

STRENGTHENING PEOPLES' PARTICIPATION IN LAKE CONSERVATION

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ABSTRACT

Lake is a large body of water contained in a depression of the earth's surface, and supplied from the drainage of a more or less extended area. Through the ages, lakes have been the lifelines of most cities in India. They were preserved and looked after by the people, as they are main source of water supply for drinking and irrigation. Lakes are found all over the country, are either natural or built by people. Over the years, they have gradually depleted, leading to a number of problems in urban areas such as flooding, water scarcity, and water logging. The main causes are inflow of domestic sewage, agricultural run-off, discharge of industrial effluents, over-fishing, introduction of exotic species and habitat degradation from population growth, expansion of cities. Peoples' Participation in Lake Conservation would always improve decision making as it allows public to represent their new ideas or view prior to the development of the new conservation plan or policy. The stakeholders on lake are from different segments of society and thus in conservation programme peoples' participation allow different people from variety of backgrounds and interests to participate in decision that affect their community. A variety of individuals and organizations – stakeholders including Local Community; Government Department and others should involve and participate in Lake Conservation Programme. The ability to involve people in any Natural Resource Conservation Plan is critical and challenging. Behind the strength and success of Lake Conservation programme, participation of each stakeholder is essential. The paper will, therefore, search, explore and elaborate the key steps behind the "Successful Peoples' Participation in Lake Conservation Programme".

INTRODUCTION

All the water resources on the earth are invaluable part of living creatures. The Earth is called "the water planet" because it has approximately 14,108 cubic kilometers of water. However, 97.5% of this water exists in the seas, and nearly all of the remaining fresh water is locked up in the Antarctic or Arctic ice caps or as groundwater. Therefore, we can freely access only the water in lakes (0.007%) in rivers (0.002%). Of these, lakes are the best "available fresh water source on the Earth's surface". (<http://www.env.go.jp/en/jeg/water/lakes/why.html>)

A lake is low-lying part of Earth's surface in which rainwater, surface water run-off, outflows from river and water from other sources accumulates. There are great varieties of lakes on earth: freshwater lakes and salt water lakes, ranging in their sizes from small to huge one like Lake Superior in USA which is largest fresh water lake. The Caspian Sea in Europe and the Sambhar Lake in Rajasthan, India are the examples of saltwater lakes. Lakes are valued as

water sources and for fishing, water transport, recreation, tourism and other livelihood based activities. They provide habitat for a rich diversity of animal and plant life.

Lake Water is perceived as belonging to everyone and no one, resulting in it being frequently undervalued and insufficiently managed. ((Mukerjee, 2004) Among all the water resources, lakes are most important and most threatened ecosystem on earth. Except few special cases, all the water resources especially lakes are in varying degrees of environmental degradation. Lake Ecosystem have been increasingly disturbed and polluted by human activities. The degradation itself is a result of lack of public awareness and governmental indifference. There has been sudden boost in population during last century without corresponding expansion of civic facilities resulting in water bodies like lakes, especially in urban area, becomes bins or sink for garbage or contaminants. Increase in population, urbanization around the lake enhances the process of ecological imbalance. Resulting, most of the lakes are now polluted, dry or will be demolish in future. Therefore, they need special attention as they not only satisfies the drinking water requirement but also act as main source in building physical, natural, social and economical capital for the people living around it.

Now, slowly the situation is changing. Environment activism and legal intervention have raised the issue of sustainability of lakes, their management and conservation. The importance of lake and their conservation in a sustainable way have been widely recognized.

BACKGROUND

Broadly, Lake Management and Conservation process comprises of five major activities viz. Source Control, In- Lake treatment, Shoreline Management, Peoples Participation and Environment education and awareness. (Reddy, Char, 2004) Environmental active groups have recognized the importance and necessity of each activity. The *top to bottom approach* in Sustainable Development Programme has been widely adopted. It has been believed that the Development initiatives can't be successful by eliminating one factor and taking over remaining one. Resulting there is increasing recognition on the part of involvement of "social component – Stakeholder based approach, community involvement". On one side management and conservation programme is essential within the lake and in its catchment area while on other side education and awareness in local community and their participation is also necessary so as to sustain and keep alive the process. This emphasis has led to a plethora of practices and processes aimed at involvement and participation of local community in Lake Conservation Programme. While government agencies may set strategies and prepare plan and policies of Lake Conservation, their ultimate success depends on the support, participation and involvement of wide spectrum of society.

