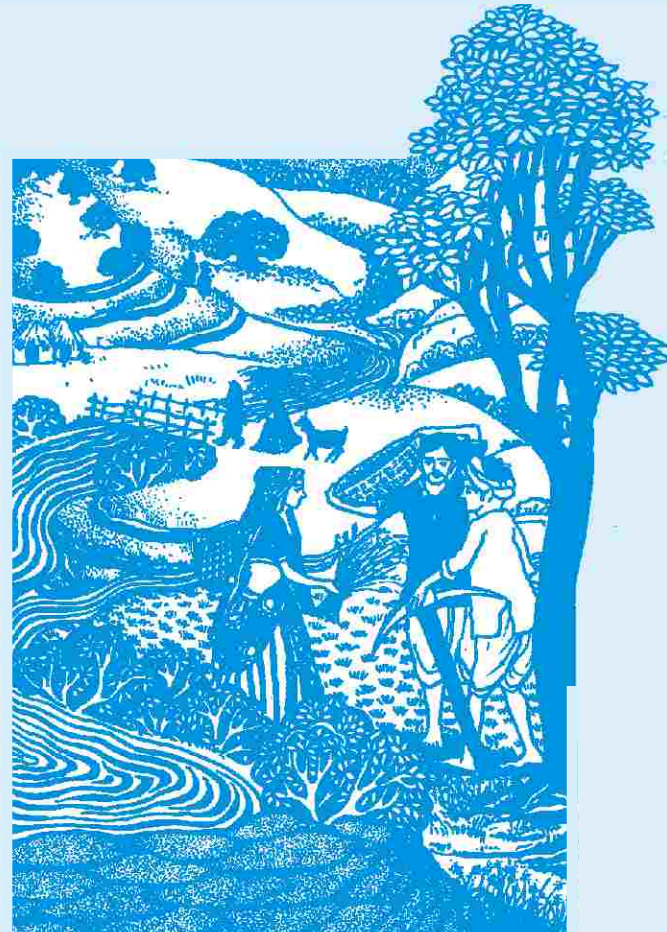


Water Policy Research

Highlight

**Choosing 'not' to Participate:
Evidence from Drought Prone
Area Program (DPAP) in
Chitradurga, Karnataka**

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Based on a five village study in Chitradurga, Karnataka, the paper outlines the constraints that government programs face in institutionalizing participation in watershed management.

It shows that in absence of proper incentives/disincentives people choose not to participate in the 'processes' of participatory planning and management of watersheds. The government officials too find out alternate mechanisms to meet the requirements of the guidelines.

CHOOSING 'NOT' TO PARTICIPATE: EVIDENCE FROM DROUGHT PRONE AREA PROGRAM (DPAP) IN CHITRADURGA, KARNATAKA¹

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT BASED ON A PAPER WITH THE SAME TITLE

In watershed development, the shift towards participatory planning is taking place because of both domestic policy shifts and international donor pressure. These “imply a significant departure from normal procedures and decision making systems, and/or are implemented by people who may as yet have little to gain from the new accountabilities they signify...there are often *strong disincentives* to adopting participatory approaches” (Mosse, 2001, p.17, emphasis author's). This paper is an attempt to understand the constraints that government interventions face in the watershed arena. The constraints are two fold: [1] constraints of the farmers in participating in the program of somebody else: 'the government' and [2] of the government staff (particularly at the village and taluk level) in achieving policy objectives decided at the national level.

The two major constraints that government interventions face in the watershed arena are - [1] of the farmers in participating in the program of the government, and [2] of the government staff in achieving policy objectives decided at the national level.

The relationship between policy discourse and field practices has centered on two opposing views of the role of policy. The instrumental view sees policy as a rational problem solving exercise in which policy plays a 'direct' role in influencing

the way development is done. The critical view sees “policy as a rationalizing discourse concealing hidden purposes of bureaucratic power or dominance, in which the true political intent of development is hidden behind a cloak of rational planning” (Mosse, 2003, p.3, citing Fergusson, 1990, Escobar, 1995, Shore and Wright, 1997). Mosse rightly argues that neither of these views does justice to the complexity of the relationship between policy making and development practice. The wider enquiry is to locate it in the discourse where the multiple tensions of the 'developer' (in particular, lower level field staff) and the 'developed' (farmers) are examined. This paper is part of a wider enquiry wherein the hypothesis that the 'mode' (technical and institutional design) of the project leads to differential outcomes is tested. In this paper, we examine the constraints farmers face in participating in a program of somebody else- 'the government'. We examine the processes relating to the build up and initiation of the user groups (Ugs), self help groups (SHGs), watershed associations (WAs), and watershed development committees (WDCs).

