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CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY: INSIGHTS FROM INDIA'S NICRA PROJECT

Angshuman Sarmah*

Senior Research Fellow (NICRA),Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Darrang

Corresponding author email: sarmahangshuman97@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Climate change presents formidable challenges to India's ecosystems, agriculture, water resources, and socio-economic progress. Despite these challenges, India has emerged as a global leader in fostering climate-resilient environments. This study delves into India's perspective on climate change, exploring its impacts, adaptation strategies, and policy responses. By providing an overview of climate change's effects on various sectors, vulnerable regions, and communities, this paper aims to raise awareness among decision-makers, stakeholders, and the public regarding the urgent need for climate action and resilience-building measures. Through analyzing initiatives like the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and the National Innovations on Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA) project, it offers insights into India's journey towards a sustainable and resilient future.

KEYWORDS: Climate change, India, Adaptation, Mitigation, Policy responses, Sustainable development, NICRA

INTRODUCTION

Climate change poses significant challenges to agricultural sustainability, food security, and rural livelihoods, particularly in countries like India where agriculture plays a crucial role in the economy and sustenance of millions. Climate change is a global phenomenon with far-reaching implications for ecosystems, economies, and societies worldwide. In the Indian context, climate change presents unique challenges due to the country's diverse geography, large population, and dependence on agriculture and natural resources. Key impacts include changes in temperature and precipitation patterns, increased frequency of extreme weather events, sea-level rise, glacial retreat, and loss of biodiversity. These impacts have profound implications for agriculture, water resources, coastal communities, urban areas, and vulnerable populations such as farmers, fishermen, and indigenous communities. Changing rainfall patterns, temperature extremes, droughts, floods, and cyclones have become increasingly frequent, posing significant challenges to crop productivity, water resources, and rural livelihoods. Climate change threatens to exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, deepen poverty, and undermine food security in India. Climate change is no longer a distant threat; it is a pressing reality for India. Recognizing the urgency,

India has embarked on a multi-pronged approach to address climate change challenges and build a more resilient future.

CLIMATE CHANGE DRIVERS AND TRENDS

The drivers of climate change in India are complex and multifaceted, encompassing both natural and human-induced factors. Greenhouse gas emissions from burning fossil fuels, deforestation, industrial activities, and agriculture are major contributors to global warming and climate variability. Additionally, natural phenomena such as solar radiation, volcanic eruptions, and ocean-atmosphere interactions play a role in shaping India's climate patterns.

Observed trends in India's climate include rising temperatures, changes in precipitation patterns, increased frequency of extreme weather events, sea-level rise, glacial retreat, and shifts in monsoon dynamics. These changes have profound implications for agriculture, water resources, biodiversity, health, and livelihoods in India.

IMPACTS ON ENVIRONMENT AND ECOSYSTEMS

Climate change is altering India's natural landscapes and biodiversity, threatening fragile ecosystems and species. The Himalayan region is particularly vulnerable to glacial melt, leading to water scarcity, landslides, and downstream impacts on river systems. Coastal areas are at risk from sea-level rise, storm surges, and saltwater intrusion, endangering habitats, fisheries, and coastal communities.

Changes in temperature and precipitation patterns are affecting forests, wetlands, and grasslands, leading to habitat loss, species migration, and altered ecosystem dynamics. These impacts have implications for carbon sequestration, soil erosion, water quality, and ecosystem services essential for human well-being.

India's vast and diverse geography exposes it to a range of climate change impacts:

- Agriculture: Erratic monsoon rains and rising temperatures threaten crop yields, jeopardizing food security for millions.
- Water Resources: Melting glaciers, changing rainfall patterns, and increased evaporation stress water availability, impacting agriculture, industry, and domestic use.
- Sea Level Rise: Coastal communities in low-lying areas face the threat of inundation and salinization of freshwater resources.
- Extreme Weather Events: Increased frequency and intensity of heatwaves, floods, and droughts pose a significant risk to infrastructure, livelihoods, and public health.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

Climate change poses significant socio-economic challenges for India, affecting livelihoods, food security, public health, and social equity. Smallholder farmers, rural communities, and marginalized

groups are disproportionately affected by climate variability and extreme weather events. Erratic monsoon rains, heatwaves, floods, and droughts disrupt agricultural production, leading to crop failures, income loss, and rural distress.

Water scarcity and pollution threaten drinking water supplies, sanitation, and hygiene, exacerbating health risks such as waterborne diseases and malnutrition. Urban areas face challenges related to heat stress, air pollution, water scarcity, and infrastructure vulnerabilities, impacting public health, productivity, and quality of life

INDIA'S CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY

India has adopted various adaptation strategies to cope with the impacts of climate change and enhance resilience. These include measures such as climate-resilient agriculture practices, water management, disaster risk reduction, infrastructure development, and ecosystem restoration. Additionally, capacity building, technology transfer, early warning systems, and community-based adaptation initiatives are being promoted to empower communities and enhance adaptive capacity.

