

Evolving Grass Root Level Institutions for Watershed Management Programmes in India

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ABSTRACT

India is endowed with annual average rainfall of nearly 1200 mm, more than the global mean of 990 mm, but a very small proportion of it is managed effectively. The ground water resources are also getting depleted very fast in order to meet ever increasing demands of agriculture, industry and urbanization. However, various estimates on potential for rainwater harvesting suggest vast opportunities for mitigating the shortages. The country has a history of programmes on water conservation, especially in rainfed regions, and the government has lately made efforts to make them people's own programme in order to improve their implementation and efficacy. Involvement of local communities is further facilitated by granting constitutional status to village level societies under *Panchayati Raj* form of self-governance in rural areas. However, bureaucratic functioning of government departments and poor empowerment of local communities has not created a general environment of their participation in these efforts. But there are several instances of initiatives by individuals and NGOs, in various parts of the country, to successfully involve local communities in rainwater harvesting on a large scale. These locally evolved organizations responded quickly to local needs, and in this process, developed organizational capacity and management skills of the local communities in managing natural resources. However, these initiatives are rarely institutionalized on national level and remained informal, unwritten and personalized. An opportunity exists to incorporate characteristics of such organizations in the already existing decentralized institutions by restructuring them. There is need to develop an explicit focus on procedures and functioning by transferring more legal and administrative powers. Simultaneously, there is need for various reforms in agricultural sector for such institutions to take roots and work efficiently.