

PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN DOON VALLEY WATERSHED - LESSONS FOR WASTELAND MANAGEMENT

Lakhan Singh¹, B.P. Sinha² and D.U.M. Rao³

Doon valley a fragile ecosystem with steeply sloping land is inherently unstable and prone to land slides, severe erosion, environmental degradation and ecological deterioration. A development intervention through a project using participatory approach brought to highlight significant lessons that can be applied to wastelands management throughout India. An attempt is made here to summarize these lessons of the dynamics of people's participation.

Doon Valley—The Doon valley occupies 1854 sq. Km area including steep slopes of the lesser Himalayas, deeply incised terraces, gently sloping pediments and steeply dissected terrain of the Shiwalik hills. Elevations range from 500-2500 m from mean sea level. The rural population is dominated by subsistence farmers with low cash incomes, dependent on non-farm labour wages and remittances from migrant family members. Many villages are dispersed and poorly accessible. The area is geo-morphologically unstable, exacerbated by destruction of forest cover, increase in rural population pressure and urban expansion in the valley.

Doon Valley Integrated Watershed Management Project—Doon Valley Integrated Watershed Management Project was initiated in June, 1993 by the Government of Uttar Pradesh with the technical and financial assistance of European Commission. This is a unique project in attempting to try, test and promote a new extension strategy for sustainable management of village resources

by the people themselves through community participation and group actions. The project is also unique for its bold attempt in adopting an integrated approach. Thus the project activities were thought of and well designed to impact intensively on the people and their environment. The project was also extensive in area covering as many as 250 villages all over the Doon valley watershed in Dehra Dun and Tehri Garhwal districts (Thapliyal, *et al.*, 1994).

The project envisaged to arrest as far as possible, reverse the ongoing degradation of the Doon valley ecosystem, improve rural living standards and to ensure positive involvement of rural people in managing their environment.

The basic modality of the project is to ensure that the beneficiaries, in terms of both cash and kind, reciprocate the project interventions so that they not only participate in it, but also own it up. This alone can ensure success to the project's goals.

Research Study—The research investigation (Singh, 1998) was designed to examine how contextual needs of the participatory development approach were determined and how the identified issues were being addressed to by the project. The specific objectives of the project were :

- To study people's orientation towards development agencies and their commitment to their goals of the watershed project.
- To study some selected development actions initiated by the project, their success/failure in eliciting people's participation.

1. Sr. Scientist (Agril Extn), ZCU, Zone IV (ICAR), CSAUA&T Campus, Kanpur-208 002.

2. Former Head & 3. Sr. Scientist (Agril Extn), Division of Agril Extension, IARI, New Delhi -110 012

- To document people's experiences of participating in the project activities.

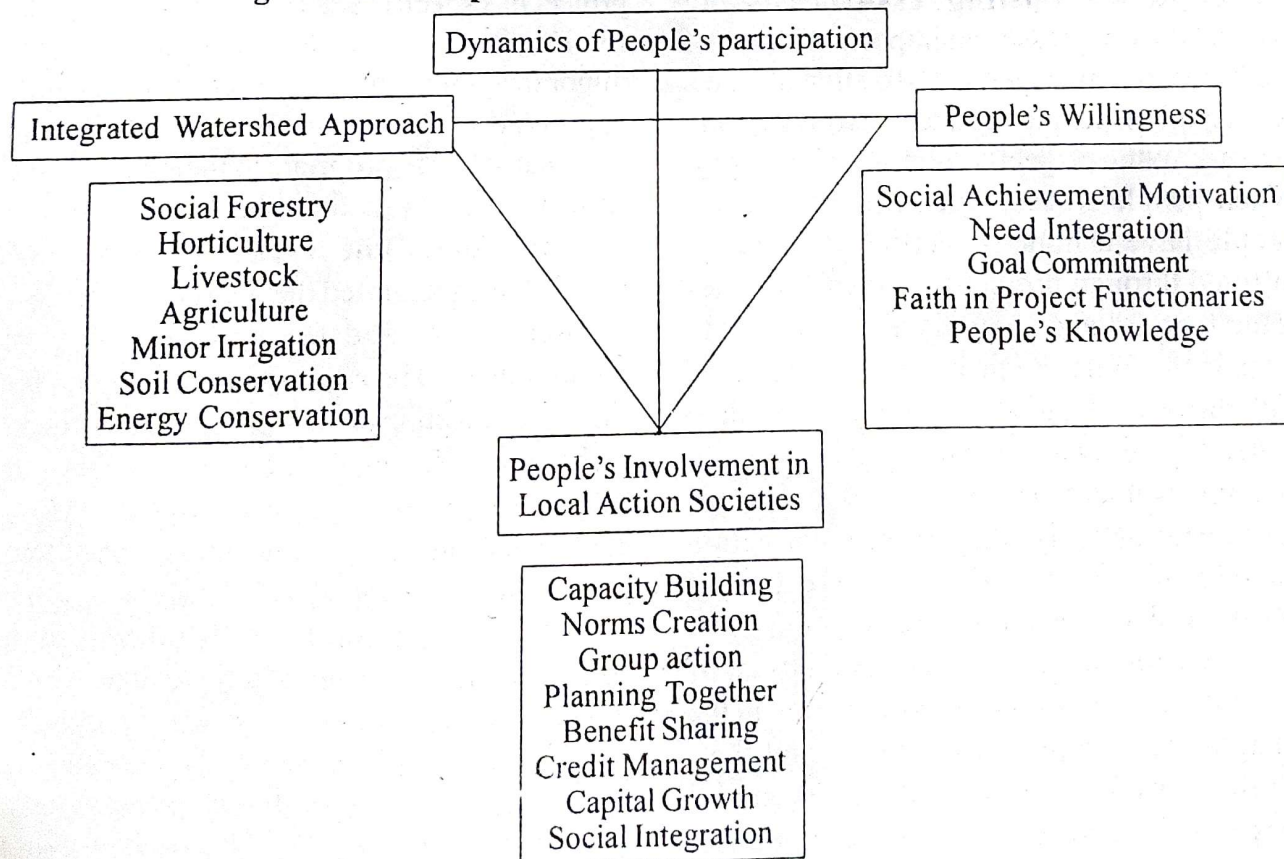
Mode Of Investigation—The study was conducted in six villages of the Doon valley integrated watershed management project. Fifty-one respondents from three villages where the project was found to be successful and fifty-five respondents from three villages where project was less successful formed the sample of respondents for this study. Personal interviews, informal interactions, recorded conversations, projective techniques, scales and case method were used for data collection. Data were analyzed and interpreted and reflected upon to work out results and conclusions.

