PRELIMINARY DRAFT REPORT – FORCED MIGRATION WORKSHOP
(25-26 JUNE 2020)

TITLE: CLIMATE CHANGE POLITICS, MAHARASHTRA DROUGHTS AND MIGRANTS

INTRODUCTION

Anthropogenic climate change, global environmental transformation and forced migration are a humanitarian challenge. As policy makers view climate induced drought and migration as inevitable and governments reframe development policies as 'climate action plans', empirical contexts of local communities, that experience drought are reshaped in the language of vulnerability or adaptation. Drawing on the concept of 'social nature' (Castree) and going beyond visions of local people as victims or adaptation experts, this research aims to understand the recent experiences of drought and migration in the state of Maharashtra, from local narratives about environmental crisis and explore its relationship with community decisions and political engagements. This paper, based on a preliminary exploration of public twitter, in the period following the announcement of COVID-19 lockdown in India, from March 24 - June15, looks at the claims and counter claims, around the migrant workers exodus from the industrial and commercial areas of the state, in what some observers are describing as 'reverse migration' through the 'framing of attribution'. As the summer sowing season gets underway in large areas of rain-fed farming, the broader aim is to understand whether climate change, environmental action and drought-relief action re-emerged as a framing discourse in this critical and uncertain situation as migrant workers returned to their rural homes, often in some of the most drought-affected regions of the state.

To study the importance given to migration as seasonal coping and during exceptional drought years among people in rural Maharashtra in the past and in recent times. To examine the interpretation of environment and climate change and its relationship with drought causation and migration decisions. To examine how people (farmers, migrant wage labour and officials) obtained their knowledge about drought and changing climate and how this shapes their viewsand political activism and claims-making around drought and state responsibility – both in their offline and online worlds. The study will use qualitative case study design to collect, analyze, interpret and report

data on local understandings of environmental change and drought induced migration from selected drought prone areas of Maharashtra and Migrant destination area (Marathwada, Vidarbha, Mumbai). The study will also use digital ethnography to collect data about computer-mediated environments and online activities, including consumption of social media reportage of drought, water crisis, election debates and official responsibility among members of the local community. Data collected will derive from public/user-shared content such as threads, posts, tweets, videos, and observation of online activities.

DROUGHT AND MIGRATION

A 2018 World Bank report predicted that by 2050, millions of people in the global south would be forced to migrate within their own countries due to the slow onset impacts of climate change.[1] However, researchers and policy makers have consistently faced difficulties in attributing the causation of environmental migration to phenomena such as drought, due to its slow onset, long time-scales, definitional issues and intertwining with complex socio-economic and political causal factors. For instance, in India, where an estimated 330 million people were affected by severe drought in 2016, the areas that witnessed migration by several million people were also regions with high seasonal migration (IDMC 2020). An estimated 330 million people were affected by drought in 10 states of India in 2016. These areas were characterised by rising summer temperatures and water crisis, following poor monsoon rains. The western state of Maharastra suffered several consecutive drought years.[2] In 2016, a series of 13 articles on Maharashtra drought, attributing causation to climate change related factors such as uneven seasonal precipitation and intense heat waves, general agrarian distress, inadequate irrigation infrastructure, farmer-indebteness, water-intensive sugarcane cultivation and poor implementation of Government's Climate Action Plan.[3] During the 2018 drought, newspapers again reported widespread migration as farmers experienced multiple crop failure. Many farmers told the visiting reporters how their family members had been forced to take on low status migrant wage work such sugar cane harvesting.

[1] "Rigaud, Kanta Kumari; de Sherbinin, Alex; Jones, Bryan; Bergmann, Jonas; Clement, Viviane; Ober, Kayly; Schewe, Jacob; Adamo, Susana; McCusker, Brent; Heuser, Silke; Midgley, Amelia. 2018. Groundswell : Preparing for Internal

[2] Historically Maharashtra has been affected by frequent droughts, especially in the 'rain-shadow' districts. After the drought years of 1971-72, economists and observers had noted the absence of preventive mitigations in the form of protective irrigation systems. They had also noted the absence of adequate opportunites in the urban-industrial sector to absorb the distressed, drought affected surplus labour that was migrating from the rural areas. The policy makers then had suggested economic growth as the key solution to this crisis (Ladejinsky 1973).

