

Sujala Watershed Project

Completion Report

of

Partner NGO MYRADA

October 2002 to September 2007

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Abbreviations used in this Report

AG	Area Group
BAIF	Bharathiya Agro Industries Foundation
CBO	Community Based Organisation
DFID	Departmental Fund for International Development
DRG	District Resource Group
DWDO	District Watershed Development Office
EAP	Entrepreneurial Awareness Programme
EC	Executive Committee
EDP	Entrepreneurship Development Programme
EMPRI	Environmental Management and Policy Research Institute
EPA	Entry Point Activity
ESA	Environmental and Social Assessment
FNGO	Field NGO
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
Ha.	Hectares
IDS	India Development Service
IFAD	International Fund for Agriculture Development
IGP	Income Generation Activity
ISRO	Indian Space Research Organisation
KAWAD	Karnataka Watershed Development (Society)
LNGO	Lead NGO
LOC	Letter of Credit
M & L	Monitoring and Learning
M/B	Multilateral/Bilateral (Agencies)
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PAD	Project Appraisal Document
PBPS	Performance Based Payment System
PIDOW	People's Involvement in the Development of Watersheds
PNGO	Partner NGO
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRI	Panchayath Raj Institutions
SHG	Self Help Group
SNGO	Specialist NGO
SOE	Statement of Expenditure
SWAP	Sujala Watershed Action Plan
SWS	Sujala Watershed Sangha
TNA	Training Needs Assessment
ToR	Terms of Reference
ToT	Training of Trainers
UAS	University of Agricultural Sciences
WDD	Watershed Development Department
WDT	Watershed Development Team

Fact Sheet

State	1	Karnataka, India
Districts	5	Chitradurga Dharwad Haveri Kolar Tumkur
Talukas	38	
Villages	1,270	
Sub-watersheds	77	- 5,000 to 12,000 hectares
Micro watersheds	741	- 500 to 700 hectares
Total area	427,000	hectares
Project value	Rs. 676.96	crores
World Bank assistance	:	77.3%
Government of Karnataka investment	:	12.5%
Local communities' investment	:	10.2%

NGO involvement

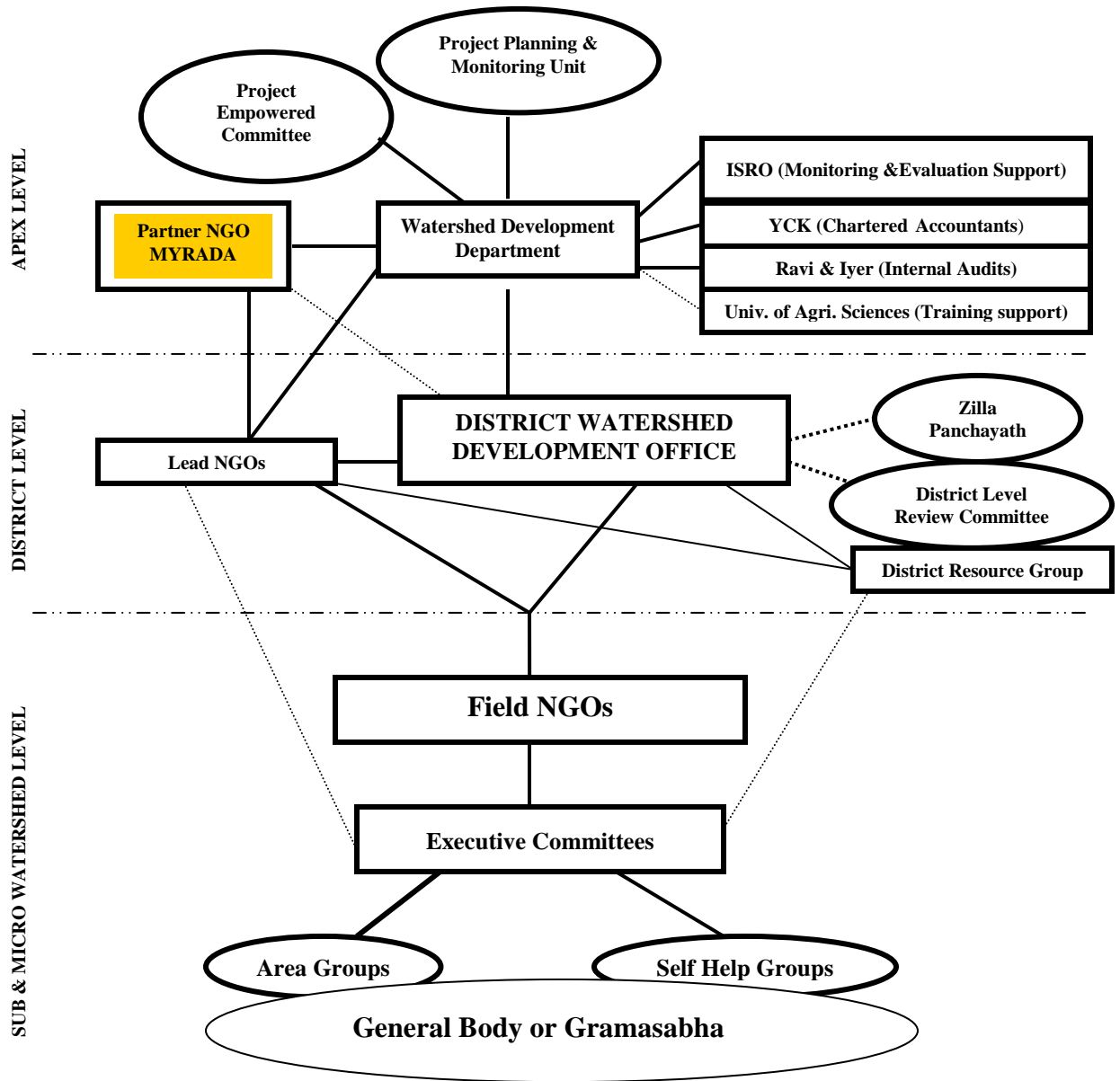
Partner NGO	1	At State level (Myrada)
Lead NGOs	3	At District level (BAIF, IDS, Myrada)
Field NGOs	51	At Sub-watershed level

Phasing of sub-watershed implementation activities

Phase 1 :	10 sub-watersheds :	June 2002 to September 2005
Phase 2 :	20 sub-watersheds :	August 2003 to February 2007
Phase 3 :	47 sub-watersheds :	March 2004 to September 2008

PNGO Contract Period
October 2002 to September 2007

Functional Organogram



Legend:

————— Continuous line indicates higher degree of interaction

..... Dotted line indicates a lower degree of interaction

The Sujala Watershed Programme

Sujala, a World Bank assisted watershed project operating in five districts of Karnataka, was introduced with an aim "...to increase the productive potential of the watersheds by involving the communities in the process through building appropriate people's institutions, and capacitating them to plan, implement and manage their resources to achieve more sustainable development"¹.