STUDY AREA

Molkalmur taluk of Chitradurga district was selected as the study area. Out of seven villages where intervention was made during the second phase² of Drought Prone Area Program (DPAP), five villages were selected (Table 1). The first three villages form part of a single watershed area,

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²The second phase projects (1999-2003) were the earliest available projects wherein an attempt was made to initiate watershed intervention as per GOI (1994).

while Bommadevarahalli and Muthugarahalli are stand-alone villages. Data were collected from 167 farm households from the above five villages.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Locating 'Participation' in Watershed Development

Participation in watershed programs requires that implementing agencies do not have a blueprint, but involve communities in analyzing soil and water conservation problems and identify strategies to alleviate them (Hencliffe, et.al, 1999). The social organization efforts requires the following sequence of activities: [1] rapport building; [2] initiating the process of SHG formation; [3] strengthening SHGs; [4] formation of the Was; [5] formation of the WDCs; [6] PRA exercise for arriving at treatment plans; [7] training of the members; and [8] soil and water conservation treatments. We take a look at how community participation features at different

stages, for the villages covered under the study.

Village meeting before watershed intervention

The initial meeting whose purpose is to inform the farmers of the objective of the program and solicit their cooperation was held in only three of the five villages. In Venkatapura and Vithalapura, meetings were not held since the meetings were centralized in Devasamudra village. A majority of the farmers (79 percent) had not attended the meeting, a significant proportion of whom (52 percent) were not aware that such a meeting had been held. Thirteen percent did not attend although they knew about it, as they were 'busy in agricultural work'. Only 23 percent of farmers stated that they had attended the initial meeting. An entrepreneurial farmer in Vithalapura used it as an opportunity to gain control of his fellow farmers by volunteering to pay the membership fees for the whole village. This happened with the knowledge of the agricultural assistant. The agricultural assistant was quite immune to all this as he himself was a party to greater adjustments

Table 1: Locating the Differential Village Level Characteristics

Name of the village	Important features of the village
Devasamudra	Head end village; local power structures are centralized in the village; attempt has been made to appropriate the maximum resources within the village; in tail end villages, resources get spent - 'adjusted' based on some sort of patron-client relationship; conflict between the panchayat (controlled by the Congress) and the WDC (controlled by the Janata Dal); decision on (a) whether the land has to be treated, (b) what sort of treatment to be done, to a large extent, is influenced by whether the farmer's alliance is to the Congress or the Janata Dal.
Venkatapura and Vithalapura	Tail end villages lobby to ensure that there is only one WDC and not WDC in each village so that resource appropriation by Devasamudra can be minimized. WDC members representing the tail end villages lobby (with the MLA at the <i>hobli</i> (unit of administration below the taluk level) and agricultural assistant) to ensure that the power exercised by the influence of Devasamudra WDC members is minimized.
Bommadevarahalli	Strong indigenous 'corporate' organization of the temple committee, which is involved in various activities. Although there is this strong indigenous set up, government is in the realm of the 'other' and the designated person ' <i>Sarkarada Manusha</i> ' represents largely any interaction that needs to be undertaken with the ' <i>Sarkara</i> ' (Government)
Muthugarahalli	'Passive' village, decisions taken by the agricultural assistant, the WDC chairman is a 'rubber stamp' to the agricultural assistant, certain amount of elite capture takes place (eg, boulder removal being done in Lingayat plots and not in others which is not an authorized activity under the DPAP program)

to meet the 10 percent contribution norm, as per national guidelines.

Lack of interest in the intervention could be due to a multiplicity of factors. One possible reason could be that farmers did not see immediate benefits coming out of the exercise. The situation changes later as the benefits start showing. It was observed that when the real action (implementation) is initiated, there is lobbying to garner the benefits from the program.

SHG Formation

The process of being a part of SHGs is a learning and in some sense empowering exercise for members. By collectively managing credit activities, the right organizational capital is built up so that higher level objectives like creation of village institutions can be embarked upon (Fernandez, 1994). Unfortunately, these components have received minimal attention. The emphasis of the government staff was on getting the 'real thing' done, i.e. fulfillment of work targets prepared in the action plans.

Even the option of contracting the work to NGOs, when exercised, was plagued with problems. In four villages (Devasamudra, Venkatapura, Vithalapura and Bommadevarahalli), effort had been put by an NGO SAHANA for initiating SHGs. However, there was no commitment on the part of the district level authorities to ensure that these efforts were supported adequately. Irregularity in payments and lack of proper follow up made the job very difficult for NGOs, which in most of the cases were one or two man teams. This directly reflected in some of the SHGs becoming defunct. Also, in at least two of the above four villages, efforts were put for creation of area groups which basically consisted of households following a particular occupation such as pottery. However, these area groups remained only on paper (in the NGO records) as further efforts were not put in terms of training and facilitating income enhancement strategies. Some SHGs which were formed with the expectation of getting loans were

disbanded, as people realized that their chances of getting loans were low.

