in normal circumstances they would have faced in adulthood. Girl children, especially children from the Dalit communities, are facing severe disparities in allocation of nutrition at the household level. The coping strategies used by children have led to deprivations in enjoyment of their childhood and huge efforts would be required to compensate these, if at all. Yet, in eternal optimism children also hope for a better future - and monsoons.



Two out of every three children (mainly girls) were optimistic and think that situation will get better.



Conclusion





The present study has brought to the fore many interesting perspectives of how drought has affected the lives of children. All the findings can be linked up to the rights of children, which are here grouped into four categories, relating to survival, protection, development and participation.

The effect of drought is visible on all children but it was found that caste, gender and attendance at local school have a varied role to play. Thus, the degree of severity of effect of drought, its understanding, perception and the coping mechanisms employed are influenced by these criteria.

In the present study there were two main caste groups in Rajasthan, namely the higher caste groups or the Svarna, and the Low caste groups or the Dalit. Disaggregating the data along these lines, it was found that out of the 96 children in the sample, 47 were Dalit and 49 were Svarna i.e. 49% and 51% respectively.



Drought and Right to Survival

The right to survival includes those dimensions of child rights which include food, nutrition, health, shelter and other essentials required to survive.

Food and Nutrition

There have been numerous studies citing how gender influences the right to survival of children. The present study has attempted to add another dimension of drought to the scenario. As mentioned in chapter 3, though, more boys than girls were found to be falling in the undernourished category. This was quite an unusual finding and requires more in-depth research, as generally it is believed that the problem of lack of food had more severe effects on girls, as many of them get to eat food only after their brothers have been fed. Gender disparities in allocation of food and nutrition get exacerbated during natural calamities like drought. Two among every three children in the study sample have meals twice a day, irrespective of their caste and gender.

However, the quality of food differs among castes. While the meals of some Svarna children regularly consist of 'chhaachh' and curd, Dalits rarely get to have milk products. This is substantiated by the fact that Dalit children gave their highest ranking to the right to survival.

Water as a commodity is scarce in drought-affected areas, and often its use for personal hygiene gets affected. In the present study, 23% of total children take a bath only thrice a week due to non-availability of water. However, the number of boys who do not take bath daily was more as compared to girls. The reason for this could be that, as a majority of the girls is involved in fetching water, they take a bath near the particular water source.

Mothers of children below 8 years of age were also interviewed to understand the impact of drought on their children. All the mothers reported not





being able to provide milk and milk products to their children, which was possible earlier. Due to drought, their children have become weaker. A majority of these ladies go to work, and therefore are not able to give quality time to their children. According to them, their children are among the worst-affected in drought. Lack of food, water, proper clothing and lack of education are the problems faced by their children. Most of the mothers wanted the facility of good food and proper clothing for their children. They believed that these needs that are important for the survival of a person should be fulfilled first. Few considered education important or wanted to send their children to school.

Drought and Right to Protection

The Right to protection covers safeguards against abusive environments, both physical, emotional and neglectful.

Every third child shared that their parents become more demanding during drought, of which 75% respondents were boys. The reason behind this fact is that boys are expected to provide monetary support to the family, which is not an easy task. The age of children acts as a big obstacle in getting them work. Inability to earn makes these children a victim of their parents' punishment. Not only boys but girls too face the threat of being abused if the tasks assigned to them by their parents remain unfinished. Physical abuse has increased as the parents are also facing the psychological deprivations and mental tensions of drought. Thus, the right to protection, which involves providing a safe and conflict free environment, is being seriously affected.

For half the children, the feeling of dejection has become a dominant part of their lives. This is owing to the fact that a lot of animals have died due to starvation in drought. Children have to go through mental torture when they see such disturbing phenomena of death and have to experience the loss of their beloved pets. Sand storms and chronic hunger, which have become a regular feature in the lives of these children, induce fear in them. More girls than boys reported feeling fearful during drought.

