

WOMEN AND WATERSHEDS - CURRENT STATUS
Strategies for ensuring Gender Balance in Watershed Program

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I. Introduction:

In a male dominated society like ours, one has to accept the fact that women are at the receiving end. The opportunities and access to decision-making institutions are not equal to men and women. Because of this less access, the needs /issues of women aren't given priority and therefore not addressed. We see a clear division of labour among men and women, designating certain tasks exclusively to each other. Most often we see that the activities, which are considered of low value, or those which do not have the element of market or money attached to them are treated as women's sphere and the others of men. It clearly shapes the livelihood pattern of men and women.

With women spending most of their time in household maintenance and the men in the matters of so called productive activities getting an image of bread winner. Women's livelihood then clearly made dependent on the men. Though she interacts with the natural resources relatively more, she doesn't have the rights over them.

If we take the case of water, Women's priority concern is very largely the water for domestic use. Providing water for domestic purpose has been traditionally the responsibility of women. Family water needs like drinking, cooking, bathing, washing clothes, water for animals to drink and wash, for making cow dung cakes, construction etc. Depending upon the no. of people, season and animals in the family women have to go far distances to fetch water.

If it comes to irrigation though women have a role, its primarily seen as a men's activity and the external agencies only interact with men giving legitimacy to the division. This kind of discrimination is also reflected in the implementation of various programmes envisaged for poverty eradication, natural resource management etc.. One of the important programmes among them is Watershed development Program. This paper examines the relation ship of women to various natural resources, water in particular and puts it in the context of Watershed and other related natural resource management programmes, highlighting the processes of inclusion and exclusion and the possible strategies to address those concerns with relevant experiences.

II. Women and Natural resources management:

Census 1991 reveals that

- 34.22 per cent rural women are cultivators,
- 44.93 per cent fall in the category of agricultural laborers and
- 1.60 per cent is engaged in livestock, forestry, fisheries and other allied activities. A study conducted by Women and Population Division of FAO in 1990 revealed that in developing countries,
- women provide 70 percent of agricultural labour,
- 60–80 per cent labour for household food production,
- 100 percent labour for processing the basic food stuffs,
- 80 percent for food storage and transport from farm to village, 90 percent for water and fuel wood collection for households.

Less Visible Roles of women in Water:

- **Watering livestock and washing animals and agricultural implements (e.g. sprayers)**
- **Managing grazing of livestock and gathering bushes and roots for fuel in watershed catchments areas**
- **Maintenance of field level water management features and terraces**
- **Puddling of ponds and earth canals and maintenance of bunds and weeding canals**
- **Timing of cropping and land preparation influencing losses by evapo-transpiration**
- **Watering young plants in nursery beds**
- **Protecting trees and other key ground cover**
- **Fire control**
- **Mulching crops and managing water retaining materials (e.g. composting)**
- **Management of household and farm waste and other potential contaminants**
- **Transportation of water to the home and maintenance of home water stores**
- **Training of children about wise use of water (reducing waste) and hygiene**
- **Use of gray water for home gardens**

These facts and figures basically establish the close proximity of women with natural resources. If it is the case, ideally they should be playing key role in the management of natural resources, but unfortunately not, as these roles are being attributed to men in most of the cases.

There are also gender differences in access and control over water resources and these are important elements to consider in development programmes especially where interventions may change the value of the resource and reduce women's access. The kind of worldview that women are only associated with domestic water and men with irrigation reflects in the design and implementation of various programmes.

For example, An IIMI study of a farmer-managed irrigation system in Nepal showed that the discrepancy between women's involvement in irrigated agriculture on the one hand, and their absence in water user organizations on the other negatively affected management performance. De facto female heads of farms used more water than their official entitlement, while at the same time contributing less labor to maintenance than they should. This occurred because it was difficult for the system's organizers to enforce their rules on women, who are not members. Although non-membership is thus in the interest of female farmers, because it allows them to become free riders, the long-term sustainability of the irrigation system is at risk.
– FAO report

This emphasizes the need to understand the gender issues and also the role of women in the natural resources more clearly and incorporate into project design, the elements which address their concerns. And clear strategies to operationalise those elements.

