MULTI-AGENCY PARTNERSHIP IN NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT: EVIDENCE FROM PARTICIPATORY WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT IN RAJASTHAN, INDIA

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Poster presentation at the 53rd Annual Conference of the German Society of Economic and Social Sciences in Agriculture (GEWISOLA)

“How much market and how much regulation does sustainable agricultural development need?”

Berlin, September 25-27, 2013

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Introduction

- Effective management of natural resources in ecologically fragile regions is a major concern for international development donors, project implementing agencies as well as for the resource dependent communities.

- Experts (e.g. Farrington and Lobo, 1997) suggest that multi-agency partnerships involving various stakeholders (donors, governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations etc.) could ensure better management of common property resources, such as water, pastures or forests, especially in rainfed areas like Rajasthan in India.

- This qualitative research presents a critical analysis of multi-agency partnership in a participatory watershed development project implemented in the late 1990s in rural Rajasthan.

Background to the Case-Study

- A participatory watershed development project called People’s Action for Watershed Development Initiative (PAWDI) initiated in 1995 in two districts of Rajasthan
- Sponsored by the Swiss Agency for Development & Cooperation (SDC); targeted to treat 15,000 hectares of land over 7 years
- Implemented by the state Department of Watershed Development and Soil Conservation (DWD&SC) and two NGOs: Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS) and Sahyog Sansthan
- Elements of people’s participation and GO-NGO partnership as main features of the project design
- Project was abandoned half-way due to inter-agency conflicts

Research Objectives

- To assess the practical challenges involved in the projects designed on the basis of theoretical benefits of ‘GO-NGO partnership’ and ‘participation’
- To understand the differing viewpoints of various stakeholders and evaluate why well meaning projects fail?
- What lessons can be learned from the failure (or success) of such innovative and theoretically-sound projects?

Research Methods

- Review of primary and secondary material, which comprises government publications; documents; policy guidelines on watershed development; watershed project reports prepared by the staff of DWD&SC and NGOs; and external evaluation reports on PAWDI prepared for the donor agency (SDC).
- Primary data was generated through unstructured and semi-structured interviews with NGO workers and key government officials of DWD&SC in Rajasthan

Results

- International donors, government officials and NGOs, all belong to different social worlds- little efforts were made to reach out to each other
- NGOs were given the task of community mobilisation and the DWD&SC controlled the land treatment activities and finances
- NGOs flagged the issue of corruption by DWD&SC engineers; their relationship became strained
- NGOs selected the sites on the basis of their own interests rather than the watershed atlas
- Actual needs of the people (access to firwood or drinking water) were not incorporated in the project although it was meant to be participatory
- It took 2 years to kick-start the project after approval of funds and then it was abandoned after 3 years

Conclusions

- GO-NGO partnerships are not given but need to be nurtured before the start of projects
- Good institutional forms may not necessarily lead to good institutional practices
- Projects may fail but they can foster good governance practices (minimisation of corruption) in the long run
- Unrealistic donor expectations about people’s participation and multi-agency partnerships may lead to project failures

References


Acknowledgement

The author is grateful to the respondents from Tarun Bharat Sangh, Sahyog Sansthan and Department of Watershed Development & Soil Conservation, Rajasthan. The study was supported by the Felix Scholarship Trust, UK

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