

88a. GENDER ISSUES IN WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT IN INDIA

Vasudha Lokur Pangare

88b. WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT—CREATING SPACE FOR WOMEN

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Central and State governments, donors and NGOs have all been involved in implementing watershed programmes in India. Although the details vary with different projects, the basic institutional structures are similar. Money flows to a project implementing agency (either a government or non-government organisation) which works closely with a village-level body—a watershed committee—to design and implement project activities. Evidence suggests that certain social groups have consistently been marginalised by watershed development projects. These include the landless, families in the upper levels of catchments, marginalised tribal groups and women. The two papers in this volume assess the level of involvement of women in watershed projects and describe the impact of watershed development on their roles and responsibilities. Both papers emphasise that unless women play a central role in the decision-making process, the long-term sustainability of development efforts is threatened. Paper 88a reviews a number of government and non-government projects in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. It argues strongly that unless we progress from a view where women are treated as a 'disadvantaged group' to a point where they are treated as integral members of the community, development efforts will continue to sideline women's concerns. It emphasises the need to ensure that watershed development activities are compatible with women's livelihood strategies. Paper 88b looks in detail at a German-funded project in Maharashtra. It advocates the need for a sectoral approach to meeting women's needs. Both papers provide practical suggestions on how to ensure that watershed development programmes respond to the concerns of women.

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88b. WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT—CREATING SPACE FOR WOMEN

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Acronyms and Abbreviations	
CAPART	Council for Advancement of Peoples Action and Rural Technology
CBP	Capacity Building Phase
DPAP	Drought Prone Areas Programme
FIP	Full Implementation Phase
GTZ	German Agency for Technical Cooperation
ICAR	Indian Council of Agricultural Research
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
IGWDP	Indo-German Watershed Development Programme
KfW	German Bank for Reconstruction and Development
MM	Mahila Mandal (Women's group/organisation)
MP	Mahila Pravartak (Village Women Promoter)
MSS	Mahila Samaj Sevika (Female Social Worker)
NABARD	National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development
NCAP	National Centre for Agricultural Economics and Policy
NGO	Non Government Organisation
NWDPPRA	National Watershed Development Programme for Rainfed Areas
PIA	Project Implementation Agency
SHG	Self-help group
WC	Village Watershed Committee
WOTR	Watershed Organisation Trust

88a. GENDER ISSUES IN WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT IN INDIA

Vasudha Lokur Pangare

Abstract

Increasing women's participation in watershed projects is critical to the long term sustainability of development efforts. There is a need to sensitise policy makers and staff of project implementing agencies to the core issues affecting women's participation in decision-making processes and the distribution of benefits between men and women.

This paper is based on primary data from a field survey of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. It concludes that activities undertaken for women in watershed development projects do not empower them to be equal partners with men. There is a need to progress from an attitude where women are treated as a 'disadvantaged group', to a point where they are treated as integral members of the community. Unless women are involved in the decision-making process, watershed development projects will remain welfare oriented as far as women are concerned.

A central reason that women remain 'disadvantaged' is because their contribution to the rural economy is not recognised. Since women rarely own or control productive assets, they are not looked upon as decision-makers in the management of natural resources. Consequently, they do not receive their rightful compensation in terms of wages, or in terms of ownership of productive assets and benefits accrued from them.

The paper provides suggestions on how to strengthen women's involvement in watershed activities. An assessment of the interface between livelihoods and resource base can help to identify the key issues related to the economic survival of women resource users and ensure their interests do not become sidelined. Stronger guidance on the number of women to be appointed to the watershed committees is needed as current recommendations (of one or two women) have resulted in tokenism. Project implementing agencies must take responsibility for facilitating women's participation by setting up support systems and providing training to both local people and their staff. Training in gender issues and also technical training (especially for women) will strengthen women's roles in the decision-making hierarchy

1 INTRODUCTION

The Guidelines for Watershed Development issued by the Council for Advancement of Peoples Action and Rural Technology (CAPART), Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment, specify that efforts should be made "to improve the social and economic conditions of the disadvantaged in the watershed community, such as the assetless and the women". This statement, at the very beginning of the document, establishes a picture of women as a group of 'helpless and weak individuals' within the community that require support. The suggestions put forward later in the document, on how the social and economic conditions of this group can be improved, do little to change this perspective.

This paper argues that unless we progress from a view where women are treated as a 'disadvantaged group', to a point where women are treated as integral members of the community and central to the decision-making process, development projects will continue to remain welfare-oriented as far as women are concerned. The real reason that women are considered 'disadvantaged' is because their contribution to the rural economy is not recognised. Consequently, women do not receive rightful

compensation in terms of wages, or in terms of ownership of productive assets and benefits accrued from them. Activities undertaken for women in watershed development projects do not empower them to be equal partners with men. Women's participation continues to be judged by the number of women working as labour, or by their 'presence' in meetings.

This paper is based on primary data from a field survey in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, carried out as part of the Sustainable Rainfed Agriculture Research and Development Project by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and National Centre for Agricultural Economics and Policy (NCAP). The study reviewed the performance of a number of projects selected to be broadly representative of the range of approaches to watershed development in India. Schemes funded by Central government (National Watershed Development Programme for Rainfed Areas, Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Drought Prone Areas Programme), State government (*Jal Sandharan* and *Adarsh Gaon Yojana*—Government of Maharashtra Watershed Programmes), multilateral agencies (World Bank), donors (IGWDP) and NGOs were visited during the study. Projects are usually implemented jointly by a Project Implementing Agency (PIA)—which can be government or NGO—and a village level watershed committee. Control villages—those without watershed programmes—were also included. Further insights come from fieldwork undertaken by the author in Rajasthan in 1997.

This study forms part of the Sustainable Rainfed Agriculture Research and Development Project. The study was undertaken by the International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington and the National Centre for Agricultural Economics and Policy Research, New Delhi. It is funded by the World Bank and the Indian Council for Agricultural Research.
The author was responsible for the gender aspects of the study.

2 APPROACHES TO MORE EFFECTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF WOMEN

Several ways to achieve more effective integration of women into watershed development efforts can be identified.

The need to acknowledge women as farmers

An important objective of watershed development is to improve land productivity. It is therefore farmers who first come forward to participate in project activities. It is the same farmers who are nominated to the local decision-making bodies—including the watershed committee—set up for the project. Women are nominated to these committees under a kind of ‘reservation policy’, implying that they are not members of the farming community in their own right. However women are and always have been farmers. They are the primary food producers, contribute more hours of work and perform more tasks than men in agricultural production. They not only cultivate land belonging to their families and work as agricultural labourers, they also independently lease plots for cultivation.