These feelings can have a bad influence on the psychological development of the children if not dealt with properly. The best way of coping with such distressing emotions is to vent one's feelings by talking to someone. More girls as compared to boys employ this coping strategy.



Out of a total 96 children, the majority of children hope for a miracle to happen that would bring an end to their sufferings, with the number of boys falling into this category being higher than girls. Many boys tend to distract themselves from thinking about drought by involving themselves in activities like playing or taking the animals for grazing. Girls, however, try to distract themselves by doing the household chores. Two out of every three girls were very optimistic about the present situation of drought getting better. However, the majority of the boys were not sure about the situation getting better. Monsoons are the favorite season of 87% of the children interviewed. The reason that can be cited here is that in the monsoons, there are plenty of green vegetables and fruits to eat. Animals can graze near the house, and this frees the children from half the work and they get more time to play.

Drought and Right to Development

Right to development has the following components: workload, ability to access education and psychological support at the family level.

Effect on Work Load

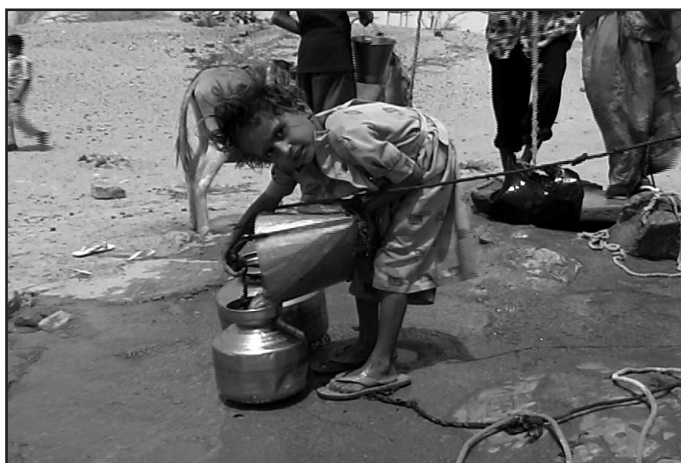
Children in rural India often help in household level survival strategies. The contribution of boys and girls in different caste groups is varied as was also seen in the present study.

In the traditional set up of Rajasthan, girls have always contributed at the household level. The social sanctions and the non-availability of good quality education at a safe distance make them more prone to help at the household level than boys. Boys, on the other hand, contribute in grazing and even attend school in nearby villages or towns. Therefore, even though the present study shows that the workload of girls has not increased, it is because girls were anyway contributing to the household economy, while for boys this has increased, as fodder for animals has become scarce and its collection takes more time. Also, due to lack of household level resources, boys have quit their education and have started to contribute in a bigger way to the household economy.





In the present study, increase of workload was felt more by boys. The boys of the Svarna caste groups who were earlier attending school, now due to lack of resources increasingly help at the household level. Though drought has worsened the situation for girls, demands from the parents have also increased on the boys. This is especially so for the boys who are school going. Working along with going to school becomes taxing for the male child. Boys are asked to work and add to the earnings of the house due to the financial burden on the family. The main responsibility of 35% children (mainly boys) is feeding animals, followed by fetching water, which was reported by 27% children (more than half were girls) as their main responsibility. Due to low socioeconomic status, many Dalit (23 out of 47) children cannot afford education and are involved in some or the other work. In other words, these children are used to doing work. On the other hand, Svarna children, who can easily access education (35 out of 49) owing to their stable economic conditions, spend more time in studying and less time on work. The increase in workload due to constant drought is, therefore felt more by these children. As a result, playtime of these children has also decreased. Fifty-six children expressed that they are left with very little time to play, which ranges from 1-3 hours per day. According to these children, their playtime has been considerably reduced, which is now spent on surviving the drought.



Lack of water was the most serious problem affecting the girls, since many girls have to spend large amounts of time in fetching water. Every third child admitted that in a day most of their time is spent in fetching water, out of which 77% were girls.