III. In the context of Watershed Program:

Watershed development program is an opportunity to conserve, improve and manage natural resources in a participatory manner. However, the key questions in this process are “Who participates in the process? Who benefits from the process? Are there equal opportunities for men and women in the process?”

Guidelines have a very clear emphasis on participatory processes in watershed program. However, the actual practices on ground are found to be different. The studies conducted by WASSAN in Ranga Reddy (10 villages), Nalgonda (30 villages) and Mahaboobnagar (20 villages) Districts, to understand the nature of these processes indicate that there are many gaps between the envisaged processes and actual practices on the ground. Though the watershed program is successfully scaled up with occasional positive experiences, the quality of the program suffered. The main observations from these studies are presented here. These can be classified into two categories.

1. *Most Common Observations (observed in about 70% to 80% of watersheds).*

- A. Though awareness programs are organized, they are not consistent and regular. Importance of works got highlighted in these awareness programs, instead of role of community in the program.
- B. A very weak institution of primary stakeholders is created. User groups are almost absent. Watershed Committee consists of powerful village leaders. They do not necessarily represent user groups or self help groups.
- C. Centralization of power at the community level in the hands of few (president/ secretary) is not a rare feature. The program became “Committee Centered” instead of “Community Centered”.
- D. Action planning process is driven by the district administration. The primary stakeholders did not find space in the process of planning.
- E. The menu of watershed interventions is a short one, with limited number of standard interventions. Bunding, check dams, gully checks, plantation, and contour trenches were the most common interventions.
- F. Space of peoples’ knowledge in the program is fairly limited. Some times the options demanded by farmers were not allowed in the program.
- G. Women did not receive any importance in the program.
- H. Genuine contribution from users is not mobilized in majority of the cases. Majority of the contribution is cut from the wage labourers, from their daily wages.

2. *Special Practices (observed in about 10 to 20% of watersheds):*

- A. The net planning exercises helped to create User groups and develop user group based action plans.
- B. Multiple interventions were taken up by the watershed committee in water conservation related activities.
- C. Consistent communication programs were organized to spread the message of the watershed program. Project Implementation Agencies organized training programs to committees/ user groups.
- D. Contribution was mobilized genuinely from users as a necessary condition.
- E. SHGs were given responsibility of watershed works.
- F. Women members of SHGs formed the watershed committee.

Lessons Learned:

Providing space and time for promoting participatory planning and implementation processes is a critical bottleneck.

Facilitating teams do not have necessary skills, orientation and capacities to develop institutional base for the program.

Centralization of resources does not promote transparent and democratic systems.

This is the overall picture and it is definitely worse with respect to the 'oppressed among oppressed class' i.e. women.

In watershed development program, women representation is cursory and more of a token. She is just a labourer, when it comes to management of natural resources. The popular perception of addressing gender concerns in the watershed program was, constituting women self help groups and providing them with revolving fund of Rs.30, 000 – 50,000. Provision of nominal representation in the committees, as they are necessitated to have representation from Self Help Groups is the other major means of addressing gender balance.

A. Gender related issues in various aspects of the programme:**a. Representation in the structure/decision making bodies:**

The key institutions in the watershed program and the indicative representation pattern from the state level are as follows:

Institution	Men	Women
Commissionerate- Program related	100%	--
Project Directors	84%	16%
Multi disciplinary teams(MDT)	99%	Rare instance, less than 1%
Watershed Development Team(WDT)	95%	Less than 5%
Watershed Committees	75%	25%

The space in these institutions is not gender balanced both in terms of quantity and also quality. Though certain measures were there to ensure minimum presence of women in those bodies particularly in Advisory committees at higher level and in Watershed committees at village level, certain institutions like MDT, WDT, and User groups are highly gender imbalanced. In the Committee/Associations also only nominal space is provided with no key role. As a result their concerns are not addressed.