Women farmers have independent views about farming practices and can contribute significantly to the improvement of agriculture:

- Women reported that the shift to cash cropping resulting from increased water availability in rehabilitated watersheds had been disastrous for their families. Increased investment financed through credit, has resulted in a highly vulnerable economic condition. Given a choice, women would opt for enhanced stability and the cultivation of food grains.
- Men in Udaipur district (Rajasthan) said that they preferred to marry brides who were able to share their knowledge of agricultural practices. One man told how his wife had taught him to space the sowing of different crops for better yields.

However, since women rarely own land, they are not recognised by policy makers as farmers; the term ‘farmer’ is usually treated as masculine.

The need to identify women’s livelihoods in the watershed community

An effective way of ensuring that the interests of various groups of resource users, especially women, are represented in decision-making, is to understand different livelihood strategies upon which they are based. This should focus on access and control issues related to private and common resources (land, water, fuel, fodder) and on those resources which provide livelihood options to women—such as rope making, basket weaving and leaf plate making.

Watershed development requires decisions on the appropriate management of common pool resources, upon which poor and marginal groups in the community often depend for their economic survival. Common pool resources play a key role in fulfilling fodder and fuel needs, the collection of which is primarily the responsibility of

women. Common pool resources also provide independent sources of income to women. In the IFPRI/NCAP survey, women from 24 per cent of the villages stated goat rearing to be a source of independent income. Women from 29 per cent of the villages stated that occupations such as broom making, leaf plate making and collection of tendu leaves and tamarind are important sources of income. All these occupations depend upon common pool resources, either for fodder or raw materials.

These livelihood options are not easily visible because:

- the percentage of the population involved is small;
- income from these sources is regarded as secondary in terms of family income, even though it may be the primary source of income for the woman¹.

An assessment of livelihood strategies is therefore an important way of keeping issues related to the economic survival of women in focus.

Participation of women in decision-making

Along with the PIA, it is the village watershed committee that is responsible for planning and decision-making in watershed development projects. Most women are unaware of the role they can play in watershed development projects. PIA efforts to involve women are often limited to ‘awareness camps’, or explanations of the concept of watershed development in women’s meetings.

One of the main objectives of these camps and meetings is to ‘enforce’ the ban on free grazing and open access to common pool resources. Results from the survey indicated that the number of villages in which women have had to resort to stealing fuelwood from others has doubled over the last ten years; in 23 per cent of the villages, women said they stole from restricted areas. More significantly, women in 53 per cent of the villages said they had to travel farther in search of fuel wood and fodder due to restrictions on village commons and forest lands. Common pool resources often remain inaccessible to women, even when resources have regenerated as a result of watershed development efforts. It is essential therefore that women have a say in decisions regarding watershed resources.

The CAPART Watershed Guidelines stipulate that at least one member of the watershed committee should be a woman. The Guidelines issued by the Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment state that an ‘adequate’ number of women should be included in the watershed committee; the actual number is not specified. Given prevailing socio-cultural constraints, it is only exceptionally strong women who are able to make themselves heard under such circumstances. Furthermore, a single woman, or even two, may find it difficult to represent the interests of all women in the village. Although women in general can be divided into two broad groups, landed and landless, there will be different needs and priorities within these groups depending on the occupations and socio-economic status of the women. The study encountered differences in the views of women from different socio-economic groups. Women from *Harijan*—untouchable lower status—households were more interested in watershed project activities since these directly affected their access to common pool resources. Women from

Reddy—large landholding—households were less interested, as they were not directly affected by restrictions on village common and forest land.

The mandatory requirement of ‘at least one woman’, or an ‘adequate number of women’ on committees encourages tokenism and does not demonstrate a committed effort to involve women in decision-making. For effective participation, it is recommended that at least one-third, preferably one-half, of the committee should consist of women (Pangare, 1997)². Furthermore, female committee members need to be given specific responsibilities and made signatories to the bank account for the project, in order to emphasise the importance of their role.

As a first step towards strengthening the involvement of women in decision-making, the objectives of the PIA and the plans for intervention in the watershed should be made available to women in the community from the beginning of the project. Watershed plans are usually presented by the PIA through the *gram sabha*³ and it is therefore essential that full participation of women in these meetings is attained (Pangare, 1997). This can be achieved by specifying that the unit of participation is the individual adult and not the household. Sensitive scheduling of the time and location of the meeting can also encourage attendance by the poorest women in the community.

Efforts are rarely made to understand the needs of women. Indeed sanctioned processes can inadvertently contribute to the sidelining of women’s interests. For example, according to the CAPART guidelines, the PIA is required to obtain signed consent for the project from two-thirds of the adults in the community. However in reality what happens is that consent is taken from the heads of two-thirds of the households. Since men are accepted as the heads of households, it is therefore they, not the women, who give their consent to the project. It is assumed that the opinions and decisions of the men are representative of the women in the household. However households comprise different groups of women—single, divorced, widowed and abandoned—who adopt different livelihood strategies to meet individual needs. Unless the requirement for consent is redefined to ensure that the signatures represent the census composition of two-thirds of the adult population, it is unlikely that the specific needs of different groups of women will be met.

Homogenous women’s groups

Separate meetings of women with similar interests to identify their priorities prior to the *gram sabha* can help to facilitate more effective expression of women’s needs and priorities (Box 1).

Women’s organisations serve to empower women socially and economically. Such groups can be strengthened by PIAs, as one way of encouraging women to participate in community activities. Eighty-two percent of surveyed villages contained local women’s groups. In 39 per cent of villages women reported that one of the most important changes that has occurred in the last ten years is that they have become more vocal in expressing their needs and opinions (Table 1). This was true regardless of whether the PIA was an NGO or a government agency.

Supporting women’s participation in community activities

Women who want to participate in community activities can do so only after completing their household duties and other work—whether it be in their own fields or outside employment outside. Participation in community activities therefore becomes the third work burden of women (Box 2). On the one hand, we recognise that women can make significant contributions to community development and expect them to participate. At the same time, we criticise them for not attending meetings and for their inability to take time off from their domestic responsibilities to participate in community activities.

Facilitating women’s participation begins with understanding the community in which the watershed activity is to be undertaken. Gender roles, responsibilities and gender-based division of tasks in the household and community need to be analysed before planning any development activity. Although certain socio-economic generalisations can be made, each community will be unique in terms of specific norms and relationships. Watershed development projects depend on community action and it is important, therefore, to understand each individual community before any attempts can be made to overcome social and cultural barriers.