In the preceding paragraph, the effect of drought on the right to development is quite visible. Interestingly, for right to development, it was observed that more Dalit than Svarna children found this right to be more important. Although

Svarna children recognize the importance of education as they get better opportunity to experience it, Dalit children give it more importance because most of them are being deprived of education. Another reason, which explains this fact is that since the right to development in terms of education of Svarna children is being fulfilled, they tend to look for satisfaction of their other needs. Inferring this information, it seems that the Dalit children lay more stress on survival, mainly because survival was an issue for them while survival was not an issue for Svarna children. Out of these Svarna children, more boys than girls gave more importance to this right. This again can be explained by the fact



that the majority of girls drop out of the schooling process after class 5, and thus do not recognize the importance of education as much as the boys do. This may be a reflection of the socio-cultural environment, which emphasizes that boys of Svarna caste groups are more precious than Svarna caste girls; and children of Svarna caste groups are more precious than Dalit children.

Drought and Right to Participation

All children have the right to have a say in any decision which affects them and to participate in society. The recognition of this ability of children to participate in those decisions that influence them is the crux of this right.

According to the prevailing customs and traditional values of the villagers, involvement of children in the decision making process is not considered necessary or important. Children participate in village gatherings like marriages, festivals etc., but they have never been allowed to participate in gram Panchayat meetings or any other activity requiring serious thinking and voicing of one's opinions. However, constant drought for the past five years has led to even more decrease in participation of the children. The time given to marriages and festivals has reduced and many children are not taken along so as to minimize the burden on the host. The right to participation has always been violated; but due to drought, this situation has worsened. All the children desired to be asked before the family or the village takes any decision, especially concerning their matters. Out of 96 children, 38% children gave the highest ranking to the right to participation, which also emerged as the most important right out of all the four child rights. Out of these 38%, the majority of the children belong to the Svarna class, and less than half belong to the Dalit class. One reason could be that most of the Svarna children are getting education and their problems related to food are less as compared to Dalit children. In other words, Svarna children have most of their needs fulfilled, i.e., except for the right to participation; they are getting the other rights to some extent. Dalit children, on the other hand, have more problems related to food and water. Due to low financial status, many cannot afford education. Therefore, for these children, these things have more importance. Only when these needs are satisfied, can they think of other needs. This can be supported by the finding that they have given more importance to the right to survival, followed by right to development. Out of all the four rights, very few Dalit children considered the right to participation important.





Barso Mhare Des ...



Glossary of Terms

Bania ~ Normally a caste category of trader, but also used synonymously as a grocer.

Bajra ~ Pearl millet.

Beri ~ A type of small well, distinctive of Rajasthan.

Bhopa ~ The local witch doctor.

Bigha ~ A unit of measurement for land = 6.25 hectares.

Chhaachh ~ Buttermilk.

Dalit ~ Lower caste group, menial.

Dhani ~ Hamlet.

Diwali ~ The festival of lights, which comes in the month of November. It is the no moon night of November.

Gittey ~ A game played by using small stones.

Ghooghri ~ A mixture of beaten wheat, jaggery, and sugar.

Holi ~ The spring festival of colors, which comes in March.

Kabaddi ~ An outdoor group game popular among boys.

Kuccha road ~ Made of mud and stones.

Mirchi ~ Chillies.

Nadi ~ A small village level reservoir.

Pucca road ~ A sealed or tarmac road.

Roti ~ Chapatti, kind of Indian bread made of wheat or bajra.

Sukhi ~ Dry.

Svarna ~ Upper caste group.

Tanka ~ Water harvesting storage facility.

Tehsil ~ Block.



