



**International
Institute for
Environment and
Development**

Sustainable Agriculture
and Rural Livelihoods
Programme

Gatekeeper Series no. 92

Women's Participation in Watershed Development in India

Janet Seeley, Meenakshi Batra
and Madhu Sarin

2000

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Abstract

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Executive Summary

Watershed development has been adopted in India to address land degradation and the need for increased agricultural productivity. Women have tended to be marginalised in watershed development projects because of the focus on land development, which given the control of land in many parts of India, makes it male-focused. We argue that the fact that women are often left out of such projects matters, because women play a central role in the management of natural resources. Land-based activities usually generate more income and carry less risk than non-land-based activities that women are often encouraged to take up.

The Watershed Guidelines issued by the Government of India in 1994 encourage the greater participation of women and marginal groups. However, their implementation continues to be hindered by beliefs that watershed development is land development for landowners. Women are often not recognised as members of the watershed community in their own right, but are viewed as being there to fill the quota which the Guidelines outlines. The Guidelines do not specify any mechanism or institutional arrangement for ensuring and sustaining the true involvement of the poor and women.

Efforts are being made to change the *status quo* by capitalising, for example, on the strength of existing women's groups by drawing their membership into other government programmes, including watershed development. But many women's self-help groups have remained fairly autonomous savings initiatives with no direct link to natural resource management.

Developing land development planning on the basis of existing use and dependence patterns could bring poor women into centre stage as key participants. Effective gender sensitisation programmes must shift from the current emphasis on numbers of women in groups or amounts saved, towards identifying and addressing work loads, access to resources etc. Some government and NGO programmes are promoting gender sensitive planning and decision-making. Empowered and self-confident women are likely to be able to articulate their needs and plan their livelihood strategies, encompassing all aspects of their lives, not just the agrarian-type activities. Women's involvement is not just needed at the village level but at the district, state and national level if lasting change is to occur. If the way the watershed programme is viewed is changed so that it is seen as a 'rural livelihoods' rather than a land development programme, women and the poorer marginal farming households will benefit, given their dependence on many non-land-based activities. Finally, there is a need to ensure that women do not become overwhelmed by schemes and programmes focused at them. They need to be able to make informed choices about where to invest their time.

Women's Participation in Watershed Development in India

Janet Seeley, Meenakshi Batra and Madhu Sarin¹

According to some estimates, half of the total land area of India, approximately 170 million hectares, is classified as degraded land. Roughly half of this degraded land falls in undulating semi-arid areas where rainfed farming predominates. In recent years the Government of India has adopted a 'watershed development approach' in an effort to reverse the degradation of these lands and thereby increase productivity and provide wage employment.

In this paper we look at who participates in the watershed development programme and describe some of the efforts being made to ensure that people who are left out of land development activities are included. We look particularly at the role of women in watershed development. It is our contention that in reality the watershed programme continues to be primarily land-based and landowner focused, and therefore 'male-focused', given the control of land-ownership in India, and does not take adequate account of the role women play in the rural economy. One may ask whether it actually matters whether people are left out, given the many other national and state government schemes, as well as non-governmental organisation (NGO) initiatives that are intended to enhance the livelihoods of the poor. We argue that it does matter, because women play a central role in agricultural development and the management of natural resources and they have a right to an equal say in the way those resources are developed, managed and used. In addition, land-based activities usually generate more income, and carry less risk, than the non-land-based activities that women are often encouraged to take up.

Background

Watershed, or catchment, conservation started in India in the 1950s as an attempt to provide a framework of conserved soil and water for sustained agricultural production. The approach was essentially based on a set of technical interventions, all within the confines of a natural drainage basin of a size chosen for administrative convenience. It was intended that watershed development should integrate natural resource conservation and management, broadly following a ridge to valley approach. This was to be done through a variety of land-based activities, including protecting degraded common

1 The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect official DFID policy. This paper is intended as a basis for discussion with interested parties.

forest and pasture, water conservation and harvesting on common land with check dams, percolation tanks, and trenches; soil and water conservation on private land with earthen/vegetative bunds and percolation tanks; and developing minor irrigation works from open wells, tanks and boreholes. In the watershed development programme, promoted by the Government of India, the watershed is defined as a natural water catchment area, but in reality the focus remains mainly on the agricultural land for a range of administrative and social reasons.