The key facilitating persons at ground level are MDT and WDT. The profile of these facilitating staff is the major influencing factor in the quality of the program. From the table, the gender focus in the program can be judged.

Alternatives sought are Constituting Watershed Committee with all women and entrusting the responsibility of implementation to Women Thrift cooperatives/ Federations. This takes the issue to other extreme rather bringing in the balance. Though this kind of intervention will have some positive impact on addressing women issues, it cannot be complete unless there is a specific gender focus and enabling mechanisms in different elements of the program. Otherwise, the women committee members may end up doing what at present their men counterparts are doing.

b. Involvement in the planning and implementation process:

As the space in the decision-making bodies is very limited, the case with involvement in planning and implementation processes is also similar in the mainstream watershed programs. It has also to do with the outlook towards watershed program and various gender insensitive practices.

i. Program perception

In practice it is reduced to construction of a set of physical structures, rather than viewing it as an initiation of comprehensive conservation, development and management of the natural resources of the area. And those structures involve 'technical expertise', money, investment etc., which do not find match with women in general view. It also excludes poor and the whole programme confines to few individuals who can influence and invest.

Also the target driven approach and haste to show expenditures facilitates this Exclusion process.

ii. Role perception of women

In the whole program, the women's role is only perceived, as being part of self-help groups to take revolving fund of around Rs. 50,0000. In this process they are mostly kept out of the preview of natural resource development. It resulted in the action plans and actions where the most dependent one's needs and concerns are not addressed.

Since no organic linkage is established with the programme, the focus on groups ends, once the revolving fund is distributed and they just remain on paper.

iii. Whose needs

In most cases the activities of soil moisture conservation and water harvesting are perceived in vacuum, isolated from the people, their dependency on resources and needs.

The present practice gives more preference to water harvesting and that too in valley portions. The practical needs of women like fodder, fuel wood, drinking water and the food security of the household are very rarely addressed.

iv. Resource ownership

The general perception of farmer being male and the land ownership lying with men, despite the major role of women in the agriculture restricts the involvement of women in the program. And there are very minimal efforts to create access and control over resources for women. Mostly men are only involved in the planning and decision-making. This results in improper assessment of needs, i.e. leaving out the women's needs. Hence different aspects of resource management are not addressed. And in the process the dependency of women further deepens as the assetlessness is reinforced.

v. Technical Knowledge/ knowledge holders

The popular perception of Technology as a special skill which could be handled only by few and that too men also limited the involvement of women in the implementation. As the activities in the program are mostly limited to construction of check dams and percolation tanks, this reinforced the perception

vi. Trainings / enabling / sensitizing environment

Understanding of the issues related to gender and the relationships with natural resource management programs is fairly limited at various level – DPAP/Project Implementation Agency/WDT and Committees. Since these key stakeholders are unable to establish conceptual linkages between the NRM and women, they are unable to operationalise them at grass root level.

It is found from various process studies that the capacity building agenda in the program is given the least priority. The training and community organization budgets are mostly centralized and the lack of capacities at Implementing agencies level is shown as the reason. Even the centralized training programme doesn't match the requirements or demands of the program both in quantity and focus.

Therefore even after the completion of the program, no capacities are built at the village level. And there are no specific gender sensitization programmes both for facilitators and at village level to build the enabling environment for the participation of women.

vii. Vulnerability/ special needs:

The most vulnerable sections in the society, like women headed families, single women need special emphasis and efforts in any program. But the present implementation structures totally exclude them. The various studies show almost nil investments going to these families.

viii. Institutions and Leadership:

A very weak institution of primary stakeholders is created. User groups are almost absent. Watershed Committee consists of powerful village leaders. They do not necessarily represent user groups or self help groups. This kind of practice does not create an environment conducive for emergence of women leadership.