The project was originally to be completed in 5½ years starting from September 2001. Field conditions merited an extension of the implementation period, which was agreed to by the World Bank. Accordingly, the period now extends upto September 2008. The total project cost is of the order of Rs. 676.96 crores. The responsibility to make this investment has been divided between the World Bank, the State Government and the local communities in the ratio of 77.3%, 12.5% and 10.2% respectively. The selected watershed areas are spread across 1,270 villages of 38 taluks of the 5 districts of Tumkur, Kolar, Chitradurga, Dharwad and Haveri. In all, 77 sub-watershed (741 micro-watersheds) covering 4.27 lakh Hectares are taken under the project. Each sub-watershed covers around 5,000 to 7,000 Ha. In rare cases it has also gone upto 10,000 and even 12,000 Ha. Each sub-watershed is further divided into micro-watersheds, which cover areas ranging from 500 to 700 Ha. The main objectives of the project are²:

1. To reduce the poverty and to improve livelihoods of the people living in the watershed area.
2. To increase production and productivity of agricultural land
3. To improve the status of natural resource base
4. To increase the productivity of non-arable lands
5. To increase capabilities of local institutions for sustainable management of natural resources
6. To improve skills and create alternate livelihood options for vulnerable families in the watersheds

Phase I of the project covering 10 sub-watersheds was completed in September 2005. This included an extension period of 3 months granted to the FNGOs of this phase to implement the withdrawal strategy chalked out by the Department. Phase II of the project came to an end in February 2007, including an extension period of 6 months. This phase covered 20 sub-watersheds. Phase III, which covers 47 sub-watersheds, was originally aimed to be completed with in three years, but was extended for a further period of 18 months; it will be completed by September 2008.

The Sujala Project has multiple stakeholders providing various technical, social, and administrative services to the project. At all levels, (State, District and Sub-watershed), it has partners to ensure that services that are required for quality implementation of the project are regularly provided. The structure is as shown on page 5.

¹ Sujala Operations Manual, Watershed Development Department, Government of Karnataka.

² Ibid.

The Partner NGO - Myrada

Myrada's association with the Sujala Project dates back to the time when the project was being formulated and the World Bank was having preliminary discussions with the State Government. Myrada was invited to share its experiences of working in watersheds involving the local community, and thus, guide the project in formulating the social mobilisation strategies. Apart from taking experiences and lessons from various watershed development programmes of the State, Officials from the Watershed Development Department (WDD) and the World Bank visited projects of MYRADA to gain first hand knowledge of its work in fostering people's participation in watershed development, as demonstrated through Watershed Development Associations and Self Help Groups. These experiences and lessons were adopted with refinements made by Government of Karnataka in the Sujala approach to establish a watershed programme managed by the people rather than taking a pre-dominantly physical/geo-hydrological development approach. The project was carefully designed to promote effective ownership through community involvement in all stages of project planning, budget management, and implementation.

As already mentioned, Sujala was designed as a multi stakeholder project in order to secure adequate and competent technical, social, and administrative inputs on a regular basis. Thus, while the project holder would be the Government of Karnataka represented by the Watershed Development Department, a number of other independent agencies were contracted to provide a wide range of need-based and value adding services, as shown in the diagram on page 5.

At this time, space was created for an agency to perform the following roles that were regarded as necessary to locate outside of the Government :

- To act as an advisor and a sounding board to the WDD on aspects related to the integration of the participatory approach at every step in project implementation. This included formulating the processes for community mobilization, participatory planning (preparation of SWAP³), participatory implementation of the SWAP, various aspects related to monitoring and evaluation, strategies to promote non-farm based income generation activities for especially vulnerable groups, environment and social assessment, processes of implementing entry point activities (EPA), etc.
- To provide systems support inputs to the WDD in order to establish functional and practical systems for monitoring the project, enable community based organisations (CBOs, like the self help groups, watershed executive committees, and area groups) to manage their book-keeping and finances, and to enable the regular audit of CBOs.

³ SWAP – Sujala Watershed Action Plan – prepared for every micro-watershed

- To provide capacity building support in the area of social mobilisation to various stakeholders as the case may be, including the Lead NGOs, the District Resource Groups, the Field NGOs when required, etc. This also included conducting training of trainers' programmes on modules related to the strengthening of CBOs, on SWAP preparation, on programme implementation and monitoring, etc.
- To work on materials development, i.e. training materials and reading materials for all social trainings to be conducted by the Field NGOs to the CBOs.

The programme provided for the appointment of an NGO at the State-level to perform the above functions, to be designated as Partner NGO (PNGO). After due diligence, Myrada was appointed to this position.

The Sujala Programme officially began in September 2001. By January 2002, Myrada had been identified as Partner NGO. However, it took until October 2002 for the official contract to be signed between Myrada and the WDD. The delay was on account of a number of technical formalities that had to be complied with. In the interim period, Myrada's services were made use of even if it did not have any formal status in the programme yet. Thus, even before October 2002, Myrada was actively involved in preparing formats for contract agreements and terms of reference between the government and NGOs at various levels⁴, preparing criteria for the selection of Field NGOs, working out the roles of various partners at all levels, working out approximate administration and programme costs for all levels of NGOs involved, and assisting in various other such tasks.

The Lead NGOs and Field NGOs for Phase 1 had already been contracted between May and June 2002. Myrada was the Lead NGO in 2 districts (Chitradurga and Kolar). In October 2002, Myrada also formally came onboard as Partner NGO. The PNGO contract provided for one full time staff working as Project Coordinator, one full time Documentation Officer (for 3 years), one part time Secretary, and five part time consultants working for periods ranging from 250 to 1,300 hours over the 5-year period. The contract period was 5 years, from October 2002 upto September 2007.

The total budget for the PNGO for 5 years was Rs.87,20,138 (including both administration and programme costs). This was revised to Rs. 1,00,15,109 in June 2003.

With the extension in the Sujala 3rd phase implementation period, Myrada was consulted by the WDD with regard to an extension of the PNGO contract. However, Myrada felt that this was not necessary. The role of the PNGO was essentially to develop strategies and approaches to embed people's

⁴ Even though Myrada was asked to work out the format for agreements between NGOs and the WDD, the Department later realised that the standard World Bank format of consultants' contracts had to be adopted for all the NGOs. Nevertheless, the ToRs within the contract were reviewed and appropriately adjusted to the Sujala context.

participation in the programme without compromising on the quality of the watershed works as demanded under Government norms. Since all the systems, training modules and materials, and monitoring and evaluation parameters and practices had already been developed and put into use, no further purpose would be served in continuing the position. If required, Myrada would still continue to support the programme in any manner that the WDD wanted.

Thus, Myrada's role as the PNGO in the Sujala Watershed Programme ended at the close of work on September 30, 2007. As a closure formality, this Completion Report briefly summarises Myrada's work in this period, and some of the lessons learnt.

The PNGO's contributions to the Sujala Watershed Project

Pre-Project Period (During 2001): Myrada's involvement in watershed development began when it partnered the Government of Karnataka and the Swiss Development Co-operation to bring in the element of people's participation in the PIDOW⁵ Project in Gulbarga District. This was in 1984-85. From then on, it took up many more such programmes. Thus, during the Sujala project formulation process, Myrada was invited to share its experiences with the officials of Bank, the Formulation Mission members, and the WDD, particularly on aspects related to community involvement. This also included organising field visits to Chitradurga and Kolar to interact with functioning watershed development associations. In this period, Myrada was also asked to conduct a workshop for NGOs of the five Sujala districts and selected staff of WDD with the objective of making a training needs assessment (TNA). A consolidated report of the outputs from this TNA was submitted to the WDD.

Non-Contract Project Period (From January to September 2002): As already mentioned, the Lead NGOs and Field NGOs for Phase 1 had already been contracted between May and June 2002. Though Myrada was not yet appointed as PNGO, it was in regular interaction with the WDD and actively involved in preparing formats for contract agreements and terms of reference between the government and NGOs at various levels⁶, preparing criteria for the selection of Field NGOs, working out the roles of various partners at all levels, working out approximate administration and programme costs for all levels of NGOs involved, and assisting in various other such tasks.