The Watershed Guidelines

Over the last decade the need to consider the social, financial and institutional aspects of rural development, as well as the technical and physical works, has been recognised. In 1994 the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) of the Government of India produced a new set of guidelines (GoI, 1994) for implementing its watershed programmes.² This was a progressive piece of official policy and incorporated many of the good practices developed in NGO and government projects. These Guidelines responded to concerns that the full benefits of watershed work were not being achieved because of different approaches and because of inadequate adaptation of technical and organisational approaches to local circumstances.

The Guidelines state the objectives of each watershed development project³ as promoting economic development, the restoration of ecological balance, and giving “*special emphasis to improve the economic and social condition of the resource-poor and the disadvantaged sections of the watershed community such as the assetless and women*”.

The Guidelines promote a bottom-up planning approach, working where possible through NGOs and with community participation as a central principle.

Under the Guidelines, watershed projects should start with general awareness-raising, followed by the establishment of user groups and self-help groups that include women or are exclusively for women. Representatives of these groups, together with other villagers, should then go forward to form the watershed committee. This is intended to ensure adequate representation in the committee of different sections of the community. Thus, a participatory approach through different common interest groups, including self-help groups, should be adopted as a tool for implementation. This is the ideal, with

2 The Ministry of Rural Development is not the only Ministry that has a watershed development programme: the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Environment and Forest have similar schemes. There have been efforts in recent months to draw the various schemes together. The Ministry of Rural Development and the Ministry of Agriculture now plan to follow a common approach and have produced a Report of the Inter-Ministerial Sub-Committee on Formulation of Common Approach/Principles for Watershed Development (April 2000). The Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, is working towards putting this common approach in place in new watersheds in its own programme from October 2000. A manual of operational guidelines is being prepared. The Approach follows closely the participatory model set out in the MoRD 1994 Guidelines.

3 The watershed programme is made up of thousands of different watershed projects scattered in different states, and implemented by various government and non-government organisations.

the watershed plan prepared according to the needs and preferences of local people who are members of the Watershed Association that elects a watershed committee. The genuine representation of marginal farmers, the landless and women in the committee should generate a process that is as concerned with water and common pool resources as with private land management.

The Guidelines are very much a 'statement of intent', but how is this intent working in reality? Here we examine who has been excluded (and who has been included) in this programme.

How does the current approach affect women?

Agriculture in India accounts for 37% of India's GNP and according to the National Sample Survey organisation data, employs 70% of the working population and about 84% of all economically active women (NSS, GoI, 1991). However, some argue that 84% is an underestimate. In reality there are few women in rural areas who are not 'farmers' in some way, be it working on the family farm, working as wage labour, or working as share croppers.

Despite recent efforts to increase the visibility of women's productive work in census data, it is widely accepted that it remains grossly under-reported. In general women are involved in activities that are less remunerative or escape enumeration because it is unpaid work within the household economy or for subsistence. Women are often paid lower wages than men, for equal hours and intensity of labour inputs because it is perceived that they cannot do the same hard work as men.⁴

Women's involvement with natural resource production and management is not confined to agriculture; gender roles typically tie poor rural women far more than men to direct and regular use and dependence on natural resources, particularly common lands, forests and water.

The watershed programme has altered access to Common Pool Resources (CPRs) such as village common lands, forests and water resources through the creation of, for example, tree plantations in these areas. The closure of common lands for tree plantations leads to the loss of access to grazing areas. This particularly affects the landless and poor, single women eking out a living by raising a few goats, forcing such villagers to sell small livestock or change to a stall-fed system, which usually increases the workloads of women and children. This problem is particularly acute where there are limited areas of CPRs and where the community is highly stratified. Without planning processes giving focused attention to the resource use patterns of the poor and women, such CPR development often curtails, rather than increases their resource access.

⁴ Comments like that made by a senior bureaucrat: "a woman carries 20 kg of earth and a man carries 30 kg, so of course a woman should be paid less. If they do equal work then they can have equal pay..." are not unusual.

