

Research Note :

FAILURE EXPERIENCES OF PARTICIPATORY WATERSHED MANAGEMENT—A CASE OF TANGOLIGARH VILLAGE

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In 1993-94, a nine year project 'Doon Valley Integrated Watershed Management Project' funded by European Community, selected ten villages to arrest and reverse the trend of natural resource degradation and regenerate natural resources of Doon valley. Tangoligarh is one of them.

Tangoligarh is a village situated at an altitude of 4000 feet msl in the micro-watershed of Bhidhalna Rao in Rishikesh Division of the Doon valley watershed project. This village is located on Dehra dun-Raipur road, 40 km away from Dehra Dun and 12 km away from Thano town in Raipur C.D. block of Dehra Dun district. The total cultivated area of the village is 32 ha out of which 1.5 ha is irrigated, 25 ha unirrigated and the remaining 5.21 ha semiirrigated. The village has wasteland of about 2.5 ha.

The population of the Tangoligarh village is 170 (49 men, 39 Women, 40 boys and 42 girls) living in 28 families. The habitat of the village is divided into two hamlets at different altitudes, Garh at higher altitude and Tangoli in the valley (14 families are living in each hamlet). Literacy level among men is 64% and among women only 32%. Among the children, about 60% are school going.

The mode of transport available to reach this village is a jeep run from Thano to Dharkot village once a day from nearby Thano town that takes passengers/visitors from Dehra Dun. Otherwise the only way to reach the village is traversing all 14 km on foot. Because of the poor accessibility development staff rarely visit the village. Unemployment and under employment are quite rampant. The village has a primary school and all

other amenities like Middle School, High school, College, Police station, hospitals are available only at Thano town.

The land is mostly rainfed, with undulated topography and stony with boulders, containing badly created terraces. The village has six mutual springs. During summer, these springs dry up leaving the village with acute water scarcity. Cattle are of local breed and the animals are left out for open grazing in forest.

The main crops are grown are paddy, maize, wheat, jhingora (minor millets), ginger, gaagla, chillies, frechbeans, blackgram, rape seed. Women's involvement in agricultural operations, animal rearing, fuelwood collection, fodder collection and home management is overwhelming.

The villagers are dependent on forest for fuel and fodder. Women spend a lot of time in fuelwood and fodder collection, drinking water fetching, etc They are quite busy from 5.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m. in activities like cleaning, cooking, child care, animal care, agricultural work, etc Men mostly go out for daily waged employment, which is generally in scarce.

METHODOLGY

Data were collected from members (twenty eight) and executive committee members (eleven) of Gaon Resource Mangement Association (GAREMA) a village institution created under the project during February, 1997. The techniques of data collection were applied viz., personal interaction, informal group discussion, night meetings, recording of conversation while discussing the facts. Relevant information was also

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derived from the secondary sources of data. The information was also taken to confirm and collect indepth data who knew the subject (the project functionaries) with which the present case was prepared and processed through content analysis for clear understanding of people's participation.

Soon after the commencement of Doon valley watershed project (May, 1994) the project staff camped in Tangoligarh village for 7 days (2nd week of May, 1994) and collected relevant data through the PRA techniques. They lateron prepared a village development plan for Tangoligarh. In the plan the following activities were identified to be carried out in the village to develop good rapport with the villagers :

- (a) Starting a training centre for women and girls for stitching garments.
- (b) Constructing a water harvesting tank and a field channel for irrigation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For the training centre for women and girls, the project failed to find a master trainer, who was willing to go to this remote village. As a result, the project did not take off. Instead they offered the training facility to the village women at Thano Community centre, 14 km away from the village which they refused to avail.

In September, 1994 the project staff again visited the village. They called a meeting in the Primary School premises of the Tangoli hamlet of the village. On the advice of the project functionaries, GAREMA was constituted in this meeting. All the office bearers of the GAREMA infact were nominees of the old Village Pradhan who hailed from Tangoli hamlet. The other hamlet Garh was represented in GAREMA by a nominated Secretary.