⁵ PIDOW stands for Participatory Integrated Development of Watersheds.

⁶ Even though Myrada was asked to work out the format for agreements between NGOs and the WDD, the Government later realised that the standard World Bank format of consultants' contracts had to be adopted for all the NGOs. Nevertheless, the ToRs within the contract were reviewed and appropriately adjusted to the Sujala context.

The Contract Period (From October 2002 to September 2007): Myrada primarily supported the project in determining the institutional framework for a community driven participatory watershed project, designing capacity building strategies, developing specific capacity building modules and materials for social mobilization, taking up the capacity building of LNGO/FNGO/DRG staff and other partners, providing guidance to develop project implementation and monitoring strategies, and bringing lessons from the fields to influence the policy decisions. In this period, Myrada was able to discharge its role as per the ToRs and believes that it was successful in influencing the project in many areas. Contributions made by PNGO during this period are as detailed below:

1. ADVISORY ROLE ON PROJECT PROCESS/IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES AND POLICY DECISIONS

Adoption of suitable institutional frame work for community driven participatory watershed implementation: The project document mentioned mainly the Micro-Watershed Committees, which is a representative body. Though there was a mention of other people's groups, conceptual clarity was missing. Myrada guided the WDD to adopt participatory bodies such as Area Groups (at the mini-micro watershed level of 100-150 ha.) as a strategy to include all the farmers of the watershed area in planning, implementation and monitoring. Self-Help Groups approach was suggested to reach out to vulnerable families of the watershed area. Myrada's experience elsewhere had shown that smaller and participatory bodies (like SHGs and Watershed Development Associations) function more effectively than representative bodies (like Executive Committees). Hence Myrada influenced the project to adopt the Area Group approach at mini-micro-catchment level as a base unit for people's involvement in implementation of the Sujala Watershed programme. It also developed a concept note on Area Groups for the benefit of Sujala partners. The usual practice of forming Executive Committees in a watershed programme is rather unstructured. Hence, it usually is not as representative as it is meant to be. In Sujala, the representation at the Executive Committee is drawn from well organised people's institutions – i.e. the AGs and SHGs. Besides, PRI members and the department also are represented here

Micro planning from the Area Group: Unlike other watershed programmes where planning happens at the Executive Committee level, plans in Sujala are prepared at each farmer's field level and then consolidated upward to the mini-micro-catchment level and micro-watershed level. A plan that is not passed by the Area Group cannot be approved by the Executive Committee. Myrada was able to influence the project to take such a decision.

Securing an important place for vulnerable families through SHGs: Myrada played a major role in enrolling members from vulnerable families into SHGs. Myrada influenced the project to adopt a PRA tool (wealth ranking) to identify vulnerable members and to enrol them into SHGs. SHGs are also being formed under other programmes of the Government. Myrada advised the Sujala management and programme partners to not only include groups formed specifically under the Sujala programme but also the SHGs formed under other programmes, when it came to providing support for their economic well being.

This was because the other groups also included poor families. Besides, if they were excluded, many of them would be constrained to leave their groups and join the new Sujala SHGs in order to access benefits. This would not be ethical, and neither was it necessary. Myrada's view was accepted; this helped the project value the investment made under other projects. **Involvement of SHG members in the planning of common property development and management** was another important decision taken by the project based on the advice of the PNGO.

Wider space for livelihoods creation for vulnerable groups: In the original Project Appraisal Document (PAD), the budget allocated for improving the economic conditions of vulnerable families was too inadequate; and further, no capacity building programmes were provided for vulnerable families to choose their livelihood activities. Besides, the Bank expected the specific IGP activities to be listed right at the beginning whereas, in reality, poor families often changed their minds as well as the scale of activities as they became better informed on the available options and better experienced to estimate their own risk-taking and management capabilities. The PNGO articulated its views strongly on this subject. It developed a strategy paper on how to promote IGPs for vulnerable families. It also provoked a revision in budget to accommodate EAP/EDP/Skills training with the micro-enterprise development fund. These documents were submitted to the Bank through the WDD. The PNGO also influenced the WDD to organise a meeting between the World Bank representatives and the Secretary, Women and Child Development Department in order to share the experience of the SWASHAKTI SHG Promotion Project, (also funded by World Bank along with IFAD) precisely to understand that there were lessons there that the Sujala Project could usefully take into account. As a result, the World Bank approved the strategy paper submitted by Myrada through the WDD, in addition to approving the additional budget. This policy decision created an opportunity for vulnerable families to gain business education and skills to start micro enterprises; the WDD was enabled to appoint many specialist NGOs to provide services for the purpose.

Acceptance to appoint a community person as Treasurer in 50% of the sub-watershed Executive Committees of Phase I: In the beginning there was a lot of debate as to who should be made the treasurer of Executive Committees. Myrada's contention was that a person from the community must hold this position, whereas the Department was a bit apprehensive about this. After discussions, it was agreed to try out both options by appointing a community person as Treasurer in 50% of the sub-watersheds and appointing the department person in the rest (in Phase I). The idea was to see which worked better and to adopt the same in Phase II and III. Later, on evaluation it was found that both systems had their own merits and demerits. On the balance, considering that in case of misappropriation, at least the department person could be held responsible and made liable for recovery whereas the community person could not be similarly sanctioned, it was decided to have a department person as Treasurer of Executive Committees in Phase II. (In the third phase, responsibility was

given to FNGOs and they have appointed community members in all cases; problems persist, as in the past.)

Bylaws of Sujala Watershed Groups: The PNGO reviewed the bylaws prepared by the WDD for registration of Sujala Groups. Midway through the project, based on field experiences, the PNGO advised the WDD to incorporate a few clauses to safeguard the interests of the project. The WDD included these clauses. This strengthened the project hands to intervene in case of misappropriation or non-functionality of the Sujala watershed groups.

Unit costs and cost ceilings: The PNGO advised the WDD to come out with clear guidelines on unit costs and cost ceilings for investments in the watersheds on account of the confusions that prevailed throughout the first phase. This was done.

Strategy on Operations and Maintenance: The PNGO refined the strategy paper produced by the WDD on Operations and Maintenance.

Extension of Project Period: The PNGO strongly expressed its opinion – based on previous experiences – that the duration of three years was very inadequate for watershed development, particularly given the scale of the Sujala programme, and more so, given that the project was adopting a process driven community management approach. Therefore, the PNGO constantly tried to convince the WDD and the Bank about the need to extend the time period for implementation at each sub-watershed level from three years to five years (excluding the withdrawal period). The first and second phase sub-watersheds were of three years only (the extension of a few months that was given to them was not due to any policy change but only to complete some unfinished works) but by the end of the third phase, the Bank and the WDD realized that three years was too short a duration especially for a process driven project, and hence, extended the project period by two more years.

2. CAPACITY BUILDING SUPPORT

Development of training strategy: In the first phase, training was not holistically planned and administered. The University of Agricultural Sciences and Myrada – which were the two training agencies – conducted their own programmes independently. This led to some overlaps and some inconsistent messages. Hence, in the second phase, efforts were initiated to synthesise the training. In consultation with the Sujala partners, especially the LNGOs, the first phase FNGOs, the WDD, and the DWDO staff, the PNGO developed a strategy for comprehensive training which included a listing and sequencing of contents, category of participants, integration, flow of training, action plans, follow-up needs assessments, roles of various partners, and monitoring and evaluation aspects. Based on this, the training modules were reorganised. One of the outcomes of this exercise was the emergence of the DRG. Following this, GTZ (Consultants appointed by Bank) also came into the picture to review and reformulate the training strategy. Once again, the PNGO actively assisted GTZ to develop the training strategy by sharing with them what had already been

developed and documented. Further, the WDD assigned the PNGO to review the document produced by GTZ against the ToRs given to them.