Annexe

Village Profile

Odhania, Tehsil (block) Pokharan and District Jaisalmer comprises of 244 households. Caste groups present in this village are Brahmin, Meghwal, Muslims, Suthar, Nai, Merasi, Swami, Jogi, Darzi, and Harijan. This village boasts of running a secondary school. There is a PHC (Primary Health Centre), which is not working. Canal irrigation is not being used presently and the pond has dried too. Three taps are the source of water in Odhania and a pucca road can reach this village. 30 - 40 bighas is the average land holding here. This is plain land, which is rain fed and average productivity of 'bajra' (their main crop), is 200 kilograms per bigha. On the basis of problem ranking done with children of this village, lack of education came out to be the major problem, followed by less playtime, increased workload, hot weather, health problems and lack of water.

Kunda, Tehsil Sam and District Jaisalmer. People here constitute 5 caste groups namely Rajput, Rana Rajput, Merasi, Bheel, and Meghwal. This village has a primary school and can be reached by a pucca road. A PHC is there but it is not working. There is a ration shop in the village. Average land holding here is 50 - 75 bighas. Undulated and rain fed, the land of Kunda village is unproductive, average productivity ranging from 0 - 100 kgs. Prevalent diseases in the village are cold cough, fever, pneumonia, and malaria while the main cause of death is cholera. Children in this village are facing the problem of increased workload, which got the highest ranking during Problem Ranking Activity. Lack of food got the second highest ranking, followed by the problem of lack of education, which got third ranking.

Virmani, Tehsil Fatehgarh and District Jaisalmer. This is a small village with a total population of 162 - 76 adults (40 males, 36 females), and 72 children (43 males, 29 females). People of this village belong to only one caste group, which is Meghwal. 4 families are living Below Poverty Line (BPL) here. While there is a primary school in this village, no medical facilities exist here. Neither canal irrigation is in use, nor is their water supply system working. A kuccha road is used to reach this village. The land here is very productive and dependent upon rainwater. Cold, cough, diarrhea, and pneumonia are the prevalent diseases. There is no particular cause of death in this village. People have mostly died a natural death. Workload has increased on children of this village since past 5 years, which, according to these children, was the major problem suffered by them. Less playtime, lack of food and lack of education were the other problems ranked by the children in the same order.



Didu, Tehsil Pokharan and District Jaisalmer. About 1800 is the total population of the village and the literacy rate is 22.2 % (approximately). 29 families are living below the poverty line. Caste groups that are present in this village are Rajput, Meghwal, Jogi, Nai, and Kumhar. The village can be reached by a kuccha road, has a primary school but no medical facilities exist as such. Average land holding in this village is 5 - 7 bighas. Mainly rain fed, the productivity of the land is about 50 %. Prevalent diseases are fever, pneumonia, and diarrhea. Main source of health care is the government hospital in Nachna, a near-by village. The children of this village gave the highest ranking to the problem of increased workload on them. Following the problem of work was the problem of education, lack of food and water.

Tota, Tehsil Pokharan and District Jaisalmer. Rajput, Meghwal, Merasi, Bheel, and Garg are the caste groups present in the village. The number of families that are Below Poverty Line is 14. There is a primary school, no PHC, nor does a proper road exist through which this village can be reached. 100 - 125 bighas is the average landholding among the inhabitants of Tota. The land, which is mainly dependent upon rainwater, is undulated and unproductive. Apart from fever, pneumonia, and diarrhea that are common health problems in all the villages, TB is another disease that is prevalent in this village and has also been a cause of death. For treatment, villagers generally go to Pokharan or Nachna where there is a government hospital or go to an ANM. Lack of education is the major problem faced by the children of Tota. Lack of food and less playtime emerged as the other major problems during the problem ranking exercise.

Kailawa, Tehsil Pokharan and District Jaisalmer. 260 households reside in this village, which has a population of 1820 people. People here belong to different caste groups, which are Rajput, Meghwal, Bheel, Muslim, and others. 10 families of this village are living Below Poverty Line. A kuccha road can reach this village and there is a primary school, but no medical facilities. There is a ration shop also. The land is rain fed and unproductive. Water here is supplied through a tanker (government) and a 'Tanka' (NGO). Night blindness is emerging as a health problem. This was also given the highest ranking among many other problems listed by the children, which were increased workload, lack of water, lack of education, and lack of food; in descending order.