In addition to adaptation, India is actively engaged in mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and addressing the root causes of climate change. The Indian government has formulated various policies, programs, and initiatives to address climate change at the national, state, and local levels. The country has committed to achieving its climate goals under the Paris Agreement, including targets for reducing emissions intensity, increasing the share of renewable energy, enhancing energy efficiency, and expanding forest cover. Initiatives such as the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), Clean India Mission, and National Solar Mission are aimed at promoting low-carbon development pathways and sustainable practices across sectors.

India has adopted a multi-pronged strategy to address these challenges:

- National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC): Launched in 2008, NAPCC outlines eight national missions focusing on adaptation and mitigation strategies in key sectors like agriculture, water, energy, and forestry. These missions aim to promote sustainable development and enhance climate resilience.
- National Innovations on Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA): This crucial initiative focuses on developing and disseminating climate-resilient crop varieties, promoting water-saving irrigation practices, and empowering farmers through capacity building programs.
- International Cooperation: India actively participates in international climate change negotiations, advocating for ambitious global emissions reduction targets and seeking financial and technological support from developed nations.

- Renewable Energy Initiatives: India has made significant strides in expanding renewable energy sources like solar and wind power, aiming to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and transition to a low-carbon economy.

Enhancing resilience to climate change is a priority for India, given the country's exposure to climate risks and vulnerabilities. Resilience-building efforts focus on strengthening infrastructure, improving disaster preparedness, mainstreaming climate considerations into development planning, and fostering adaptive governance. Additionally, investments in education, health, social protection, and poverty alleviation are essential for building resilient communities and reducing vulnerability to climate impacts.

NICRA PROJECT OVERVIEW

The specter of climate change looms large over global food security, with India being particularly vulnerable. Erratic rainfall patterns, rising temperatures, and extreme weather events disrupt agricultural production cycles, leading to crop losses, jeopardizing livelihoods, and potentially destabilizing national food security. Recognizing this urgency, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) launched the National Innovations on Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA) initiative in 2011. The National Innovations in Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA) project in India is a notable endeavor aimed at enhancing resilience and sustainability in the agricultural sector. The project focuses on developing and promoting climate-resilient technologies and practices, capacity building, and knowledge dissemination among farmers and stakeholders.

NICRA'S MULTI-FACETED APPROACH

NICRA, the National Innovations on Climate Resilient Agriculture, plays a crucial role in shaping India's fight against climate change by adopting a multi-pronged approach:

1. Strategic Research:

- Vulnerability Assessment: NICRA identifies areas most vulnerable to climate change impacts through spatial modeling and historical data analysis. This targeted approach allows for focused research efforts.
- Developing Climate-Resilient Crops: Research focuses on breeding crops tolerant to heat stress, drought, salinity, and pests – factors exacerbated by climate change. This reduces reliance on external inputs like water and pesticides, contributing to sustainability.
- Mitigation Strategies: Research explores ways to reduce agricultural greenhouse gas emissions (e.g., optimizing fertilizer application, promoting organic farming) and enhance soil carbon sequestration, contributing to climate change mitigation in the long run.

2. Technology Demonstration:

- Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs): NICRA leverages KVKs, agricultural knowledge centers in vulnerable districts, to showcase proven climate-resilient technologies. Farmers witness firsthand the benefits of practices like:

✓ Conservation Agriculture: This involves no-till farming, mulching, and crop residue management, improving soil health, conserving moisture, and reducing erosion – all crucial for resilience in a changing climate.

✓ Water-Saving Irrigation: Techniques like drip and sprinkler irrigation are demonstrated, promoting water use efficiency in drought-prone regions.

✓ Climate-Smart Crop Management: Demonstrations showcase best practices for sowing dates, fertilizer application based on soil health, and integrated pest management (IPM) techniques adapted for changing climatic conditions.

3. Knowledge Management:

- Farmer Field Schools: These interactive sessions provide a platform for farmers to learn directly from scientists and extension workers about climate-smart practices and share their own experiences, fostering knowledge exchange and wider adoption.
- Extension Materials: Development of informative brochures, booklets, and audio-visual aids in local languages ensures accessibility and promotes wider understanding of climate-resilient technologies.
- Mass Media Campaigns: Utilizing radio, television, and social media platforms enhances awareness about climate change issues and NICRA's solutions, promoting public engagement in climate action.

4. Capacity Building:

- Farmer Training: Training modules focus on climate-smart agriculture practices, weather forecasting tools, and resource management techniques, empowering farmers to make informed decisions in a changing climate.
- Extension Worker Training: Capacity building programs enhance their knowledge and skills to effectively guide farmers in adopting climate-resilient practices, ensuring effective knowledge dissemination at the grassroots level.