Box 1 Gender sensitive decision-making

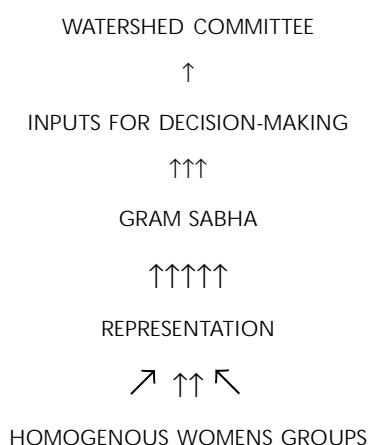


Table 1 Major changes for women that have taken place over the last ten years.

Category of Project	% of villages with women’s groups	% of villages where women said they have become vocal
NWDPRA ^a / World Bank/ICAR	19	17
DPAP ^b / JALSANDHARAN ^c	7	17
NGO	29	42
AGY ^d / INDO-GERMAN ^e	19	17
CONTROL	23	8
TOTAL	82	39

^a National Watershed Development Program for Rainfed Areas

^b DPAP, Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment

^c Watershed Development Program of the Government of Maharashtra

^d Adarsh Gaon Yojana of the Government of Maharashtra

^e Indo German Watershed Development Program

Box 2 Triple work burden of women

Domestic work
+
Work in own fields/work with livestock/daily wage labour
++
Community action
shramdan (voluntary labour)/meetings/*gram sabha*/watershed
development activities
=
Triple work burden of women

Women are usually unable to participate in community activities without the consent and support of men in their families and in the community. Men, therefore, need to be made aware of the importance of the contribution of women to the project and to the development of the village. Women who assume leadership roles or give time to community activities are often single, living with their parents (if for instance they are divorced, widowed or abandoned), or in situations where there are elderly family members in the house who are willing to help out with childcare. Even when women become involved in community activities they find it difficult to move beyond their ‘domesticated’ role. It is not uncommon to see a woman *sarpanch* (elected president of the village committee) serving tea during meetings, while PIA staff and men from the community discuss project activities. It is the responsibility of the PIA to recognise women as leaders and appreciate the value of their contribution. An important way in which PIAs can facilitate the participation of women in community activities is by providing support systems, such as childcare facilities that enable the women to attend meetings, workshops and camps. Women who want to attend training programs and camps can be helped to set up support systems with neighbours and other family members, so their household duties can be taken care of in their absence.

Importance of sensitising PIA staff

Men dominate the decision-making hierarchies in most PIAs—especially in government PIAs—and it is essential that staff are trained to understand issues related to women’s roles and needs. Female staff are generally recruited only when a conscious decision is taken to work with women in a project. In discussions with PIAs, one NGO staff member questioned the assumption that only female staff can work effectively with village women: “although it is true that it is easier for women staff to interact with women in the community, there is also a positive aspect to male staff speaking up on behalf of women; men are often more responsive to male staff advocating greater participation by women”. There is still however an urgent need to increase the number of female staff in PIAs. Female staff also need to be trained in facilitating women’s participation and in the technical aspects of watershed development.

Importance of technical training for women

Knowledge and skills determine an individual’s position in the hierarchy set up to implement project activities. Unfortunately, training programs in watershed development target men rather than women. Some PIAs hold meetings with women, or use existing women’s groups as forums for explaining the objectives of a watershed development program. Women are typically isolated from the scientific and technical aspects of watershed development. The most common training programmes for women are related to the development of nurseries for tree planting programmes; they are rarely offered training in surveying methods or the construction of conservation structures. Even in nursery training, women are used as labour and rarely contribute to the selection of species to be raised in the nursery.

Due to the lack technical training, women rarely hold supervisory positions on land development sites and only contribute to the labour component. They are also unable to participate in decisions related to the selection of sites and identification of appropriate conservation structures. One of the common reasons given for not offering technical training to women is their lack of education. However, even illiterate women can be trained to measure the amount of work completed on construction sites. For example, women from two villages in Maharashtra have learned to measure trenches with the help of markings made on measuring tapes, ensuring that they receive the correct wages and that they are not being made to work more than required.

Training modules need to be specifically designed for women. The purpose of offering technical training to women should be to create an opportunity for them to move up in the decision-making hierarchy. Educated women from the community can also be identified for specific training.

3 FACILITATING THE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN THE WATERSHED COMMUNITY

Rural women have always worked to support their families. However, their contribution to household income is often regarded as secondary, despite the fact that women’s income is often equally as important as men’s. Even when women are the sole earners in the family, they are often not treated as primary earners. There are significant disparities in the wages paid to men and women for agricultural labour (Table 2).

The average peak and slack wages for women are 35 per cent less than the male equivalents. In project areas where water resources have become available for irrigation, the volume of agriculture-related work undertaken by women has increased substantially. It might be expected that as the work burden increases, wages would also increase. However, a substantial difference remains between the basic wage rates for men and women. According to farmers in Maharashtra, as economic conditions improve, farmers invest in productive assets

Table 2 Average wages for men and women in Maharashtra

	Peak wage (current)	10 yrs ago (current)	Slack wage	10 yrs ago
Men	41	23	35	20
Women	27	15	23	13
% difference	35	32	35	32

All wages in rupees: US\$1 = Rs43

like land and improved livestock leading to an increased work burden for women. Ideally, women should be given equal ownership rights to the newly acquired assets.

The most immediate perceived benefit of watershed development is wage employment. In watershed development projects, conservation measures are installed for which labour is required and most of the physical works are undertaken during summer when there is a need for wage employment. The non-government PIAs work within their specific budgets and have different wage rates from the government PIAs. Government agencies utilise the wage employment programs like the Employment Guarantee Scheme, Employment Assurance Scheme, Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Scheme and the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana to execute the physical works. Although there are equal basic wage rates for men and women in all these programs, there are differences in the nature of work undertaken by men and women.

Physical works in watershed development are categorised on the basis of the degree of difficulty (Table 3).

Wage rates increase from 'a' to 'd', whereas the contribution of women's labour decreases.

There are several possible explanations for this situation. Men believe that women are not capable of working with rock and stone. Women say however that when they are

working in their own fields, they never stop to think whether the ground is soft or hard. Furthermore, if equal daily wages are paid to men and women regardless of the nature of the work, then the differential rates and reduced contribution of women at the top end of the scale seem dubious.