The project staff explained to the villagers about their proposal for organising minikit demonstrations and undertake afforestation work with financial assistance from the project. They also advised them to contribute about 20% of the total involvement which could be deposited in Oriental Bank of Commerce located at Thano and this amount could be lateron used for other development activities.

The minikit trials of wheat, peas and some vegetables were lateron laid in some farmer's fields selected by GAREMA executives. The villager's contribution from the beneficiary of minikit trials were also collected and deposited in Savings Bank Account of GAREMA. However, this created heart burning in some of those villagers who were left out in the minikit trial distribution.

Another important activity started in the village was afforestation. For this, the project provided some fund to raise nursery. as per the project norms, a person, a villager was paid Paise 10 for planting one seed in one polythene bag (both seeds and bags were provided by the project). Since soil for filling the bag was to be carried from a distant place this was not considered remunerative by the villagers. Yet they carried this work for two reasons—(i) that it provided them some employment; and (ii) that this provided continued employment for carrying future activities like planting, etc. Further, for planting, the villagers were given a target of 100 saplings every day against a payment of Rs. 35/- per day. Again planting 100 saplings in a day after digging pits in hilly region is too heavy work load. Hence the target was unreasonable and this gave birth to some malpractices. The villagers did not properly plant saplings in order to achieve the target. The result was heavy mortality and ultimate failure of afforestation programme. Not only that this activity was taken up by the villagers purely as a wage earning activity but they also collected lot of grudge during the process against the afforestation programme. The GAREMA President's wife probably because of his proximity with the project staff appointed as watch person for the plantation by the project on payment of Rs. 800/- per month. This caused a lot of resentment in the villagers and particularly amongst those who worked in the afforestation programme on inadequate wage payment (as perceived by them). All this caused a great mistrust in the people for project functionaries. This further lead the villagers to believe that they were underpaid by the project staff for the afforestation work they undertook and about Rs. 8,000/- were misappropriated by th project functionaries.

During implementation of the above two programmes, some contributions were collected from village beneficiaries which was deposited in the GAREMA account opened in the Oriental Bank of Commerce at Thano. Interestingly, the Secretary of GAREMA who represents Garh hamlet was not involved in operating the joint bank account. The account was to be handled by the President and Treasurer of GAREMA who betray to Tangoli hamlet only. This sowed the seed of mistrust in the people of Garh hamlet who took a decision not to cooperate in the project activities to be carried out by GAREMA in future. They also refused to make payment towards their contribution to GAREMA's revolving fund.

As mentioned earlier, construction of water harvesting tank was planned as entry point activity in the village community. But no initiation could be taken towards this largely because Uttarkhand agitation was started in this area in June, 1994. However, after the winter rainy season, they took fresh initiation in January, 1995 to construct water harvesting tank in the village. May be because of shortage of time since the project was to be completed in the same financial year, they did not undertake the detailed survey work etc. and taking into account only the quantum of water discharged in natural fountain, site for water harvesting tank was selected in garh hamlet. Ten villagers were identified as the potential beneficiaries of this tank. The cost estimate for this was made by the project staff and an amount of Rs. 1,500/- was worked out as beneficiary's contribution. They were asked to make this payment either in cash from their pocket or from the wage to be earned by them in working as mutual labour for digging the tank. The beneficiaries pleased with them to make payment for the mutual labour to be contributed by them since they were too poor to live without the wage payment and they promised that they would pay their contribution later on after their earning increases with irrigation water provided to them from the tank. This was accepted and the construction work started. The tank was completed by March, 1995 as per the schedule. But the whole affair again created a big mistrust among the villagers. According to them they were promised a

wage payment of R. 35/- per cubic metre of the tank area. But they were actually paid a daily wage @ Rs. 25/- per labour per day. According to the villagers, the total wage as per promise would be much more than what they were paid and the remaining amount was misappropriated by the project staff. But as per the project staff, the total payable amount was distributed equitably among them which came out to be Rs. 25/- per head per day. Whatever may be the fact, the ground reality was that the villagers considered the project staff as dishonest and exploiter and took the water harvesting tank as an instrument of eating project money by the project staff. They never owned up the tank despite very clean understanding that the water accumulated in the tank was to be utilized by the ten of them for irrigating their crops.