Developing modules/content (materials) for social mobilization trainings: The PNGO prepared training modules including detailed contents (materials) for all the identified categories of participants and on all the topics under social mobilization. The training materials (in Kannada language) for the use of SHG members covered topics S-1 to S-6⁷ which was consolidated into a Manual that was fully designed by the PNGO and printed by the WDD. The Manual for AGs and ECs (in Kannada language) covered topics 1 to 11⁸; in addition to content development, the PNGO also completed the DTP work of the text which was then illustrated and printed by the WDD. The Trainers' Manual for field guides (in Kannada language) covered all the modules included for SHGs, AGs and ECs. A Trainers' Training Manual on People's Institutions in the Management of Watersheds⁹ that had been separately written and published by Myrada in English was adapted to the Sujala context and translated into Kannada. (The soft copy has been handed over to the WDD and is yet to be published.)

Conducting Training: The PNGO conducted induction training to the key staff of all the selected LNGOs, FNGOs and DRGs on social mobilization. Training of Trainers (ToTs) to staff of LNGOs, DRGs and for selected staff of FNGOs were organised and conducted by the PNGO on all social mobilization topics. Eight day long practical ToTs were held for LNGO/FNGO key staff and DRG members on SWAP (Sujala Watershed Action Plan) in all three phases. Training on assessment of environmental and social safeguard issues, gender and equity, linkages, leadership, ToT on CBO self assessment, PRA for all LNGOs and selected FNGOs, were conducted. NGO management training was conducted for the heads of the FNGOs. All the agreed number of trainings (as per contract) were completed by the PNGO. The only training not conducted was on the topic of Vision Building for the development of a withdrawal strategy; this was cancelled on the basis of instructions from the WDD.

Development of visual materials for use in training: The PNGO organised a workshop with artists and experts to prepare pictures for use by the trainers in CBO training programmes. These pictures were eventually converted into large-sized flexicharts by the Department. These materials were very useful as a majority of the CBO members are unable to read and write.

⁷ **S-1:** About Sujala, watershed development, CBOs under Sujala, and particular details on SHGs and their links with Sujala; **S-2:** SHG management aspects; **S-3:** SHG book-keeping and finance management; **S-4:** Focus on equity, vulnerable groups, IGAs, and sub-plan preparations; **S-5:** Leadership, decision-making and conflict resolution; **S-6:** Linkages with other institutions.

⁸ **1:** Introduction to Sujala; **2:** Concept of watershed and watershed development; **3:** CBOs under Sujala, with particular details on AG, SWS, and EC; **4:** EC books, book-keeping and finance management; **5:** SWAP preparation processes; **6:** Preparing sub-plans for vulnerable groups; **7:** SWAP implementation and monitoring; **8:** Leadership development; **9:** Conflict resolution; **10:** Decision making; **11:** Linkages with other institutions.

⁹ The Myrada Experience : A Manual for Capacity Building of People's Institutions Managing Watersheds.

Training Need Assessment for further improvements: Training needs were assessed for all FNGOs of the first and second phase to explore the gaps and possibilities to fill the same. Based on the results of the assessment, the PNGO suggested to the WDD to adopt a few modifications in the training strategies and topics.

3. SYSTEMS SUPPORT

Monitoring and Evaluation

Support to WDD: The PNGO played a major role in reviewing the project goals and redefining the expected impacts. It provided valuable inputs to develop clarity on expected impacts, and also assisted the WDD to work out the indicators for each impact.

Support to Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Agency (M & L Agency): The task of monitoring and evaluation was assigned to Antrix, a division of ISRO. Though experts in the generation and analyses of satellite images of watersheds areas, they did not have any experience in the implementation of watershed activities and social mobilisation processes. In the initial stages of the project, the PNGO was totally involved in designing the monitoring and evaluation systems. The PNGO gave much of its time to develop monitoring indicators, evaluation indicators, frequency of data collection, tools to collect base line data, process monitoring of CBOs and programmes. It provided a lot of support in designing the progress report formats for FNGOs, LNGOs, DWDOs, and PNGO at the beginning of the project. Apart from this, the PNGO was regular in giving feedback/suggestions on the outputs of the various studies carried out by the M & L agency from time to time, as well as on the regular observation reports that they wrote. Myrada was also involved actively, along with the WDD computer experts, to assist Antrix to develop the Sukriya software (for the Sujala Watershed Action Plan), including designing the input/ output reports and field testing the same during the SWAP ToT.

Support to LNGOs/FNGOs: The PNGO facilitated the process of setting milestones for achievements of various activities and sub-activities at LNGO level and a Gantt chart for FNGOs. During field visits, the PNGO regularly reviewed the monitoring systems of FNGOs and LNGOs, and gave guidance on improving them where necessary.

Systems for monitoring and evaluation of capacity building activities : Indicators and formats to assess the progress and quality of social mobilization trainings were developed by PNGO. These formats were used by the trainers (for pre and post evaluation), LNGOs and DRGs for the assessment of training impacts.

Self Assessment system for CBOs: The PNGO developed self-assessment tools for CBOs (SHG/AG/EC) promoted under Sujala to assess their own performance. Measurable performance indicators and weightages were given to each indicator to score themselves. Trainers and other key staff from LNGOs/FNGOs were trained to use the self assessment tools on a practical basis. The PNGO monitored the training of CBOs by the trained staff. Every six months, CBOs were facilitated to conduct self-assessment along with action

planning to strengthen their weaker areas. The results of these assessments were analyzed and recommendations were suggested by LNGOs. The PNGO also followed up on progress during field visits and audio-conferences.

Area Group Evaluation: When an evaluation by Antrix of the performance of AGs had shown negative results, the PNGO looked into the reasons for poor performance and suggested means for improvement. It also observed that a good part of the reason was because the better off farmers quit the AGs soon after their land treatment was completed under Sujala, whereas the small and marginal farmers were interested in continuing as members. Based on this finding, the PNGO suggested to focus capacity building efforts on interested members, and also the link the AGs with other resource agencies that could continue to support them in the manner of SHG-Bank Linkage. Some of the FNGOs adopted this system.

Preparation of Operation Manual

The PNGO took the complete responsibility to write on the social mobilisation processes and steps. It also undertook to co-ordinate the entire manual preparation process by compiling materials from various contributors, providing feedback on draft documents, and editing the final outputs.

Inputs on Entry Point Activities

With the support of LNGOs, the PNGO evolved the implementation process and developed guidelines for taking up entry point activities prior to the main watershed works (as a measure of relationship building with the communities though taking up some need-based community programmes).

Strategies for collection of community contributions

The PNGO gave practical inputs on guidelines and safeguards in the collection of community contribution such as accepting payments through AGs, Field Guide-wise weekly collection schedules, immediate issuing of receipt, immediate remittance to bank, etc.

Designing and application of Sujala Watershed Action Plans (Micro-Plans)

The PNGO designed the participatory micro planning method for Sujala. This micro plan was named as Sujala Watershed Action Plan (SWAP). SWAP method was developed and discussed with the WDD technical staff during the first phase. An 8-day training programme was designed to use PRA methods to develop the SWAP in each location. This training was held for the LNGO and DWDO staff and tools were applied at Chennammanagathihalli Sub-watershed in Chitradurga district. Based on the experiences of this exercise, modifications were made in the design. During this exercise, the WDD got an opportunity to discuss and modify unit costs/sizes(volumes) of various watershed activities.

