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

Saurabh Gupta

Division of Social and Institutional Change in Agricultural Development
(490c)

University of Hohenheim, Stuttgart, Germany

Contact e-mail address: saurabh.gupta@uni-hohenheim.de



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Multi-Agency Partnership in Natural Resource Management: Evidence from participatory watershed development in Rajasthan, India

Dr Saurabh Gupta

Division of Social and Institutional Change in Agricultural Development (490c), University of Hohenheim



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.



Source: Watershed Department, Government of Rajasthan

Resarch 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



TBS workers interacting with donors; Copyright: TBS



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 firewood 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

Farrington, J. and Lobo, C.: 1997, Scaling up Participatory Watershed Development in India: Lessons from the Indo-German Watershed Development Program. Natural Resource Perspectives 17, London, ODI

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Contact: saurabh.gupta@uni-hohenheim.de

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



Watershed treatment by farm bunding; Copyright: Sahyog Sansthan