

**A brief History of Convergence and Participation in Watershed
Management Strategy
In GOI and GOK¹ Programmes
Myrada's Role in Policy Change**

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Introduction

If a development project proposal with a focus of alleviating poverty conceptualised since the eighties dared to exclude "convergence of interveners", "people's participation" and "group formation" from its strategy, it stood little chance of being approved. Watershed Projects were and are no exception. The reasons for introducing these two dimensions in intervention strategy are several, ranging from reduced costs to increased potential for sustainability. The consequence of introducing people's participation in watershed management strategy opened the way for NGOs to be involved. Two other concerns related to equity and gender also emerged in the early nineties as a result of experiences in involving people and NGOs.

This foreword traces the history of:

1. Convergence of interveners and participation of community based organisations and NGOs in watershed programs in Karnataka since the 80s.
2. Participation of community based organisations and NGOs as a critical component in watershed management strategy in programmes/policies promoted by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India since the early 90s.

The role that Myrada played in the history of these developments in Karnataka and at the National level will be described.

¹ **GOI** Government of India
GOK Government of Karnataka

1. Convergence of interveners and participation of community based organisations and NGOs in watershed programs in Karnataka since the 80s.

Convergence or integration as it was called in the early 80s started in Karnataka in the mid-eighties when there was both political as well as bureaucratic support to involve the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in development programmes. *The political and policy framework for introducing people's participation in development was the introduction of the Panchayat Raj Bill in 1983, which was approved by the President in 1986 and passed as an Act in Karnataka in 1987.* The process of involving the PRIs during the four intervening years (1983-1987) continued under the momentum generated by the policy of the political party in power and with the active support of Shri. P.R.Nayak as Development Commissioner and Shri Meenakshisundaram as Secretary, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department. These two officers reasoned that involving people in development is part of a broader "political" strategy to build up and involve the PRIs.

The first development programme in which the PRIs were formally involved was the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP). The participation of people, however, was seen as the involvement of the Panchayat institutions particularly the Zilla Panchayat (ZP). When the Dryland Development Boards were constituted which were also responsible for implementing the watershed programmes, they were also situated in the context of the Panchayat Raj, but only at the ZP at the District level. The original concept of the Dry Land Development Board (DLDB) bears this out. It was envisioned to be a people's committee. This is mainly why it had an elected representative as its chair. However, in practice, it was largely managed by the administration at the District level. There was not much thought given to people's involvement at the Gram Panchayat level or through their community based organisations below the GPs.

The programmes managed by the DLDB were in practice implemented through officials drawn from the Line departments. While the objective of integrating various sectors - like forestry, agriculture, soil and water conservation, agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry - was partially achieved by bringing all the technical staff supporting these sectors under the DLDB, their attitudes and the systems they subscribed to remained firmly entrenched in their respective departments. These attitudes and systems did not promote participation of people at the watershed level or foster the process and institutions required for people's effective participation in identifying, planning, budgeting, implementing and managing watersheds. The two Officers mentioned above were aware of this, and decided that a pilot project involving NGOs who would be directly responsible for community organisation while the DLDB implemented the technical and infrastructural aspects would help to introduce people's participation more effectively in watershed management strategy.

These two officials decided to support a pilot project in Gulbarga District. PIDOW (Participative Integrated Development of Watersheds) was launched in 1985. There were three co-operating organisations: 1) The Government of Karnataka - during the first two years through the Line Departments, then for a year and a half through the Zilla Panchayat and finally through the Dry Land Development Board, 2) the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation which provided the funds, and 3) MYRADA WHICH took the lead in promoting Peoples Institutions and ensuring their participation at every stage in the planning, budgeting and implementation process.

In order to institutionalise this three-way partnership, a Joint Project Committee was constituted with the Secretary RD&PR, (Government of Karnataka) as Chairperson. The Government was responsible for the technical support and physical implementation. It promoted "convergence" among the various line Departments. MYRADA's organisational objective was to promote people's institutions appropriate to manage watersheds and to support them to become the fourth, and hopefully, the leading partner. "Participation" was clearly enshrined in "PIDOW" as the name itself indicates. This was four years before Participatory Rural Appraisal appeared on the development scenario in India.

