Linking relief to long-term protection

Bharat Dogra

OVER 250 cattle camps have provided badly needed relief to almost one lakh cattle and there is demand for more such camps from several areas. At the same time there are complaints about the poor quality of fodder. Some of the trucks deliver almost as much sand as dry fodder; if quality control is not adequate at this stage, it will be much more difficult later when more animals have to be looked after.

Camps are mostly organized in collaboration with voluntary organizations, the government making a payment of Rs. 12 per adult cow. However it may be better to fix the quantity of fodder rather than the cash payment so that a certain minimum of fodder per animal is assured. These camps also need more shade.

Action Aid with the help of European Commission Humanitarian Organization (ECHO) will soon start efforts to protect goats and sheep as well by providing fodder. A similar effort for the most neglected donkey, which patiently carries water for many needy families without receiving any care is still awaited.

In the longer run efforts to revive indigenous hardy breeds such as Tharparkar will be useful. A leading voluntary organization of Barmer Society to Uplift Rural Economy has been making concerted efforts in this direction which has brought success in villages like Poshal.

There is clear need for saving Gochar (pasture) as well as orans (sacred groves of trees which are protected by local villagers). Barmer has a rich tradition of orans which has languished in recent past. However, Bhuvnesh Jain, coordinator of Barmer district's Nehru Yuva Kendra asserts that now there is an awakening in many villages to protect oran land. For example, recently there was a successful movement in Ranigaon village to protect the land from being occupied by an industrial unit. Jain's forthcoming book on orans reveals how villages with a tradition of orans were able to support more animals.

Some social activists assert that the forest department should modify its plantation to give the main priority to fodder trees. They also say that commercialisation of agriculture should be checked if the many useful bushes and plants which provide both fodder and food are to be protected.

Hanuman Choudhary, an activist of SURE says that several failures of water supply can be checked by better coordination among officials and ensuring electricity supply or providing generator backup.

At present many naadis or tanks are being deepened without realizing that the layer of soil which had the capacity to preserve water is being dug up. Such mistakes should be avoided. Improvement of catchment areas of tanks and preparing small tankas or water storages for economically poor families can be emphasized. The limited water resources in the district have to be used optimally so any wasteful use of water, including for highly commercialised agriculture, should be curbed. More attention should be given to ground water exploration.

While timely relief is the need of the hour, efforts should also be made to link this to environment protection and sustainable development.

(Concluded)

The writer is on CSE Fellowship

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