Table 3 also highlights the variation in payments under different watershed development programs. The method of calculating wage rates also varies. In some cases—notably the IGWDP—wages are paid on the basis of an eight-hour day. In most cases—both under government and non-government programs—work is contracted to a group of individuals or to a *mukadam* (local contractor) who recruits labour for the specific work. Under a contractual arrangement, the volume of work is calculated in terms of cubic meters and payment is made equally to the labourers. This is done every two days, every fifteen days, or when the work is completed (depending on the length of the contract). Exploitation often takes place when work output is calculated by the *mukadam*. In two AGY villages visited during the study women were observed carefully noting the volume of work they had completed to refer to when payments were made.

Lack of PIA commitment to addressing the issue of equal wage rates further compounds the problem. PIA field level staff in Maharashtra stated that it was safer to structure the wages for watershed activities as per the structure of current agriculture wages, rather than antagonise men by taking up the issue of equal wages for women. As a result, women receive at least 30 per cent lower wages than men. Some PIAs have however successfully trained women to measure the volume of work, so that they are able to demand their rightful wages. Women in a village in Maharashtra stated how they are now able to find out whether the PIA is extracting more work out of them through '*shramdan*' (voluntary contribution of labour), than is expected. There are several ways through which PIAs can demonstrate the value of the economic contribution of women. For instance in

certain activities where men and women work together such as trenching, the output of both can be calculated together and an equal payment be paid separately to men and women.

A common incentive promoted by many PIAs is the introduction of income generating activities to create supplementary income sources for women to meet the cash needs of the family. These activities often target single, widowed or deserted women who are the heads of households. Women are trained in activities such as tailoring, *papad/masala* (local snacks)—making, poultry rearing and goat farming. They are also sometimes provided with credit facilities. Income generation groups for women are

Table 3 Wage Rates under different schemes in watershed development projects for Maharashtra.

Degree of difficulty	Government programmes	IGWDP ¹	AGY ²	Approx. % of womens labour ³
(a) Work in soil	9.2	10	8.67	50 % and above
(b) Work in gravel (soft murum)	11.5	15	12.64	50 % and above
(c) Work in hard gravel (hard murum)	16.87	20	14.67	Up to 50 %
(d) Work in rock and stone	19.93	19.83	29.34	20% to 25%
Daily wage	23	35	26	NA

Wage rate in Rupees per cubic metre. Daily wages calculated on the basis of expected work output per day

¹ IGWDP have their own rates.

² Villages are given specific funds as per the physical works to be installed. The village NGO decides the rates.

³ Approximate percentages taken from NGO staff and attendance books.

also formed under the Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment's scheme for the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas. Experience shows that training and credit facilities are of limited value unless marketing facilities are also provided. Whilst income generation activities undoubtedly benefit women (especially those who do not depend upon natural resources for survival), activities and inputs related to farming and post-harvest processes would be more useful for women whose primary occupations are agriculture-related. Savings and self help groups have been more successful in terms of women's economic empowerment. Members of these groups save a certain amount of money per month, as little as Rs2-5 in some cases. The act of putting money aside gives women a sense of control.

4 GENDER ISSUES IN THE MANAGEMENT, SHARING AND CONTROL OF RESOURCES

If decisions related to ownership, access and control of productive resources remain exclusively in the hands of the men, it is unlikely that women will receive a fair share of benefits. Efforts must be made to improve intra-household distribution of benefits through community projects.

Common pool resources not only meet daily household needs for fuel and fodder, but also provide livelihood options for women. Although common pool resources remain heavily degraded in many areas, the imposition of access restrictions on common and forest land has led to successful regeneration of the resources in watershed development areas. Women however rarely benefit from this regeneration, mainly because they are unable to pay for rights to cut and carry fuel and fodder. As a result, many women have been forced to reduce or sell their livestock. Furthermore, women have to go further afield to fetch fuelwood, increasing the time spent in collection.

Box 3 Higher wages for men

In one village a well was being dug downstream of a water conservation structure. Women were only receiving half of the wage paid to men. The reason given by the PIA was that men were risking their lives by getting down into the well in order to dig, whereas the women were only clearing away the rocks and soil. What the women were actually doing was climbing down into the well and then up again along the steep sides—without steps or a path—with stones and rocks on their heads. The question is who deserves the higher wages?

The wages were being calculated according to the rate for specific tasks. Men were being paid according to the rate for work in rock and stone, which varies between Rs50-60 per cubic metre. Women's rates were based on the depth from which the stones and soil were removed and the distance transported. The rate for distance ranges from Rs2.30 per cubic metre of material transported for 10 to 20 metres to Rs16.10 per cubic metre of material for 70 to 80 metres. The rate for depth ranges from Rs2.88 per cubic metre of material lifted or removed from a depth of 1 to 2 metres to Rs18.42 per cubic metre for a depth of 6 to 7 metres. The difference between the rates for digging and transporting are substantial. The task of transporting soil and rock horizontally and vertically is equally as hazardous as digging. If the risk factor is built into the rate for digging, then it should also be built in to rate for distance and depth of transportation.

Only women from land-owning families who have benefited from irrigation are able to use gas or kerosene stoves as a substitute for the lack of access to fuelwood. Similarly, when water becomes available, it is men—specifically landowners—who tend to assume control over the resource. Water resources developed through community enterprise should belong to the community as a whole and logically, women should be made equal partners in the management of these resources.

Watershed development projects are therefore taking away livelihood options from women and increasing the drudgery involved in accessing fuel, fodder and water. It is important that PIAs develop mechanisms to enable a wider sharing of benefits. Where common pool resources are concerned, women can be given rights over village common and forest land to access the resources they need for their livelihoods. The PIA can provide infra-structural support to record and confer user rights to these resources. It can also help set up systems—such as social fencing or rotational grazing—to ensure that women do not completely lose their access rights to common pool resources.

5 CONCLUSION

CAPART's watershed guidelines state that “this programme is conceived to achieve conservation and development of a watershed, to improve its ecological well-being and thereby enhance its productivity and life supporting systems for the betterment of the people and their environment.” In addition, the program is expected to achieve “more equitable distribution of the benefits of land, water resources and bio-mass development”.

To achieve this, it is first necessary to acknowledge the importance of women's contributions to the village economy. The ‘disadvantaged’ status of women has arisen from gender imbalances in the distribution of productive resources between men and women. It is important therefore that women are involved in decisions related to the control and management of resources in watershed projects. With their knowledge and experience of resource management, women can play a significant role in project implementation. Furthermore, women's involvement in management will ensure sustainable livelihoods for women and more equitable distribution of benefits between men and women.

ENDNOTES

1 During the IFPRI/NCAP project there were examples from four villages where the village level survey indicated that the percentage of the population engaged in sheep and goat rearing was nil, whereas in the same villages, women stated goat keeping to be a source of income.