We argue that rapport building and strengthening existing SHGs should have preceded the intervention. No training or financial assistance was provided to these groups from the watershed department. The initial organizational capital existing in these villages was also not utilized to generate interest in watershed intervention. Having lost the possibilities of engagement with the village community in the initial stages, we see later as to how this leads to lack of interest and participation in the processes put in place.

Preparation of the 'Master Plan and Action Plan' Document

The basic flaw in the planning process has been that activities relating to SHG formation (however feeble these attempts were) were taken up only after the action plans were prepared and submitted. The PRA exercise as envisaged by the architects of the common guidelines in terms of it being a 'learning, sharing and contestation exercise' had not been undertaken.

If anything which had the semblance of a PRA exercise, it was the following: the agricultural assistant undertook transact of the field with the assistance of the key person in the village. This person could be either the NGO staff or a farmer who potentially became the assistant to the agricultural assistant in the village.

In the case of Bommadevarahalli, we saw that eventually this person, to a large extent became the only link the farmer had with the government. For farmers he was the *Sarkarda Manusha* (government man). He undertook the trouble of discussing about all the matters related to the watershed intervention with the agricultural assistant. Since farmers trusted that this key person would take right decisions; they did not have to take the trouble to meet the agricultural assistant when he came to the village. They would rather prefer to concentrate on earning their livelihood through wage labor or just sit around

idly, maximizing their leisure. In fact a respondent in Bommadevarahalli stated that even when called by the key person and the agricultural assistant to undertake a transact to discuss the location of the check dams he did not prefer to go as he was sleeping.

The transact led to the identification of treatment plans for the entire designated watershed area. This also led to the preparation of year-wise action plan for treatment to be undertaken, area to be covered and the financial implications. The agriculture assistant performed the exercise and took decisions solely based on his one-two days visit to the village and one-week of number crunching on his calculator in between his trips to the line departments for data collection. The document was submitted to the zilla parishad in Chitradurga. This was done to meet the guidelines requirements and the agricultural assistant got them periodically ratified in the WDC meetings in the village. Although the document produced was quite impressive in terms of the data it had on a variety of variables- rainfall, cropping pattern, livestock holding, etc. This exercise was largely a data collation exercise based on the agricultural assistant's shuttling between various government departments in the taluk. The 'Master Plan and Action Plan' document eventually got ratified as the approved estimates which dictated the bounds under which the agricultural assistant could operate in the field.

Out of the total number of farmers interviewed, 70 percent were not aware that a WDC existed. A significant percentage of people did not know about the existence of the agricultural assistant (58 percent).

Awareness and Perception of the 'Crafted' WDC

Out of the total number of farmers interviewed, 70 percent were not aware that a WDC existed. A significant percentage of people did not know about the existence of the agricultural assistant (58 percent). Only 29 percent of the respondents were able to identify, the present chairman or the past chairman or both, while 71 percent could not identify any of them. While the chairman was not

recognized, some farmers did recognize the key person or NGO staff or the zilla parishad (ZP) member of having played a role.

The WDC chairmen in both Muthugarahalli and Bommadevarahalli agreed that decision-making and knowledge on the financial implications of the intervention were known only to the agricultural assistant. In fact the chairman of the WDC in Devasamudra arranged a meeting of various WDC chairmen in Devasamudra village. It was decided here that a request would be sent to the district watershed development office (DWDO) on the need to arrange an orientation program, so that the chairmen could become aware of their rights and responsibilities. That apparently did not happen owing to internal differences between the chairmen. The chairman of the Muthugarahalli WDC clearly indicated that he effectively is not in control; and he blindly signs on the cheque without actually knowing the cost of the treatment.

Only 8 percent of farmers stated that the WDC members had visited their plot. Visibility or perception about the role of the WDC was largely restricted to the chairman. However, the WDC members in Vithalapura and Venkatapura put efforts in lobbying to ensure that they got the maximum possible treatment in their respective villages.