Furthermore, women control a small fraction⁵ of all agricultural land and have in the past been systematically ignored by all institutions, households, community and government bodies in planning for natural resources. *“Land defines social status and political power in the village, and it structures relationships both within and outside the household. Yet for most women, effective rights in land remain elusive, even as their marital and kin support erodes and female-headed households multiply. In legal terms, women have struggled for and won fairly extensive rights to inherit and control land in much of South Asia; but in practice most stand disinherited. Few own land; even fewer can exercise effective control over it.”* (Agarwal, 1994).

The largest budgetary provision under the Watershed Guidelines remains for land development. While private landowners have to contribute 10% of their land development cost through voluntary labour, the community as a whole is expected to contribute five percent of the cost of developing common lands such as grazing and forest lands. Given the role of women in many poor households as the gatherers of fodder and fuel, it often falls to them to contribute this labour on behalf of their households. They may not benefit greatly from such labour since the areas are ‘common’ land and they may even, in the short to medium term, be worse off. Protection of a degraded area may transfer harvesting pressure to another area and this may increase women’s (and children’s) drudgery if they have to travel a greater distance to collect their daily requirements of fuel and fodder. Development of wasteland may change the species balance and some shrubs, grasses and trees valued as medicinal herbs or food by women and poorer households may be lost. Saxena (n.d.), writing about the impact of forest protection on women, observes that *“the gender-differentiated impact is not restricted to firewood – it applies equally to other forest produce. For example, protecting sal trees with the existing technology of multiple shoot cutting results in the leaves getting out of reach. This affects the making of sal leaf plates, which is a common source of income, primarily for poor women in many parts of West Bengal, Orissa and Bihar.”*

The nature of participation: real or token?

Despite the Guidelines’ emphasis on the participation of women and other marginal groups, in reality this is proving more problematic to achieve for a number of reasons. Tensions continue to exist between those involved in the watershed programme over who should be participating, and over the very meaning of ‘participation’ in terms of content and process. Some people in government departments and in NGOs continue to view watershed development as exclusively a private land-based programme leading

⁵ The exact amount is not known because the de jure and de facto situation is very complex. While the Constitution of India guarantees fundamental rights to all citizens for equal treatment under law (Article 14) and non-discrimination on the grounds of sex (Article 15), in reality customary law which favours male heirs tends to ensure that men inherit much more land than women, and the land owned by women may be controlled by male relatives. N.C. Saxena (personal communication) comments that all categories of land related legislation need to protect the gender rights to land, but these acts and rules do not contain provisions whereby the right of women to land can be asserted or safeguarded. Gender equality in legal rights to own property does not guarantee gender equality in actual ownership.

to productivity enhancement and conservation. Land-based watershed projects are often perceived by the agencies involved as 'men's' projects and consequently not women's concern. Men, who have title to much of the productive land, are perceived to be the natural target-group for watershed work. This is reinforced by the Guidelines' budgetary allocations, which target a large amount of the money at land development activities. The development of local organisations, also envisaged in the Guidelines, is either ignored or, at best, used as an instrument for achieving the physical targets.

For example, 'participation' is sometimes reduced to contributing voluntary labour. Of course, involving people in the building of structures and other physical works seems like a useful way of encouraging community participation and ownership. But often those who contribute the free labour are the women; men may only get involved when the labour is valued and paid for.

The Guidelines recommend the formation of a Watershed Development Team to provide technical support to the community, comprising four to five experts with skills in civil engineering, forestry, veterinary medicine, soil and water conservation, and community development. In addition, the Common Approach for Watershed Development (GoI, 2000) states that "*one of the WDT members should be a woman*". It is the responsibility of the community development expert to facilitate community participation and to ensure that women and Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes⁶ are involved in watershed activities. The community development person is seen as the 'front-end' of the technical team, preparing the way for the technical specialists.