[3] https://www.firstpost.com/india/marathwadas-drought-how-climate-change-has-destroyed-agriculture-and-ruined-farmers-2736992.html

Drought, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), is defined as a 'period of abnormally dry weather long enough to cause a serious hydrological imbalance (IPCC 2012:558).' Frequent droughts are known to have widespread, long term and devastating social and environmental effects. Less visible to policy makers the debilitating effects of drought are most often absorbed by the poorest communities and the agricultural sector. Despite the close relationship between drought and population movement has multiple causal factors and it remains difficult to conceptualize migration as emerging from purely environmental crisis. Climate change discourse, with its scientific, political and moral import has been influential in recent times, in shifting the understanding and enframing of local events (Milton 2008:57) cited in (Crate 2011:178). Anthropologists have greatly contributed to our understanding of: 'how place-based peoples who depend directly on their immediate physical environment observe, perceive and respond to the local effects of global climate change' (Crate 2011). An important contribution by Sara de Wit (2018) makes a case for the need to shift our focus from techno-managerial representations of climate and adaptation that makes local communities appear as victims, perpetrators or adadpation experts and attend instead to the rich 'counter voices and narratives'.

Migration occupies a central role in the long-term coping strategies of rural households, ebbing and flowing with exceptional crisis events. It is important to understand how drought affected rural migrants perceive the recent crisis based on cultural understandings about water crisis, agrarian decline and migration, how they negotiated the terrain of new environmentalism and climate knowledge and how they participate in political debates on some of these concerns. According to Castree (2001), knowledge of nature not only expresses social power relations but such knowledge also has material effect when they shape belief and action, even as nature is continuously shaped by human action. Thus climate knowledge and action, adopted or interpreted in local struggles over power and influence may shape actions that would affect livelihoods and environment in ways that would have social and environmental consequences.

DEFINING DROUGHT

Drought, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), is defined as a 'period of abnormally dry weather long enough to cause a serious hydrological imbalance (IPCC 2012:558).' But drought is also described as a 'relative term' that needs explication based on the 'particular precipitation related activity' that is being discussed. The three sub-types that emerge from this understanding are agricultural, hydrological and meteorological droughts. The social and economic dimensions of drought are not part of this definition. A World Health Organization (WHO) technical brief, describes drought as a 'slow-onset' phenomena caused by rainfall deficit and other factors that may result in 'mass displacement of population.'[4] Interestingly, population displacement is viewed both as an effect of drought as well as a factor that influences the impact of drought on communities (see ibid). In the twenty first century, frequent droughts are known to have widespread, long term and devastating social and environmental effects. Less visible to policy makers the debilitating effects of drought are most often absorbed by the poorest communities and the agricultural sector. A recent global policy report associates the phenomenon with disruptions created by climate change.[5]

Definition of drought has been subject to contestations in India around the revisions in the Government's drought manual. A change in the criteria based on which an area is 'declared' as drought affected has meant that thousands of farmers and agriculturally dependent households in the rainfed farmed areas of the country has not been able to avail of support in the event of crop loss due to poor distribution of rainfall at critical stages of the growing season. The western state of Maharashtra, that has witnessed successive episodes of drought since 2016, has been at the centre of this framing crisis. Drought manual changes, according to some observers created tremendous uncertainty for farmers. A second important issue that has emrged is the focus on the drinking water in rural Maharastra's traditional dry zones that has displaced previous emphasis on the demands of irrigation projects or canal construction in rain fed areas. A third has been the sporadic 'virality' of issues and spread of rumours around drought and in dry years on social media in election years whose purpose has been to manage and re-direct popular concerns and anger. The continued agrarian crisis in even the propserous agrarian areas (especially the cotton belt) of the state has served as the backdrop for the above debates. Drawing on newspaper reports, journal articles and

[4] https://www.who.int/hac/techguidance/ems/drought/en/
[5] UNESCAP 2020. Ready for the Dry Years: Building Resilience to Droughts in South-East Asia. https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/publications/Ready%20for%20the%20Dry%20Years.pdf

public twitter posts by the concerned departments of Government of India, this section provides a preliminary discussion and analysis of the rought crisis.