By addressing these challenges and continuing its multi-faceted approach, NICRA can play a significant role in building resilience and promoting sustainable agriculture in India's fight against climate change.

OBJECTIVE OF NICRA

- To enhance the resilience of Indian agriculture covering crops, livestock and fisheries to climatic variability and climate change through development and application of improved production and risk management technologies.
- To demonstrate site specific technology packages on farmers' fields for adapting to current climate risks.
- To enhance the capacity of scientists and other stakeholders in climate resilient agricultural research and its application.

NICRA ON THE GROUND: FROM VILLAGE SELECTION TO FARMER EMPOWERMENT

NICRA's impact on climate-resilient agriculture unfolds at the village level through a well-structured process that involves collaboration between various stakeholders. Here's a breakdown of how NICRA projects work on the ground:

1. Village Selection:

NICRA projects begin by identifying villages that are highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, such as drought, floods, extreme temperatures, or erratic rainfall

- Criteria: Criteria for selecting NICRA villages include factors such as climatic variability, agricultural dependence, socio-economic vulnerability, and community readiness for participation. . NICRA prioritizes villages located in districts highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, considering factors like drought frequency, erratic rainfall patterns, and rising temperatures. Additionally, villages with a significant agricultural base and existing Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) presence are preferred. KVKs serve as crucial knowledge dissemination centers.
- Vulnerability assessments and participatory rural appraisals are conducted to identify villages facing the most significant climate risks and where interventions are most needed.

2. Village Committee Formation:

- VCRMC (Village Climate Risk Management Committee): A crucial component of NICRA's ground-level operations is the formation of a VCRMC in each selected village. This committee serves as a bridge between farmers, scientists, and extension workers.
- The VCRMC acts as a platform for community engagement, decision-making, and implementation of climate-resilient agricultural interventions
- Members of the VCRMC are trained and capacitated in climate-smart agricultural practices, disaster preparedness, and natural resource management

3. Needs Assessment and Capacity Building:

- Baseline Survey: Once the VCRMC is formed, a baseline survey is conducted to assess the village's specific vulnerabilities, existing agricultural practices, and farmer needs. This information helps tailor NICRA interventions to address the village's unique challenges.
- Participatory planning involves consultations with farmers and other stakeholders to identify suitable adaptation and mitigation measures that are contextually relevant and feasible
- Training Programs: Based on the needs assessment, NICRA, in collaboration with KVKs, organizes training programs for VCRMC members and farmers. These programs focus on climate-smart agriculture practices, resource management techniques, and weather forecasting tools.

4. Technology Demonstration and Knowledge Sharing:

Based on the needs assessment and participatory planning, NICRA projects implement a range of climate-resilient agricultural interventions tailored to the specific needs and priorities of each NICRA village. Interventions may include the promotion of climate-resilient crop varieties, adoption of sustainable farming practices, water management initiatives, capacity building activities, and establishment of weather monitoring systems.

- KVK Demonstrations: The KVK serves as a crucial platform for showcasing proven climate-resilient technologies. Farmers witness firsthand the benefits of practices like conservation agriculture, water-saving irrigation methods, and use of climate-resilient crop varieties through field demonstrations.
- Farmer Field Schools: These interactive sessions, facilitated by scientists and extension workers, provide a platform for in-depth learning and knowledge exchange. Farmers discuss challenges, share experiences, and learn about adapting climate-smart practices to their specific contexts.

5. Monitoring and Feedback:

- Regular Monitoring: NICRA and KVK personnel regularly monitor the progress of interventions, including crop performance, water use efficiency, and farmer adoption rates.
- Feedback Mechanism: A feedback mechanism is established to gather input from farmers and VCRMC members. This feedback helps refine interventions and address any emerging challenges.

Overall, NICRA's ground-level approach is characterized by:

- Community participation: VCRMCs ensure local ownership and active participation of farmers in decision-making and knowledge dissemination.
- Site-specific interventions: Needs assessment and baseline surveys enable tailoring solutions to address the unique challenges of each village.

- Knowledge sharing and capacity building: Training programs and farmer field schools empower farmers with the knowledge and skills to adapt to climate change.
- Technology demonstration: KVK demonstrations provide farmers with a tangible experience of the benefits of climate-resient practices.

By working closely with village communities, KVKs, and VCRMCs, NICRA fosters a collaborative environment that empowers farmers to become active participants in building climate-resilient agriculture in India.