In the second phase, the PNGO modified and included the ESA (Environmental and Social Assessment) aspects, social inclusion, pre-SWAP

survey for water budgeting, and broadened the scope for analyses of each sector and their integration with the other sectors. The PNGO also worked on the input/output reports for creation of pilot software by systems experts of the WDD. An 8-day ToT for DRG/LNGO and FNGO key staff was conducted by the PNGO at Gangasamudra Sub-Watershed. Sectoral experts from Department, EMPRI and ATI-Mysore participated as resource persons. An actual plan was prepared and fed into the software prepared by the WDD. Trainees were supported to prepare ESA, budgets, contributions, and social inclusion along with the CBO members. Individual farmer-wise plans were fed into the pilot software, and reports that were generated were shared again with the AGs/SHGs and ECs for final modifications. Several modifications on unit costs and sizes were also made on the spot, as senior officials from the WDD were available. Based on field experience, the PNGO made recommendations to ensure effective planning, upon which the WDD printed ledgers for individual planning, gave directions to complete water budgeting in all the sub-watersheds before SWAP, deputed experts from the WDD to support for conducting ESA, finalized the unit costs and sizes for all activities, and also took a decision on cost ceiling for land treatment. Apart from these, the WDD asked Antrix to prepare software in local language. The PNGO representatives and WDD systems specialists assisted. It was possible for the PNGO to design this effective planning tool because of the immense and immediate support provided by the then Commissioner of the WDD.

In the third phase, the PNGO used the same design and conducted ToTs in three different batches to cover all the key staff of FNGOs/LNGOs and DRGs within the time schedule.

Development of ESA strategy and tool

Jointly with EMPRI and WDD, the PNGO developed the ESA strategy and application tools, including assumptions to be considered, anticipated risks and risk mitigation plans. A detailed session to apply the tools was included in the ToT on SWAP Preparation.

Book Keeping system at ECs and AGs

The PNGO shared with the WDD the formats that it had developed and used for book-keeping systems at the watershed level in previously implemented watershed programmes (e.g. the DFID supported programme implemented through KAWAD¹⁰ Society, where Myrada was also a district partner). The PNGO also gave feedback on the Finance Management section of the Operations Manual. Thus, the development of book-keeping systems was a consultative process. Myrada's feedback was also given in developing the book-keeping training module in the content book for SHGs and AGs. During field visits the PNGO constantly made its observations on the books of accounts at EC/AG/SHG levels, along with appropriate recommendations to the Field NGOs to improve quality. The PNGO also pressed the WDD to

¹⁰ KAWAD Society refers to the Karnataka Watershed Development Society which was created by the Government of Karnataka to administer the DFID-supported watershed programme.

arrange audit for ECs on a half-yearly basis, though the WDD eventually decided on annual audits.

Income Generation Activity and Sub-plan preparation

As mentioned earlier (paragraph 1.4), Myrada worked out the livelihoods strategy for vulnerable groups. Apart from this, it also worked out the implementation strategy. It prepared the method and tools for sub-plan preparation, which was then included in the training materials book for SHG and AG/EC members. It assisted the WDD in the preparation of ToRs for Specialist NGOs engaged to provide support for non-farm income generating activities. In the first phase, it was also involved in the selection of SNGOs. Further, the PNGO gave inputs for the EAP/EDP training modules and monitoring systems.

NGO Selection and ToR preparation

The PNGO was involved in the FNGO and SNGO selection processes, preparation of ToRs and their revisions from time to time. It also assisted the WDD to work out staff requirements for all second and third phase FNGOs, along with roles of each staff. Later, it also provided assistance the WDD to redefine the roles, structure and costs of FNGOs and LNGOs under the PBPS system.

Facilitation for NGO Management

During its field visits, the PNGO observed that several of the FNGOs were poor in managing their organisational issues. Issues related to personnel, compliance with statutory requirements, financial management systems, and leadership issues were affecting the progress of the project. The PNGO identified some of the major weak areas of each FNGO during its field visits and gave concrete recommendations for improvements. It also shared copies of Myrada's operational systems to those who requested. It had meetings with the heads of NGOs to sort of some of the issues. Continued follow-up from the PNGO with regard to the actions taken on the observations and recommendations helped many NGOs to sort out several issues.

Negotiations between the WDD and NGOs

Issues such as long pending bills, disallowed payments under SOE or contract clauses of NGOs, and procedural divergences from the ToRs were some of the major issues where the PNGO negotiated between the WDD and LNGOs/FNGOs. The PNGO, with its constant efforts, was able to assist the WDD to clear most of the long pending/disallowed bills of LNGOs/FNGOs and in bringing back the Billing Rate payment system as agreed in the contract.

Review of implementation guidelines, and systems to ensure transparency

The PNGO assisted the WDD in the development of systems to ensure transparency in implementation of SWAP through the ECs. The PNGO discussed with three committees in Suvernamukhi sub-watershed (these committees were facing management and financial mishandling problems), and took their inputs to evolve strategies to ensure transparency and participatory implementation processes. Based on these strategies, and with inputs from other experts, the WDD set the implementation guidelines to be followed (21 points). On this basis, the committees put up wall paintings of wage rates for each type of work, and prepared pamphlets for distribution to the public. Payments through banking (Pay to order) system, work photos, display of boards with information on completed works, etc. were introduced.

Withdrawal strategy

On the basis of Myrada's experience of working with Community Managed Resource Centres¹¹, the PNGO prepared and presented a withdrawal strategy for the first phase. This was not accepted by the WDD which developed and executed its own strategy. The PNGO then studied the outcomes of it in Tumkur and Haveri and developed another strategy paper suggesting modifications and improvements. However, again, the WDD implemented its own modifications to the earlier strategy. The PNGO then supported selected 2nd phase FNGOs to develop detailed action plans to achieve the modified withdrawal/exit strategy of the WDD. These action plans were submitted to the WDD to replicate in other FNGO areas.

Field visits

Regular field visits were made by the PNGO throughout its tenure (upto September 2007) to review with the LNGOs/FNGOs/CBOs the planned activities and progress on implementation, discuss practical problems, review the follow up on recommendations, etc. This was useful for PNGO to draw lessons from the field and to make recommendations to the WDD to take suitable decisions. Special and detailed reports were submitted after each visit, with specific recommendations. Observations and recommendations also focused on implementation processes, CBO performance, financial management at ECs, social inclusion, ESA issues, training quality and impact, L/FNGO performance, DRG role, coordination between the Department and NGO staff, payments procedures, SWAP implementation and quality of land treatments, horticulture, livestock, forestry, EAP/EDP/micro-enterprises, etc. In majority of the time, recommendations were reviewed by the WDD and decisions were taken.

Labour availability

¹¹ A Community Managed Resource Centre is a federated structure of approximately 25 to 120 primary level membership organizations (CBOs like SHGs and Watershed Associations) managed by an elected Executive Committee. It follows the revenue model where each member organization pays a monthly subscription that contributes to staff and maintain an office that provides a range of services. These include routine functions (e.g. support for book-keeping and audits, facilitating bank linkages) as well as request-based functions (e.g. writing applications for various purposes, agricultural support services). In addition to the subscription, each service is also fee-carrying.