In places where the government, rather than an NGO, is the implementing agency for the watershed, most of the experts in the team are seconded to new roles from within the government departments. Because of the dearth of women technicians working in government departments this usually means that the posts are filled by men. Invariably the community development expert is recruited externally on the grounds that social development expertise does not exist within the government. That places this expert⁷ at a disadvantage in comparison to the rest of the team because they do not have the authority of a government employee and, if a woman, will often be treated as less important than the men on the team. In addition, because of the tendency for social scientists to be viewed as being of lower status than 'technicians' (by both technical personnel, as well as community members, who place great store by technical know-how) the community development person may be paid a lower wage than other members of the team. All these factors may result in low motivation and therefore inadequate support for a participatory process.

6 Since colonial times certain caste groups (formerly called 'untouchables') and tribal groups were placed on a 'schedule'. Groups listed on the Schedule, which varies from state to state, are entitled to certain benefits and schemes and the right to apply for reserved posts and seats in government bodies.

7 Unfortunately the person is not always an expert given the dearth of people with appropriate participatory development skills. So the post is often filled by a recent sociology or social work graduate, and sometimes graduates from other unrelated disciplines (like commerce or business studies) who cannot get other work; such people may have had no experience in rural development or the formation and support of groups.

The focus on women's participation in watershed development is not an isolated issue in present day India. It is part of a wider move to emphasise the need for community participation in the development process, in particular of marginal groups such as women. Take the example of local government bodies. A key village level institution in India is the *Panchayat*⁸ where 33% of posts are reserved for women. As different states in the country move towards decentralisation of development administration, *Panchayats* in future will play a significant role in managing watershed development. A recent poverty profile study in Himachal Pradesh (PRAXIS, 2000) shows that while the upper castes are able to identify closely with the *Panchayats*, this is not so with the Scheduled Castes, and among the Scheduled Caste groups the women know the least about the process. The findings showed that women feel distant from official institutions in general, including the *Panchayats*. The issues related to women's participation in both the *panchayats* and watershed committees are inter-linked, there is a need in both to create social space for them in such public fora and to help them increase their confidence and capacity to participate effectively.

Women are often not recognised as members of the 'watershed' community in their own right as farmers and resource decision-makers, but are seen as 'quota women'.⁹ Women involved in watershed committees and other village institutions are often not given a chance to voice their opinions, or lack the self confidence and access to information to participate in informed decision-making (Box 1). A number of commentators have expressed the view that the token participation of two or three individual women in a watershed committee is not working. Instances have been recorded in a number of places in India where male members on committees take all decisions (often at meetings which women can not attend because of the inconvenient time or social restrictions) and send the final resolution to the women members for their signature. Such women are not in a position to question the decision, or worse, if illiterate, they place their thumb-print on the document without knowing what they have agreed to.

How can we create better support for women's involvement?

Linking existing women's groups with the watershed development process

Some efforts are being made to capitalise on the strength of existing women's groups so that they can help increase women's participation in implementation of watershed and various other government programmes.

⁸ A panchayat is a local level council or body responsible for the government's development and welfare delivery programme as well as some aspects of local government. The powers of the panchayats and the levels at which they operate (district, block and village) vary from state to state.

⁹ There to fill the quota: "While making nominations, it may be ensured that the Watershed Committee has adequate representation of women, members of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/Shepherd community" (GoI, 1994).

Box 1. A woman's perspective on watershed planning

A woman member of the watershed committee in the tribal district of Surguja in eastern Madhya Pradesh was asked how women's priorities had been incorporated into the watershed plan. She said that she knew nothing about the plan or its contents. She complained bitterly about all the women in the village being debarred from wage employment on the watershed works. The agricultural officer present, the person responsible for the watershed project, explained to the visitors that women did not qualify for membership of land based 'user groups' because only men owned land. Hence, only male landowners had been considered eligible for wage work for land development. He went on to explain that two 'self-help groups' of women had been formed: one for weaving mats from palm leaves, and the other for making brooms. Each group had been given a returnable revolving fund of Rs 5000¹⁰ to get on with regular savings and producing their respective products for earning income. The woman committee member fumed at the very mention of mat weaving. She told the visitors that it took 8 to 10 days to weave a single mat that could be sold for barely Rs 35 to 40. In contrast, the minimum daily wage for unskilled work was Rs 48.50. She went on to say that within her tribal community, the tradition was that both women and men controlled their respective incomes, thereby enabling married women to enjoy a relatively more equal status with their men and also ensuring greater household food security through their independent earnings.