An estimated 330 million people were affected by drought in 10 states of India in 2016. These areas were characterised by rising summer temperatures and water crisis, following poor monsoon rains. A rapid assessment report, described widespread migration due to livelihood insecurity from all the drought-affected states and leaving behind of children and old people and rising incidence of child traffiking, child labour and early marriage (UNICEF 2016:34). The western state of Maharastra suffered several consecutive drought years.[6] In 2016, the online magazine, firstpost ran a series of 13 articles on Maharashtra drought, attributing causation to climate change related factors such as uneven seasonal precipitation and intense heat waves, general agrarian distress, inadequate irrigation infrastructure, farmer-indebteness, water-intensive sugarcane cultivation and implementation of Government's Climate Action Plan.[7] Community fieldwork based 'adaptation' studies associated variable drought risks and vulnerabilities on place specific resource endowment (Vedeld etal 2014).

Newspaper reports warned about the humanitarian crisis in Marathwada after four consecutive drought years as adult men and women migrated to cities to look for work and wages, the old people, children and disabled family members were left behind to fend for themselves (Kumar 2016).[8] During the 2018 drought, newspapers again reported widespread migration as farmers experienced multiple crop failure. As 180 tehsils out of 355 were affected by droughts, many farmers told the visiting reporters how their family members had been forced to take on low status migrant wage work such canecutting. Sarpanches described emptying villages as working age population, including from small farming families had left looking for wages. Officials were unable to assess the new drought-induced migration as the landless rural people from this area seasonally migrate to work as sugar cane harvestors (see Ghoghe 2018).[9] Studies by civil society groups indicated the rise in proportion of sugar

[6] Historically Maharashtra has been affected by frequent droughts, especially in the 'rain-shadow' districts. After the drought years of 1971-72, economists and observers had noted the absence of preventive mitigations in the form of protective irrigation systems. They had also noted the absence of adequate opportunites in the urban-industrial sector to absorb the distressed, drought affected surplus labour that was migrating from the rural areas. The policy makers then had suggested economic growth as the key solution to this crisis (Ladejinsky 1973).

[7] https://www.firstpost.com/india/marathwadas-drought-how-climate-change-has-destroyed-agriculture-and-ruined-farmers-2736992.html

[8] https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/humanitarian-crisis-in-marathwada-as-drought-forces-families-to-migrate/articleshow/51918044.cms

[9] https://www.hindustantimes.com/mumbai-news/marathwada-farmers-turn-to-cities-industries-as-water-runs-out-crops-fail/story-D4m9a8xDEo37Su54JnPtLJ.html

cane harvestors (labour migrants) from the drought prone areas of Maharashtra (Shiralkar et al. 2019, Bhadbhade et al 2019)). Most commentators highlighted the mismanagement of water resources[10], unutilised irrigation potential and 'water grabbing' by sugar industries and local breweries (Jamwal 2016, Dandekar 2015).[11] Images of water trains travelling to parched areas of Marathwada dominated domestic and international media.

