

The Interventions Of A Voluntary Agency In The Process And Growth Of

PEOPLE'S INSTITUTIONS FOR SUSTAINED & EQUITABLE MANAGEMENT OF MICRO-WATERSHEDS

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April 5, 1993

CHAPTER I

The Entry Phase

It is becoming evident that the attitudes and strategies adopted by intervenors during the entry and planning phases and the growth of appropriate peoples' institutions and skills are important factors to achieve the objectives of regeneration of degraded micro-watersheds and of their management in a way that is both equitable and sustained. With the increasing number of watershed programmes in which both the Government and the NGO staff are co-intervenors, it is useful to reflect on project experiences like PIDOW¹ Gulbarga, where this form of collaboration has occurred for some years. It must be pointed out that the Government organisations involved in PIDOW changed over the past 8 years. To begin with each Department (Agriculture, Horticulture, etc.) intervened separately; this pattern was replaced by the Zilla Parishad which did not have time to settle down when the Dry Land Development Board (DLDB) took over.

MYRADA's experience in participatory management of micro watersheds is not restricted to PIDOW Gulbarga. It extends to projects in Bangarpet, Huthur, Holalkere and Kadiri. There is, however, a significant difference between PIDOW and the other projects. While PIDOW focuses on watershed management and therefore adopts this as an entry point, the others started by mobilising the poor of 50-107 villages primarily to form institutions to mobilise and manage their credit needs for consumption and income generation as well as to cope with livelihood requirements like health, education and housing. It was only after a few years when peoples institutions had emerged to manage credit and certain other basic needs had been met like drinking water, that these projects began focusing on micro catchments in an integrated manner. In a way therefore, these projects already went through an entry phase.

¹ PIDOW Participative Integrated Development of Watersheds.

In PIDOW however, both because of the time constraints that flowed from the pattern of project management in which several Government Departments were involved, as well as because the focus on micro catchments defined and in a way restricted the programme - spread to a defined geographical area and to activities which tend to be dominant in watershed management (like those that revolved around soil and water conservation), the need for an entry phase, becomes critical. The observations in this paper regarding the strategy adopted in PIDOW during the entry phase have emerged from reflecting on MYRADA's experiences over a few years. No claim is made that these interventions are the only ones possible or that the sequence cannot be changed or that others are not more effective. Though these observations are based on discussions with the MYRADA team in Gulbarga in the context of PIDOW, the experiences from several MYRADA projects like Bangarpet and Kadiri are also drawn from. The interventions of the NGO during the entry phase are not listed randomly; the order does have a logic that has emerged through a process of action, reflection and sharing of experiences in different MYRADA projects; the sequence however, needs to be adapted to local situations.

1. **Identify the sub-watershed and the villages in it** : In PIDOW the sub-watershed ² is identified by the DLDB; priority is given to treatment of Micro-watersheds based on the need to begin with catchments in the upper reaches. MYRADA's criteria used during the earlier years before the entry of the DLDB included not only their location in the upper reaches, but also the degree of response from people especially to collective action undertaken by them to identify and solve their problems; the number of landless was also considered; if, for example the number of landless was over 20% such watersheds were not given priority even if they were on the upper reaches. Another criterion that MYRADA took into consideration was the number of farmers who cultivated lands in the watersheds but lived outside it; once again if this number was significant (over 25%), the watershed was not given priority. It was found that such families often have several sources of income and do not get fully involved in the regeneration and management of the watershed; since they live outside, they tend to be more interested in extracting resources from the watershed rather than to develop them.

However, with the DLDB playing a significant part in the selection of new watersheds, during the past two year, the major criterion and often the only one is the location on the upper reaches. This may present a problem to NGOs who have lived and worked in an area before the focus on watershed management became dominant as they usually support an integrated programme over a wider area within which management of micro watersheds is only a component.

² A Sub-watershed is an area of around 1,000 ha., with one exit drainage point; it is often made up of several micro-watersheds whose drainage systems are integrated with it.

In general however, if the treatment in a watershed is to be sustained over the long term, MYRADA's experience has shown that the criteria for selection of a watershed has to include factors that go beyond its geographical situation; the response of people and the number of small and marginal farmers who live in the watershed are important criteria.

2. **Collect Information** : Once a Sub-watershed has been identified in PIDOW, it is necessary to collect the following information from various Government sources :

- Area map and Topo sheet of the sub-watershed of which the micro watershed is a part.
- Cadastral Map and Khatedar list of the villages involved.

In many cases, the Khatedar list and revenue boundaries are outdated; verification on the ground therefore is required later in the process.

3. **Establish Rapport with the people** : Senior staff of the NGO and staff who will or already live in the watershed visit the people to establish a rapport and to clear any doubts they may have about the intentions of the intervenors. The number of visits cannot be specified but they should be spread out for atleast a month. In the case of PIDOW where the programme works according to pre-established schedule, it is necessary to allot atleast one month of intensive contact with the villages. The collection of data described under No.2 continues concurrently.

4. **Conduct a Jatha** : At this stage, a Jatha has proved to be a useful instrument to carry the process forward. During the Jatha, street plays are conducted on the need for literacy and education, the importance of trees and the problems created by certain social customs. The Jatha is a traditional medium and serves to mobilise people, to arouse their curiosity, to make the NGO staff aware of the general problems in the area and to build rapport with all sections and classes in the village; this last objective requires that the NGO staff make a special effort to relate to all groups during the Jatha.

5. **Organise Village Meetings** : These meetings go further than visits described under No.3. Once the Jatha has helped to identify several groups in the village, it is important to arrange meetings with each group at times convenient to the people. The objective of these meetings is to establish a pattern of group discussion that is organised and recorded. These meetings also help the staff of MYRADA to get further insights into village dynamics and the inter-relationships between the various groups and to assess if these relationships are conducive to mutual cooperation or not, and if they are not, to assess the reasons why and whether they can be removed. At this stage if it is found that the antagonism among groups

is high and that there is little chance of them working together, it may be necessary to postpone further work in this watershed.