One particular area where encouraging women's involvement has often been successful has been in the development of micro-credit groups, where women are often the main clients. This is because women have less access to formal and other sources of credit, and so have an incentive to use micro-finance. In addition, they are included as beneficiaries in schemes for the poor because women make up a disproportionate proportion of the poor, and have a superior repayment track record.

For example, in its 1997 Women's Sub-Plan, the Andhra Pradesh State Government made a commitment to include all poor women in self-help groups and DWCRA (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas programme¹¹) in the next few years (GoAP, 1997). There are now over 140,000 women's self-help groups in Andhra Pradesh, including those mobilised by DWCRA and NGOs. Many of these groups have grown out of a women's movement with its roots in the Total Literacy Campaign in Nellore District and anti-arrack (locally brewed-alcohol) agitation which began in that district. This was followed by the setting up of the State Government's savings movement 'Podupu Lakshmi' in the early 1990s which led, in its first five years, to 200,000 women joining groups saving a total of Rs 140m.

¹⁰ The exchange rate is currently, June 2000, 44 rupees to the \$1.

¹¹ The DWCRA Scheme has recently been discontinued and absorbed into an amalgamated scheme for the promotion of self-help groups, of both women and men (Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana). Its aim is to establish a large number of micro-enterprises in the rural areas. At least 50% of the people involved in the scheme (Swarogaris) will be from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 40% will be women and 3% disabled.

While the quality of the women's self-help groups is variable, the concept of mobilising communities through women's thrift and credit groups has penetrated to the remotest areas of Andhra Pradesh. While the government has played a dominant role in the process, almost half of the groups active have been promoted by NGOs and micro-finance institutions with about five percent of those linked to banks through a National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD) scheme. Data on the DW CRA programme (GoAP, December 1998) and research done by CARE¹² show that the programme had reached 79,000 groups in the state and in five of the drought-prone districts 45 of the local NGOs have reached a further 3,350 groups.

However, women's self-help groups have remained fairly autonomous savings initiatives with no direct links to natural resource management, although loans may be taken to pay for agricultural inputs for their households.

Furthermore, questions remain about who is actually involved in the women's groups (do the poorest participate?) and where the money goes that these groups receive or earn in addition to their own savings. While some studies have shown that these savings and credit groups do make a difference to household food security or incomes by providing women with funds for household consumption (such as medicines, house repairs, school costs etc.) and investment in income-generating initiatives, others have questioned the groups' long term benefit for women and their ability to enhance women's status. For example, *"most women's organisations (whatever their political persuasion), with some recent exceptions, have been pre-occupied with employment and non-land-based income-generating schemes as the means of improving women's economic status and welfare, paying little attention to the issue of property rights."* (Agarwal, 1994)

Such schemes have not, therefore, been a vehicle for directly addressing women's empowerment and rights, but offer the potential to do so, especially in the context of watershed development, since the Guidelines provide scope for the user and self-help groups to be the building blocks in the process of developing broad-based participation in decision-making.

However, the 'building block' role of user and self-help groups in the watershed programme remains poorly understood. This is because the Watershed Guidelines do not specify any mechanism or institutional arrangement for ensuring and sustaining the involvement of the poor and women in the programme on the basis of their resource use and dependence and ensuring equitable entitlements for them. *"In the beginning of the project itself, women and resource poor people are formed into self-help groups in order to meet the target and distribute the revolving fund of Rs 50,000 among them. Thereafter, they are totally forgotten."*¹³

¹² This research was done as part of the project preparation for 'Credit and Savings for Household Enterprise' a project implemented through CARE in Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal, and funded by DFID.

¹³ Comment during a workshop for the design of the DFID funded Andhra Pradesh Rural Livelihoods Project.