Drought causation and its impact on rural farming households and land less people in the state of Maharashtra are well understood. Migration occupies a central role in the long-term coping strategies of rural households, ebbing and flowing with exceptional crisis events. Historically government response has focussed on addressing immediate distress and fallen short of long- term mitigation and consistent protective measures. In this context farming people have been dependent on personal agency, cultural knowledge, social relationships and migration networks forged over the years, notwithstanding that many of these are under stress, insecure, fragile and based on unequal or exploitative terms. It is important to understand how drought affected rural migrants perceive the recent crisis based on cultural understandings about water crisis, agrarian decline and migration, how they negotiated the terrain of new environmentalism and climate knowledge and how they participate in political debates on some of these concerns. According to Castree (2001), knowledge of nature not only expresses social power relations but such knowledge also has material effect when they shape belief and action, even as nature is continuously shaped by human action. Thus climate knowledge and action, adopted or interpreted in local struggles over power and influence may shape actions that would affect livelihoods and environment in ways that would have social and environmental consequences.

Increase in area planted under the cotton crop in Western India (including the present state of Maharashtra), is attributed by historians to the period from 1861-1865, when the American civil war, stopped the supply of cotton to England (McAlpin 1983).[12] During the same time area under millets, the staple food grains of this region (jowar,

[10] Dhanagare, D. (1992). 1992 Drought in Maharashtra: Misplaced Priorities, Mismanagement of Water Resources. *Economic and Political Weekly, 27*(27), 1421-1425. Retrieved February 14, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/4398589

[11] https://sandrp.in/2015/08/18/drought-and-marathwada-an-oft-repeated-tragedy/

[12] McAlpin, M. (1983). Economic Change in Western India, 1860–1920. In *Subject to Famine: Food Crisis and Economic Change in Western India, 1860-1920: Food Crisis and Economic Change in Western India, 1860-1920* (pp. 144-160). Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. doi:10.2307/j.ctt7zttw6.14

bajra and pulses) also increased (ibid). From the early twentieth century, area under cotton increased while that planted with food grains had declined (ibid). The kharif, or the long growing season was always subject to the uncertainty of water due to scarce and poorly distributed rainfall (ibid). For a long time drought was viewed from the perspective of a calamity affected agrarian system and farm-dependent rural population, at risk of hunger and food insecurity through failure of harvests, depleting water sources and shortage of fodder for farm animals leading to decline in key farm assets. Historical accounts of famine causation in western India have held crop failure as the central consequence of drought. Massive migration to the urban sprawl of Mumbai is attributed to late twentieth century droughts in arid Maharashtra, in 1965, 1972 and 1983. Livelihood diversification was actively sought by farming households, and migration of young men to urban areas continued to be a process even in the nineties and the early part of this century. Historians of Mumbai hold that rural migration was the most important source of labour for the city of Bombay. Most workers retained their rural connection due to the uncertain and irregular supply of work in the city. While scarcity and distress sent the migrants to the city, the uncertainties of urban and industrial livelihoods in the city compelled them to maintain strong rural connections – to which they returned during periods of unemployment (Chandavarkar 2009:124). An important point made by the historian is that, the migrants with the strongest rural connection such as landed status were able to sustain their search for urban or industrial livelihoods. As such a strong rural base was critical to urban survival (ibid:126).

COVID-19 REVERSE MIGRATIONS IN MAHARASHTRA

Migration brought on by natural disaster is an increasing concern in the twenty first century. In global policy arena this phenomena is viewed as a humanitarian challenge of unprecedented proportion. A 2018 World Bank report predicted that by 2050, millions of people in the global south would be forced to migrate within their own countries due to the slow onset impacts of climate change.[13] During the COP21 consultative process, the forcible displacement of 184.6 million people affected by natural disasters, from their homes was described as environmental migration. According to IDMC (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre), India has the highest