2 Recommendations submitted by the author to Council for Advancement of Peoples' Action and Rural Technology for introducing gender perspectives in the National Guidelines for Watershed Development. The recommendations were discussed at a workshop on ‘Women in Watershed Development’ organised by the author in Maharashtra, in October 1996.

3 The *gram sabha* or village body consists of all adult voting members of the village.

88b. WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT—CREATING SPACE FOR WOMEN

Marcella d'Souza

Abstract

A previous article, "Gender and Watershed Development", published in the July 1997 edition of the AgREN newsletter, described the impact of watershed development on women's lives and on gender relationships. It indicated that while watershed development does initially lead to an increase in women's workloads, it can also offer them unique opportunities to improve their economic situation as well as enhance their status in society. Specifically, watershed development has a notable impact on employment and income opportunities, food security, fodder, fuel and water availability and access to credit. Socially, impacts relate to migration rates and the status and self-confidence of women. The degree to which impacts are positive varies in time (with benefits becoming evident three to four years after initiation of programmes) and the extent to which development plans and allows for women's empowerment.

This paper focuses on some options for mitigating the negative impacts of watershed development and to enable women to become more self-reliant and more self confident. It addresses two key issues:

- *How to capitalise on the opportunities offered and mitigate some of the key problems arising from watershed development activities; and*
- *The approach, the organisational framework and mechanisms adopted by the Indo-German Watershed Project to create space for women in watershed development.*

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper draws on experiences from watershed development projects being implemented by the Indo-German Watershed Development Programme (IGWDP) in Maharashtra, India. The majority of watersheds are characterised by the following conditions:

- they are 500 to 1,500 hectares in size and are located in drought-prone areas, with an annual rainfall ranging from 150 to 800 mm;
- hills and wastelands have sparse vegetative cover and are mainly barren and degraded;
- agriculture is largely rainfed and the main crops are coarse cereals.

The projects have the following characteristics:

- they are implemented by those living within the watershed, through a village watershed committee (WC) supported by an NGO. The WC is a representative body nominated through consensus by the *gram sabha*¹. Rehabilitation is planned and implemented using external and local expertise;
- a ridge to valley approach is followed with an emphasis on soil and water conservation and biomass development. Controlled grazing and a ban on tree felling are enforced in project areas;
- total time taken for project implementation, including a capacity building phase, is approximately five to six years.

There is no denying that watershed development, at least in the initial years, does lead to an increase in women's workloads. Nevertheless, women indicate their willingness to shoulder these extra burdens, provided it leads to the fulfillment of four basic needs:

- access to a reliable source of safe drinking water within a reasonable distance and improvement in health and hygiene status;
- access to a steady flow of income to ensure food, fuel and financial security. The latter is especially important in times of crisis—for instance if abandoned by their husbands or widowed;
- a future for their children through education;
- participation in household decision-making (in decisions regarding utilisation of funds, upbringing of their children, farming decisions) and in village affairs and acceptance in and respect of society.

This paper focuses on some possibilities for mitigating the negative impacts of watershed development on women. Sections two to six provide some practical examples of options and mechanisms for capitalising on opportunities created by watershed development efforts. Sections seven and eight outline the IGWDP approach to 'creating space' for women in watershed development.

Laxmibai of Kasare village, Ahmednagar district (project completed in 1995):

Before watershed work, we had no work in summer—we would rest long under the trees—but we were worried and unhappy because we did not know whether we would be able to get by the coming days securely. Now however, we have no time as we have regular work, both from the project and increased farm production. We don't mind this since we now have a sense of security of food and income and also the possibility of making a future.

2 FINANCIAL SECURITY

In the context of rural Maharashtra, financial security comes from: wages (preferably a regular source within the village); and returns on investments and inputs.

Wages

A desirable wage is one which not only meets survival and social needs, but also enables investment for further contingencies—sickness and old age—and acquisition of income-generating assets such as milch cattle. Employment should preferably be available within the village.

At the start of a project in a village in Jalna district, women were initially able to save only Rs10/person/month². However, as the programme was paying higher than the "minimum wage" (survival wage), household needs were met and investible surpluses increased. The saving rate increased to Rs25 within a period of six months.

It is important therefore, that any watershed development effort should provide a wage that is sufficient to ensure that savings can provide some buffer for the period following the end of the project, as well as allowing for investments in livestock and other livelihood/income generating assets. Moreover, it should also allow for increased travel, participation in social, cultural and religious and other events which contribute to a widening of horizons and increasing self-confidence.

Many of the inhabitants of Khodpakhindi, a remote tribal village in Yavatmal district, had never ventured beyond their district headquarters, about 40 km away. However, within three years of project implementation some of the villagers (including women) undertook a tour by hired vehicle for pilgrimage and social purposes—covering approximately 1,200 km—at their own expense.

The local agricultural wage is generally lower than the project-assisted wage. Post-watershed development agricultural wages however tend to be higher (assuming favourable agro-meteorological conditions), due to an increase in net irrigated area, increased agricultural and land productivity and withdrawal from the labour force of some small and marginal farmers who revert to their own farms once their productivity increases. To ensure that at least a fair wage is available, it is important that the measures adopted during the project lead to a substantial increase in land productivity. Soil and water conservation activities are not enough; a substantial portion of arable land should be able to produce at least two crops a year.

Return on investments

This comes generally from 4 sources: (i) income from private farms; (ii) farm-based activities; (iii) non-farm activities; and (iv) Self help group (SHG) activities.

Income from private farms

While increases in agricultural productivity might occur as a result of watershed development, on-farm gains are usually appropriated by men and increased drudgery is disproportionately borne by women. Although this is difficult to change, it is possible to introduce improved agricultural implements and mechanisation that will reduce drudgery and save women's time; much remains to be done in the area of improving and disseminating non-mechanized agricultural implements. On common land or private fallow land, grass production and cutting is generally perceived as a woman's chore. This can also provide income for women especially when, through project intervention, intensive cultivation and management of nutritious and improved fodder species is undertaken. Introduction of effective cutting implements is possible.

Farm-based activities

Bans on free grazing, pasture development through tree and grass planting and soil and water conservation (SWC) measures lead to an increase in fodder production on both common and private lands and increased availability of drinking water. This can lead to an increase in the number of cross-bred animals and stall-fed goat rearing. Pisciculture, using water in the check-dams, is another potential source of income and also serves as a nutritious diet supplement. Smaller animals—such as goats—are usually the preserve of women and income from goat production is often retained by the women. Care should be undertaken to ensure that small ruminant livestock are penned and, as far as possible, managed collectively. This denies men the excuse of taking over the management of these livestock assets on grounds of alleged incompetence and destruction of plantations 'they' have raised due to free grazing. It also provides some assurance that the earnings generated will remain with the women themselves.