An initiative already being tested in Andhra Pradesh is attempting to link existing women's groups formally to the watershed programme. In March 1999, 1,200 women's self-help groups (SHGs) in Mahaboobnagar were linked formally to the watershed programme. Rather than joining DWCRA, these groups will receive support from the watershed programme and be 'building blocks' in that programme. This is a conscious effort on the part of GoAP to address the criticism of the watershed programme as being a men's programme and actively to pursue one of the often under-resourced aspects of the watershed guidelines.

In this approach, women representatives in the watershed committee will be representatives of the larger SHGs (and will be drawn from SHGs from different social and income groups) and will have the support and ideas of those women behind them. This might be seen as an attempt to "*invest in social capital*"¹⁴ as Bebbington (1999) describes, "*certain types of community level relationship—often ones based on shared cultural identity, frequent confrontations with other groups, shared experience of discrimination and strong intra-group communication [...] – can play important roles in facilitating member access to local resources of various types.*"

Addressing and understanding the impacts on women

Despite the intentions of the Guidelines, women's involvement in the planning and implementation of soil and water conservation and in managing newly created resources in the watershed is limited. In part, this is because the Guidelines do not emphasise the importance of beginning the preparation of the watershed plans with an understanding and analysis of women and men's differing use and dependence on both private and common lands. Nor is the dependence for survival of landless and poor women on common land resources recognised.

The increase in the workload of women, at least in the initial years of watershed activities, needs to be recognised as they walk further for fuel and fodder or even water while nearby resources are replenished through land development works. When areas of common land are closed off to allow regeneration the distance women travel to gather fodder and fuel may not only increase substantially but they may also switch to inferior (and less efficient) fuels like leaves, husks, weeds and bushes because they can not access the fuel they require (Saxena, pers. comm.). According to Marcella D'Souza (1999), women indicate their willingness to carry out this extra work provided it leads to the fulfilment of four basic needs:

1. Access to a reliable source of safe drinking water within a reasonable distance, and improvements in health and hygiene. It is found that often the irrigation and watershed activities that enhance water access for agriculture ignore women's water needs for household purposes, livestock etc.

¹⁴ Social capital is defined in the DFID Livelihoods Guidance Sheets (1999) as: "The social resources (networks, membership of groups, relationships of trust, access to wider institutions of society) upon which people draw in pursuit of livelihoods."

2. Access to a steady flow of income to ensure food, fuel and financial security.
3. A secure future for their children through education.
4. Participation in household decision-making and community affairs.

Developing watershed plans on the basis of existing use and dependence patterns could bring poor women centre stage as key participants in decision-making as resource users and not simply as disinterested women to be involved 'somehow'. In the absence of such an approach, not surprisingly, one study of the watershed programme in Anantapur and Mahaboobnagar in Andhra Pradesh found many government and non-government agencies involved in the watershed programme continuing to believe that women should concentrate on domestic activities, like education, health, thrift and credit, and non-land-based income generation activities, without considering the equity impacts of such interventions (Adolph and Turton, 1998). However, the promotion of women's involvement requires careful management to ensure that the situation for women is not made worse by the intervention, particularly if men resent the attention and potential power women receive. For example, some NGOs are promoting 'women only' watershed development whereby a cluster of women's self help groups become the watershed association and hold free elections among their members to form the watershed committee. They contract labour as required and direct the work. The idea is that they control the land development. The NGO involved has a difficult role in brokering the situation with men in the village, ensuring that men are sensitised to what is going on and support the process.

Whilst this is admirable in its intent, one can't just turn social norms upside down and expect the process to be sustained. Although it may make a short-term difference, it can also sometimes make matters worse if men feel threatened by the process and claim the power back once the NGO supporting the process moves on or the particular project supporting this intervention ends.

Effective gender sensitisation programmes must shift from the current emphasis on numbers of women in the groups, or amounts saved, or separate schemes for women, towards identifying and addressing strategic gender interests (workloads, access and control over productive resources particularly Common Pool Resources, economic interests) in core activities. Kitchen gardens, CPR management control for fuel-fodder and grazing, non-farm activities etc., may be of more interest than token participation in land development or challenging cultural norms by forcing women into positions of leadership which are not supported by the wider community. In addition, such activities should also lead to more efficient and productive use of water and other natural resources.