There was at that time some opposition from concerned Departments in Delhi to the formal involvement of an NGO in a bilateral project. It was Shri.Bandhopadhyay (Secretary, Rural Development, Government of India) who supported the formal involvement of Myrada in this pilot experiment.

Convergence of Interveners

Several sectors and departments are involved in an integrated watershed programme - prominent among these are Agriculture, Forestry, Horticulture and Soil and water Conservation. This decision to integrate these interventions was taken by the Government of Karnataka in the context of the Panchayat Raj framework. The second World Bank supported Karnataka Watershed project was being formulated in the mid 1980s during the same period that the Panchayat Raj policy was being formalised. Convergence (or integration) of interventions was part of the World Bank discourse in the 1970s and 80s as critical to effectiveness. In Karnataka the Bank found that the Government had taken a step towards integrating technical support in the RLEGP Programme. A Multi Disciplinary Team (MDT) had been introduced in Karnataka which provided technical support to the RLEGP. The Bank sponsored Watershed Project built on this initiative. It must be noted that participation of people and their institutions did not figure in Bank discourse in a significant way till the early 1990s; it was "integration of interventions" that took central place.

The Government of Karnataka's initiative to integrate intervention through the MDTs in the RLEGP took a step forward with the constitution of the Dry Land Development Boards (DLDB) which had both technical staff and people's representatives at the Zilla

Panchayat level. The Chairperson of the DLDB was an elected representative. The DLDBs therefore sought to bring together and to provide an institutional basis both for the intervenors who were mainly technical staff as well as for the representatives of people. In Government of Karnataka's perception therefore convergence of interveners alone was inadequate; it had to include people. However "people" was restricted to representatives elected at the ZP level.

MYRADA - PIDOW, Gulbarga which started in 1985-86 was the first example in the country of a Bilateral project where a first step was taken towards institutionalising participation of people who were actually involved in implementing watershed programs (and who were outside the ZPs). MYRADA distinguished between people's institutions which are representative like the Zilla Panchayat and those which are participatory like the Gram Sabha and the SHGs (which had already emerged in Myrada in the mid 80s) and later the Watershed management Associations, User/Area Groups which emerged during the process of implementing watershed programmes. It held the position that both types of institutions are required as the basis of democracy partly to promote equity and gender balance and partly to make participation more effective and sustainable. Between 1986 and 1992 MYRADA promoted the SHGs as the basic institution in watershed management. Alongside people decided that they prefer to work together to manage a micro watershed which covered between 150-200 ha in the area. These groups came to be known as Watershed Management Associations (WMAs) and comprised between 30 to 35 families who had a stake (lands and livelihood base) in the micro watershed.²

The learnings from PIDOW were not absorbed into watershed strategy in Karnataka in the late 80s and early 90s. Participatory peoples institutions as a critical element in watershed strategy was not institutionalised in programmes sponsored by the Government of Karnataka until the late nineties when KAWAD and SUJALA were grounded. Surprisingly, the PIDOW experiment had a greater impact on national policy through the Ministry of Rural development (Government of India) in the early nineties than it had in Karnataka.

The Government of Karnataka continued to view participation of people in the context of the ZP in the 1980s and through most of the 1990s. There was no initiative from Government in Karnataka to promote people's institutions below the Zilla Panchayat till the late 1990s

The emergence of the Watershed Committee comprising families in the watershed at the 500 ha level originated from centrally sponsored watershed programmes, initially