The water harvesting tank became a victim of serious soil erosion in the next monsoon itself. It got completely filled with soil, debris, etc. and the field channel seriously damaged. As per project norms, the maintenance of structure created in the village is the responsibility of the beneficiaries/user group. But in this case, the user group saw this tank as a creation of the project and never owned it up. In fact, they even failed to taste the benefit of this tank since it was soon made dysfunctional by the soil erosion. The user group therefore held the view that this tank was the creation of project and project owes the responsibility of renovating it. The project did not accept this. Under this difference of views, the renovation work could not be taken up in time till the next crop was harvested. The project staff again held a meeting of the villagers and explained and impressed upon the user group that the renovation of this tank was actually not taken up because they did not make their contribution of Rs. 1,500/- initially which was meant for this purpose only. They further prepared that the project can make further investment in renovating the tank provided they pay at least R. 1,000/- or Rs. 1,500/ due to them, either in cash or in kind by contributing their labour. The user group agreed with this proposal committing their contribution in kind. The renovation work started but the user group of farmers again made the same plea with the project staff that they were on the brink of

starvation because of non-payment of the wage earned by them in the tank excavation work. The project ultimately made wage payment to them again extracting another promise that they would make their contribution later on. The tank got renovated and field channels were made functional. The user group started irrigating their crops but they again did not keep their promise to pay their share of contribution to GAREMA. So long as the tank is functional, they will certainly continue to draw irrigation water from it but nobody knows what will happen to the tank if it requires repairs, renovation, etc.

The farmers including the user group continue to blame the project functionaries for making wrong site selection for the tank. They say that this tank carry a perpetual threat of being silted because of its wrong location. They also suggest that this could be saved by creating a *pushta* (embankment) towards the upper elevation of it to prevent soil erosion. But eloquently speaks of the fate of the tank and the user group's orientation towards it. It is in fact a case of project doom.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The development programme initiated in the village was taken up as a casual affair by the Doon valley Integrated Watershed Management Project. The entry point was rightly identified but not pursued. This may be because of a genuine reason but there was no effort made to repair the damage caused due to non-pursuance. The project functionaries entrusted with the responsibility got frequently transferred without any attention paid by the project management to the project proposal and its pursuance.

2. The initial casual approach sowed the first seed of misanthropy about the project in the minds of the villagers which later on grew to a big tree of serious mistrust about the project functionaries labelling them as dishonest and exploiters.

3. The villager's participation in the project

from the very beginning was half hearted. The constitution of GAREMA was allowed to be dominated by village influentials antagonising the village community at large.

4. All the development activities carried out in the village gave an impression to the villagers that they were rarely wage earning opportunities for them. They never considered or made to believe that these activities were for their own enduring well being which they should have embraced and owned up.

5. The villagers instead of taking the project as an opportunity to initiate and foster their economic well being, they turned out to be exploiters of the opportunity for petty wage earning gains. They repeatedly pleaded with the project functionaries projecting their poverty to evade participation in the contribution in the infrastructure created. This completely robbed them of their sense of ownership to the income generating assets created under the project whether it was water harvesting tank or afforestation.

6. The villagers were thoroughly submitted to the rentier dole syndrome and this project also could not empower them to break away from the grip of the syndrome. They could not provide matching grant to the project activities as required. They did not perceive the matching grant in the spirit of claiming ownership of the created assets and tried to evade in on false pretext.

7. Several meetings of the villagers were organized but no effort was made to create cohesiveness among them with unity of purpose so that the community participation in the project could have emerged. The village meetings were conducted in such a fashion that old group rivalry got further strengthened and new group rivalries also emerged. This was in complete contrast of the concept of community participation envisaged in the philosophy with which Doon valley Integrated Watershed Management Project was conceived and constituted.

REFERENCES

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