

Watershed Management Project in an Environment of Cynicism and Mistrust –The Case of Aduwala Village

Lakhan Singh¹ and B P Sinha²

1. Introduction

Aduwala is a village situated at an altitude of 2000 msl in the micro-watershed Kunja Grant of Asan Left sub-watershed of Kalsi division of Doon valley watershed project. It is a revenue village located at 45 km north-east from Dehra Dun district headquarters at Vikas Nagar C.D. block. Total area of the village is 416 hectares, out of which 311 hectares are under cultivation (170 hectares irrigated, 121 hectares unirrigated and 19 hectares semi irrigated) and government reserve forest land is 105 hectares.

Aduwala is a relatively big hill village with a population of 1560 living in 296 families in two hamlets- Aduwala and Judali. This village has 95 per cent of families belonging to backward and scheduled castes. Literacy level is about 50 per cent (WMD, 1994).

The main crops grown are wheat, paddy, maize, sugarcane, lentil and ginger. There is a canal running from the right bank of the Dak Pathar barrage of Yomuna river, but the water supply is available only in monsoon. There is a government run tubewell which remained under repairs most of the time. Women form the major work force for agricultural operations. Unemployment are serious problems of the village. The village has a primary health centre and a veterinary hospital. Gram Sabha, Yuvak Mongal Dal, Anganwadi, Primary School are the few social institutions of the village.

2. Methodology

Data were collected from members (thirty) and executive committee members (eleven) of GAREMA (Gaon Resource Management Association) and self help group during March-April, 1997. The information was also gathered from the project functionaries. The methods and techniques used were personal and group discussion, recorded conversation while discussion and daily diary writing. After data collection, content analysis was done and a case was prepared for clear understanding of factors responsible for facilitating or retarding people's involvement in community activities.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Intervention

In 1993-94, a project called Doon Valley Integrated Watershed Management Project funded by European Commission was launched in ten villages of Doon valley to arrest and reverse the trend of natural resource degradation and regenerate these natural resources (Thapliyal *et al*, 1994). Aduwala village is one of those ten villages.

In April 1994, the project staff visited the village and made door to door contacts to collect some basic data about their socio-economic condition. During this contact they also built rapport with the villagers.

-
1. Senior Scientist (Agricultural Extension), Zonal Coordination Unit, Zone – IV, CSAUAT Campus, Kanpur – 208002
 2. Former Head, Division of Agricultural Extension, IARI, New Delhi - 12

One farmer who was also the president of GAREMA narrated one incident. "On the day, I was atop the mango tree and harvesting mangoes. Then one of the project staff called me down and asked some questions. He asked 'What do you need?' I replied, 'There is no one who does not need anything. First tell me what do you want to do here and why?' He repeated his question, 'What do you want?' Then I questioned back 'What would you give?' Tell me.' He said that he would give mango saplings, chaff cutter, pressure cooker, seeds, implements, etc. I asked whether he would sell them to us. The project staff clarified that you will have to pay only 20 per cent of the cost and 80 per cent will be given as subsidy. He further said that even the 20 per cent cost which you will pay remain in the village in the account of a village institution called GAREMA which will be created in this village. I then replied all his questions."

After these initial contacts, extensive contacts were made by the project team and relevant data were collected through Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) techniques. In the first week of May, the village development plan (VDP) was made at the project office and in the second week of May, the VDP was presented in the general body meeting of all the villagers. The meeting was conducted in the primary school premises in Aduwala hamlet. On the same day, the project staff initiated discussions to form GAREMA and the executive body of GAREMA was constituted.

The farmer (The president of GAREMA) continued his narration about his experience of this meeting as follows -

"Many people gathered in the meeting. The project staff and former Gram Sabha Pradhan and a few village elite were monitoring the proceedings. I sat 10 meters away from the school building. When the project staff initiated choosing people for the executive committee of GAREMA, my name was proposed by Sh. Ilam Chand Sharma, former Gram Sabha Pradhan for the post of President of GAREMA. The project staff then asked the group 'Who is this Banarasi Das, let us see'. Then I got up and I was appointed as President of GAREMA. No single villager came forward to become a part of the executive committee. No one proposed any of their friends' names. Only a few village elite had all the say and they nominated a few villagers for the executive committee. This is how, eight members from Aduwala hamlet and three from Judali hamlet constituted the executive committee."

