

## **Participatory watershed management - a lesson through experience**

**PRASAD SEVEKARI**

Chief Consultant, Watershed Division, CAPART, New Delhi, India

**MANEESH. K. SHUKLA**

Programme Officer, Watershed Management Project, District –Mandi (H.P.), India

### **Abstract**

The paper reviews the success factors behind the different watershed management programmes carried by the N.G.O.s in different parts of the country. The paper has been divided into three parts, the first part deals with the introduction of the watershed programmes, the involvement of those who have stake in it, and how that involvement can be ensured at the different levels. The second part deals with the case studies of different watershed management programmes undertaken by the NGOs in different parts of the country and delineates the key success factors and lessons. The third part of the paper brings out the conclusion based on the experiences and lessons. It brings out the fact that development is not the sole responsibility of the policy makers, it can be only achieved through participation of localites who are much concerned about the problems. Watershed management is a holistic and bottom up approach. It is not only concerned with the natural resource management, but also with the social problems of the area. The approach stresses on a proper institutional set up, which results in a sustainable pattern of development by promoting proper management of resources, coping with drought and by development of a healthy society.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Over the last decade, the government of India has sought to focus on watershed management. By launching drought prone areas programme and desert development programme, adopted the watershed approach in 1987. The integrated wasteland development projects schemes taken by National Wasteland development Board in 1989 also aimed at developing wasteland at watershed basis. There are few other programmes that are being implemented by various ministries on bilateral arrangement. Large allocation of funds has taken place through various sources, which is of vital importance to the various national problems such as food security, unemployment and mismanagement of natural resources.

It has been recently demonstrated to meet the challenge of food security in next millennium, main focus would be placed on raising agricultural productivity in wastelands of India along with the proper management of existing agricultural land resources through Watershed management.

To meet the above challenge we can not think of second green revolution on the same agricultural lands where green revolution has already taken place because some post green revolution issues are associated with these areas such as:

Sustainability of irrigated rice wheat cropping system as it has been already pointed out that green is turning grey

Declining natural soil productivity

Increase in cultivable wastelands owing to flooding, water logging, saline lands and wastelands.

Deteriorating productivity of community lands due to increasing pressure of cattle and livestock.

So it has become necessary to focus on rainfed and the wastelands of the country through watershed management

Watershed management is seen in the parity with long awaited rural development in India. Community participation is always reflected in the ideology of the programme. It is however important to recognise that there is little chances of success of the programmes unless they are based on the participatory approach to development. While ensuring community participation it should be kept in mind that whose participation, where, why and how it is going to regulate the dynamics of the projects.

The goal of the watershed management is to plan and work towards an environmentally healthy watershed that benefit all who have stake in it, so from the beginning of the project it should be very clear that whose participation is going to be ensured.

**Local community:** Partnership of local community is necessary because these are the people, who are directly influenced by the project so it becomes crucial to mobilise their participation at every stage.

- In planning of watershed.
- In institution building.
- In decision making
- In implementation of project.
- In operation and maintenance.
- In maintaining records.

**N.G.O:** Role of NGO is as a catalyst in watershed management. It's capability depends upon its levels of devotedness, technical and social understandings. It's main area of intervention is to mobilise the community and bring them to the level of understandability of the project.

**Government Machinery:** At the policy level government machinery has its major role in the mobilization and implementation of watershed project, so their sensitization towards the philosophy of the project is necessary. At the implementation stage proper sensitized monitoring is necessary and at the higher level there should be proper sympathetic view point for the project.

**Politicians:** Political wish works as a leader in the programme In the democratic set up it has capacity to revolutionize the whole setup. It has its roots from bottom to top. Politicians can mobilise the locals by bringing their problems in notice at higher levels.

### **How to ensure participation at different level**

Bringing attitudinal and behavioral changes by converting them from passive onlookers to pro- active implementers can ensure community participation. At the local community level so many social and cultural hindrances are prevailing which are reflected through their behavior, which can only be overcome through mass awareness.