6. Organise a PRA³ Exercise with the following objectives :

- To work out a plan and a strategy to solve the problem selected earlier. This is the major objective; if there is time and people are interested the following data could be collected :-

- 1) the number of landless, large, medium/small farmers in the watershed.
- 2) the number of farmers living outside but with lands inside the watershed and where they live.
- 3) the number of farmers with lands outside the watershed, but living inside.

The reasons for this categorisation is that it has been observed that each category relates differently to a common concern and an action plan within the watershed.

- To collect information about previous Government or other sponsored programmes especially regarding soil and water conservation and forestry and to assess their success or failure and the reasons.

The focus of this exercise, however is to work out a plan and strategy to tackle the common problem identified rather than to collect and verify information.

7. Organise a common action (in response to the problem which was identified) based on the plan and strategy drawn up and agreed to during the PRA exercise. This common action will serve to further energise the people and give them a sense of achievement and confidence, that if they come together they can achieve a common objective. It is important that the NGO staff do not play the lead role in organising this common action but motivate the various groups to take the initiative. No doubt the staff will have to play a supporting role, which in some cases may be a major contributing factor to the success of the action. Since villagers normally undertake combined action by dividing up the work among groups which are formed on the basis of affinity, this common action will help the staff to identify the various affinity groups in the watershed which could develop into the socially viable groups required to manage credit. With reference to the time frame in PI DOW, this common action could take place during the third month after the initial entry in the new watersheds.

³ PRA Participatory Rural Appraisal

8. **Expose the Affinity Groups to Credit Management Groups which are working well** : MYRADA's experience in all projects confirms that the small/marginal farmers and the landless, give priority to their livelihood needs; they therefore require small and quick loans to meet their daily needs. The only source in the area for such loans is the large farmer and the local shop keeper or middlemen; as a result of their continuous dependency on these sources, the poorer farmers and landless do not have the confidence to express their opinions in public or press for their rights. It is therefore necessary to provide another source for these urgent loans which does not weaken the position of the poor sectors but rather strengthens it. This is the reason for supporting the emergence of small affinity groups which are "socially viable" - the members will hold together without outside intervention. These affinity groups form the basis for the Credit Management Groups (CMG). As a first step in forming these credit groups, it is recommended that the members of an affinity group be exposed to other credit groups in the area or in other MYRADA projects which are working well.

9. **Support the Formation of Credit Management Groups** : These credit groups are the building blocks on which the future Watershed Development Association (WDA) or Implementation Committee (WIC) will rest. With reference to the time schedule in PI DOW, this could be done towards the end of the fourth month after the initial intervention. The groups would start savings immediately and then go on to function as other groups in MYRADA. It has been observed in PI DOW that the large farmers do not form these credit groups since they are not in need of urgent, small loans. However, they need to be encouraged to come together so that they can later send their representatives to the WDA/WIC. Classes in numeracy and literacy as well as workshops for each group to help them to function as a groups in which every member participates effectively and to work out simple and appropriate rules and regulations to manage their affairs are required. This is the practice in all MYRADA projects and adequate papers and studies are available which describe the process of formation of these credit groups.

10. At the end of 7 - 8 months an initial audit needs to be made of the credit groups to assess their mobilisation of savings, management of the common fund, general performance and progress in developing their patterns and rules of behaviour; briefly the audit should cover both financial and social indicators.

During the entry phase no attempt is made by MYRADA staff to introduce the concept of micro watershed management. The strategy to implement this concept requires that the people have confidence that they can mobilise the entire community of the watershed to achieve atleast part of the watershed plan. An overview of all the watershed programmes that MYRADA is involved in, indicates that it takes several months of interaction (including community action as described earlier), for the people to take the initiative or to respond willingly to any initiative to bring all together; besides all the groups may not agree to work

together at the first attempt. During the entry phase the small and marginal farmers, who perhaps benefit the most from watershed management activities, do not have the confidence to bring all other groups, or even all of their own group together. The larger farmers may be willing to try, but they are not trusted since they have a history of putting their interests first; their actions are also often symbolic and geared to demonstrate their continuing influence in the area. They are aware that though people may attend their meetings, few will really cooperate, and even among these, several will respond only because they are dependent on them. But more importantly as far as the programme is concerned, many do not trust the agency that attempts to intervene, (the NGO or Government). The NGO staff have particularly to prove that they do not want votes, bribes or land and that they are not aligned with the larger farmers or interest groups⁴.

The lack of trust is aggravated by the history of watershed treatment works which many of the older farmers still recall. The conservation work done free of cost by Government agencies in some areas during the sixties and seventies focused on contour and earthen bunds which were obstacles to field operations like ploughing, often created new gullies, and took a large part of the fields away from cultivation; they also breached regularly due to heavy rains. Since the Government had paid for the works with the main purpose of controlling silting of the tanks and reservoirs lower down, the farmers were not allowed to break them; in fact in some States, laws to punish acts destructive of bunds were not only enacted but enforced by enthusiastic and well-intentioned officers. With this background, the new approach of watershed treatment is bound to meet with scepticism in certain areas where it had been a failure previously.

The farmers are also aware that to implement some of the management activities, like drainage, requires the collaboration of several farmers. They often do not have the confidence to approach all those involved directly due to several reasons, including neighbouring or family feuds over the years. This is why an outside agency or a third party which has no particular interest to support, is required to start the process.

The NGO staff have to build confidence gradually through regular visits at arranged times and by adopting an approach which is respectful, open and willing to listen to peoples views. The success of watershed management programme particularly if measured in terms of achieving equity and sustainability, depends to a great extent on the approach of the NGO during the entry phase. While establishing this relationship of "confidence" the NGO should exercise care that it does not slip into one of dependency. While, the image people have of Government is that the "Government gives money", it is often discovered that the image they have of NGOs is that the "NGO will do it for us".