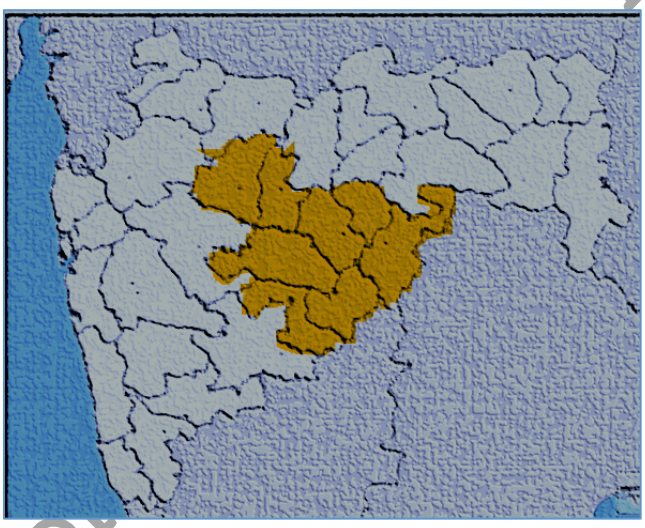
[13] "Rigaud, Kanta Kumari; de Sherbinin, Alex; Jones, Bryan; Bergmann, Jonas; Clement, Viviane; Ober, Kayly; Schewe, Jacob; Adamo, Susana; McCusker, Brent; Heuser, Silke; Midgley, Amelia. 2018. Groundswell : Preparing for Internal Climate Migration. World Bank, Washington, DC. © World Bank. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/29461 License: CC BY 3.0 IGO."

level of displacement associated with disasters globally. In early 2019, disasters led to 2,171,000 new displacements recorded from India (IDMC 2020). However, researchers and policy makers have consistently faced difficulties in attributing the causation of environmental migration to phenomena such as drought, due to its slow onset, long time-scales, definitional issues and intertwining with complex socio-economic and political causal factors. For instance, in India, where an estimated 330 million people were affected by severe drought in 2016, the areas that witnessed migration by several million people were also regions with high seasonal migration (IDMC 2020).

Migration affects and is affected by climate related environment stress like droughts all over the world. But despite the close relationship between drought and population movement, it is often difficult to conceptualize migration as emerging from environmental crisis. As Piguet 2010, suggests in an important review article, what is needed is an understanding of population displacement based on multicausal relationship between environmental, political, economic, social and cultural dimensions. It is also argued that environmental stress does not affect all communities equally. In India, seasonal migration plays an important role in supporting rural livelihoods in agricultural lean seasons. Such migration is attributed with increasing rural wages in the origin-communities, though observers highlight the absence of transformatory outcomes. Migrant decisons and outcomes tend to be highly gendered and shaped by class and caste dimensions. Circular or seasonal migration have been viewed as driven by distress among resource less rural people or a temporary coping strategy supported by the need to sell labour in advance and at the cost of debt-bondage (Breman et al 2009, Guerin et al 2013, Carswell and de Neeve 2013). It is also viewed as leading to livelihood diversification and reducing local inequalities (Rogaly etal 2001, Rogaly 2008, Mosse et al 2005). [14] In climate literature migration is viewed as adaptation to disruption of liveihoods, subsistence and prolonged scarcity under environmental stress. The emphasis on climate change as planetary crisis shifts the frame and scale for understanding the effects of migration in unique ways. Following the COVID-19 lockdown in the state of Maharashtra, millions of migrant workers found themselves stranded in the city without means and fearing for their lives.

[14] There is a large scholarship on seasonal migration in the context of India. Only a few are mentioned here.

A new welfare scheme, Garib Kalyan Rozgar Abhiyan (GKRA) was launched on June 20, this year to provide livelihoods to the migrant workers who had returned to their rural homes following the COVID-19 lockdown. An early assessment of the reverse migration context in the most drought-prone districts of Maharashtra, carried by the Indian Express newspaper, suggest that such programmes would be of little use for the 'inter-district' migrants who were employed in industries and manufacturing units in the larger cities of the state. Following the COVID-19 lockdown measures 1.08 milion migrant workers have returned to eight districts located in the drought affected Marathwada region in the Aurangabad division of Maharashtra mainly from the cities of Mumbai and Pune. Districts in this region are, Aurangabad, Latur, Nanded, Osmanabad, Parbhani, Hingoli and Jalna (Rashid 2020, June 23 IE).[15] Among the reverse migrants, 0.25 million, the largest proportion were sugar cane harvesters from the district of Beed, who seasonally migrate to work in the Sugar industries of Western Maharashtra. While the government has capped the inclusion limit for the GKRA scheme at 25000 per district, the number of COVID-19 reverse migrants in Marathwada are much higher, from 60,000 to 250,000 (ibid). District administration representatives were hopeful that the skilled migrant workers would be able to return to work places once the economic activities begin and transport services are restored. Preliminary data on intra-state migrant situation in Maharashtra suggests that the cost of economic disruption brought on through COVID-19 lockdown is being shifted to migrant workers of the drought-prone areas where the scope of local non-farm economy and agricultural sector to absorb the shock of dislocation is also low.