Padroda, Tehsil Pokharan and District Jaisalmer. The total population of this village is about 950, and the caste groups present here are Rajput, Nai, Muslim, Swami, and others. 71 families are Below Poverty Line. A secondary school is there but no PHC, and only a kuccha road can reach this village. The land is unproductive, undulated, and rain fed. The children gave top priority to the problem of lack of food during the Problem Ranking Activity, followed by lack of water, increased workload and lack of food. Children also acknowledged the problem of night blindness.

Rathora, Tehsil Pokharan and District Jaisalmer. About 800 people dwell in this village, among which only 1/8 are literate. Caste groups in this village are namely, Rajput, Meghwal, Bheel and others. Approximately 20 families are Below Poverty line. There is a primary school, no PHC, and there used to be a ration shop which is not being used presently. Average land holding in this village is around 50 bighas. The land is unproductive and mainly dependent upon rainwater. Night blindness, TB, and stomachaches are the prevalent health problems. Besides natural deaths, people here have died due to TB also. The main source of health care for the villagers is the government hospital in Pokharan. Health problems (or lack of medical facilities) came out to be a major problem the village is facing, according to the children. Other problems (as ranked by the children in descending order) are lack of education, food, water, and an increased workload.





Khuiyala, Tehsil Sam and District Jaisalmer. This is a massive village with approximately 2200 people residing there. Meghwal, Bheel, Muslim, and Bania are the major caste groups here. With a literacy rate of approximately 40%, this village runs a school up to secondary level. The major source of water is a pipeline. There used to be 'beris' of water which are not working now. A pucca road is used to reach the village and there is a ration shop also which the villagers are using. The land is productive at some places and unproductive in some. It is undulated and mainly rain fed. Prevalent diseases among people are Malaria, TB, and vomiting. Animals too suffer from various diseases like Night blindness, swollen limbs and mouth, and blood in stools. The main cause of death is TB, and in children is Malaria. The children of this village rated increased workload, especially fetching water, as the most problematic situation they are facing today. Lack of food was the second major problem that the children discussed, followed by increased workload, lack of education, and health problems.

Netsi, Tehsil Ramgarh and District Jaisalmer. Around 101 families reside in the village and the total population is 608. The literacy rate in the village is 35%. People here belong to only one caste group, which is Rajput. 20 - 25 families are living Below Poverty Line. There is a primary school in the village. Netsi can be reached by a kuccha road. The average land holding in this village is 20 - 25 bighas. The land here is dependent upon rainwater, and is 50% productive and 50% unproductive. 1 quintal per bigha is the average productivity. The health problems are malaria and diarrhea. According to the Problem Ranking Activity done in this village (involving only girls here), lack of water emerged as the major problem faced by the children. Less playtime got the second ranking and increased workload, which affects the playtime of children, received third ranking.

Lakhmana*, Tehsil Sam and District Jaisalmer. Around 560 people reside in this village, and constitute 3 caste groups namely, Rajput, Meghwal, and Jat. 21 families are Below Poverty Line; the literacy rate is approximately 45%. There is a primary school, and a kuccha road is used to reach Lakhmana. Health facilities are non-existent. The average land holding is about 75 bighas. The land is productive, undulated and rain fed. Average productivity is 1 -2 quintal per bigha. Besides malaria, TB, and diarrhea, which are a common problem in all villages, Anaemia, Skin diseases, Black cough, and night blindness are other prevalent diseases. For treatment people mostly go to a government hospital in Devikot. Lack of food got the highest ranking for the worst problem faced by the children, followed by lack of water, increased workload, night blindness and less playtime.