⁴ This alignment can happen even unintentionally; for example, when staff of the NGO opt to stay in the villages, they require accommodation and often the only one to offer space is the large farmer; by boarding with him even on payment, the image of the NGO is clearly compromised.

The Planning Phase

1. **Stabilise the Credit Management Groups** : An ongoing effort is required by the NGO to stabilise the credit management groups until there are indicators that the groups are stabilising and developing a culture that will support their growth not just as organisations (set up to implement a project or to receive grants) but as institutions which develop and accept behaviour patterns and norms that are higher than those practiced around in society. For example, group support, (what we call "sideways linkages" shared responsibility, regular recoveries, acceptance of sanctions for behaviour that departs from accepted norms like fines imposed on drinking, smoking, coming late to meetings, default on loans and large families. The indicators of the progress of the credit management groups during this phase could be the following :
 - regular meetings - atleast 4 times a month (one or two for business and the others to discuss issues or for literacy and numeracy classes).
 - improvement in group management - better organised meetings, maintenance of books and records (this requires specific training inputs).
 - regular financial operations like savings, loans, recoveries.
 - stabilisation of membership - some may leave or be asked to, and others may be allowed to join.

The NGO staff should now introduce the topic of a micro watershed management at group meetings. The message at this stage should not be too complex; it could be reduced to the following :

- a) the concept of one drainage system; this could be done through a PRA transect exercise, if possible after a heavy shower of rain when the drainage systems and the impact of erosion are striking.
- b) the message that the people can and must take charge of the work in their watershed; that they have the skills, as is evident from the work they or others in the area have done in the past; that their ideas and suggestions on the design and location of structures, drainage systems and regeneration of resources are important and take priority, and that
- c) they require institutions to support the planning and implementation of the micro watershed programme and to sustain atleast some of the activities. These institutions must include representatives from all the groups who

have an interest in the micro watershed like the big farmers, the landless and even those who have lands in the watershed but live outside it.

The NGO staff must ensure that the vulnerable sections (tribals, landless, women) are included in the credit groups or, if they form a significant number, should start groups of their own. It has been observed that it is these credit groups that form the basis of a Watershed Development Association or Implementation Committee; they play an important role in monitoring the activities of the members of the WDA/WIC and ensure that it serve the interest of all groups.

2. **Collect Materials (Maps) required for the Treatment Plan** : A drainage map and a survey map showing individual holdings are required; other relevant maps if available should also be collected from various Government offices; this takes time and effort.

3. A two day workshop should be arranged by the NGO with DLDB (Govt.) staff (where relevant) especially the field level staff. It has been observed that in PIDOW Gulbarga a great chunk of time is devoted to interaction among senior staff of Government and MYRADA, but hardly any time is given to organising workshops and discussion sessions with field level staff. This workshop should bring together all the staff of the NGO involved in the sub-watershed (of which the micro watershed is a part) and the senior staff of the NGO with the field level staff of DLDB (Government). The purpose of this workshop is to :
 - establish a rapport between DLDB staff and the NGO.
 - expose the DLDB staff to the credit groups and to help them to gain confidence in each other.
 - place before the groups the survey and drainage maps and to verify the survey map containing details of private holdings in the watershed with the actual situation on the ground; this can be done by organising a transect along with the groups. The Khatedar list can also be finalised.
 - explain the role that the people will play in planning and implementing the treatment of their watershed and the formation of a Watershed Development Association or Implementation Committee with the representatives from all the groups in the watershed including the large farmers; the role of this committee could be discussed especially since it will be the institution with which the DLDB will relate and which will organise and manage all further activities in the micro watershed.
 - Fix the date for the PRA to prepare the treatment plan of the watershed.

4. **Prepare the Micro Watershed Map** : For this the survey map (after verification on the ground) needs to be superimposed on the drainage map (drawn from the topo sheet).
5. **Prepare for the PRA Exercise** : This is done by the NGO together with the groups in the watershed. The steps required for the preparation of the PRA exercise, to prepare a treatment plan for the Watershed are given in a separate paper. Briefly, however the PRA exercise should focus on :
 - 5.1. **The Status of Private Lands** : The types of soils in each cultivated field, which fields are single and which are double cropped, which fields are lying fallow and why; whether productivity has deteriorated and why.
 - 5.2. **The Status of Common Lands** : How they contribute to erosion, especially if located on high or steeper slopes; usage of these lands; are there any traditional or customary rights for grazing, collecting fuel or other resources; who uses these lands - whether farmers living within or outside the watershed, when and for what periods?
 - 5.3. **The Status of Government Lands** : Identify the following categories : Degraded Forest Lands - Revenue Lands - Panchayat Lands - PWD⁵ lands. In each case identify where located, who uses them; are there traditional user rights; their location in the drainage system and the impact they have on erosion on the lower reaches; what resources are collected - fuel, fodder, quarrying, etc., and who benefits from these resources.
 - 5.4. **Identification of the Drainage System** : It is evident that people give priority to conservation of water above soil; this is a common experience in all watershed programmes where MYRADA is involved. This data is collected together with the people through transects and group mapping as well as through group discussion and interviews with key persons. The data collected could then be cross checked with all present and differences sorted out in public. As customary all presentations are made by the villagers and not by the NGO or outside participants in the exercise.
 - 5.5. **The Identification of Groups** : Most of the families will already be members of the credit groups. But it is necessary to collect information about the vulnerable groups like tribals, landless and women and to ensure that all of them participate in planning and implementation and share in the benefits; as for the large farmers it is necessary to know how many are involved in the watershed, since they will not be in the credit groups. We also need to finalise the number of farmers with lands inside the watershed but living outside, farmers with lands outside but living inside, and to ascertain how many of these two categories are members of credit groups

⁵ PWD Public Works Department

(either of the watershed or of others) and how many are not. Unless a special effort is made, farmers living outside but with lands within tend to be left out of the PRA Exercise and will therefore not be fully involved in the watershed treatment plan which could create problems later in management.