CLIMATE CHANGE

The global climate change risk index released in 2019 indicated the increased vulnerability of India to extreme weather events due to climate change. Citing the

[15] Rashid, A. 2020, June 23. For over 8 lakh workers who returned to Marathwada, PM's scheme offers little help. Indian Express, June 23, 2020, p.6.

effects of 2018 monsoon season that led to floods and landslides in the southern state of Kerala, the index changed India's rank from from 15 to 5.[16] The most recent assessment (see below) ranks India along with South and Southeast Asian countries as highly vulnerable to climate change induced events.[17] According to the makers of the Index, people in the poorest countries of the global South are least able to protect themselves in situations of climate-induced disasters.[18] Newspaper reports show that, responding to demands for climate action policies, the Maharashtra Government in 2018, proposed a 'crop-mapping' exercise across the major regions of the state (Vidarbha, Konkan, Northern Maharashtra, Western Maharashtra and Marathwada) that would involve students from state agricultural colleges and government officials to create a kharif (summer season) cropping plan for the state and that they would ensure that farmers receive 'climate advisories'.[19] While it is unclear whether such ad-hoc exercises shaped choice of crops or sowing decisions of millions of small holders in 2019, it is important to note not just the significance of agriculture in climate change discussions in the context of India but also how specific and contextual issues obtain space in such debates. For instance, in the discussion around climate change, the Government Ministry officials raised as principal concern the fluctuation in production of specific crops in particular years that made it difficult to regulate prices and markets, due to seasonal factors (ibid). Farmers are engaged in high value and high-risk market transactions in addition to growing the standard crops. When the unseasonal rains in 2019, destroyed much of the kharif harvest, it was clear that farmers lacked access to protective instruments that covered a range of risks from seasonal distribution of summer rainfall. For instance, crop insurance failed to protect the high value grapes and cotton crops, leading to farmers' dependence on government's disaster relief.[20] In 2018-19, 21000 vilalges in 26 districts were declared as drought affected due to failure of summer monsoons in 2018.[21] The state government had sought Rs. 79,610 million (US$1046 million) as assistance from the Central Government to provide drought relief to compensate for crop damage and to provide fodder and water supply to farming households in Maharashtra. Beed district in the Marathwada region was at the centre

[16] https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-5th-most-vulnerable-country-to-climate-change-global-climate-risk-index-cop25-madrid-6151322/
[17] https://www.germanwatch.org/en/17307
[18] Sabine Minninger, Laura Schäfer and Vera Künzel 2020. Building resilience: climate impact and corona. https://www.germanwatch.org/en/18535

[19] https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/to-tackle-drought-climate-changes-govt-plans-crop-mapping-by-drones-and-on-ground-5509323/
[20] https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/agriculture/one-third-of-maharashtras-cultivated-area-damaged-due-to-unseasonal-rainfall/articleshow/71921631.cms?from=mdr
[21] https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/agriculture/drought-but-why-what-happened-to-the-promise-of-a-drought-free-maharashtra--63417

of the 2018 drought crisis and captured media attention with reports of farmers selling cattle and deserted villages. See for instance an excerpt from a report published in the Down to Earth magazine:

'Almost every other house in the village has locks hanging from the doors. Jadhav says they have all migrated to cities in search of work. Those staying back have placed plastic barrels outside their houses to store tanker water that the district administration supplies twice a week.' [22]