Since there were problems of labour scarcity that were cited as the cause of implementation delays and had provoked discussions on the cost and convenience of using machines, the PNGO was assigned the task of assessing the scarcity level. The PNGO conducted individual interviews and focus group discussions with labourers, FNGOs, LNGOs, Department and also with machine owners to assess the level of scarcity and cost of using alternate options. Along with submitting a paper on the outcome of this research, a presentation was made to the WDD and the Bank. Since labour scarcity was a fact especially during summer and especially when it came to working on hard soil, the PNGO suggested that a few heavy works on hard soil could be done with the use machines to achieve the expected level of progress within the given project period. Though this suggestion was not considered immediately, in the latter part of the fifth year, the WDD gave permission to use machines for some of the activities.

Development of performance based payment system (PBPS)

In the third phase, the WDD initiated a performance based payment system. The PNGO was involved in these discussions and shared its views on the limitations of the system and its foreseeable negative impacts. The Commissioner was keen to introduce the system and assured that he would take steps to address all the limitations to make the system work. Based on request from the WDD, the PNGO developed draft performance indicators of both Department (WDT level) and FNGOs along with means of verification for each indicator. The draft was critically reviewed and finalized by a committee consisting of senior officers and subject matter specialists from the WDD, PNGO, LNGOs, M & L Agency and selected FNGOs. This Committee also listed pre-requisites from the WDD to perform as per the set indicators. The PNGO discussed the finalized set of indicators and pre-requisites with all FNGOs and WDT members at each District, and collected their views. These views were again discussed by the committee members and necessary modifications were made before presenting to the Commissioner for approval. The Bank was also consulted by the WDD. The PNGO intensely collaborated with the WDD to work out an assessment system to be used by the Accounts Department while making payments. The measurement system was tested in the FNGOs of Myrada and discussed with all the FNGOs/WDT members before finalization. The whole process took around six months to be completed. The PNGO also prepared required formats required for monitoring the system and also for assessment of CBOs by various agencies. The performance based payment system was operationalised from November 2006.

Development of revised contracts for third phase FNGOs

Following the introduction of the performance based payment system, there was need to revise the contract of FNGOs. The PNGO assisted the WDD to rework the contract contents.

Observations on the functioning of the performance based payment system

The PNGO made two rounds of visits to the Sujala districts to observe the functioning of the PBPS. It had meetings with FNGOs, LNGOs and WDT members to discuss the process of PBPS implementation and its impact on the SWAP progress. A report from the PNGO on the outcome of the meetings and observations along with recommendations was submitted to the WDD. Major observations were those that had already been anticipated by the PNGO in the discussion stage. They included : (i) Non-availability of the agreed number of WDT staff to meet the workload such as approvals, CMR, etc. This was one of the pre-requisites from the WDD that was not suitably addressed. (ii) Delays in release of funds to ECs. The earlier system of LOC-based payments had been replaced by payments through Treasury cheques. The DWDO had to get the money released from the Treasury in order to make payments to the ECs. This was responsible for inordinate delays. The WDD could not comply with the pre-requisite of making timely payments. (iii) Non-availability of labour for earth work on hard soil led to delays in progress, and consequently, to the conclusion that performance had been poor. Here again, the problem of labour scarcity to work on hard soils had already been anticipated, but the NGOs had to bear payment deductions. (iv) As one of the consequences of payment delays and cuts in payments, the problem of heavy staff turnover continued. Hence, it was again pointed out that it was difficult to make the PBPS work under such conditions. The WDD had a meeting with LNGOs and the PNGO to discuss the issue. In the light of some of the findings of PNGO and recommendations made by LNGOs, some relaxations in assessment of progress against indicators were made due to which more timely payments could be made in the initial 3 to 4 quarters (out of 6 quarters spread over 18 months). Later, machine use was also approved. (Now the system has been further revised to make speedier payments.

4. MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT:

The PNGO either developed or assisted in the process of developing many materials for use in project implementation. Since the context of materials development has already been mentioned in the preceding sections, only the list of materials is given below:

- Sujala Watershed Sangha Byelaws
- Grading Criteria for assessment of SHG, AG, and SWS (for 1st phase, and subsequently modified for 2nd phase)
- Social Training Topics for various stakeholders of Sujala
- Strategy paper on involving vulnerable groups in Sujala
- Paper on preparation of sub-plan for vulnerable groups
- Paper on Community Based Institutions under Sujala
- Paper on Roles of FNGOs, LNGOs and DWDOs in Sujala (Draft) and modified after discussions with LNGOs
- Paper on sequencing Sujala activities, with timeframe for all activities – developed by the PNGO, discussed and modified by all LNGOs
- Paper on Entry Point Programme – objectives, implementation processes and guidelines (guidelines were discussed and modified by the WDD)

Training content material book for members of Area Groups and Executive Committees
 Training content material book for members of SHGs (social mobilization)
 Trainers' Manual for use of FNGO field guides (social mobilization topics of SHG/EC/AG)
 Training Manual for institution building for managing watersheds – Kannada version (both social and technical topics)
 Materials for Tele-conferences
 Development of Environmental and Social Assessment formats along with EMPRI and SMS – WDD
 Baseline monitoring formats for filling by FNGOs (both 1st phase and modified version for the 2nd phase)
 Progress monitoring indicators and formats
 Goals of Sujala, expected impacts and indicators for monitoring the project – prepared by the PNGO, discussed and modified by WDD and M & L Agency
 Baseline data collection format for use of the M & L Agency (prepared with the M & L Agency)
 Paper on preparing SWAP
 Reading materials for SWAP ToT, formats for SWAP, SWAP booklet
 Strategy paper on capacity building of CBOs under Sujala (draft)
 Operations Manual with the support of Subject Matter Specialists and Concerned Agencies (Draft)
 1st Phase SNGO ToRs (draft)
 Third phase FNGO ToRs
 Training Materials on Equity, Gender and Linkages – for use of LNGO training
 Roles and performance indicators of FNGO staff (3rd phase)
 Performance Based Payment System – Task identification, performance indicators for each task and means of verification – draft prepared by the PNGO, discussed and modified by the Committee set up by the WDD and the WDT/FNGOs
 Monitoring Formats under PBPS (Draft)
 Strategy paper on withdrawal strategy – 1st phase
 Study report on 1st phase withdrawal strategy
 Revised Strategy Paper on withdrawal strategy for 2nd phase (evolved based on the findings of 1st phase withdrawal)
 Study report on labour availability for SWAP works
 Special reports on field visits along with concrete recommendations
 Though not under Sujala, the PNGO used its Sujala experiences to develop a video film titled **How to make a Watershed Plan** in English and Kannada for use in training programmes

5. WORKSHOPS/REPORTS/MEETINGS

The PNGO regularly participated in all the required workshops organized by the WDD, M & L Agency, U.A.S., etc. It also took part in monthly/quarterly review meetings, weekly/fortnightly audio conferences and other special meetings of Sujala. Besides it took active part in all the Mission visits of the Bank (with one exception where it was not invited). In all these platforms, the PNGO participated

actively and contributed to the discussions on issues that concerned the project. It played several roles – pro-active, negotiator, facilitator – depending on the requirements of the context. On many occasions, the PNGO viewed issues deeply and critically in order to provoke appropriate and speedy decisions from the concerned partners, especially the WDD.

The PNGO submitted inception report and quarterly reports as agreed in the contract. Besides, it also submitted lists of activities carried out to accompany every claim for payment. Special reports on all field visits along with recommendations were submitted. Though this requirement was not specified, the PNGO felt the need to share its views with the WDD on field issues and experiences.

The PNGO Experience : Learning and Recommendations

MYRADA, as the PNGO in Sujala, gained useful experience and learnt a few lessons. Working with multiple partners, working under pressure, working to achieve huge targets, working with the challenging demand of combining quantity with quality, working with different leaders of the project – though complex, Sujala provided Myrada with a vibrant and enriching learning experience. Some of what Myrada got from this experience have been listed below that may also serve the purposes of other projects and project implementing agencies.