One of the vulnerable groups that tends to get marginalised in a programme that focusses on watersheds is women. The case of PIDOW is illustrative. When the Project started, though the theoretical focus was on an area namely a micro watershed, the staff began with an integrated programme which focusses on livelihoods of the poor living in a wide area. The Project Officer at that time was a medical doctor who naturally gave priority to health though it did not figure in the project concept. As a result of his interest, however, several women health animators were trained and several groups of women formed mainly to tackle their problems of health. As the focus shifted towards an area - the micro watershed, however, these womens group found that they were marginalised. Some of them, who had formed credit management groups, continued to function, but there was no doubt that, the message they were receiving indicated that the focus had moved away from them. Micro watershed management was the message and all interest and resources were directed to this objective. A year or so later the women in one watershed took an interesting decision, they seemed to say 'if you cannot fight them, join them'. They came up with the proposal to develop a micro watershed entirely by the women in the group. While our staff have found this an exciting proposal, they have to sit down with the women to work out what this actually means in terms of access to and control of resources, and in terms of responsibilities and strategy. Unless this is done, the phrase "A Womens Watershed" may draw applause but it will be devoid of content.

- 5.6. Identification of Traditional Practices still existing and those that have died out are found appropriate by the people. These practices relate to the whole range of land management, not only to structures for the conservation of soil and water; they also cover the use of humus and biomass, management of grazing lands and common assets like tanks and drinking water sources, fuel plots and cropping patterns and cycles. They also include post harvest activities like storage, selection of seed and marketing. The PRA exercises used here could include Time Line and Transects, semi-structured interviews with farmers and with womens groups, and discussions with key informants.
- 5.7. Selection of Trees : The local trees and those which people find useful and important due to religious and other reasons need to be identified; this can be done through a Transect if there is some forest, however degraded, and through matrix ranking and scoring. It is however important to note that though people may rank certain trees high in terms of their use it does not follow that it is these same species that they will opt for when it comes to raising a nursery or deciding to plant

on lands both private and common. The assumption that the matrix ranking during a PRA exercise indicates their ultimate choice needs to be tested.

- 5.8. Comparative Models : It is also important to conduct an exercise in which the people depict on the ground what their watershed looked like fifty years ago, what it is today and what they want it to be in the future. The discussion that could be started around these three models on the ground should focus on why the changes occurred and on the linkage between the degradation of the watershed and falling productivity which they have experienced. Common resources which have been badly managed like tanks and community wells and shortage of fuel, fodder, water, food and daily needs are other issues which can be incorporated.

Other exercises like modelling of the village and the fields, identification of traditional fodder grasses, a Resource Flow diagram or map - are to be included in the PRA if relevant to the area.

- 5.9. Output of the PRA Exercise : In terms of concepts, the people should begin to think of the micro watershed as one drainage system; to treat it therefore requires the cooperation of all. Further, the causal linkage between degradation and falling productivity should be made visible using instruments and techniques with which people are familiar; they may not produce accurate data but will help to encourage reflection and discussion. It is important that the PRA generates some confidence in their ability to achieve the plan to regenerate and sustain the watershed. This is why it is essential that outside participants in the PRA do not give advice during the exercise or discredit in any way people's efforts to manage their resources.

In terms of instruments required to implement the treatment plan, the PRA should produce a basic treatment map of the area which is understood by the people so that they can explain it to others. The treatment plan should list the types of activities required on Private, Common and Government lands; if a model could be made and placed within the watershed it would help to keep interest alive.

In terms of organisation of the PRA should initiate discussion on the needs to set up a WDA or a WIC consisting of representatives from all the credit groups as well as of groups of farmers who are not in the credit groups like large farmers and those living outside the watershed. Care must be taken to involve the vulnerable groups like tribals and women. A Watershed Budget must be drawn up, discussed and accepted publicly.

It is also necessary at the end of the PRA to list briefly and initiate discussion on the roles of the WDA/WIC; a few are listed below; others could be added on by the participants :

- To assess once again after a few days whether the treatment plan conforms to requirements on the ground and to the individual farmers who may have been reluctant to express their views during the PRA since they could be controversial or cause conflict; or because outsiders were present.
- To put together a final budget for the treatment plan: This exercise also requires other decisions on matters like the following; the contribution of each farmer in cash and kind to the work on his fields and on common lands; what should be done with the contribution in cash; the basis of payment for work done on private lands; whether on labour days or unit costs; the time frame for implementing the treatment plan.
- To mobilise labour instead of the traditional practice of employing contractors or piece workers; this is an important responsibility since the pressure to hire contractors or outside labour is great, especially when the work is supervised by local level Government employees.

Discussion on these roles and responsibilities (among others) of the WDA/WIC need to be initiated at the end of the PRA and a general consensus arrived at to form the WIC/WDA, who will be the members and to empower it to call a meeting of its members to deal with these issues as they arise and to take urgent decisions if required which would then be fed back to the credit and other groups.

6. A meeting (or meetings) should be called by the WDA/WIC preferably on its letterhead (which should be printed in the interim) to be attended by the representatives of the groups involved, the staff of Government at field and middle levels and of the NGO to consider the following issues :

- To fix the date for marking by Government staff.
- To assess the level of technical support required. From experience in Kadiri, Bangarpet and Huthur we find that people are quite capable of implementing terracing, bunding and establishing silt traps without any outside technical assistance; major drainage systems and weirs (which have low priority) may require technical help though the problem with drainage is more social, than technical.
- To finalise the percentage of people's contribution in cash or kind with respect to each activity and to decide how to manage the contribution in cash.
- To decide whether funds should be given to individual farmers as grants or as loans.