² These WMAs are similar to the Area or User Groups that are given a place in the Hariyali Guidelines that came out in 2003)

from the Ministry of Rural Development Government of India and later under the policy and strategy enshrined in the Common Guidelines for watershed programmes. Myrada staff were involved in opening spaces for NGOs and CBOs in these Guidelines thanks largely to the influence of Shri Yugandar who was Secretary RD Government of India in the early 90s. These Guidelines had an influence in opening spaces for CBOs and NGOs in KAWAD (the Karnataka Watershed Development Society) a Karnataka government sponsored Society which managed a watershed programme in three districts in Karnataka (funded by DFID-UK) which was the first to introduce in 1999 the self help affinity groups in all watershed programmes as an institutional expression of people's participation. The SHGs were also introduced in SUJALA, the watershed programme managed by the Government of Karnataka and supported by the World Bank which started in 2001. Myrada was involved both in the KAWAD as well as in Sujala and was primarily responsible for introducing the SHGs into these two programs primarily to address the objective of equity as well as to bring gender concerns to the fore. These SHGs focused on women and the landless families and trained people to manage their affairs and intervene in broader issues related livelihood strategies and gender balance as well as to lobby for their rights and entitlements.. Another expression of people's participation namely, the Watershed Management Associations or User Groups or Area groups emerged at the level of the micro watersheds covering 150-200 ha and were promoted, again at the initiative of Myrada, both in KAWAD programme as well as in SUJALA. Both these people's institutions finally found a place in the revised guidelines of the Government of India called Hariyali (2003) .

MYRADA's experience with the DLDB started in Gulbarga. When the Gulbarga project started in 85-86 the Government of Karnataka intervened through the Line Departments. This was found to be highly ineffective. Each Department was driven by its own internal priorities and constrained by the flow of its resources, which together had little relevance to the schedules and needs of people. After the Panchayat Raj Act was passed in 1987, the Zilla Panchayat took over. However, the Zilla Panchayat of Gulbarga took time to get its act together. Further, watershed development was low on its list of priorities; the Government's contribution under the Bilateral Agreement of around 30% was either not forthcoming or could not be traced. The accounting systems of the Zilla Panchayat were not adequate to meet the requirements of a bilateral programme. A year and a half of this experience was adequate for the Government of Karnataka to shift to the DLDB. After the DLDB took over, there was significant improvement in the quality of "integration" not just in the timing of interventions but also between the intervening institutions schedules and priorities and those of the watershed institutions. This provided a far more conducive and appropriate support structure to promote participation in the process of watershed management. The experiences of working with three institutions in watershed development - namely the Line Departments, the Zilla Panchayat and the DLDB - where the level of integration differed in each - were a rich source of learnings; but no effort was made to assess them and incorporate learnings in state policy.

Beyond Convergence Of Interveners To Participation Of People and their Institutions

One often finds that the concept of integration tends to get mixed up with the concept of participation. No doubt integration and participation are linked. Integration of interventions is necessary as a first step to make participation "friendly" to people, but it is not enough. Besides, and more significantly, for integration of interventions to be really effective, the interventions must integrate not only with each other but with people's priorities and practices related to planning, budgeting and implementation. Further, integration of interventions must be driven by participatory peoples' institutions in which every stakeholder is a member and not by an external agency even if it is a representative one like the Zilla Panchayat. In order for these priorities and practices of people to have an impact on the programme, they need to be backed by peoples' institutions which are strong enough to ensure that people discuss and come to conclusions in a participative and transparent manner and that the voice of people is respected. **This in turn requires a comprehensive strategy to promote and institutionalise people's participation through participatory institutions like SHGs and the Watershed Management Associations, (Area Groups/User Groups).**

Integration of interventions and participation of people need to be balanced in such a way that together they have an impact at least on the following activities in watershed management:

- ❖ Priorities in Planning – for example people opt to give priority to protect and regenerate private lands lying fallow where conflict is limited (the watershed association enters into a agreement with the absentee landowner to share produce), rather than to protect and regenerate common lands where the potential for conflict is high; people opt to position gully plugs near fields of farmers who are willing to maintain them rather than where intervenors position these plugs for greatest impact.
- ❖ Integration of Land treatment measures –for example people often have implemented some measures long before the present project was proposed; they would prefer to integrate these measures where possible with those proposed in the new project rather than destroy them when the new plan is implemented.
- ❖ The integration of purposes –for example while the intervenors plan to construct bunds to reduce soil erosion, people may also want bunds to fulfil other objectives like protection; this will require bunds of greater height than those required only for erosion protection.
- ❖ The integration of traditional methods used by people, with measures brought in by intervenors – for example people may prefer to construct boulder bunds since their fields are full of boulders (this serves a double purpose of clearing their fields and finding materials for bund construction) while intervenors opt for mud bunds - with mud dug out from the fields - since they measure work by the quantity of soil dug out and have no official measure for assess work done to collect boulders. In such

cases, the watershed committees, when asked, have come up with workable solutions.

However as a first step it was necessary to integrate the activities of intervenors so that all of them approach the people together; this, it was assumed, would help to remove over lapping of activities and result in better timing to conform with people's schedules.

Unfortunately, no in-depth studies of the processes that emerged in Myrada PIDOW Gulbarga were carried out by GOK during the 1990s even though Gulbarga was conceived partly as a search for answers. Some of the insights and learnings were recorded by MYRADA staff in several papers between 1988 and 1992 and finally in a booklet by this writer published in 1993 and titled "The interventions of a Voluntary Agency in the emergence and growth of People's Institutions for the Sustained and Equitable Management of Micro Watersheds". However, this was not adequate to trigger off policy change in the watershed programmes of the GOK, or even to produce relevant guidelines to guide watershed programmes promoted by the Government. For such institutionalisation to take place, there is need for a combined team including Government to carry out the analysis and for the Development Commissioner and secretary RD & PR to be actively involved in the process

2. Participation of community based organisations and NGOs as a critical component in watershed management strategy in programmes/policies promoted by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, since the early 90s.

Given the important role that the Ministry of Rural development plays in the management and funding of Watershed Programmes, it will be useful to record how participation was introduced in watershed management at the level of the Government of India. Convergence at the National level will be discussed at the end.

Interaction with Government officials who were the key players during 1992-96 indicated that there was a general dissatisfaction with the performance of the DPAP and DDP³ since the 1980s at least. This was officially documented and confirmed by the report of a Committee set up by the Ministry of Rural Development, which was published in 1989. In a way it put an official stamp on the general feeling of dissatisfaction. The report provided evidence that in spite of major programmes - like the Soil Conservation in the catchments of River Valley Projects launched in 1962, the DPAP launched in 1972-73, the DDP in 1977-78, the Integrated Watershed Management Scheme for Flood Control in the Catchments of Flood prone rivers in 1992-93 - there was overwhelming evidence that reservoirs were silting up, that there

³ **DPAP** Drought Prone Area Programme
 DDP Desert Development Programme

was no significant or sustainable impact on productivity or on the resilience of crops to long dry spells in drought prone areas and that floods were a recurring feature.

Shri B.N.Yugandha, took over as Secretary of the Ministry of Rural Development, GOI in 1992. The findings of the above mentioned report, were confirmed by his own experience and the evaluations of the DPAP/DDP programmes which he had initiated while in the Academy in Mussoorie. Studies conducted on the role that people's institutions (particularly SAGs) played in the Integrated Tribal Development Project in Andhra Pradesh and the Women's Empowerment Project in Tamilnadu both supported by IFAD (International Fund of Agricultural Development) and reports from MYRADA PIDOW Gulbarga experience strongly indicated that where people played an effective role, there was significant improvement in the transparency and accountability of cash utilisation, in the quality of work and in people's skills and capacities to manage their lives and resources. He asked: "Why could not participation of people in watershed development have a similar impact?"

The Eighth Plan in the context of meeting food requirements had asked for a regionally more broad based pattern of growth by devoting greater attention and resources to the development of rainfed tracts. This set the framework of quantitative and qualitative increase in resources directed to watershed management in dry and drought prone areas.