Non-farm livelihood activities

Due to the heavy demand for forest and horticultural species during project implementation, nursery raising can provide substantial income to women. Nurseries also provide a training ground in the dynamics of group management and functioning through acquisition of skills in negotiation, conflict resolution, bargaining and management, which are necessary to successfully run any micro enterprise. Once the project is completed, the demand for trees declines (if external markets have not been obtained), although the demand for high value horticultural species is likely to remain. It is therefore essential that nurseries should be of a composite nature. Appropriate skills and training in seed selection, nursery raising and grafting should be given to women.

In Malegaon Pathar village of Ahmednagar district, the women's SHG comprising 60 members took a loan of Rs6000 to start a nursery in 1995. In 1996, they made a net profit of Rs10,000 through the sale of plants and re-invested Rs6000 towards another nursery. This they sold in 1997, for a profit of Rs47,000, made possible for such a large group by their effective management and accounting system.

With the increasing demand for organically-grown crops and food products, the production of compost manures, bio-fertilizers, vermi-composting, bio-pesticides (for example the collection and processing of seeds of Neem and other locally available plants) can provide income as well as inputs to improve land quality and productivity. Fortuitously, this is an area that is traditionally viewed as women's work. NGOs need to provide technology, management and marketing support from the outset of the project to ensure efficient group functioning.

Establishing income-generating activities is a more difficult proposition for remote villages. Non-farm activities are especially important during the lean period when there is less work in the fields or when there are elderly people at home. These activities should be based on locally available raw materials and where there is a demand for the end product. Possible options include mushroom cultivation and plate production.

Saving and Credit activities

Saving and credit activities provide an important means through which women can control their own finances. Individual savings are pooled to form group capital. This is used to provide loans to meet productive and consumptive needs. It is important that groups understand that 'cash floating is cash alive'. That is, cash given in loans multiplies. Women themselves can have control over access to their funds when taught simple accounting and maintenance of their ledgers³. Training can also assist women to take decisions over the prioritisation of loans and enable them to withstand pressure from men by claiming helplessness in the face of group ownership.

3 FOOD AND FUEL SECURITY

With an increase in land productivity, men frequently choose to increase the production of cash crops such as sugarcane, timber and cotton. It is important therefore that women are included in decision about land use and crop planning to ensure that household food requirements (vegetables, fruit and a variety of grains) are adequately provided. It is important that both men and women be given information about the nutritive value of various foods and their importance to health, so that the family readily sets aside a sufficient amount for home consumption. As fuel for cooking is a scarce commodity in rural areas, women a need to be involved in the selection of fuel and fodder species. The distribution of interim and end products from these plantations can be handled by women and SHGs.

4 EDUCATION

Women lay great store in education for their children and the acquisition of information, knowledge and skills for themselves. Middle and secondary schools and higher education centres are often located far from the village, limiting attendance particularly of female children. Cultural norms and poverty necessitate that female children attend to the household chores and look after younger siblings. Sources of income provided by

the project and related developments can help reverse the situation. As watershed projects work with the community, the opportunity to promote education, especially for female children, should not be missed.

In a village in Nanded district an NGO has started a "Kishori Varg" (classes for teenage girls) where they are taught home management skills. The girls have, in turn, started literacy sessions for the illiterate women of the village.

For tribals living in remote areas, problems are particularly acute. Apathy and a lack of hope in obtaining productive employment results from poverty and their isolation from society in general. In mixed villages—where tribals and other cultural groups live together—working side by side on watershed work, attending WC meetings and *gram sabhas* and SHGs and *Mahila Mandal* (MMs, womens' organisation) breaks down barriers and encourages tribals to take advantage of development and send their children to school. However, in homogeneous tribal villages, special attention and efforts have to be made to promote education.

The increasing integration of urban and rural areas, market development and the widespread use of mass media (radio and television) is leading to the breakdown of traditional thought patterns. Women even in remote areas, are increasingly aware that they are being bypassed by progress and are therefore unable to enjoy the benefits of modern development; as such, they are becoming more vocal about their rights. Fortunately women are beginning to be supported in their quest by men, who are gradually realising that their home situation is a reflection and consequence of the level of knowledge, information and skills women possess. If women are active and capably manage the home, the status of men is also increased, particularly in the larger society with which they socialise or conduct commerce. A man's status in rural society is increasingly measured by the image his wife presents socially. While previously women themselves would not think of spending a night away from the family, men increasingly allow women to participate in training of two to three days outside their villages.

When the IGWDP initiated measures for women's promotion, the NGOs and WCs insisted that training should consist of one day sessions, with women returning home in the early evening. Two years later, however, the picture has changed. The project has now conducted over 18 training programmes (for 691 women) and 15 exposure visits (involving 830 women) with overnight stays of two to three days outside the village. Men actively endorse their participation.

The experience of IGWDP shows that the demand for 'literacy', comes later, usually two to three years after the beginning of the project. Women's initial priority is for information, knowledge and skills related to their daily responsibilities. NGO field workers need to be sensitive to this need and short, 'action-oriented-learning' sessions should be organised accordingly.

In Tondoli watershed in Ahmednagar district, waste water from households flowed freely into the roads between houses. The children played in this and contracted diseases. Women were taught the relationship between children's sicknesses and waste water. As a result they dug soak pits which absorbed the water underground. This opened up another possibility—kitchen gardens or planting of vegetable creepers/fruit trees around these pits—thus obtaining a nutritious supplement to the household diet.

Exposure visits, training programmes and *melawas* (social gatherings) give women opportunities to express themselves in public and improve their self confidence. As confidence increases leadership emerges. These leaders or *Mahila Pravartaks* (MPs, village women promoters) need to be identified and trained to conduct women's group meetings and sessions. This will ensure continuity and functioning of women's groups after the project period is completed.

5 WATER, HEALTH AND HYGIENE

While watershed development can lead to an increase in ground water levels and ensure water is available in the village for longer periods, obtaining water for household needs still consumes on average, one and a half to three hours of a woman's day and water sources (especially open wells) are often unhygienic. Attention should be given to this aspect, by providing women with information on the causes of drinking water contamination, its consequences for health and simple ways of purification. Water sources (open wells, hand pumps, springs) that are susceptible to contamination should be protected by building masonry aprons or structures. Wherever possible, a piped drinking water scheme within the village should be established by government schemes, other projects or community contributions. Formation of village level committees or habitation-wise user group committees can be established (preferably of women) to ensure that water sources are well maintained and protected.