- To prioritise the treatment activities. Though the PRA will describe all the interventions required, it tends not to list the people's priorities. We find that in Bangarpet and Kadiri where the implementation is not directed by outsiders, the people decide which activity is important; the common basis for prioritisation is their perception of immediate increase in returns and proximity and control of the resource so that they obtain maximum benefit as soon as possible. It is in this area that technical experts will require to modify their stand since they follow certain procedures governing priorities; NGOs also have to revise their enthusiasm for treating common lands before private fallow lands.
 - To fix the basis of payment - unit costs or labour days.
 - To settle the day for payment if this involves the Government or the NGO.
 - To set up a system to monitor the quality of work done and to solve the problems that may arise when several farmers have to work together.
7. Consolidation of the treatment plan and preparation of the treatment map; this is done by the Government (DLDB in PI DOW) together with MYRADA technical staff.
8. Verification of the treatment map in an open meeting called by the WIC/WDA in the village; all the families involved should be invited to participate in this meeting together with Government staff and the NGO.
- The meeting should end with the treatment map signed by all parties concerned. The WIC/WDA signs on behalf of the watershed groups.
- The meeting ends with the clear recognition that the WIC/WDA will be the responsible body to implement the treatment plan and that all outside intervenors will deal with the WIC/WDA in all matters.
9. Before bringing this part to a close it may be useful to make a few general observations related to the process during the planning phase based on several experiences in micro-watershed management. They concern some important issues like equity, livelihoods, flexibility, appropriate systems and structures, which have an important bearing on sustainability.
- 9.1. The Experience of Mobilisation : One observation of MYRADA staff is that there has been very small or no attempts at mobilising the entire village over the past 30 years. The last effort made in some villages was during the period when community projects were given an impetus in the fifties and early sixties. Since then all interventions have been directly to individuals through the several anti-poverty programmes; often these "beneficiaries" were selected by local politicians,

representing various interest groups. This approach served to polarise groups rather than to mobilise the entire village. Micro-watershed management however, requires that all families in the village are involved - even the landless who depend on the village resources for their livelihood and fuel/fodder needs. Hence, a strategy is required to mobilise people and to sustain their interest; this is an important role that the NGO has to play.

- 9.2. The Need to Broaden Options : People's expressed needs and the opportunities to which they respond are those that concern their livelihood. When their needs are discussed, watershed treatment is not given priority. Land use is one part of the whole livelihood issue; hence the proper management of land and resources must be viewed as a support base to broaden the set of their options. The credit groups fulfill this function, to some extent, by providing small loans for income generation schemes of their choice, but the support must be expanded to include training/upgrading in skills and exposure to alternatives in and around the area from which they can select livelihood activities which they find manageable and viable.
- 9.3. The Need for Equity : It is by broadening the set of options that the landless find opportunities for their livelihood. For example, as members of the credit group, they are eligible for loans. Further, the regeneration of fallow lands and wastelands provides them with opportunities to harvest fodder and fuel. The NGO must ensure that the landless are able to use these opportunities. Other vulnerable groups like tribals and women need to be organised in separate credit groups which give them a degree of independence and confidence which is the basis to assume further responsibilities and to benefit through greater access to and control of the resources of the watershed provided productivity has first increased all around. Social pressures tend to exclude these vulnerable groups. The nature of the watershed programme, which is land based, tends to marginalise the landless. The NGO, therefore has to take special care to introduce a bias towards these vulnerable groups without creating conflict at this early stage which will result in further marginalisation of the poor since they are still vulnerable.
- 9.4. The Need for Sustainability : The other major objective that the NGO needs to give priority to is sustainability which in this programme comes down to the ability of the farmers, especially the small and marginal ones, to sustain the work they have done on their lands and the ability of the families in the watershed have established to manage the watershed resources and to resolve problems and conflict. The small and marginal farmers and landless will continue to need a credit source; this is where the credit groups play a significant role in sustaining the treatment works. The initial steps to establish these groups needs to be taken during the entry phase; the most important of which is to identify the affinity groups or the socially viable groups whose members can remain united and work together without the constant intervention of the NGO.

As far as institutions to sustain the activities of watershed management are concerned, representatives from various groups, need to come together to form a WDA/WIC. To take over responsibility to finalise the plan and to control the implementation. This will be treated at length in the following chapter. This shift from the initiative taken by the NGO during the entry phase to the dominant role that the WDA/WIC should play during the implementation is crucial to sustainability; however, it is evident that to reach this stage the watershed groups require atleast a year of intensive effort to build their confidence and to enable them to perceive the potential for success if they undertake such activities. All obstacles to the growth of the WDA/WIC and to the transfer of power to it, need to be removed; one of these obstacles is the intervention of agencies both Government and NGO at the implementation level.

The small and marginal farmers who are traditionally in the debt of the larger farmers need to build up an independent source of credit to meet their urgent needs if the watershed institutions are to function in the interests of all the members both big and small. Therefore, the credit groups are important not only as a source of funds to maintain watershed structures, but also to enable the poorer families to maintain a degree of self-reliance and independence which is essential for their sustained growth.

- 9.5. The Need for Appropriate Structures : The people in all the watersheds where MYRADA has intervened are engaged in dryland farming. They have constructed structures with locally available materials - largely boulders and flat stones. They have the skills required to construct these structures. Introduction of high cost structures involving cement and steel require contractors and skills not available locally. It also opens the door to corruption, poor quality work and above all projects the message to people that they have no control in implementation and that the beneficiaries of the treatment works are outsiders. Appropriate structures are indigenous, low cost and can be maintained by the local people. These are the structures that the treatment plan should focus on.
- 9.6. The Need for Flexibility : Many of the appropriate structures do not conform to the structural designs in official manuals. To insist that the official designs are maintained will be to undermine sustainability, since the objectives of people will not be achieved. For example, the shape of structures prescribed in official manuals to hold silt, encroach on the neighbours fields and often cause conflict. The farmers know that a near vertical wall may result in a few boulders toppling over occasionally; but he prefers to replace them when this occurs rather than to construct a structure which is entirely stable but could cause conflict with his neighbour. The trend to recommend a "perfect" remedy is also inappropriate. For example, while "**Vetiver**" may be practical as an alternative to earthen bunds in some areas, it is surely not a universal remedy as often projected.