One of the first steps that Sri B.N. Yugandar took was to constitute a committee chaired by Dr.Hanumantha Rao (a well-known economist and former Vice Chair of the Planning Commission); it was called the Technical Committee on Drought Prone Areas and Desert Development Programme; it came to be known as the Hanumantha Rao Committee. Among the committees terms of reference was the following: "To recommend measures intended to promote the role of watershed committees, Pani Panchayats, NGOs, etc., in order to encourage widespread participation of people and ensure greater accountability of funds and sectoral Departments to people's representatives".

The Hanumantha Rao Committee: The Hanumantha Rao Committee's Report recommended that the responsibility for planning and implementing DPAP and DDP should be transferred to the democratically constituted local self government institutions and to the voluntary organisations of the people. It is presumed that the democratically constituted institutions included those set up under the Panchayat Raj Act. The report also recommended that the support structure to foster participation should be a combination of Government Departments, NGOs and people's institutions and not NGOs or Government alone. The report in several places linked participation with sustainability particularly related to the maintenance of structures. It states for example, "where people have been motivated to participate from inception ... the structures are protected by them". In brief, the report recognised that there is a

causal relationship between participation and sustainability, particularly of physical structures.

MYRADA's experience indicates that though participation is linked to sustainability, it is not adequate to build the basis for sustainability. There is a gap in the process. Participation needs to lead to the development and growth of people's institutions appropriate to the task and/or resources to be managed and this in turn lays a more appropriate basis for sustainability. Further, the structure of people's institutions required to take the lead in planning and implementing watershed activities is not necessarily the same as the structure of institutions appropriate for maintenance and sustainability. These insights emerged from the MYRADA Gulbarga-PIDOW experience but were not followed through at that time

The recommendations of the Hanumantha Rao Committee were incorporated in the Guidelines for watershed development brought out by the Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment Government of India in 1995 with a foreword by B.N. Yugandhar. Myrada was involved in preparing these guidelines. The MoRD brought out guidelines and initiated a participatory approach in watershed management from 1995. The Ministry of Agriculture (which has the largest budget for Watershed Development) came out with similar guidelines in 2000. A working group was constituted on "Watershed development, rainfed farming and NRM" in 2000 as part of the preparation for the 10th Plan. Myrada was a member of this Working Group. Finally the Ministry of Agriculture together with the Ministry for Rural Development came out with Common Guidelines in Oct 2001. The common guidelines were revised in a document popularly called "Hariyali" which became applicable from April 2003. All these Report/Guidelines stressed the need for: a) decentralisation b) participation c) productivity and d) equity.

However there were shifts in emphasis. MoRD aimed primarily at drought mitigation and dryland agriculture in DPAP and DDP districts/areas. Hariyali shifted this emphasis to "all rural areas", "special areas" and "irrigation". Focus shifted to natural resource conservation, regeneration and maintenance of assets. The focus on poverty mitigation through productivity enhancement of agriculture and promoting livelihoods was diluted. (Resource enhancement by itself does not change the situation of the rural poor).

Hariyali Guidelines (HG) also removed /diluted the role of participatory platforms (Watershed Associations, Watershed Committees, User Groups, SHGs) and of NGOs and gave responsibility to the PRIs. In the HG, the ZP/DRDA, is the nodal authority for implementation. It has the authority to approve the selection of the watersheds, to appoint the Project Implementation Agencies (PIAs) and to approve the action plan for treatment. The CEO (ZP) and PD (DRDA) sign all statutory papers. The ZP/DRDA appoints the Project Implementation Agencies (PIAs). The PIAs can be ZPs, Line Agencies, Agencies of the State government, Universities and Intermediate Panchayats

at the level of Taluk or Mandal; "failing these options, the ZP/DRDA may consider appointing a reputed NGO" (HG)