Women bear the burden of the ill health of their family. The health and nutrition of women and female children are usually the last priority. Through the provision of information, nutritional status can be improved. Hence efforts along the lines of 'action-oriented-learning' sessions concerning health, hygiene, sanitation, family planning and nutrition are important. Interventions such as raising kitchen gardens or homestead poultry and latrine building can help address some of these needs. Establishment of soak pits to drain waste water, as well as improve the hygiene of surroundings, can reduce skin and diarrhoeal infections. The use of improved energy conserving *chulhas* (earthen stoves) and biogas units can reduce time and energy spent on fuel collection (on an average, eight hours a week), as well as reduce smoke levels in the kitchen (the cause of many respiratory illnesses) where women and small children usually sit.

6 DECISION MAKING

Women repeatedly stress that any change in gender relations must be obtained in a manner that does not threaten the harmony of their homes or their security. To create space for women in society, sessions on gender sensitivity therefore need to be organized for men. The approach and method adopted for awareness generation and integration should be consensual, even if at times change appears imperceptible and slow in occurring.

An analogy of the household that is useful, is that of the two-wheeled bullock cart. It moves ahead only if both the wheels are of the same dimension. The cart represents a family and the husband and wife, who bear equal responsibility, each represent a wheel. If the wheel which represents the woman is much smaller than the other, the family and in fact the entire village community makes no headway. Only when the women are encouraged and respected can she take her place as an equal; only then will both shoulders (wheels of the household) be equal and the family progress. Along with the family, the village and the community also develops.

Some accompanying initiatives that can prove helpful in accelerating the inclusion of women in decision-making roles include:

- strengthening women's participation in the *gram sabha*. This requires a determined effort in encouraging women to actively share their problems and seek solutions within their own SHGs. Savings and credit operations can be a 'nursery' for the acquisition of crucial management, negotiation and bargaining skills
- ensuring a minimum of 33 per cent representation of women in the WC. While a 50 per cent representation is preferred, this may not be immediately achievable
- active participation in landuse and crop planning as well as selection of plantation species and raising of nurseries
- fostering and facilitation of activities of women's groups and SHGs

7 IGWDP AND THE WOMEN'S SECTOR

When IGWDP was launched in 1993, women were included in the overall programme strategy, but not as a separate sector. It rapidly became clear that unless they were given special attention, their effective contribution in watershed development would not be realised. Moreover, it was recognised that, without the active participation of women in all aspects of the project, the sustainability of the watershed development was questionable. The Womens Promotion Sector was therefore introduced in late 1995. This late insertion has had several disadvantages:

- Several of the projects which had begun in 1993 focused on land and water problems. Issues of concern to women had been taken up by only a few projects,

mainly at the initiative of NGOs. Since land and water issues are primarily the domain of men, women played practically no role in the decision making process. At an early stage therefore, watershed development unintentionally became a male-dominated programme. By the end of 1995, only eight out of 43 projects had undertaken some womens' activities (kitchen gardens, nursery raising, womens' group meetings etc.) and only five had established savings and credit groups.

- The focus of the NGOs and villagers was on getting work done and enhancing the productive status of the land. Introducing an intervention for women's promotion was perceived by many as an unnecessary distraction. Where it was accepted, it was viewed as a sectoral intervention, isolated from the main effort of natural resource management and therefore unrelated to the processes of decision making in the project.

- Not all NGOs give equal priority to women's development as they do to land, water and income-generating activities. They do not extend equal support to women staff, resulting in a loss of enthusiasm, inefficiency and discouragement. *Mahila Samaj Sevika*—MSS (female social workers) face particular difficulties. Village women are only free to meet at night and young MSS are unable to travel to the village alone and must be

accompanied by another staff member. Hence this sector is viewed as a burden by some NGOs. Staff turnover is also high (particularly if the MSS is young and unmarried), resulting in a lack of continuity.

The challenge facing IGWDP was therefore how to “organize a meaningful and productive effort for women's integration and involvement for sustainable watershed development, in a manner that elicits men's interest and active support?”

Towards women's integration: A graduated response

The goal of intervention in the women's sector is to develop the capacity of women to enable them to actively participate and take up responsibilities for integrated and sustainable development of their watershed. The objectives are:

- to enhance financial and food security and improve health, hygiene, nutritional and living conditions;
- to reduce drudgery and mitigate some of the effects of the additional workload;
- to improve women's input into decision making processes in families, institutions and village life.

To achieve this, IGWDP has adopted several guiding principles (Box 1).

Box 1 IGWDP guiding principles

In order to empower women, men must be taken into confidence. Hence, the focus will not be on women *per se* but on the family. Without the support of men, they will make little or no progress.

Strength is derived from fellowship and partnerships which arise from group formation and organization. Women are therefore encouraged to organize themselves into groups. Activities, even when individually undertaken, will be promoted and supported by their group.

Knowledge and understanding is the key to motivated action and efficiency. Efforts are made to enable women to gain more information and knowledge to manage natural resources and improve managerial skills, increase efficiency and reduce drudgery.

Access to financial resources empowers and gives societal status. Women should increasingly have access to sources of income and control over income earned. In this regard, the potential of women to save will be capitalized upon, particularly on a group basis. Group activities that provide livelihood opportunities will be encouraged.

Possessing skills and competencies that are valued by both the household and the village ensures an active role and a valued membership. The skills and competence of women and groups will improve so that they are able to play a contributory role in project implementation and village and family affairs.

Owning an asset, even a common one (e.g. land), gives a sense of identity and enables alliances for mutual support and advancement. Efforts will be made to transfer land or lease to the name of women's groups. Moreover they will then be able to acquire various income generating assets, which will contribute towards a sense of self-dependence and fulfillment.

“Women-to-women” and “group-to-group” extension is not only effective but offers a learning and feedback mechanism and creates enthusiasm and synergies. Local women as facilitators and mobilisers individually and in groups, should be actively encouraged and employed. They enable quick rapport building and bonding which greatly promotes group function, consensus building and inspires commonality of purpose and enthusiasm.

Work and needs unite. When activities are taken up within the watershed in which everyone can work, caste and social barriers are broken down. This has profound implications both for social dynamics and the quality of life in the village. Women with common needs and concerns from all social groups will be encouraged to come together irrespective of caste, creed or financial status.