The Participatory Process During Implementation

1. It is often assumed that the processes that govern planning are carried over in implementation. If therefore, the planning process has been strongly influenced by a participatory culture, this culture should also influence the implementation of the plan. Our observations over several MYRADA Projects however, tell a different story. In fact in some projects, what emerges is that while on the one hand a level of concern to introduce a participatory process in planning is increasing, little or no attention is given to the level of participation in implementation; as a result the involvement of people in implementation shows a marked decline. This fortunately is not true in all MYRADA projects; yet in general there is need for a closer analysis of peoples role in implementation.

The reasons for this gap between the levels of participation in planning and in implementation are many and differ from project to project, but there are a few common and important ones which have been identified; some of them have also been addressed.

- 1.1. The pressure to achieve targets : This pressure is noticeable and operates in all MYRADA projects where Government funds and personnel are involved as well as in projects supported by one of our major donors. While the pressure from the Government is partly due to the system of evaluation which tends to stress heavily the achievement - or lack of - the target number of families to be supported under a particular programme, the donor referred to operates under pressure - which is passed on to the partner NGO - to spend the funds allocated by the budget approved for a financial year. Since the budget is prepared at least a year and a half before implementation starts the situation in the field changes, which in turn affects the allocations in the budget. That the budget is an essential tool for planning is accepted, but to make expenditure a major indicator of success is dangerous and leads to a sharp decrease in the space given for participatory process to play a major role during implementation. It is therefore not surprising that this donor has no place in its feedback and evaluation systems for local resources (cash mobilised from people and local Government) which indicates to a degree the involvement of local people in the implementation process and the willingness to invest in their own progress. Their contribution makes them stakeholders and helps to ensure that investment is made in income generating projects which they can manage and which have more chances of becoming sustainable. The "target approach" and the "pressure to spend the budget", obstructs the participatory process that evolved during the planning phase from continuing and gathering strength during implementation.

- 1.2.** The culture and practice operating in bureaucracies practically ensures that those who are involved in planning are not those who implement the plan on the field. Besides, the former group has a higher status; this is particularly true of Government, and therefore impacts on programmes where Government staff are operational with MYRADA. Planning is an exercise that is traditionally given a status which implementation does not enjoy; more recently those handling computers for monitoring and evaluation are also accorded a higher status. Those who monitor, evaluate, plan or deal with computers tend to have not only higher qualifications but also hold senior posts in the bureaucracy than those who are given the job of implementation. The planners are consequently higher paid than the implementers and this difference in salaries clearly provides a status to the planners. As a result, those who are involved in the planning exercise tend to have the time and confidence required to join in participatory appraisal exercises in the field especially if those exercises have acquired the glow and status that PRA has brought. To have participated in a PRA exercise is becoming one of the indicators of being in touch and upto date with the latest fashion; whether this exercise has helped to change attitudes and approaches is another matter. The implementers on the other hand tend to be either junior staff (who are usually supervisors) and field level staff with lower qualifications who have little chance of promotion but who are supposed to "implement" the plan. However, they are often marginalised; even when they participate in the planning exercise, their participation is limited since senior officers are around; it has often been noticed that the people participate in PRA exercises far more than the Government field level staff.
- 1.3.** The Government field level staff in PIDOW Gulbarga have little stake in the participatory process; it is time consuming for one and provides people with the power to monitor their work which they usually resent. They consider the people lower in status and give them the same treatment that they are accustomed to receive from their superiors. Besides, they usually live far from the work spot, and in some areas they have other duties to perform. Their interests often do not coincide with those of the people; for example, they usually prefer to hire labour than to allow people to work on their lands or in their watershed. The result of such differences at the field level at the time of implementation is sometimes fed back to superiors as "non-cooperation of people", "lack of technical expertise among people", refusal to accept and implement plan", etc. If an NGO is involved, suspicions are aroused that the NGO is encouraging people to question Government staff and interrupt their work.
- 1.4.** Field level staff (of Government and often the NGO) are not in a position to make adjustments on the field since they are accustomed to obey orders and to implement an approved plan; they cannot allow any change in plan which people may want to introduce in the field while work is in progress in order to make the structures more manageable or to serve purposes that were not taken into account in the planning exercise. For example in one area in PI DOW, the people wanted the

boulder bunds not only to prevent soil and water erosion but also to protect their fields from cattle; this requires that the bunds become walls. Now the accepted structures for soil and water conservation are smaller rounded bunds which cannot protect the fields from animals. The field level staff however are not in a position to take decisions to change the shape of the structure.

- 1.5. An assessment of MYRADA-PI DOW where a number of field level Government staff are engaged in implementing the plan for watershed treatment, indicates that the project (includes the three partners SDC, DLDB and MYRADA) have not given adequate attention to interact with and train field level staff of the DLDB and the peoples' groups; by far the major portion of time spent on workshops and meetings was with staff at higher level. Field staff did not have the opportunity to participate freely in workshops where the concept of PI DOW was discussed. In MEADOW⁶ Dharmapuri, on the other hand training courses were held for the field level staff and for the groups during 1992.

A study of the process that is emerging in PI DOW over the past one year during the implementation of the treatment plan provides a few insights that could help to make implementation a participatory experience with results that are both manageable by the people and sustainable. The experience of the process in Micro Watershed Management in the Kamasamudram Project of MYRADA which started as an integrated programme covering a wide area and only after a few years of experience focussed on six micro watersheds within the larger project area, has features which are significantly different from those of PI DOW and have been useful in analysing the processes that emerged in PI DOW. The following observations are focussed mainly on the PI DOW experience, but are also relevant for other MYRADA Projects where the management of Micro Watersheds has emerged in a significant way.

