

Agri Min outlines slew of measures to tackle drought

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The Union Agriculture Ministry has outlined measures to tackle drought situation in the country. This includes provisions to handle water scarcity, providing drought resistant seeds and promoting low water intensive crops. Besides, additional food grains have been allocated to Maharashtra and Karnataka under the Food Security Act and schools in drought-affected States have been asked to serve mid-day meal even during summer vacations.

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According to the Union Agriculture Ministry, out of the 1.71 million rural habitations, more than 25 per cent (4,41,390) are facing drinking water scarcity. To address the situation, the State Governments have been asked to repair and restore hand pumps and provide borewells to access deeper groundwater reserves. About 1,400 temporary piped-water supply schemes have been set up and water trucking through tankers have been provided to 15,345 habitations. Besides, 44,498 new borewells have been commissioned. According to the Agriculture Ministry, the Government is closely monitoring the drought situation.



above rather than the earlier threshold of 50 per cent. Under NDRF, ₹10,275 crore has been released to States, the highest assistance ever provided. Loans worth more than ₹15,000 crore have already been restructured.

The Government has released ₹819.67 crore under Drinking Water Programme to the States as the first installment for 2016-17. Further, the States have also been requested to utilise the Flexi Fund under the programme to mitigate scarcity of drinking water in drought-affected districts.

Using Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme to tackle agrarian distress, last year States were asked to provide employment in drought-affected areas. As a result 13 States generated person days beyond their estimated labour budgets for 2015-2016 and more than 63 per cent of the total expenditure was on agriculture and related works with a focus on Natural Resource Management (NRM) and water conservation.

The majority of the drought-affected States have been given financial approvals to serve mid-day meals to children even during summer vacations in their drought affected districts/areas.

Under the Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP), a series of activities have been undertaken to develop rainfed/degraded areas and wastelands and ₹1,064.23 crore was released last year to drought-affected States for watershed related activities.

The Ministry in statement said the Government has enhanced the quantum of input subsidy (relief assistance to farmers) provided under SDRF/NDRF by 50 per cent in April 2015. Further, the norms for assistance were also made more farmer-friendly by setting the threshold for assistance at a crop loss of 33 per cent or

Meanwhile, the Government has also undertaken pre-monsoon preparedness by advising the affected States of short-and medium-term measures to conserve water received during the monsoon period and to better manage the demand for existing water resources, the Ministry statement said.

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