By empowering the local community : Participation can only be assured by providing certain rights to the community at different levels

By sensitization of local government machinery: By giving proper orientation to the government staff for the understanding the project. By sending only guidelines, the purpose is not fulfilled.

Few case studies from different part of the country are reviewed to analyse the factors of the watershed programme in the country. The case studies are taken from the study done by Samaj pragati Sahyog (S.V.O) in Madhya Pradesh and Sadguru in Gujarat.

The case studies reveal the initial strategy and the factors responsible for the success of the watershed and the main issues in watershed management.

### **CASE STUDY –I, REFLECTING THE WATERSHED ANAGEMENT BY ADDRESSING THE SOCIAL AND LEGAL PROBLEMS**

Grameen Sevasansthan is working in Chattisgarh region of Madhya Pradesh. A study of the growth of this organization shows that the mobilization work done by it during the early four years mainly accounts for its success in securing people's participation in watershed work. The following issues were taken up by G.S.S during its early mobilization phase

- Land reform
- Rehabilitation of Project Affected Persons
- Health
- Social problems such as alcoholism

### **Achievements in Watershed Development**

Pali milli Watershed is being developed by this NGO under the Rajiv Gandhi mission since 1995, covers 8400 hectares, 11 gram Panchayats and 41 villages. As a result of the implementation of the watershed project, out migration has stopped completely. The soil and Water conservation technologies were applied successfully for arresting soil erosion and enhancing soil moisture. There has been 10-15% increase in cultivable area and 30-40% increase in crop productivity. The roots of the success achieved by G.S.S. in its watershed works lie in the mobilization work carried out by the organization around the issues mentioned above.

### **Lessons**

For the success of the watershed development programs in India, it is imperative that N.G.O.s with the good record and the strong mobilisation capacity should be identified as programme implementing agencies.

The work of the N.G.Os also exemplifies the complementarity of the interventions in legal, health and social spheres with natural resource management efforts.

Interventions in social issues such as health care, anti alcohol campaigns create a strong basis for the involvement of women in watershed development activities.

The experience of the organization shows how traditional system of the water harvesting of a region can be utilised in Watershed management.

For the long run sustainability it is important to develop an appropriate institutional framework and an empowered core team.

## **CASE STUDY-II, GO-NGO-PRI PARTNERSHIP IN WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT**

Lokshakti Samiti has been active in Raigarh district of Madhya Pradesh since 1996. It has carved out a distinct position for itself among the voluntary organizations in Madhya Pradesh due to exceptionally committed core team and its excellent track record.

The success of Lokshakti in the implementation of the Watershed programmes has to be traced to its role of mobilization of people in literacy campaign. In fact example of Lokshakti underlines how Government and NGO can work together for a common goal.

### **Achievements in watershed development**

Lokshakti Samiti is working on 24 micro watersheds covering 44 villages and 15000 hectares under Rajiv Gandhi Mission for Watershed development.

In all the watersheds, Lokshakti has ensured the formation of truly participate structure of the implementation.

Samiti has striven for and achieved a very high degree of transparency and accountability. The local community has been informed in detail of all the work done under the watershed project.

Labour employed on the watershed sites is entirely local

In order to ensure a proper spread of benefits priority has been given to work on common or revenue lands.

Selection of sites for water harvesting structures is done after careful scrutiny of the beneficiaries.

### **Issues**

A major lacuna has been the low participation of women in some of the watershed projects. Two reasons are cited for this

The social status of the women are backward

There are social taboos on their mobility and participation in public life.

## **Lessons**

Importance of comprehensive broad based mobilization efforts involving people from different walk of life

If government officials and non-government organizations join hands, a very potent force emerges.

Key to success in any programme aimed at the development of rural, tribal areas is the commitment and the dedication of its team to the work at hand.