2. In PI DOW-Gulbarga the prevalent thinking that is expressed in documents governing the project has been that plans will be "implemented through functional groups". MYRADA's observations from its experience in PI DOW as well as in its other projects have been that this approach tends to extend control of Government and the NGO on the process of implementation. The PI DOW approach to "implement through the groups" has been justified by the claim that the treatment plan has been prepared in participation with the people, hence there should be no changes during implementation; further, the concern is that any divergence from the approved plan during implementation would make supervision by Government staff (who have to assess work done in the field and allocate payments) difficult. Besides, throwing the responsibility of decision making on the lower level staff who are not accustomed to deal with divergence from the plan, any change, would leave the field level staff open to criticism by senior officials

⁶ MEADOW Management of the Environment and Development of Women

who evaluate their performance on the basis of the plan. There is also an underlying cultural block which makes it difficult for the "technical experts" who have had input in the treatment plan to accept any change. There is the claim that the National and State planning norms based on long practices have been used in planning. MYRADA staff in PIDOW on their part have insisted that the plan must be implemented "through groups" in accordance with the strategy that was expressed in the agreements signed by the partners. An analysis of the implementation process, however, during the past year indicates clearly that implementation "through the groups" did not foster participation by the people, since power remained with the intervening staff. What is emerging is that unless the peoples institutions take control of implementing the plan with the support - if required - from outsiders, the degree of usefulness of the work done from the peoples point of view and the chances of sustainability will both decrease. In PIDOW while the DLDB's role is to provide technical support, MYRADA's role is to strengthen peoples' institutions with the skills and resources to manage their watershed. It is these institutions which should implement the treatment plan; they should be free to call on the services of Government or NGOs - or to refuse them if considered inappropriate or unnecessary.

It is true that PIDOW has not had enough time to work out a creative synergy between the intervening partners since the collaboration with the DLDB is fairly recent (1½ years). There are also certain feelings, some based on experiences and others on perceptions which are obstructing the emergence of a combined effort which is required if the people take control of implementation. While Government staff at higher levels feel that the MYRADA staff are taking undue credit for the work and that technically they are weak, the MYRADA staff feel that the gap between what is said about participation at higher levels of Government and what actually happens on the field is larger; they also feel that while the technical input of Government in planning is high, at the field level it is poor and often the people have the skills required to carry out works on their own; finally they feel that according to the roles which were allotted to the partners, it is the PIDOW-MYRADA staff who should play a major role in fostering participatory approaches and strategies; however, the trend is for non technical staff at higher levels of Government to take on the role of participatory experts; this results in conflicting messages. Many of these perceptions may be blown out of proportion due to personalities, but there are surely perceptions on both sides that are justified. Ironically, present underlying perceptions seem to indicate that while the DLDB staff, atleast at higher levels seem to be of the opinion that they are capable of introducing participatory approaches, the NGO feels that people are quite capable of implementing the treatment plan and that intervention by DLDB during the implementation phase is not only unnecessary but is also obstructing the participatory process. It is therefore necessary that, for power to pass over to peoples institutions, the intervening partners realise the need to collaborate in order to support the emergence of appropriate peoples institutions.

A clear shift is required to transfer power (access and control) from those involved in the planning stage to peoples institutions during the implementation phase. But to which institutions will power be transferred and over which activities or resources does this power extend? There are sufficient emerging trends of peoples groupings in PIDOW which can provide the beginnings of an answer and form the basis for a strategy to transfer power to people and to define the scope of this power.

As far as PIDOW is concerned, several peoples groups within each micro watershed have emerged during the past 2-3 years. These groups resemble the Credit Management Groups in all MYRADA projects. Besides managing credit they also take on roles in response to local needs. In PIDOW, for instance, several groups have taken on lease private fallow lands as well as Revenue wastelands, which they have protected and from which they have earned profits from harvesting and selling traditional fodder grasses. Several groups have also been involved in implementing the treatment plan in the fields of their members. As yet no single organisation has emerged to take over the implementation of the treatment plan in one micro or sub-watershed. There are reasons for this which will be discussed below; however, the absence of one apex society covering the entire watershed need not obstruct the handing over of power to the people. The 'lead role' in the implementation has been allotted to the DLDB field level staff who are expected to implement the plan "through the groups"; this perception has to change. In the PIDOW area itself there are Micro Watersheds where the DLDB did not play a role in the implementation of the treatment plan. The implementation was carried out largely by the peoples groups in consultation with one another but with considerable input from MYRADA staff who played a role in solving disputes, marking and assessing work done for payment. Implementation in these micro watersheds however went ahead much faster and without any delays and misunderstandings. There was also no obvious difference in the technical quality of the structures constructed in these watersheds and of others supervised by the DLDB field level staff. The question that arises therefore is what exactly is the technical value added during the implementation phase by the field level technical staff of DLDB? If there is no value added, are they required at all?

Observations of land development works carried out by people in MYRADA projects near Kadiri, Bangarpet and Huthur where no technical support was provided by DLDB and minimal by MYRADA also show that the quality of structures is high. The people have traditional skills in terracing and bunding which are adequate; it is only where major structures like weirs are concerned that outside expertise is required. On the other hand, in areas where the DLDB is not involved the technical quality of plans and maps prepared during the preparatory phase is low.

What was lacking till recently in PIDOW watersheds where DLDB and MYRADA are working are Apex organisations that could legitimately claim to represent all the groups in the watersheds and which in turn could demand the right to control the implementation phase. During the past 6-9 months however, in the newer watersheds, several groups which have been managing savings and providing credit, have come together to form Apex Societies. The original assumption made by MYRADA was that there would be one Apex Society for each sub-watershed, but the present pattern emerging does not bear this out. Left to take the initiative, the families in Margutti Doddahalla sub-watershed have formed 2 Apex Societies, one comprising 6 credit groups and the other 7. One Apex Society covers families with lands on the right of the main drainage running through the sub watershed and the other Apex Society covers those with lands on the left. The larger farmers who own lands (on both sides) have formed a group of their own. There are also other sub watersheds in PIDOW where a similar pattern is emerging namely where there are 2 or more Apex Societies in one Sub watershed. The two Apex Societies in Margutti Doddahalla sub-watershed are formed by 2-3 representatives selected by each credit management group.