The 2018-19 drought led to the widespread criticism of the state government's water sustainability project, 'the Jalyukt Shivar Abhiyan (JSA).'[23] The goal of the project, that involved costructing soil and water conservation structures, was to reduce water scarcity and drought vulnerability in 25000 villages in five years. Through the JSA, the government claimed to have met three goals: water supply, irrigation and increase in crop productivity. It surprised experienced water conservationists that the government claimed to be creating 'storage capacity' and poorly conceived and technically flawed designed and constructed structures that were meant to be for water conservation. The JSA was the result of upscaling of 'successful' case of stream digging and widening projects (the 'Shirpur model') in a part of Maharashtra by a local geologist who had termed the process as:'He called it angioplasty of the river which would help store water in aquifers for at least three years.'[24] While the state government supported flawed water conservation projects, farmers have invested in digging borewells, resulting in depletion of ground water. The JSA was also described in 2015 by some observers as Maharashtra's first 'crowd-funded' water conservation project requiring villagers and private organizations to pool their resources and augment government funds. Villages were required to contribute with funds for the hiring of earth moving machinary to deepen the streams and desilt riverbeds. Absence of transparency in the use of resources was also an early criticism in addition to poor design and technical flaws.[25] Other non-technical, popular sounding terms used in the context of claims made around this scheme are villages being made 'water neutral'. JSA was also used for a variety of populist campaigns on social media:

[22] https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/agriculture/drought-but-why-what-happened-to-the-promise-of-a-drought-free-maharashtra--63417
[23] https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/agriculture/drought-but-why-what-happened-to-the-promise-of-a-drought-free-maharashtra--63417
[24] https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/agriculture/drought-but-why-what-happened-to-the-promise-of-a-drought-free-maharashtra--63417
[25] https://scroll.in/article/812991/maharashtra-is-crowdfunding-water-conservation-but-the-money-might-go-down-the-drain

'What evolved, in the words of Pandurang Pole, the district collector of Latur, was "a formula" for public participation. "We tell people that their village has been selected and that they should at least do the work of two or three nalas on their own," he said. Or the administration puts a pre-condition that only the villages that had gathered funds of their own would be considered for government funds. "So they feel that to get into the scheme, they will have to do this work," Pole added.'[26]

Tweet by the Chief Minister's Office on July 22, 2016: 'Team CMO contributes their 1 day salary towards #JalYuktShivar on the occasion of CM @Dev_Fadnavis' birthday.'[27]