Ancient wisdom can be integrated with modern practices in order to develop sustainable system with local control. Looking towards the old traditional practices for water conservation, local community was caretaker and actively involved in management practices of water resources. Khadin¹, Johad², Bawdi³ etc. are some examples of traditional structures for which

¹ Khadin is an ancient skilful and sound scientific example of rainwater harvesting system in Western Rajasthan/ India.

special norms were existed for their management, which were followed regularly by local community.

PEOPLES PARTICIPATION

Peoples' Participation is pre-decisional communication between the group or agency or organization responsible for decision and local community. It is any citizen forum where "opinions can be revised, premises altered, and common interests discovered"(Reich, 1988,p.144). The phrase Peoples' Participation is often used as Stakeholder participation, Community participation etc. The traditional aim of Peoples' Participation activities is to "inform and educate" local community. Peoples' Participation not only highlight the issues, problems to be address and solve but also help in designing relevant policy. The decision-making by local community helps in gathering information and developing common language for discussing and defining problems, issues and evaluation criteria. Also, it educates and influences local community about the problem and proposed alternative.

In Lake Conservation, Peoples' Participation can be define as the involvement of all the stakeholders right from grass root level to the upper level whose activities and livelihood are directly or indirectly dependent on the lake. The degradation or improvement of lake would affect their lives as well as their livelihood. The Peoples' Participation in Lake Conservation is an integrated approach by local, state and national level government authority, local communities, researchers, activist, local NGOs, international donors or funding agencies for implementation of conservation methods.

WHO ARE INVOLVED ?

Lake Management involves different level of actions under which Peoples' Participation plays crucial role. Peoples' Participation incorporates a series of inclusion of different level of government as well as the different section of society. Among these stakeholders, inhabitants living around the periphery of lake and from lower section of society are most affected. These are street vendors, nearby shop owners, local guides, small restaurants, farmers, local skilled or unskilled labours who are directly or indirectly dependent on lake. The ongoing destruction of the lake ecosystem contributes to increased poverty and insecurity, particularly among the most disadvantaged, who are also least able to plan for or mitigate environmental change. Their interests are limited unless an immediate danger to their lake based livelihood occurred. These people are unorganized, having few resources and are unable to express their views. *These are the peoples who suffer most but have least to say.* For the sustainable and successful lake management, development initiatives must be address, especially for those who are most affected and having few resources. The changes in existing policies or development of new policies can be possible, only when the basic need of community would be satisfied.

Another section of community, can express their views but sometimes it get lost politically or financially. These are academician, researchers, informed citizen group, etc. Sometimes they

² *Johads* are small earthen check dams that capture and conserve rainwater, improving percolation and groundwater recharge.

³ Bawdi, a traditional step- well.

are unable to find out suitable platform for expressing it. A number of big- small NGOs plays important role in educating, implementing lake management programme but most of the times are restricted themselves in terms of lack of funds, powers. The narrow nature of goal unable to cover the entire stakeholders and hence the approach will be appear more individualistic. Finally, local government, which is, comprises of municipal, district; regional government is closest to the ground and responsible for initiation, execution and feedback of Lake Management activities & concerning policies.

It is essential to bring all the different stakeholders including business groups, industries, environmental groups, farmers and other stakeholders for preparing the program for developing and managing the lake. The other key issue is to find out the effective ways to facilitate each group for active participation. Ultimately, the future of lake is in hands of the people who live and work within the lake region. They have to realize its importance and understand the fact that it is a finite invaluable resource. Though, other agencies like NGOs, regional, state and national government bodies each of have important role in Lake Conservation and its proper management but local authority is major one, which is responsible of for day-to-day monitoring and facilitating each and every stakeholders for their invaluable contribution in Lake Conservation.

Additionally, it is also important to bring "resistors" in the Peoples' Participation for Lake Conservation. The notion behind any successful initiative is that to eliminate or transform negative factor into positive one. Although having a variety of representatives voices may complicate the process but ultimately it allows the better understanding on concerning issues of community regarding Lake Conservation. An overall goal for community and decision making agency in Lake Conservation to craft a collective plan of action that addresses diverse community perspectives and threaten environmental issues.

TYPES OF PARTICIPATION

When we consider participation of stakeholders in decision-making process of Lake Conservation, it is important to consider the type of participation that would be most effective. Walker outlines three types of participation in decision –making process:

- Consultation – involves stakeholders in public policy making process without sharing any aspect of the decision itself
- Consensus – approval or absence of active opposition by interested parties
- Collaboration - the process of joint decision making among the stakeholders and the decision-making agency about the future of lake

When development thinking during the last two decades shifted from a "top-down" approach towards "bottom-up" and "people-centred" development, "**participation**" has become an important part of the language of development thinking (Chambers, 1983). Participation for members of communities can take many forms and, it varies from being passive at one extreme (only be informed by outsiders about what will happen) to self-mobilization at the other (see Table 1).