1. Myrada has been in other partnerships with the Government, on other bilaterally/ multilaterally funded projects. It has worked at the implementation level as well as been the nodal agency at the district level (e.g. under the DFID-KAWAD Society watershed programme). However, under Sujala, Myrada had a role at an apex (State) level where the contractual demands were different. It must be pointed out here that under Sujala, Myrada was also contracted as Lead NGO in two districts (Chitradurga and Kolar) and as Field NGO in six sub-watersheds (in Chitradurga and Kolar Districts). As PNGO, Myrada had to be constantly aware that it had to remain dissociated from its roles as LNGO and FNGO (to add to this list, in the 3rd phase, it was also selected as SNGO in Chitradurga District). In its role as PNGO, it had to be as critical of itself as L/F/SNGO as it was expected to be with the other Sujala partners. In retrospect, Myrada believes that it was able to successfully maintain this distance.

2. In the 5 years that it was PNGO, the Commissioner at the WDD changed four times. Each incumbent had his own distinct personality, priorities, and management style. The other senior staff at the WDD also changed from time to time. With each change, the PNGO had to work to re-establish working relationships. At times it involved working through biases for/against NGOs in general and Myrada in particular. Within Myrada too, there were several changes in the Sujala PNGO Programme Co-ordinator that added to the complexity of stabilising new relationships. In retrospect, Myrada has to acknowledge the many ups and downs (including many tearful days and sleepless nights) that

accompanied these staff changes at senior management levels, but believes that it was able to remain on top of its contractual obligations and complete all of them.

3. In the past, Myrada has written about the experiences of NGOs that partner Governments in the execution of bilaterally/multilaterally funded projects¹². Many of these experiences continued to hold in the Sujala Project. It would not be amiss to start by observing that in State-M/B Agency partnerships into which NGOs are brought in¹³ as a third partner, the NGO experiences itself as being an unwanted partner in an unequal partnership. The reasons for this are several¹⁴:

(i) There are direct and formal communication channels between the M/B Agency and the State while the NGO can communicate formally only with the State.

(ii) The State and M/B Agencies have a long tradition of working together, leading to the growth of relationships and a good understanding of one another. NGOs are relatively new entrants who still have to establish their status.

(iii) The State and M/B agencies work the context of sovereign Agreements that locate their relationship in a particular project within the broader context of mutual overarching interests. NGOs do not share the same background and do not understand it very well.

(iv) The State and M/B Agencies are likely to have greater ownership over the programme; one of them is the lender, the other, the borrower, and the onus of delivering as per the Loan Agreement is on them. The State's position – though never expressed in so many words – is that the NGOs have no right to space of their own since they do not have the obligation to repay.

(v) Project management structures and systems are set up mainly by the State in consultation with the M/B Agency; the NGO partner has little say in them. The structures and systems, therefore, are conditioned by the organisational culture and operating norms of only the former two partners. Project functioning is conditioned by the pressures that they both have to cope with – both from within their own systems and from the wider context within which they are placed.

(vi) At the operational level, the NGO's 'different-ness' is further emphasized by its exclusion from meetings between the M/B Agency and the State, except those where 'NGO issues' are the subject of discussion.

From Myrada's perspective, the above issues prevailed in the Sujala project as well. As PNGO, Myrada expected to be regarded as an equal partner in every

¹² Myrada RMS Paper 26 - Working with Governments in Multi and Bilateral Projects – Why involve Myrada? (This is one of several publications on the subject by Aloysius Fernandez, Executive Director, Myrada).

¹³ Usually, the engagement of a NGO as a partner happens not because the State wishes it but because the M/B Agency recommends it and includes it in the project document.

¹⁴ Creating spaces for partnerships to work : NGO involvement in Multilateral/Bilateral Projects – paper written by Myrada and published in *Enhancing Ownership and Sustainability – A Resource Book on Participation* published jointly by IFAD, ANGOC and IIRR, April 2001.

sense of the word – open to being informed on issues it did not understand, open to being corrected on issues it mismanaged, open to surrendering credit for work that it did but that were appropriated by other partners as theirs, but not expecting to be excluded as partner and treated as contractor. A telling beginning was made when the Sujala Management Organogram (see page 5), in its drafting discussions, placed the PNGO below the WDD; Myrada had to argue vehemently to be placed alongside and not below; it did this not to satisfy egos but to emphasize partnership. There were many occasions on which Myrada came close to opting out as the PNGO; maybe there were as many or more occasions when the Government was also equally tempted to ask Myrada to leave. Credit is probably due to both organisations for making the effort to jointly stay the course. How was this managed? The PNGO can only speak for itself. There were four factors that enabled Myrada to cope :

i. Even though the PNGO had a team of only 2 full time staff for Sujala, within the Myrada Head Office, almost all the senior staff got involved in sharing responsibilities and providing hands-on support for all the tasks to be completed. This included attending meetings, drafting formats, writing reports, participating in workshops, preparing materials, converting data into information, thinking through concepts and strategies, and counselling one another in times of stress. Thus, the pressures were distributed.

ii. Myrada indulged in scenario building every once in a while : What were the best and worst case scenarios if it quit as PNGO at this point? And if it stayed on? This usually ended by giving the organisation good reasons to stay on.

iii. In addition, Myrada chose to be tenacious rather than backward. At times this required the PNGO to be aggressive and at other times, to remain calm when abused; at times it meant muscling in on securing invitations to meetings where it was not on the participant list; at times it meant taking on tasks that were not included in the ToRs – the PNGO decided to do whatever it took to remain on board. The argument was, “If we are inside the room, we have the chance to work on this programme that is in alignment with our Mission Statement; we have the right to speak; we even have the chance to influence the way the programme shapes. If we leave and shut the door behind us, we lose the right to speak and the opportunity to work.”

iv. Sadly, the fourth factor that helped was the decision to ‘go against the grain’ and compromise on certain matters when Myrada saw no other strategic path open to it.

4. Watershed development, by definition, deals with land, water, vegetation, and those who directly live off it in economic terms. To look at other excluded people and programmes need not be clubbed with watershed development. On the other hand, when a Project Approach is taken to achieve watershed development, then the livelihoods of the non-watershed dependent poor (people who figure in what are generally referred to as vulnerability, gender, and equity segments) cannot be excluded; it is neither just nor judicious to exclude them. Sujala set aside a fairly generous budget to include vulnerable groups and promote their livelihoods. In the process of implementation, the PNGO learnt that inclusion is possible if the efforts are systematic, conscious, and focused. Monitoring systems were strict in Sujala and enabled the tracking of progress versus plans. However, the PNGO also learnt that in the pre-occupation to

achieve the large watershed targets within a short time frame, vulnerable groups did not get the full span of attention they deserved.

5. The issue of the Sujala project time frame (being too inadequate) is a familiar one. It was not the watershed structural interventions per se, nor even the fact that they targeted a huge area but the fact that they had to be achieved through well-oriented, aware, empowered, and fully involved people's institutions that posed the greatest challenge in terms of time availability. Monitoring systems were strict and enabled the tracking of progress versus plans. Thus, they periodically pointed out that the quality of CBOs (especially AGs) was not to the expected standard. The PNGO recommends, as many other have, that in any watershed programme, 5 years at least be allocated per sub-watershed. (The Government of India's Watershed Guidelines provide for 7 years, including preparatory and completion phases.)