Kita*, Tehsil Fatehgarh and District Jaisalmer. Total population is about 950. Caste groups present are Rajput, Meghwal, Bheel, Swami, Suthar, and Garg. 36 families are living Below Poverty Line. The literacy rate is approximately 50% and there is a secondary school here. A PHC does not exist in Kita, and the village can be reached by a pucca road. 50 - 75 bighas is the average land holding. The land is mainly rain fed and is productive, the average productivity being 1 - 2 quintal per bigha. Malaria, cholera, pneumonia, and night blindness in animals are the prevalent diseases in this village. Besides natural deaths, pneumonia and TB are the main causes of death. The children of this village gave top priority to the problem of lack of food during Problem Ranking Activity, followed by increased workload. Health problems, lack of water, and less playtime were the other problems shared by these children.



Organizational Profile

Srajamyham: Srajamyham is working in the Sam block of Jaisalmer district. The focus of this organization is livelihood, education, health and Natural Resource Management. The drought relief work is functional in 10 villages. The drought relief programmes in these villages are cash and food for work, fodder and feed distribution, crèche activity, veterinary camps, water distribution, construction of water tanks, nadi work and advocacy.

UMBVS: Urmul Marusthali Bunkar Vikas Samiti is working in the Pokharan block of Jaisalmer district. Initially, the organization focused only on the welfare of the weavers. Presently, they are working with 165 weavers in which 16 are females. It has expanded its focus areas, which are education, gender sensitization and Dalit rights. In the drought response programme, they are covering 20 villages, and have provided employment to nearly 2000 people mainly belonging to Dalit class. The other main programmes are cash and food for work, fodder and feed distribution, crèche activity, veterinary camp, water distribution, construction of water tanks, nadi work and advocacy.

SURE: Society to Uplift Rural Economy is working in the 10 villages of Jaisalmer district apart from the 300 villages of Barmer, and covers almost all the Panchayats of that district. The drought related programmes run by SURE are setting up of cattle camps, indigenous cattle breed improvement programme, food for work, free food for destitute, nadi wok, fodder and feed supplement to sheep/goats.

Urmul Trust: Urmul Trust, Bikaner is working in 600 villages of western Rajasthan. Besides the developmental work, the organization is also involved in the drought relief work in the villages that come under Bikaner and Jaisalmer districts. In Pokharan, Urmul is working in 10 villages. The main programmes of the organization are health, education, water, employment, agriculture, income generation, self-help groups, women development and drought relief work.

CHETNA: CHETNA (Childhood Enhancement through Training and Action) is working on the issue of street children in Delhi, with special focus on girl child. It was conceived with the hope that exploited, defenseless and extremely vulnerable children living on the streets may learn to live with dignity. The professional team of CHETNA also conducts studies, training and sensitization programmes for NGOs and civil societies.

Save the Children: Save the Children is the UK's leading international children's charity. Working in more than 70 countries running emergency relief alongside long term development and prevention work to help children, their families and communities to be self-sufficient. Drawing on this practical experience, Save the Children also seeks to influence policy and practice to achieve lasting benefits for children within their communities. In all its work, Save the Children endeavours to make children's rights a reality.



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About the team

A seven member research team was formed under the leadership of Mr. Sanjay Gupta who heads a child centered organization called CHETNA (Childhood Enhancement through Training and Action), which works on the issue of street and working children.

The members of the team were selected keeping in mind the objectives of the study. Four children facilitators - Bhaum Singh, Chandan Singh, Kaan Singh and Chatura Ram - who were local students belonging to the villages in Jaisalmer district of Rajasthan were the key members of the research team. Besides there were two adult researchers - Mr. Munish Kaushik and Miss Divya Kumar. Munish is a child rights activist where as Divya is a trained psychologist, both are working with Chetna.

An advisory panel was formed to guide the research team. The two members of this panel were Dr. (Mrs.) Vikas Goswami, who is heading Business and Community Foundation (BCF), Delhi and Mr. Ghanshyam Jethwa, Emergency Programme Manager, Save the Children, Rajasthan.



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