

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Land Degradation in India – Problems, Institutions and Sustainability** by Dr. Sanatan Nayak, 2014, Published by Abhijeet Publications, 4658-A, First Floor, Ambika Bhavan, 21 Ansari Road, New Delhi- 110002, India, pp:266, Price : ₹ 1250.

The author made an attempt to understand the land degradation in various regions of Uttar Pradesh. This study was sponsored by ICSSR, New Delhi and the study was conducted by Giri Institute of Development Studies (GIDS), Lucknow. The book highlights about the Land Degradation, which is one of the serious environmental problems propelling to multifaceted problem for other associated natural resources.

The author briefly examined the natural environmental hazards such as earthquakes, landslides, droughts, cloud burst which adversely affect the quality of land and water. Over the years, country's landmass has suffered from different types of degradations. Land degradation was a major problem during post-Independence period as well as the present times. It is fascinating to note that salt affected lands constitute a significant part of the wasteland in India.

The author has selected three districts, one from each regions of Uttar Pradesh based on two conditions. Firstly, existence of sodicity and reclamation works has been done subsequently. Secondly, existence of canal irrigation in at least one district and further

reclamation work has been done subsequently.

To assess parameters such as the diversification in demographic, socio-economic pattern, production, productivity, net income, poverty, knowledge for maintaining quality of soils, the author has selected 12 remote villages based on the availability of sodic land affected villages and reclaimed villages for the study purpose.

In this connection, attempts have been made to focus on various issues of land degradation vis-à-vis reclamation in the country. This book is an amalgamation of seven chapters. Preliminary two chapters highlighted the macro level land degradation, pattern of change of land use and instability, ecological, social and economic factors responsible for degradation at both State and all India level. The findings also highlight some of the positive outcome of reclamation of sodic soils such as increase in the productivity and production, increase in employment in agriculture and allied activities. The author has also explored that due to scarcity of water there was existence of sodic patch which leads to low productivity. This has been a critical outcome of the study. In addition, inadequate gypsum treatment can reduce the soil fertility; hence it is an important factor for land degradation. These aspects are discussed in one of the chapters based on survey data. Rest of the chapters focused on estimation in reduction of poverty and its linkages with reclamation, impact of knowledge on participatory model

of reclamation and its sustainability, role of various institutions such as NGOs, WUG, SHGs in the reclamation process which tries to bridge the gap between the State and public participation in land degradation and reclamation process.

The impact studies have externalities in every corner of the development and sustainability. The impact analysis of the sodic reclamation attempted in this book raises questions about its environmental, economic and institutional sustainability. Although many institutions have come forward in the direction to reclaim degraded land through a participatory approach, the impact has been far from satisfactory. One of the limiting factors has been that the grassroots level institutions are characterised by inadequate facilities and inefficient management, which leads to improper dissemination of knowledge about the new land reclamation technology to the beneficiaries particularly among the small and marginal farmers. Much effort is needed to bring light on indigenous knowledge and traditional practices.

This book will be a source of both guide and reference material for many young researchers, academicians, policy makers, economists, rural development professionals, planners and other stakeholders engaged in land degradation and reclamation process.

*Dr. Raj Kumar Pammi*

**Bench Marking of Rural Local-Self Government in India: Some Ground Realities at Grassroots Level** by Sukhvinder Singh and Haqiqat Singh, 2015, Published by Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial

Development, Chandigarh – 160019, India, pp: 240, Price: ₹ 500.

The book makes an effort to assess the ground realities prevailing at all the three levels of Panchayats across 14 Indian States, and provides a benchmark in terms of suggestions and recommendations. The book is based on a study undertaken by Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID), Chandigarh by organising 67 workshops and some contact programmes in 14 selected States at all the three levels of Panchayats. The focus of the study relies upon examining and understanding the functioning of rural local-self government institutions covering 14 selected States across India. The book provides a comparative framework by way of measuring the performance in terms of devolution of funds, functions, functionaries; people's participation in decision-making; transparency and accountability systems and inclusion of SCs, STs and women in rural local-self government institutions of the selected States. The methods adopted for the study include workshops with elected representatives of PRIs, members of the Gram Sabha and Government officials of the Department of Rural Development and Panchayats. Apart from this, the study has also conducted Focus Group Discussions in the selected States to know the status of Panchayat functioning. Moreover, the study also derived relevant secondary information from State Panchayat Acts, rules, regulations, guidelines and published reports of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

The book comprises 15 chapters which are built around the identified 18 assessment indicators. Barring the introduction and