Where effort is put into facilitating women-only fora for confidence building and overcoming cultural inhibitions, and men are motivated to support creating such spaces for women, the women often begin to share decision-making and even asset ownership (Box 2). Benefits delivered through women are reflected in better health, education and the overall standard of living of the family.

Box 2. Empowering Women to Become Effective Players

The commitment of AKRSP(I) (Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, India), an NGO working in Gujarat, to bringing women into both the organisation and implementation of all its programmes, led to a very different outcome in one of their watershed projects. During a gender sensitisation exercise with village women and men in one of the watershed villages, the amount of labour contributed by household women and men on private land development under the watershed project was calculated. The men themselves concluded that women were contributing roughly 50% of the labour and that 50% of the wages paid for the work should legitimately be paid to the women instead of the entire wage money being paid to the men simply because they were the owners. Empowered by such public acknowledgement of their normally invisible work, the women started depositing their share of the wage money in the common fund of their women's association. They used the money for undertaking collective activities in accordance with their own priorities.

AKRSP staff (pers. comm.)

Some government and NGO programmes are promoting gender sensitive micro-planning.¹⁵ Empowered and self-confident women are likely to articulate their livelihood strategies, allowing an exploration, with them, of how these can be strengthened and support the promotion of new, appropriate¹⁶ income-generating activities. Women from marginal groups can be encouraged to take part because their views on management choices related to crops, trees, grasses, pasture and shrubs, on land and non-land based activities and the use of CPRs are likely to be different from women from other groups. Separate micro-planning exercises with informed women and marginalised groups, which are then fed into a larger group process, are likely to ensure that their views are articulated and included, but this must be facilitated by field functionaries such as WDT social mobilisers/village professionals. However, these field functionaries will need attitudinal change, gender and equity sensitisation and skill training in order to be able to do this.

But women's involvement is not just needed at the village level. Women need to be involved in planning and implementation at district, state and national levels if they are to have any influence upon the programme as a whole.

Shifting the focus from watersheds to livelihood development

One may question whether an 'improved' natural resource base can provide adequate livelihoods for a growing rural population without negatively impacting on the liveli-

15 Rukmini Rao (1999) describes three such examples.

16 Experience has shown that promoting income generating activities for women at the village level is very complex: local demand for services and goods as well as wider markets need to be understood otherwise women end up producing produce that no one wants. Too often schemes have encouraged all women to produce pickles or table cloths... and there is a limit to how many of those products a market can absorb.

hoods of those currently dependent on it. There is also no certainty that benefits will be equitably distributed without a clear policy of entitlements to the enhanced resource productivity accompanying watershed development. There is always a trade-off in switching from one resource use to another, in both social and economic terms, which needs to be recognised. Where land and water are involved, local politics invariably play a part because of the considerable economic gain that can be made from the exploitation of these resources. The watershed development programme is seen by some as a 'money-making scheme', thus attracting political interest. That interest can then influence the way the resources are dispersed.

In Andhra Pradesh the British Department for International Development (DFID) is working with the government to support initiatives that emphasise 'livelihoods' rather than just land-based 'watersheds' (Box 3), and trying to ensure that different interventions, for example support for savings and credit groups, perhaps health care, water and sanitation schemes as well as watershed development work are better integrated, so that they complement each other.

This, as Bebbington (1999) advocates in his discussion of the need to look at wider 'rural livelihoods' rather than just 'agrarian livelihoods' implies changing the way the watershed programme is viewed, *"looking less at agriculture per se and instead focusing attention on the types of resource, institutional sphere and market type that families have accessed in the course of composing sustainable, non-agricultural rural livelihoods."*

Box 3. Supporting Livelihoods Within Watersheds

DFID is supporting the Andhra Pradesh Rural Livelihoods Project (APRLP) in partnership with the Government of Andhra Pradesh and the Ministry of Rural Development (Government of India). The purpose of APRLP is to enable the Government of Andhra Pradesh comprehensively to implement pro-poor watershed-based, sustainable rural livelihoods approaches in five districts (Anantapur, Mahboobnagar, Prakasam, Nalgonda and Kurnool). The Project consists of three components: watershed-plus and sustainable rural livelihood initiatives; capacity-building for primary and secondary stakeholders; and lesson learning and policy influence.