It was observed earlier that there is no sub-watershed where only one Apex Society has emerged covering the entire area. There are clear indications that all the groups in these sub watersheds do not feel confident as yet to form a single apex society for the entire sub-watershed. The groups comprising families from the weaker sections are particularly apprehensive that their freedom and rights may be tampered with by the groups with richer and more influential members. An interesting development in PIDOW highlights this apprehension by the groups whose members are from the weaker sections of society. When the formation of Apex Groups in a sub-watershed was discussed with the people, the groups of tribals who lived mainly in the upper reaches of several micro watersheds, decided to join together to form an Apex group which consisted only of tribal groups from several micro watersheds. The tribal groups decided not to join the other groups within their own micro watershed because, while on one hand they felt a closer affinity with other tribal groups, on the other hand they were apprehensive that they would be marginalised by other groups in their micro watersheds. From its experience with Apex societies of credit groups, MYRADA expects that the tribal groups in the micro watershed will finally agree to form an Apex Society with the other micro watershed groups, but after they have built up a level of self-reliance and confidence as a result of networking with groups with which they have an affinity. The intervening NGO meanwhile has a role to ensure that the smaller credit groups especially those with weaker members are supported to attain a degree of self reliance in terms of daily needs and unexpected demands and the confidence and skills to negotiate effectively to protect their rights and their share in the benefits of the programme. Even where an Apex Society emerges, the NGO should ensure that while it supports the emerging identity of the Apex Society, the latter should not undermine the strength of the credit groups. In the

Bangarpet Watershed the families in the Apex Society have continued to depend on their respective credit groups for loans and there are sufficient indicators to assume that if they require to spend time maintaining the conservation structures on their fields they will be able to borrow from their respective credit groups to meet their daily consumption needs; in other words the pressure to migrate for wages will be eased, allowing them to stay in the area and work on their lands if required.

What roles can these emerging Apex Societies be expected to assume? The emergence of Apex Societies in various watershed programmes of MYRADA has been a relatively recent experience; they have not played any significant role as yet in watershed management. At this stage therefore, it may be useful to reflect on the process through which they have emerged in order to identify certain guidelines both tentative and flexible which may help to identify the roles of apex societies in watersheds.

Some of the roles that these Apex Societies could assume in watersheds have already been taken up by the credit groups in PIDOW. For example, it is the credit groups which have leased fallow land from private farmers, they have also taken over Revenue wastelands and degraded forest lands; all these lands have been protected and developed. The members have been paid a daily wage to harvest grasses which have been sold as fodder at a considerable profit. It will therefore be counter productive to hand over these roles to the Apex Societies, it would lead to a conflict situation which the powerful farmers would relish as it would help them to re-establish their influence which is diminishing, as the credit groups gather strength. It seems appropriate for the present to limit the role of the Apex Societies in Micro Watersheds to implementing the treatment plan. This is why it is advisable to call them "Watershed Implementation Committees" rather than "Watershed Management Committees" as the latter name indicates a much wider role. It is difficult to predict what patterns may emerge in a year or two (they will probably vary with each Watershed) but the credit groups must not be weakened in the process.

In Bangarpet the Apex Society⁷ managing one watershed has emerged through a different process. There were already 3 functioning credit groups in the micro watershed when farmers who owned lands along a large ravine decided to form a watershed Apex Society to treat the ravine. These farmers were members of different credit groups. What brought them together was the fact that they own land in an area where the potential for quick returns was the highest. Though they have contributed part of the funds wages to the watershed group, they continue to

⁷ There are Apex Societies of Credit Management Groups emerging in all MYRADA projects; these are not watershed groups and have assumed several other social roles. These are to be distinguished from the Apex Societies in Watersheds which are described here.

rely on their original credit groups for other loans. They have also not decided what to do with the common fund that has accumulated with the watershed committee. As treatment work progress to the fields of other farmers in the micro watershed they are being accepted as members of the watershed committee. However, as observed earlier; the members of the watershed society continue to depend on their credit groups for any joint activity other than the Watershed implementation programme.

Analysing the above experiences and the emerging needs in the growth of Apex Societies in Watersheds, the role of the Watershed Implementation Committee (WIC) could be described as follows :

- The WIC should call a meeting after the treatment map has been put together by the DLDB staff on the basis of the Participatory Planning exercise. The meeting is attended by staff of DLDB and MYRADA (from all levels) and as many local families as possible; hence a time and place convenient to the people should be chosen.
- The meeting ends with an over-all consensus on the treatment plan and the understanding that certain modifications are possible and welcome at the field level. Past experience indicates that the problems that arise do not relate to changes in the location of structures, since modifications upto 10% - 15% are acceptable by the DLDB; problems arise when changes are required in the design of structures to suit peoples objectives, in the mode of fixing payment according to unit costs or labour days, in a demand for change in materials used for bund construction or even when people decide to contribute from their wages to the group account. All these potential areas for change must be identified. The meeting sets up a Monitoring Committee to solve problems arising from changes in the treatment plan; members of this committee should be identified and a schedule of meetings established. The WIC fixes the date and time for marking by DLDB field level staff so that the starting date is clearly identified and agreed to.
- The WIC monitors the quality and progress of the work on each field and decides on payments. The WIC ensures that the field operations are timed to suit the convenience of local families in order that they are available to provide the labour required; consequently, in most cases no labour need be hired from outside. The WIC also prioritises the activities required by the treatment plan so that families can take up these activities according to their convenience and priority.

These are possible roles of the WIC; some have already been considered by the Apex Societies while others need to be presented by MYRADA to these societies and assessed by their members for their relevance and importance. Though in

every watershed the WIC may not take on all these roles (monitoring the work done for example is often delegated to the credit groups), every effort must be made by MYRADA staff to ensure that the WICs have the power to control the implementation process even if others point out that they may make mistakes due to inexperience.

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