Although Table 1 summarizes to what extent people can participate in development programmes, it can also be used to show the varying degrees people participate in managing their own lake resources. It is obvious that the participation level among the members of the

local communities varies a great deal. The level of participation depends, on issues which include to what extent various groups of people are involved in the use of the lake resources, their political power, economic status and gender.

In participation process of Lake Conservation, sometimes groups having common cultural interest, economic interest and natural resource management interest usually involves in the process. However, the participation process in Lake Conservation always involves personalities or agencies that have power or fund excluding those who are ultimately responsible for managing it. Despite the varied Socio-cultural and economic background people, it is the people who live close to the lake and depend on the lake for their livelihood must be involved in decision making process.

Table 1. How people can participate in development programmes

Passive Participation	Being told what is going to happen or already happened. Top down, information shared belongs only to external professionals
Participation in information giving	Answer questions posed by extractive researchers - using surveys etc. People not able to influence
Participation by consultation	Consulted and external agents listen to views. Usually externally defined problems and solutions. People not really involved in decision-making. Participation as consultation
Participation by material incentives	Provision of resources, e.g. labour. Little incentive to participate after the incentives end, for example much on farm research, some community forestry
Functional Participation	Form groups to meet predetermined objectives. Usually done after major project decisions made, therefore initially dependent on outsiders but may become self-dependent, and enabling. Participation as organization.
Interactive participation	Joint analysis to joint actions. Possible use of new local institutions or strengthening existing ones. Enabling and empowering so people have stake in maintaining structures or practices
Self-Mobilization	Already empowered, take decisions independent of external institutions. May or may not challenge existing inequitable distributions of wealth and power. Participation as empowering.

Source: Barrow and Murphree (1998).

IMPORTANCE OF PEOPLES' PARTICIPATION IN LAKE CONSERVATION

Peoples' Participation in Lake Conservation Programme promotes involvement of each level of stakeholders in decision-making, which directly means of encouraging people for the design and development of conservation plan and concerning policy of common interest. Primarily, this will also include the improvement in outcomes of Lake Conservation Programme by involving wide range and different section of community, their inputs and opinion in decision-making process. Secondly, such Lake Conservation initiatives inform and educate

community and stakeholders so that they understand that why such proposals & initiatives should be considered. It also enhances and involves people from different background and level, which give their inputs in decision – making process. In this way, Peoples participation in Lake Conservation embraces Participatory Democracy. Across the world, there are successful examples of Peoples' Participation in Lake Conservation like Bhoj wetland, Lake Biwa, Lake Chilika, Lake Victoria, Lake Toba etc. If Peoples' Participation in Lake Conservation is utilized effectively, it can reduce an “us versus them” and promote collaborative work.

PRESENT STATUS OF LAKE MANAGEMENT

There are few number of successful cases in sustainable development and conservation of Lake. However these best practices are not replicated, expanded or become commonplace because of systematic barriers and challenges. Current action for Lake Water management and Conservation are often fragmented and disparate. Yet, in spite of all existing principals and policies regarding water management, Lake Water Conservation and Management is often the blind spot of overall plans. Practically, it is impossible that technical activities are sufficient to solve multidimensional complex issues related with Lake Conservation. Community involvement is an essential part in the conservation process, which can't be neglected.

Status of Peoples Participation in Different Cases

To explore the effectiveness of Peoples' Participation in Lake Conservation, it is important to study the different Lake Management structures and the types of organization involved in the participation. A perusal of this shows that each lake has its own history to contend with and that initiatives for preserving it have come from diverse sources including local stakeholders, government action and international opinion and pressure. However, in broad way it can be classified into three categories.

First category includes local stakeholders are the foremost who took the Lake Conservation initiatives. Lake Naivasha in Kenya, is the prior example, where the initiative for lake management has come from local stakeholders, primarily through LNRA, which began as an association of property holders that has now expanded its membership to become more representative. It has drawn a management plan approved by the national government, which has also formed the LNMIC as a more wide body, having additional representation from district and national level and even one international member, the IUCN. LNMIC has no legal powers or formal budget and the plan is implemented through consensus building. (Mukerjee, 2004) Lake Biwa in Japan is classic example of concerned citizen movement that the influenced local government to initiate action for lake preservation. Housewives in the area were concerned about the incidence of diaper rash and eczema caused by synthetic detergents and had started a “Soap” movement in the beginning of the 1970s, which led to widespread awareness and soon spread to the entire prefecture establishing the "Citizen Forum for Conservation of the Aquatic Environment around Lake Biwa (Biwa-ko Forum)" in 1978.