NICRA'S SUCCESS STORIES: SHAPING CLIMATE-RESILIENT AGRICULTURE IN INDIA

NICRA's multi-pronged approach has yielded several success stories that showcase its positive impact on Indian agriculture in the face of climate change. Here are some notable examples:

1. Development of Heat-Tolerant, Drought tolerant & Flood tolerant Crop Varieties:

- The NICRA-supported research initiatives have led to the development of crop varieties demonstrating superior tolerance to climatic adverse condition. This is particularly critical in the context of rising temperatures, and irregular monsoon, a major threat to rice production in India.
- Benefits: These varieties help maintain yields and food security in a changing climate. Additionally, they often require less water and pesticides, contributing to overall sustainability.

2. Promoting Water-Saving Irrigation & Ex-situ and In-situ water conservation technique:

- Drip and Sprinkler Irrigation Demonstrations: NICRA's efforts in showcasing water-saving irrigation techniques in water-scarce regions have shown significant results. Farmers witness firsthand the benefits of drip and sprinkler irrigation:
  - Reduced Water Use: These techniques demonstrate significant reductions in water consumption compared to traditional flood irrigation methods.
  - Maintained or Increased Yields: Despite using less water, these methods can maintain or even increase crop yields, showcasing their effectiveness in drought-prone areas.

3. Empowering Farmers through Knowledge Sharing:

- Farmer Field Schools: These interactive sessions provide a platform for knowledge exchange and capacity building. Farmers learn directly from scientists and extension workers about climate-smart practices like conservation agriculture, integrated pest management (IPM), and resource management techniques adapted for changing climatic conditions.

- Increased Yields and Improved Resource Management: Farmer field schools have empowered farmers to adopt these practices, leading to increased yields, improved water use efficiency, and enhanced farm incomes in several regions.
- Sense of Ownership: By actively participating in learning and adapting these practices, farmers develop a sense of ownership over the solutions, promoting their long-term sustainability.

4. Establishing Custom Hiring Centers (CHCs):

Custom Hiring Centers (CHCs) are one of the interventions under NICRA that help farmers in several ways:

- Access to Machinery: CHCs provide farmers access to modern agricultural machinery and equipment which they may not be able to afford individually. This enables small and marginal farmers to adopt mechanized farming techniques, reducing their dependence on manual labor and increasing efficiency.
- Cost Reduction: By pooling resources through CHCs, farmers can collectively share the costs associated with machinery procurement, maintenance, and operation. This reduces the financial burden on individual farmers, making advanced agricultural technologies more accessible.
- Improved Productivity: Mechanization through CHCs can lead to increased agricultural productivity. Modern machinery allows for timely and efficient farm operations such as land preparation, sowing, planting, irrigation, harvesting, and post-harvest handling, which can result in higher crop yields.

By providing access to essential equipment, knowledge dissemination, and skill development opportunities, CHCs empower farmers to become active participants in building climate-resilient and sustainable agricultural practices in India

NICRA's success stories highlight its contribution to building climate resilience in Indian agriculture. By promoting climate-smart practices, developing tolerant varieties, and empowering farmers through knowledge sharing, NICRA is helping to safeguard food security and livelihoods in the face of a changing climate. It is important to note that these are just a few examples, and NICRA's success stories are ongoing. Continued research, development, and dissemination efforts hold promise for an even greater positive impact on Indian agriculture in the years to come.

IMPACT

1. Increased Crop Yields and Income: Adoption of climate-resilient crop varieties and sustainable farming practices resulted in improved crop yields, diversification of income sources, and enhanced household food security and income for farmers.

2. Water Security: Implementation of water management interventions helped in increasing water availability for irrigation, reducing dependency on erratic rainfall, and mitigating the impacts of droughts on crop production.
3. Enhanced Resilience: Farmers became more resilient to climate variability and extreme weather events, such as droughts and floods, due to the adoption of adaptive agricultural practices and access to weather forecasting services.
4. Empowerment of Women: Women farmers actively participated in NICRA interventions, gained knowledge and skills in climate-resilient agriculture, and contributed to household decision-making and income generation activities.
5. Replicability and Scalability: The success of NICRA interventions the replicability and scalability of climate-resilient agricultural practices in other vulnerable regions across India.

CONCLUSION

NICRA plays a pivotal role in shaping India's fight against climate change by mainstreaming climate resilience into agricultural development strategies, promoting sustainable practices and technologies, building the capacity of farmers and stakeholders, and fostering innovation and collaboration across the agricultural value chain. Through its multifaceted interventions, NICRA contributes to enhancing the resilience, productivity, and sustainability of Indian agriculture in the face of climate change. Studies evaluating the outcomes of the NICRA project have reported positive impacts on agricultural productivity, resilience, and livelihoods. Farmers adopting NICRA-recommended practices have experienced increased crop yields, income diversification, and reduced vulnerability to climate risks. Additionally, the project has contributed to improved soil health, water-use efficiency, and biodiversity conservation in agricultural landscapes.

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