The mobilization efforts of the Lokshakti also underlines the role that people's organization can play in unleashing the true potential of P.R.I.s

High degree of transparency and accountability should be maintained in the project

Preference must be given to the work on common lands or works that results in common benefit.

Low provision for administrative expenses in the ministry's watershed programme is also a factor that has an adverse impact on the quality of the work done on watershed projects.

Training and capacity building of key personal has been emphasized by the activist of the Lokshakti is extremely important in the context of the watershed.

## **CASE STUDY-III COPING WITH THE DROUGHT THROUGH WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT**

The case study involves the villages taken up by Satguru foundation in Gujarat. And the drought coping mechanism in these villages. The study reveals the difference between the situation during the drought in project villages and the non project villages.

### **Achievements in the Watershed development**

The monsoon failed in the year 1999, in the project area alike in the whole of Gujarat State. It is never claimed that full drought proofing is attained in the project area. The fact is that project villages are also facing the similar problems aroused out of the crisis, the project villages are not facing the same adverse situation as in the case of non-project villages. In the entire project villages there is sufficient availability of drinking water, which has been ensured by the large number of check dams and large number of wells recharged sufficiently under technically sound watershed programme. The information collected methodically and reliably from all villages through series of workshops, village meetings, talking with village leaders. All reveals that organization village partners are much better off in this worst drought year. The migration rate is also less even during such severe year.

### **Lessons**

The experience of the NGO shows that full drought proofing under these condition is almost impossible but by intervention magnitude of the problem can be reduced

It is water and tree combination, which has been very helpful to the project people to meet this kind of exigency.

Dry land converted to irrigated land and possession of large no of trees has significantly enhanced credit worthiness of project villages.

## CONCLUSIONS

**Empowerment:** Technical empowerment of those who are actually going to implement the watershed programmes at the ground level viz the members of the village watershed committees.

**Significance of prior mobilization Experience:** A major conclusion that emerges from case studies is that organizations with the prior experience of mobilization activities are found to be eminently capable of securing peoples participation in water shed programmes

**Importance of the multi focussed approach:** A multi-focussed approach with the intervention in several areas of development increases the chance of success in participatory watershed projects.

**Land Record Reforms:** Land record reforms cannot be separated from watershed development especially in the tribal areas of the country.

Micro- credit groups may be an integral part of watershed development.

The immediate benefit of the watershed projects for the poorest sections is employment generation. However this benefit could be immediately filtered away if simultaneously efforts are not made to encourage the saving habits among the community.

**Role of the State:** The support of the state has atleast three dimensions-financial, administrative and political. In the study carried out for the UNDP it is shown that the allocation of a mere 1-2% of national budget for the watershed oriented employment programmes is sufficient for providing an employment guarantee for all rural employed in the country.

**Supportive role of the line departments:** Probably the most important area in need of change in terms of government attitude concerns the forest department, soil and other departments.

**Need for NGO –PRI synergy:** The experiences shows that the N.G.O.s will have to be prepared to face opposition from vested interests in the PRI structure, the best way of overcoming which is to utilise the support of positive elements from within the P.R.I.s

**Transparency for credibility:** All watershed projects involve the expenditure of very large amount of public money. Any project that does not adopt complete transparency can have no credibility in the eyes of the people.

**Shram tax should not be imposed in form of Shramdan:** In few watershed projects, the shramdan target is being met by cutting it from wages. This is very grave malpractice which must be immediately brought to a halt.

Payment of minimum wage must be ensured

**Facilitating women's participation:** One of the most powerful ways of ensuring the women's participation in watershed projects is to take up large scale mobilization on issues which women feel strongly about like anti alcohol campaigns.

**Clearly defined boundaries of the users and of CPR:** The CPR must be clearly defined, as must be the boundaries of CPR itself. This is the first step in organizing for collective action. Collective choice arrangement must be made by the people themselves regarding issues related to CPR.

Watershed management should be seen as best approach to cope with drought, not as full drought proofing measure.

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