Meetings of GAREMA were not held regularly and the secretary and a few of his associated used to take decisions on an ad-hoc basis ignoring even the president of GAREMA since he was not assertive and also not very active.

3.2. Revolving Fund

Though the GAREMA had a revolving fund of about Rs. 70,000 deposited in the joint account in a bank the office bearers were not utilizing these funds for providing loans to needy villagers. It is because the president as well as secretary of GAREMA were very skeptical of people for repayment of loans, because of the past experiences of the villagers not repaying the bank loans. There is a lot of mistrust among people.

Thus, in this environment of mistrust and cynicism, all the money collected from the villagers are not being used for any productive purpose defeating one of the major objectives of GAREMA.

3.3. Afforestation

The village has a government reserve forest of about 60 hectares. Under the social forestry component of the project, tree saplings were planted in about 13 hectares of reserve forest in the first year and in about 32 hectares in the second year. The forest guard who watches these areas is paid a monthly salary from the project funds.

Since the plantations were done in the reserve forest, people's participation is minimal. People in general were also not hopeful of getting any personal benefits from this in future. Forest officials keep a strict vigil for fuel wood, fodder, etc. The president said, 'What all we got was a few days of waged employment in digging pits and planting saplings'.

The apathy of the project staff has also resulted in non-participation of women in the village project activities. The routine handling of self-help group formation, absence of project staff in the scheduled meetings and simply promises made to women for their training further alienated the villagers from the project. The self-help group is inoperative with two office bearers' posts not filled since long. The village motivator's post is also vacant for two years, as no women from the village came forward, but in the third year. GAREMA president's school going daughter was appointed as village motivator only for name sake.

4. Conclusion

The project was initiated very casually in this village. There was no effort made to involve people in the process. The villagers are with the project only for immediate gains like, wage earning, etc. They do not have faith in the project as well as in its functionaries.

- The village dynamics of power and caste system in fact, got a boost by allowing village elite to constitute village institutions and manage the way they like.
- Afforestation work, constitution of GAREMA, self help group of women, appointment of village motivator were all taken up by the project staff as a matter of routine and in the end target were met for the sake of it.
- The constitution of executive committee of GAREMA was done without any serious thought and without observing people for leadership qualities and concern for social well being of the village. The office bearers who were entrusted with the project work saw only a few immediate and tangible benefits and were short visioned.
- The villagers could not take initiative and organize themselves. The functioning of GAREMA under the control of a few influential people further reinforced the pawn role of the villagers. The oppressed people of the village were still made powerless and self depreciated resulting in an environment of cynicism.
- The project staff neglected the entry points in the beginning. They made false promises and did not follow up their own decisions. They overlooked the operation of the executive committee. They did every work as a matter of routine and did not facilitate the villagers for utilizing the project activities for socio-economic growth of the village.
- To sum up, the development activities were taken up as part or routine schedule of Doon valley integrated watershed project. In this village the project was launched for the sake of carrying out of routine activities and not with the spirit of stimulating socio-economic growth of village on

sustainable basis. In almost all the activities the villagers were not made partners but only treated as targets for the project. Initiative taken by the project functionaries were directive and prescriptive in approach.

5. References

- Thapliyal, K.C., Lepcha, S.T.S, Kumar, P., Chandra, B Virgo, K.J., and Sharma, P.N. (1994). Participatory Watershed Management in Lesser Himalayas : Experiences of the Doon Valley Project. Paper presented in 8th ISCO at New Delhi from 4-8 December, 1994.
- Watershed Management Directorate. (1994). *Village Development Plan of Aduwala*, Doon Valley Watershed Management Project, Dehra Dun.