It is clear from the above that the last priority is given to NGOs, who from experiences in watershed projects, had emerged as the most suitable and appropriate institution to form and train people's institutions. In the earlier guidelines, no organisation was given priority. Given the absence of a level playing field, it is obvious that in the selection of PIAs, NGOs will be excluded unless the CEO of the ZP/DRDA is in a position to influence the decision to select an experienced NGO working to the area. The Peoples' Institutions identified in Hariyali are 1) Representative Institutions like the Panchayat Raj Institutions at the District and Mandal levels and the Gram Panchayat and 2) Participatory Institutions where all the stakeholders are members. These are a) the Self Help groups (or what MYRADA calls the Self Help Affinity groups - SAGs), b) the User Groups whose members have a degree of homogeneity and comprise stakeholders in a micro watershed or micro catchment - this leaves the choice to the implementing agency to form smaller groups veering a micro catchment of 150-200 ha as well as larger groups covering a micro watershed of approx 500 ha depending on the topography and land ownership pattern - and c) the Gram Sabhas.

The Hariyali Guidelines however were criticised for doing away with the Watershed Committee at the 500 ha level which was responsible, under earlier guidelines, for implementing the programme and managing funds. In its place the Hariyali Guidelines identifies the Gram Panchayat through which funds would flow and which would take the lead in managing the watershed programme. The problem is that in the Gram Panchayat, party politics and short term interests often take precedence over watershed management objectives which are achieved in the long term and which require prior investment in capacity building of peoples institutions rather than immediate and direct hand outs as grants.

As a result of widespread dissatisfaction with this approach the Department of Land Resources, MoRd Government of India constituted a Technical Committee in Feb 2005 popularly called after its Chairperson as the Parthasarathy Committee consisting of 10 members, (this author was a member); it submitted a report entitled "From Hariyali to Neeranchal" in January 2006 which brought the peoples institutions and NGOs back into the picture.

Institutional Highlights of the Parthasarathy Committee Report:

It recommended the setting up of A National Authority for Sustainable development of Rainfed Areas Registered as a Society -possibly later to be converted into a Statutory Body (like NDDDB). It recommended an Apex Governing Body at All India level, Boards at State level and District Watershed Development Agencies answerable to the ZP. - all with professional CEOs as heads. Each Village would have a Village Watershed Committee answerable to the Gram Panchayat and a Womens' Watershed

Council to protect and enhance women's interests. Ample scope is provided for involvement of Watershed Associations, Self Help Groups and User Groups. NGOs have a role particularly to promote equity and sustainability and establish linkages. The overarching goals were - to ensure safe drinking water, provide sustainable livelihoods, develop the natural resource base and reduce impact of drought.

Convergence at the National Level: There are four major institutions involved with watershed programs at the Government of India level: The Ministries of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment and Forestry and the Planning Commission which manages programs like the Western Ghats Development Programme and the Special Areas Dev. Programme. Effective Convergence among these institutions is difficult given the fact that they come under different Ministers who are often from different political parties. The several reports mentioned above especially the last one entitled From Haryali to Neeranchal have brought some degree of commonality at the District level where the program is implemented. However the institutional structure recommended down to the village level has not been put in place though a start has been made. Convergence, therefore at the national level is still a distant dream; convergence at the field level however does hold promise.

MYRADA's Publications

Manuals/Books

1. Participatory Impact Monitoring of SHGs & Watersheds
2. The Myrada Experience - People's Institutions for Sustained & Equitable Management of Micro Watersheds (July 16, 1993)
3. The Myrada Experience - People's Institutions Managing Natural Resources in context of a Watersheds Strategy (Sept 2003)
4. The Myrada Experience A Manual for Capacity Building of People's Managing Watersheds (31st March 2004)

Rural Management System Papers

1. PIDOW - Towards a PIDOW Model (Paper 4)
2. Mini Watershed Management Systems (Paper 5)
3. The "P" In PIDOW (Paper 6)
4. The Question of Equity in Watershed Management (Paper 20)
5. A participatory Approach to Watershed Management (Paper 24)
6. Watershed Management - Are Loans More Effective in Promoting Participation and Ownership Than Contribution? The Roles of Panchayat Raj Institutions. (Paper 36)
7. Participation and Integration in Watershed Management Strategy in GOI and GOK programmes (Paper 37)