One can see the near collapse of watershed-based institutions (user groups and committees) once the program is completed, as the inputs they received were too inadequate to sustain the institutional base. Similarly Self Help Groups are not properly integrated into watershed program and these groups do not have any agenda of natural resource management. The nature of Institutional base would influence the sustainability of the natural resources, ability of the communities to diversify and access support from different programs/institutions.

ix. Control and access to resources:

The watershed program basically aims at resource conservation and development. Access to any resource primarily determines the inclusion and exclusion process of any particular group. For landless women this forms the exclusion mechanism in the program. Creating such access to resources (CPS/private) to asset less seems to be beyond the agenda of facilitators or managers of the program. The watershed programs are being implemented with all the above limitations. The programme created an impact in whatever form on a large scale. Creating awareness on soil and moisture conservation and water harvesting are the salient features of the watershed. Popularising the contractorship is another side of the coin.

c. **Impact of the program:**

Informal studies by WASSAN indicate that typically the following changes are most commonly visible, after the completion of watershed program in a village.

- Improved ground water position.
- Improved availability of drinking water.
- Increased intensity of agriculture.
- Increased private investments on irrigation infrastructure (mainly bore wells)
- Increased area under irrigated agriculture.

Though these changes are positive, the management of these changes is critical. It includes the aspects of 'who benefits by these changes? and are these changes diffusing the gender divisions or reinforcing ? To a certain extent these changes may reduce the drudgery of women. But shifts to irrigated agriculture leads to mono cropping of commercial crops.

It is found from many experiences and studies that this kind of practice leads to minimizing the role of women in agriculture as it involves close interaction with market. And the food security of the household will also be at stake. This is the key for the position of women in the household as it reduces her control over food.

And one of the important end result expected out of the programme is a strong institutional base at village level to sustain the efforts of conservation and development of resources which is not happening as found from the process studies of WASSAN

B. Strategies with demonstrated experiences:

At the other side of the coin, we have experiences where all the above issues are attempted and addressed though in different forms and situations. These are the experiences of various Non Governmental Organisations working in different districts of A.P out of mainstream watershed program.

a) Representation:

The first step towards ensuring the gender balance is to have substantial representation in the programme structures. Though it is not a sufficient condition, it was found that representation of poor and women in committees/ in key positions help in addressing the concerns of their communities. Women committee members enquire about the program and its development as a matter of right. This process ensures that their concerns are adequately addressed.

In Rayalaseema Watershed Development Programme (RWDP), funded by a consortium of donor agencies implemented in 4 Districts with NGOs, the equitable representation was ensured.

Body	Men	Women	Total	Percentage
Voluntary organization (coordinator)	1	1	2	50%
Watershed Central Committee	5	5	10	
Village level committee	3	3	6	50%
Watershed volunteers	4	5	9	55%
Monitoring committee	4	4	8	50%

The village level committee has worked exceedingly well. Particularly women in the monitoring committees laid down strict quality norms and enforced them.

Women and Watersheds – Current status

Separate organizations of women created a forum for them to discuss problems and solutions freely. After coming to collective decisions in separate meetings – women members in different watershed committees were able to push their agenda forward, such as demanding and receiving equal wages. They could also forcefully demand changes in earlier practices or decisions, which were anti-women. An example is payment to male members of family only. In several instances work groups were reorganized to ensure employment of women.

b) Program perception:

The clarity about the objectives and end results through out the project implementation chain involving all stakeholders is necessary. Instead of just emphasizing the construction of physical structures of watershed and on target achievement, the emphasis should be on social aspects and on the process of inclusion of women. The results of this approach were demonstrated well in various programs implemented by different organizations independently. This was possible by ensuring proper orientation mechanisms and building continuous learning environment through incorporating the training and capacity building as an essential component of the program design.

c) Role perception of women

There should be shift in the traditional thinking about different roles in agriculture. Women can successfully take up the responsibilities supposedly considered as of men. This case of APMASS not only changes the 'male' image of the farmer but also demonstrates the possibility of collective action