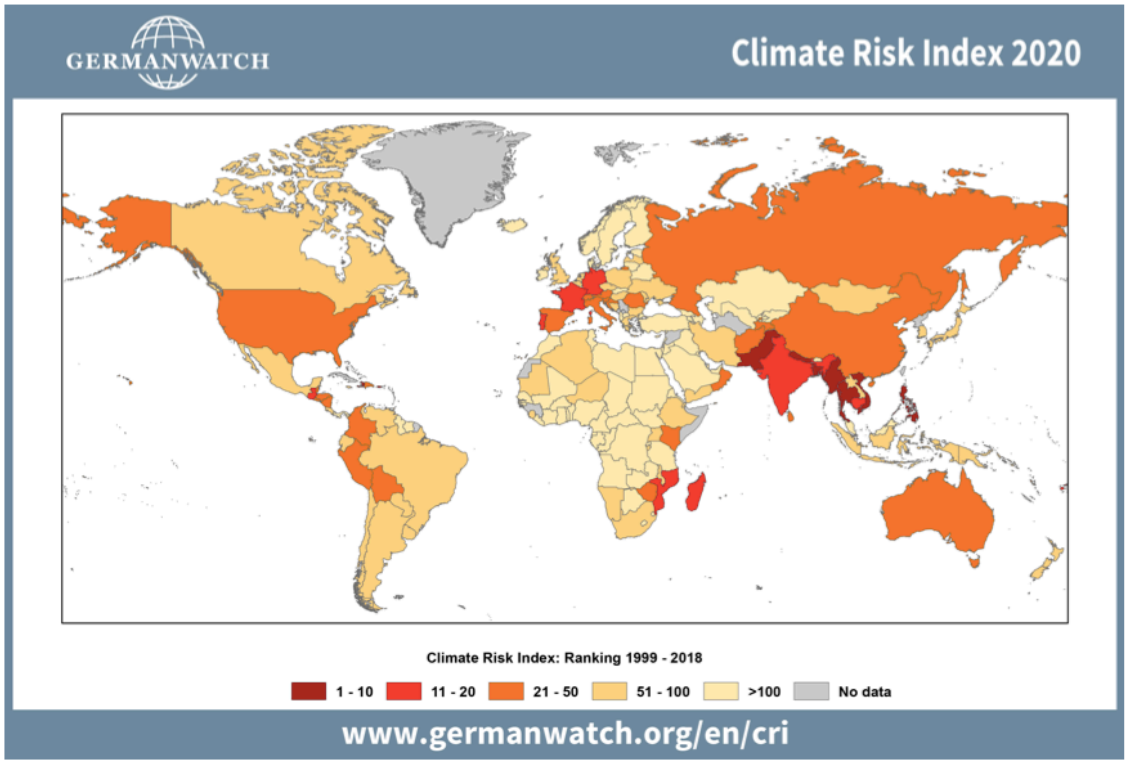
'Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis today said that 11,247 villages in the state have become 'water neutral' in the last two years under the government's flagship 'Jalyukt Shivar' scheme. He said this year 5,031 villages have been selected to be made water neutral (self-sufficient in water resources) and another 6,200 villages have been identified for 2018-19.'[28]

Maharashtra Governments drought relief programme promoted in 2019 claimed to have made many drought-affected areas of Maharashtra environmentally sustainable. Yet in February 2020, the newly elected state government discontinued the Jalyukt Shivar programme that had cost the government Rs.97070 million (US$ 127 million) in constructing cement and earthen check dams, widening stream beds and deepining farm ponds.[29] Opposition ministers continued to call the projects as 'water revolution' and held these to be critical for combatting drought in parched region of Marathwada.[30]

As the 2020, kharif or summer agricultural operations begin in Maharashtra the news from drought hit Marathwada and Vidarbha region is less than satisfactory. Based on weather information that signalled early arrival of monsoons, farmers in this region had planted one of their main crops, the oilseed, Soyabean in early June. A fast growing commercial crop, that is harvested in October and is followed by the sowing of the local staple millet crop (Jowar), Soyabean, the farmers reported had failed to germinate due to the cessation of rainfall, soil moisture deficits and poor quality of some types of commercial seeds.[31] Early assessments by farmers and agricultural officers indicate that almost half of the total sown area in two districts of Marathwada risk losing the main crop of the season. According to some observers, COVID-19 is

[26] https://scroll.in/article/812991/maharashtra-is-crowdfunding-water-conservation-but-the-money-might-go-down-the-drain
[27] https://twitter.com/CMOMaharashtra/status/756480662320783360
[28] https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/11-247-maha-villages-turned-water-neutral-in-2-yrs-fadnavis-118041101111_1.html
[29] https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/mumbai/mva-govt-discontinues-fadnaviss-pet-project-jalyukt-shivar-abhiyan/article30917352.ece
[30] https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/jalyukt-shivar-will-launch-street-agitation-if-water-projects-stalled-says-fadnavis-6238556/
[31] https://indianexpress.com/article/india/early-sowing-but-soyabean-seeds-fail-to-germinate-in-maharashtra-districts-6471690/

exacerbating the existing risks faced by farm dependent households in South and Southeast Asia that is in the midst of its worst drought in 40 year. [32]



[32] https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/covid-19-disrupting-food-industry-already-thrown-turmoil-climate-change

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Submitted by

Sohini Sengupta, PhD
Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai
sohini.sengupta@tiss.edu