This approach is likely to be of more interest to women than the watershed programme in its present form. By paying greater attention to non-land-based activities and seeking to redress inequities in the present programme it is hoped that this will encourage the involvement of women in the watershed programme, especially by taking account of their needs and interests (food-crops versus cashcrops, fruit trees versus timber, water for drinking versus water for irrigation, etc.).

Policy Implications

Lokur-Pangare and Farrington (1999) list the following actions that need to be taken to strengthen the participation of women in the watershed programme:

- Equal representation with men on various committees dealing with watershed development;
- Equal wages in construction and other work;
- Technical and social support so that they can fully play their role in watershed development (including help with child care);
- Capacity-building of women to enhance their negotiating and leadership skills;
- Sensitising government and NGO officers to women's roles and needs;
- Establishing monitoring systems to assess how women's interests are being defended.

From the material we have presented in this paper we would add the following issues that need to be addressed in both the GoI watershed programmes and initiatives supported by NGOs and donor organisations:

- Create social space for women in public fora and help them increase their confidence and capacity to participate effectively.
- Encourage the linkages between women's self-help groups and watershed associations where women representatives from the self-help groups who sit on watershed committees will represent the views of their groups, and have the backing of the group members.
- Shift attention from the current emphasis on the numbers of women participating in self-help groups, or amounts saved, in separate schemes for women, towards identifying and addressing strategic gender interests in 'mainstream' schemes in rural development, where the bulk of funding is directed.
- Innovate with participatory approaches which allow different groups of women (and men) to have a voice in planning processes (such as separate focus groups for micro-planning for marginalised groups).
- Support projects and programmes which look beyond land development to 'rural livelihoods' in general, which take into account the diverse ways in which rural people make their livelihoods from both agrarian and non-agrarian based income-generating activities.

We would argue that as long as the largest budgetary provision under the Watershed Guidelines continues to be for land development, these measures may not receive the attention they deserve. If more time and resources are assigned to the development of the participatory skills of both implementing agencies and communities and greater provision is made for investment in non-land based and land-based activities which are attractive to, and lucrative for, women, then there is a greater chance that women will be seen as valued and equal members of the village community developing the watershed. It may also mean that they will see value in investing their time in watershed/livi-

hood development programmes and projects. This would imply investing more resources in human and social capital rather than just 'produced' or natural capital. Strong budgetary support for such activities in the Guidelines would provide a platform from which to mainstream the experience learnt from the many small initiatives being tried by NGOs and some government officials.

The ownership and control of land continues to be a barrier to removing the belief held by many that non-landowners/controllers do not have a right to equal participation in land-based rural development. There is much to suggest in legislation and policy pronouncements that change is coming, the Sixth Five Year Plan (para 27.19) (GoI, 1980), for example, declared:

“Economic independence of women would accelerate the improvement of the status of women. Government would endeavour to give joint title to husband and wife in the development activities involving transfer of assets. This would be taken up for implementation to start within programmes like distribution of land and house sites and beneficiary oriented economic units”

The empowerment of women through activities that bring them sustainable economic independence and provide them with a 'voice' can help to shift the socio-economic, cultural and political norms which prevent the effective implementation of legislation which supports their right to land and property and the status that goes with those rights.¹⁷

A final warning is needed to avoid placing too much of the burden of development on women. There is a need to ensure that women do not become overwhelmed by schemes and programmes focused at them and are not persuaded to participate simply for short-term incentives (wage labour), but are able to make informed choices about what is best for them and their families. That remains the big challenge.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Charles Batchelor, Simon Croxton, Sarah Montagu, Peter Reid, NC Saxena and SP Tucker for reading earlier drafts of this paper, and for their helpful comments. We are particularly grateful to Bina Agarwal and NC. Saxena for providing additional material that helped get our facts straight! Remaining inaccuracies are, of course, our own.

¹⁷ This is of course not just an issue for South Asia. Many women in the 'North' as well as the 'South' continue to be discriminated against in the inheritance of property and title.

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ISSN 1357-9258