It is important to specify the context under which such lobbying took place. When the initial meeting was held in Devasamudra (attended by the agricultural officer, assistant agricultural officer, agriculture assistant and the technical assistant from the DWDO), the agricultural officer announced that the panchayat chairman could not be the WDC chairman. This led to a commotion and fight between the contending parties. The Congress party controlled the panchayat and the Janata Dal was in the opposition. Eventually, the meeting was cancelled and the next meeting was held only after a year, where the chairman who showed alliance to the Janata Dal was selected. Since the farmers owed alliance to either of these parties, it did make a difference whether their land

got treated or not and what treatment got done— an earthen bund, a ravine reclamation structure or a check dam.

In the Devasamudra-Venkatapura-Vithalapura-Oorthalu cluster of villages, the husband of the Zilla Parishad member, largely made the decisions. In fact, this person, an influential man, decided where and how the treatment had to be done. The agricultural assistant also used to fear this person as he was threatened that he would be suspended in case he did not listen to his instructions. This led to certain unapproved acts being done: some farmers engaging the earth removing equipment for removal of boulders (not authorized work) while such benefits were not available to other farmers.

Lack of Farmers' Contribution

The norm, as per the GOI (1994), requires that farmers should contribute 10 percent of the treatment cost. The taluk had been facing crop failures for the past three years preceding the intervention. No attempt was made to ensure that contribution was collected. Therefore it is not surprising that 95.2 percent of farmers were never asked for their mandatory 10 percent contribution. The easy way out was in the form of adjustments that took place in the quantum and quality of work. Having got a sense from the elite of the village that farmers would not be paying the contribution, the Devasamudra WDC took the stand that the work should be done without any contribution.

The eagerness shown by government staff to get the 'real thing' done, without paying much attention to farmers' concerns acted as a major constraint to participation.

We do have evidence of similar adjustments taking place in DPAP projects in other states wherein the usual *modus operandi* is to budget for higher costs while the actual costs are lower. The balance would be shown as contribution and could be pocketed (Chootray, 2004). The other

cruel mechanism is to underpay wage laborers and show the money saved as farmers' contribution.

CAUSATIVE FACTOR FOR FARMERS CHOOSING 'NOT' TO PARTICIPATE

The taluk has been facing consecutive crop failures since 1999 (upto 2003, the reference period for the study). Given such a situation, there was a greater reliance on wage employment (by the small and marginal farmers) or, a general lack of interest in farming because of the prevailing uncertainties (large farmers). Unfortunately, the intervention failed to address any of these concerns. It did not create adequate wage-employment, on the contrary, quite a lot of work was done using earth removing equipments (referred to as JCBs). In the villages of Muthugarahalli and Bommadevarahalli, most of the work (earthen bunds and contour bunds) was done using JCBs in the night time. The eagerness shown by government staff to get the 'real thing' done, without paying much attention to farmers' concerns acted as a major constraint to participation. Such an intervention where the staff were doing their job for their salaries did not interest the farmers.

The drive to be a part of the process is greater among members of the community when they realize the opportunity cost of not participating is high such as benefits going to head end villages.

The study also brings out clearly that there are certain opportunity costs associated with participation which have an impact on farmers' decisions on whether to participate or not. We, however, do not argue, that 'choosing not to participate' is a unique categorization of our field area. In fact, we do have evidence of farmers being actively involved in lobbying, for instance, the clashes between the affiliates of Janata Dal and Congress party within Devasamudra and the efforts of the tail-enders (Venkatapura and Vithalapura) to garner some benefits from the

program which otherwise would have largely accrued to the head end village (Devasamudra) . It can be inferred that the drive to be a part of the process is greater among members of the community when they realize the opportunity cost of not participating is high such as benefits going to head end villages. The lack of interest argument holds for Muthugarahalli while Bommadevarahalli falls into the passive participation category because of the presence of the omnipotent *Sarkarda Manusba*.

This phenomenon can be clearly attributed to a flaw in the implementation processes of the project. When farmers could get their land treated without attending meetings, without making contribution, without knowing who the WDC chairman or the agricultural assistant was; why would they take the trouble of going through all these processes, which the architects of the national guidelines expect them to do? The government staff also find this non-problematic since they have developed alternative mechanisms for meeting the requirements of national guidelines. Further, since the auditor also does not undertake a verification exercise to see what is happening vis-à-vis the compliance with the guidelines, the targets are met and the projects get completed. The clear learning from this study is that, while in a hurry to scale up successes, we need to look at the failures too. There is an urgent need for policymakers to pause and initiate processes for undertaking carefully designed evaluation exercises (and more importantly to learn from them) on projects implemented according to the GOI (1994) guidelines. However, this is easier said than done. A more drastic but perhaps necessary step is to drastically reduce the budgetary allocation to these projects, so that pressure is exerted upon the bureaucracy to reform. Else, we would end up replicating and scaling up failures and not successes.

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