Sustainability and replicability is greatly enhanced when local institutional actors, such as government as well as private agencies, are involved in delivery of goods and services. Wherever possible, existing government programmes and networks will be accessed and schemes and other projects utilised. This will help create a sense of “joint ownership” of the project, which is necessary from the point of maintenance and continuity.

In order to ensure sustainability, it is important that lessons learnt and experiences gained be transmitted from one generation to the next. As the future lies with children they should be introduced to the why, the how and the what of environmental regeneration and conservation.

8 PHASE-WISE PROPOSED MEASURES

Since 1993, the IGWDP has consisted of two phases. The first consists of a capacity building phase (CBP), where both NGO and village grapple with the meaning of participatory watershed development, understand its implications and experience the initial benefits. The CBP is supported by the Watershed Organisation Trust (WOTR), assisted financially by GTZ (German Agency for Technical Cooperation). This is followed by the full implementation phase (FIP), when both NGO and village—especially the WC—are deemed capable of undertaking project implementation. This phase is supported by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) assisted by WOTR and financially aided by the KfW (German Bank for Reconstruction and Development).

The capacity building phase (CBP)

The CBP comprises two stages. In stage one, the NGO mobilises the watershed community. Most NGOs entering the programme are small and relatively young, with little experience in large-scale implementation of natural resources management projects. Their experiences are usually restricted to sectoral interventions. Furthermore, even in the case of well experienced NGOs, the initial period following entry into a village is one of uncertainty. An intervention like watershed development, which involves all the social and economic groups of the village, necessarily challenges the existing power structure, as well as existing relationships and transaction arrangements. It creates anxieties, insecurities, expectations and aspirations. In the initial period, the situation is often one of ambiguity and the response of the village is unclear. The entire effort of the NGO is geared towards creating awareness, motivation and mobilizing the village's traditional structures. Given the sensitive nature of 'men/women' relationships, interventions with regard to women's promotion and gender integration must be non-threatening, easily achievable and quickly visible.

Both the NGO and the people have to establish their willingness, basic ability and need to implement a watershed project. One of the crucial activities in this stage is the 'exposure visit' to a successfully completed or on-going project. At this stage, the NGO should encourage the participation of women in the exposure visit as well as initiate dialogues with the men about the importance of including women in the watershed development process.

Stage two consists of 'hands-on' experience through the implementation of soil conservation and tree planting activities in a micro-watershed. This serves the dual purpose of demonstration and training and normally lasts about 10-18 months. At this stage, efforts need to be made to prepare the ground for the involvement of women in decision-making roles. Having obtained the support of men for women's activities during stage one, stage two should be used to strengthen and establish women's organizations and SHGs. A MSS should be appointed, preferably within three months of the pilot activities. Simple activities that bring quick results should be

encouraged such as kitchen gardens, soak-pits, improved *chulhas* (earthen stoves) to motivate women to work together and build group confidence. Savings and credit activities particularly encourage women—and also men to permit their women—to participate in group activities.

During the CBP, a small fund (up to Rs20,000 in the case of the IGWDP) may be used for activities that will strengthen the group. If it is used for small income-generating activities, women should be encouraged to treat this as a loan and create a revolving fund of the returns. By the end of this phase women should have at least a 33 per cent active representation on the WC.

The full implementation phase (FIP)

The FIP also consists of two stages. Having successfully gone through the CBP, the NGO and WC now prepare a project proposal—the feasibility study—for the entire watershed. This normally takes about six months. The women's groups should have developed a sense of identity, cohesiveness and competence in areas such as managing their finances. By this time too, women's groups would also have seen the benefits accruing from small activities such as kitchen gardens and improved *chulhas*. As a group they should have acquired a measure of confidence in each other and have experienced the possibilities and benefits offered by group action. This should be further strengthened during the feasibility study.

The aim is to ensure that women are involved wherever possible in different aspects of project planning, especially with regard to land use. In this area, men should be encouraged to actively consider the women's point of view, resulting in joint decisions. Having identified and prioritized the needs of women, a project proposal should be developed and incorporated in the feasibility study. This proposal should include activities that will reduce the workload of women, support child care and development and plan for income-generating activities that will be exclusively managed by the women's group. Meanwhile, emerging local women leaders MPs should be identified and given training to conduct their own group meetings and promote various issues and activities.

Implementation is the second stage, beginning with project and feasibility study approval and lasting a maximum of 48 months. Once implementation starts in the CBP it continues without break (assuming favourable conditions), even though a complete project proposal will not have been prepared and formally sanctioned. This is to ensure that there is no break in mobilization, enthusiasm and organisation.

Until now the measures and steps undertaken will have largely been organizational in nature, bringing women together and building confidence. The primary focus of stage two is to strengthen and elaborate on the processes initiated in the CBP and to undertake specific activities which will strengthen technical and managerial capacities, the financial position and ability to collaborate in village decision making processes. Those women not already in SHGs should be motivated to form groups. Men's SHGs should be encouraged as this promotes a better use of saved

income. During this phase, the activities generally consist of training and exposure visits directly or indirectly related to watershed development. Care should be taken that activities do not create additional burdens for women. They should be sequenced to gradually gather momentum so that when the project period is over these activities provide livelihood opportunities. Emphasis is placed on the acquisition of skills by the MPs, MSS, SHGs etc. in planning, implementation and management.

A second objective of this stage is to ensure a reduction in the drudgery and uncertainty in women's lives. Other activities having a bearing on women should also be included (for instance arrangements for obtaining potable water, fuel for cooking and fodder within reachable distance). Sanitation, child care, health and hygiene, as well as non-formal education sessions can also be considered. Progressive inclusion of women who were not earlier involved in the programme is also critical. Linkages with government departments as well as village institutions is actively promoted. Efforts also need to be made to ensure that the dependence of women's groups on NGOs and MSS is progressively reduced. Active thought should be given to transferring these values beyond the project period so that women themselves can manage successfully what they have begun.

The expected outcome of this phase will be a definite improvement in the financial position of women, acquisition of income generating assets where possible and regular and active participation in decision making meetings. A reduction in distress migration, increased food security and increased school attendance of children can also be expected. It is important that active support from the government and political establishment is gained.

9 CONCLUSION

Watershed Development, if addressed in a gender focused and sensitive manner from the beginning, can provide a space for women to capitalise on new opportunities. It calls for an inclusive and sustained effort that brings men to recognise and accept the contribution that self-confident women can bring to society.

ENDNOTES

1 The *gram sabha* or village body consists of all adult voting members of the village

2 \$1 is equivalent to Rs43

3 WOTR has developed a simple but effective system which has received an enthusiastic response from hundreds of SHGs. A manual with an accounts register is available from WOTR.

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