6. The NGO selection process was good, and the PNGO recommended it as well as used it in other situations as well. However, despite the objective criteria and transparent process, compromises in selection had to be made because of a lack of choice in some of the locations. Looking back, the PNGO can classify the NGOs into three categories : (i) those that were serious as well as skilled and experienced, (ii) those that were committed but without experience in watershed work, and (iii) those that were neither committed nor experienced but motivated by advantages to them. Yet, they all performed in relatively comparable ways. How was this achieved? The PNGO identifies two main contributing factors, in both of which it was involved : (a) Sustained and systematic capacity building inputs. The best results were seen in those NGOs that were committed but not yet experienced; Sujala helped them to build up their knowledge, information, skills, and experience to the extent that they were able to develop expertise in participatory watershed development and be graded very favourably. (b) Very strict monitoring systems at multiple levels and by multiple agencies. This worked well in the case of those NGOs that came into the programme without commitment, for their own gain. They had to work in order to show results and remain in the programme.

7. A few further comments on monitoring : In the above paragraphs the PNGO has referred to monitoring as 'strict', which does not necessarily translate into 'good' in all cases. There are three issues that are being brought out here :

(i) The monitoring under Sujala is overwhelming, to say the least. There are too many agencies doing the monitoring. The monitoring is on too many aspects. This becomes too pressurising and time-consuming, especially for the FNGOs. It has been taking too much time away from field work which could have been spent in social mobilisation processes but is being spent in complying with the demands of one monitoring officer after another, both from the same agency and from different agencies.

(ii) In the opinion of the Sujala NGO stakeholders (including the PNGO) these strict monitoring processes have been applied mainly to all stakeholders – especially NGOs – other than the Department.

(iii) In the 3rd Phase, the Department also took on a supervisory role and fully gave up the implementing role. Thus, the NGOs have become the only

agencies responsible for the field work. Interestingly, even though the EC is responsible for the implementation of works, the NGO is questioned on progress.

8. That said, the PNGO also saw that the involvement of people through their watershed institutions, the systems for approving and accounting payments and inventories, the tracking and monitoring systems, all contributed to ensure that due investments were made in the programme without much of the corruption that is generally associated with other government programmes. (However, the PNGO cannot say that it has been a corruption-free programme; rumours have been occasionally heard about both Department staff and NGO staff but they have remained at the level of rumours and it was not the task of the PNGO to probe into them.)

9. The next set of comments relate to certain specific elements of the field activities. They are being included here only so that they remain on record and can possibly assist when other watershed programmes are being planned.

9.1 A little more flexibility in the interpretation and execution of entry point programmes could be considered. The PNGO would like to make two specific observations here :

(i) The purpose of EPA should not be 'rapport establishment'; it would serve a far better purpose to regard it as a training tool. EPA for rapport establishment gives the impression that rapport is something that can be purchased by giving some donation to the community. It also gives the impression that 'they' are different from 'us', 'they' are ignorant and simple people who will definitely oppose 'our' entry but who can be soothed by giving them a programme, and that 'we' are superior to 'them' and can prise open the door to their village through the display of a little generosity. On the other hand, if the same EPA were to be regarded as a tool in training, it would be a more accurate representation of the project as interested in building capabilities. Decision making, planning, budgeting, responsibility sharing, managing conflicts, making purchases, maintaining books and records, managing the event to inaugurate the created facility, etc. would all become steps in training to manage the much bigger Sujala programme at the next stage.

(ii) In order for the EPA to become a training tool, it would be necessary for it to be managed by a local CBO. For this, it would have to be taken up at least 6 months after the start of the project, to give time for at least some base level CBOs to be formed. In the opinion of the PNGO, if the EPAs were given to AGs to manage, this could be a very useful tool to strengthen the AGs.

9.2 The AG only had a role in planning. The PNGO tried to influence the Department to involve the AGs much more in programme management, including the management of money to be invested in their respective mini-micro catchments. However, this could not be achieved. On the one hand, as per the Agreement with the World Bank, funds would not be transferred below the ECs and neither were the AGs registered bodies. On the other hand, the quality of AGs was not always up to the mark (they had no role to

play beyond planning and hence, no agenda to keep them together as a group). However, the PNGO holds the view that in order to make the project truly participatory, AGs must be given greater roles since they are primary membership bodies.

9.3 Should AGs be constructed on the basis of habitations or on the basis of agricultural land locations? This started as a difficult question and has continued to remain so. On the one hand, basing it on land locations (as Sujala did) created confusions in tracking the investments made for each farmer since the same person could (did) have land in more than one catchment and thus, had to belong to more than one AG, and came under the jurisdiction of more than one EC. On the other hand, basing it on habitations (suggested as an alternative) would confine each farmer to a single AG but would result in multiple AGs for the same catchment (since they would be living in different locations). The PNGO holds the opinion that basing it on habitations would be marginally more practical than basing it on location of land holdings.

9.4 Since money has the quality of tempting people to take it, and since the ECs of Sujala control large volumes of money, Myrada is of the opinion that EC members should change on an annual basis. It would also be useful to include one cheque signatory from the Department. This may look like a retrograde step, but ideology has to be balanced with what is practical under different situations. Please refer to paragraph 1.5 of this document. The same arguments apply here.

9.5 Payment of minimum wages was raised as an issue on several occasions. The system of giving money to farmers and expecting them to pay the minimum wages as per law turned out to be a naively conceived system since not many farmers would willingly upset the prevailing wage rates and neither would they part with more money when they had the chance to keep some of it. What are the other options? One route suggested by the PNGO would be for the EC to work through AGs and SHGs to make labour payments, ensuring proper verifications and back-up documentation.

9.6 Reporting under Sujala put a lot of pressure on the NGOs. Where it was possible to have a single reporting system, the PNGO saw that each agency and each SMS wanted separate reports. Though the number of reports had been fixed in the contract, in practice, the LNGOs/FNGOs had to furnish weekly, fortnightly, quarterly, half-yearly and special reports on every programme in addition to action plans, case studies, etc. Often, the same information was asked by separate specialists from the same office. It is possible – and not at all difficult – to streamline the reporting systems.

9.7 The PNGO would like to draw the attention of project planners and managers to understand that farmers, like other people, change their minds fairly frequently and for a variety of reasons. This also includes changes in watershed activities and number of units proposed. To expect perfect plans is not realistic. Hence, it is recommended to not only permit modifications to plans on a half-yearly basis but to also make the approval procedures simple

and speedy.

9.8 One of the major implementation hurdles was that the staff at the WDT also had the responsibility to engage with other programmes of the Government and not just the Sujala Project. As a result, they could not spare adequate time for Sujala, especially for approval of estimates and making check measurements. Hence, it is recommended for a programme of this size that exclusively dedicated staff must be made available at the sub-watershed level to ensure quick completion of such procedures.

Concluding Words

A programme of the scale of Sujala provides immense, diverse, and rich learning experiences. Myrada – as PNGO – learnt to work on scale, learnt to approach the subject far more professionally, learnt the finer nuances of planning and implementation, learnt a lot about technical aspects and the technologies themselves, learnt a number of management skills through which more could be achieved in less time, learnt to work simultaneously/jointly/parallelly with multiple stakeholders with varied expertise, learnt the advantages and difficulties of adhering to standard systems, procedures, monitoring practices, etc. when applied on scale and under conditions where too much had to be achieved in too little time, learnt about the pros and cons of NGO efficiencies from engaging with 51 NGOs in the field, and learnt much else besides. Given a chance to start afresh, Myrada would engage with Sujala all over again.