Second category includes those Lake Conservation initiative where taken up by joint venture of local stakeholders and government. There are only two such cases in the list, being those of Bhoj Wetlands in India, and Lake Baringo in Kenya. Bhoj Wetlands falls under the jurisdiction of the Bhopal Municipal Corporation (BMC) and had been subject to pollution by release of

untreated sewage waters, property development activities on the lake fringe area and siltation. The State Government has been executing the Bhoj Wetland Project since 1995. Local NGOs are running an effective public awareness programme. The Bhoj Wetland Programme (BWP) has however been able to secure the full support of stakeholders. Lake Baringo is controlled by the Baringo County council and the lake is managed through a committee with representatives from the government, community and NGOs.

Third category includes government initiatives without participation of local stakeholders. For such category, there are meager cases as if local community is residing near the lake, will definitely actively or passively participate in Lake Conservation initiatives. One exclusive case is of Lake Tucurui in Brazil, which is in under government control and no local participation involved in management of the lake, as the Lake was designed primarily for power generation.

A glance of above shows that the triumphant management control of Lake is possible with the active involvement of local stakeholders in joint collaboration of government.

STRENGTHENING PEOPLES' PARTICIPATION IN LAKE CONSERVATION

Understanding the importance, essentiality of Peoples' Participation in Lake Conservation it is also important to find and explore the key steps that strengthens it. The large and more complex the Lake Organization, more difficult to bring all the stakeholders on common decision. A threaten Lake system, itself act as reservoir of multidimensional complex issue which are difficult to resolve. Resolving the barriers can make the process smoother.

Multi-dimensional thoughts and harmony between different stakeholders.

The local stakeholders on Lake system involves Local, state, and national level government, international donor agency, NGOs, businessman, industries, street vendors, nearby shops, local guides, small restaurants, farmers, local skilled or unskilled labours etc. This indicate a wide range of stakeholders from different part of society have stake over the Lake. People from diverse background have different area of interest and to result in common interest and decision is difficult one. Most the time, low-income based groups are always excluded in the decision-making process.

Government and institution structures

Unfortunately local government authorities' efforts to influence Lake Management in their communities are frequently restricted by their limited jurisdiction in this area and the difficulty they have in bringing other levels of government to the table.

Jurisdiction and Conflicts and Compartmentalization

Complex and unclear jurisdictional issues hamper local government functioning. Insufficient clarity regarding legislative jurisdiction results in inaction by all spheres of government on key issues or in uncoordinated action where the policy of one sphere of government undermines the objective of another.

Management of Resources

Lack of sufficient financial and human resources capacity to properly implement sustainability initiatives particularly when capital investments are required.

Lack of Political Support

The relative brevity of electoral terms encourages the adoption of short-term goals with immediate results as compared to long range planning for sustainability where benefits will not be visible for years.

The other main reason behind the poor attention for Lake Conservation lies in attention to diverse responsibilities, where the lake occupy a very low position on the governments' priority list. Indeed, they have often emerged as one of the leading culprits in producing lake degradation by their indifference to pollution via urban sewage systems and by diversion of funds meant for lake governance to other activities; in some cases they have even opposed proposals to remove these pollution-generating activities. (Mukerjee, 2004)

The steps behind the effective peoples' participation to overcome the barriers are:

Analyzing the Lake issues: While analyzing the concerning Lake related issues it is necessary to Understand the political dynamics and community interest.

Identification of stakeholders: It is necessary to understand the principle and practice of inclusion while identifying the stakeholders. Also, it is necessary to involve *resistors* in Lake Conservation.:

Ways of engaging: It is important to decide how to engage stakeholders whether by dialogue or written process.

Defining needs: It is also necessary to find the needs of Local stakeholders, vision for resolving and strategic planning for it.

Informing Stakeholders - Planning strategy and process: It is required to inform and educate the local stakeholders in order to disseminate the planning of strategy, its good causes and how to maintain it for sustainable results.

CONCLUSION

Public involvement in Lake Conservation is an important process that can benefit the sponsoring agency(s) and the community. It uses the notion of **participatory democracy** to develop and implement long and short-term conservation plans and public policies. The public involvement process can achieve **comprehensive communication** between an agency(s) and the community by developing strategies that enable community members to understand the

environmental, economic, and social costs and benefits of proposed actions. In return, suggestions and recommendations developed through the public involvement process can help technical experts understand local attitudes and values. Remaining true to the process also enables **effective decision-making** by balancing extreme positions with all relevant options and alternatives. In the end, there is potential for **political legitimacy** because community members are more likely to “buy-in” to a decision after they’ve participated in its development. (Howell, Robert E., Marvin E. Olsen, & Darryll Olsen, 1987).

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