Women Nurture Land: Though women perform all the Agricultural activities along with men they are seen as laborers. APMSS has launched a program in which women take up the responsibility of agriculture, which was started when Samadhana Mahila Sangam of Alladurg village in Shadnagar Mandal of Medak decided to lease in 2 acres of land. Along with the thrift activity they had realized the importance of Organic manures for increasing the pest resistance of the crop, health of the soil and health of human beings. In addition preference was given to NPM methods instead of costly and poisonous chemical pesticides. Thereby they reaped a very good crop. Slowly they increased their land to 5 acres. With financial assistance from sanghas APMSS facilitated the program of sustainable cultivation of fallow lands. Women took the responsibility of work on individual and leased land. All decisions were taken collectively and work shared equally among them. Part of their produce was retained for household consumption and the rest sold in the market. Now, women were involved in deciding the price and marketing. They are thinking of setting up a village level grain bank for food security. They are undertaking agriculture in their own lands. In future they plan to take up vegetable marketing.

d) Whose needs:

The program should be designed in such a way so as to address the practical needs of women. It has been the task of women to cater to the family needs. There have been cases where the program addresses the practical needs of the household by actually working with women.. Such is the case of Bidakanne Chandramma... The important aspect in this case is the recognition of needs and priorities from the women point of view and helping her to address those needs in her own way.

Meeting Household needs!

Chandamma, a resident of Bidakanne village in Medak District comes from a very poor family. She has a small piece of land (2.5 acres) with very less soil in it. With the help of Narsanna (from DDS) working on permaculture she designed the land in such a way so as to meet her family needs. It would provide the required fuel wood, fodder, fruits along with agriculture. She is able to get some food grains and vegetables from the land. Grains, pulses and oilseeds were also planned in it. Cash incomes came through the sale of buffalo milk and hiring out of bullocks.

Impressed with her work, the agriculture Department and SC Corporation sanctioned Rs 28,000/- for well and some seedlings for planting. She got Rs 3000/- by selling melia tree on the bunds and now she shifted to ID crops such as vegetables, ginger, turmeric, sugarcane etc.

Overcoming all kinds of obstacles Chandamma is now able to get Rs,15000/- per acre and the fuel wood and fodder needs of the family. She is working as a teacher in the school "Paccha sala" run by DDS.

e) Resource ownership

Creating resource access and ownership is one important element in the process of empowerment. Facilitation process involving women to know about the available common resources and their right to ownership and help them access those rights is one important approach which can be seen in this case.

Sweet fruits of success

Some of the poor Dalit women from Gutti in Anantapur district, organized themselves into groups to take up regeneration of Gutti hill. Some years back Sitaphal trees were a common sight in and around Gutti hill. The women made an application for usufruct rights, which was sanctioned and they made known to all by *dandora*, people were not allowed to cut trees for fuel wood, shepherds were not allowed to graze their sheep which resulted in a conflict. Later things were resolved by permitting them to go ahead without loss to Sitaphal trees. The Dalit women have purchased milk cows with loans from Oxfam trust and are benefiting from increased fodder production. Further there were problems when some contractors started blasting the hill for granite chips. The situation was handled very confidently with protests from these women and thus mining stopped.

HANDS, an NGO in Anantapur district facilitated this process

f) Vulnerability/special needs:

As part of RWDT, the women groups with the help of KRUSHI accessed following benefits from the existing government programmes:

GOVERNMENT RESOURCES MOBILISED FOR 23 SINGLE WOMEN		
S.No	Particulars	No. of members
1.	Ration Cards	10
2.	Old Age pensions	2
3.	Widow pensions	4
4.	Flood Relief	1
5.	Nationality Family Benefit Scheme	7 (worth Rs. 36,000/-)
6.	Land allocation for 10 landless women including 4 single women	20.25 acres worth Rs. 4,10,000/-
7	House sites	15

g) Technical Knowledge/ knowledge holders:

Demystification of technology is necessary to enhance participation of women in so called 'technical activities'. If necessary support and backstopping is provided by the facilitators this can be possible as shown in this case

In Romp ally watershed, the Project Implementation Agency and its support team after many deliberations have taken an initiative to involve two poor women groups in the village in the construction of a check dam much against the wishes of village male leaders. (Perhaps this is the only case of linking Self Help Group to watershed program) The village have submitted an application to DPAP through the Project Implementation Agency saying that the construction work is beyond the capacity of women groups and the work be entrusted to somebody else. Women in the village, which on verification proved to be false, signed the application. When brought to their notice, the women opposed the move of male members and have taken initiatives to get the work entrusted to them. Trainings were organized for these women groups in construction of check dams and they have successfully completed the works.

h) Trainings / enabling / sensitizing environment

Strong Capacity Building Support to facilitating organizations and institutions of communities on gender aspects is necessary to facilitate the change. It needs conscious and patient efforts to operationalise. This is one of the prerequisites for the evolving strong institutions and leadership. Here are some examples..

In Rayalseema watershed program, local women's leadership was encouraged in a no. of ways. Women and men participated in all trainings and exposure visits in equal number. This was a norm for the programme. If women were not ready to travel, the exposure visits were postponed. These kinds of exposure visits and trainings helped to give women confidence based on knowledge.

To support the developing of women's leadership separate meetings with women were conducted regularly. The women co-coordinator of the watershed did this. In these meetings women's perception of their own skills and abilities was discussed and women encouraged learning new skills. Women were encouraged to articulate their needs and try out new ideas. Women were also provided detailed information about the watershed activities. Due to this, women were able to exert their influence their growing confidence.

At the start of training programmes for women the village watershed committee insisted that the women return home in the early evening. Two years later nearly 700 women have attended training programmes that involve overnight stays of two to three days outside the village. Men are actively supporting the women's participation.

The sustainability and quality of institutions also depends upon addressel of the changing needs of its members. In most of the above cases the interventions are routed through groups, and it is the group effort that was to solve their problems

Conclusions:

These are the experiences from different initiatives by various organizations in A.P. They are successful in addressing many key issues relating to gender imbalances. They indicate that for this, a two-fold strategy is required. They are strategies for

- Addressing practical needs and
- Strategic needs of women.

The first one can be achieved only when any program is made sensitive to various needs of women and are incorporated into project design and strategies. If emphasis is only on meeting the practical needs, it may not dissolve the present discriminatory structure against women and may even reinforce the stereotypes. Therefore simultaneously efforts are to be there to dismantle those discriminatory beliefs and structures. Women need even separate space for that, to exert and influence those structures.

These demonstrated strategies though are in different contexts are highly relevant and, the learning be feed into the mainstream watershed program. There is need to reorient the key actors involved in the program and make changes in the program implementation structures on these lines. Watershed program though cannot be a sectoral program; it cannot also leave any aspect untouched as it talks of development of resources in the watershed area. These resources include human and this is the key for sustainable development of natural resources. The guidelines clearly envisage this and emphasizes on institutional development at village level with focus on gender and equity.

There should be success indicators developed collectively to monitor all aspects of the Watershed specific to women related issues like..

- Ownership and access to resources like land etc..
- Reducing the drudgery
- Up gradation of skills related to production, processing and marketing
- Equality in wages and other opportunities like education health etc..

- Atrocities against women
- Strength of their own institutions
- Decision making and leadership etc..

Some of the measures being adopted by the DFID supported Karnataka Watershed Development Project are as much relevant:

- developing a gender strategy for the project;
- Creating gender awareness and development of appropriate skills through intensive gender training at all levels of the project;
- Gender analysis;
- Evolving new approaches to ensure that women in watersheds are reached more effectively and
- Gender mainstreaming.

The gender strategy should also include the appropriate programme implementation structures to bring the change. These measures can ensure the addressel of women issues in watershed program and bring more gender balance in the society.

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