Dynamics of People's Participation—The term people's participation has become a rhetoric these days. It is used to connote different things to different people and in different contexts. Few of the definitions are: "People's participation is a dynamic group process in which all members of a group

contribute to the attainment of group objectives, share the benefits from group activities, exchange information and experience of common interest and follow the rules and regulations, and other decisions made by the group" (Singh, 1994).

Participation is way of using the economic and social resources of rural people to achieve predetermined targets. Santhanam (1982) defined participation as "commitment on the part of the individual towards all forms of actions by which the individual can 'take part' or 'play a role' in the operation without being conscious of any socio-economic barriers to achieve certain common goals in a group situation." So, in essence, people's participation is a complex process in which people share their social and environmental concerns through processes of village institution building for their socio-economic development. The elements of people's participation and their interrelation have been presented in Fig.1.

Fig.1. The conceptual framework of people's participation



Integrated Watershed Approach—An integration should be adopted based on convergent, participatory planning by local communities and project staff. Villagers rarely see their needs in compartmentalized line agency terms or discipline/subject terms. Any individual action has implications for other components of the overall village land use system, which must be considered. More over, the requirements of each watershed will vary, demanding a far more flexible approach and a rolling programme that can be revised annually.

A clear overall strategy is therefore required at the outset, based on a holistic, integrated approach, that requires local needs as well as wider project policies and that is designed to bring the various components together in a truly integrated manner including livestock, horticulture and energy conservation components along with usual soil conservation, agriculture and minor irrigation components of watershed development.

People's Willingness—Harnessing people's willingness is an important aspect of the watershed management. To elicit people's participation, people need to be motivated and oriented to the project's aims and philosophy. When people's needs get fulfilled or when people have a hope of getting their needs fulfilled through project activities, then they come forward and show their willingness to participate. When their needs get integrated with the project's goals, their commitment to project's goals enhance which again increases their involvement in the project. When people participate actively, they form local action societies for group actions and creation of norms and bylaws for eliciting people's participation in the project activities. If sustainable institutions are to be created in the villages then people's willingness and their whole-hearted commitment to the social causes, and group actions are to be continued.

Social Achievement Motivation—Social achievement motivation in a person, refers to the concern for success in relation to a standard of excellence in some group work/activity or for improvement of quality of group/community/social life. Marked differences were observed between the two sets of villager respondents as far their motivational features are concerned. The successful village respondents were superior to the less successful group which may be one of the reasons for their success. Successful management of an integrated watershed entails that the people work in close cooperation and with a team spirit with an emphasis on societal concerns and benefits. The people with a high degree of social achievement motivation could internalize the project's goals and worked to achieve them.

Faith in Project Functionaries—The level of faith in project functionaries' intentions and abilities has a bearing on people's participation and the success of the project's efforts. The project has specific activities related to social forestry, horticulture, livestock, agriculture, minor irrigation, soil conservation and energy conservation. Those villagers who perceived these activities appropriate to their needs have shown greater faith in project functionaries.

Goal Commitment—The extent to which people have integrated the goals of the project to their needs and requirements is goal commitment. The commitment of people for the goals and philosophy of the project is found to be a significant factor in the success or failure of the project in a village. More committed the people are, more likely that project may succeed in the village.

Self-Fulfilling Faith—Self-fulfilling faith refers to one's own faith in the extent which the needs of the villagers are met through the project and the extent to which the villagers have integrated their needs with project goals. The villagers of successful villages were found

to be more articulate in expressing their needs in line with the project's goals. There was a match between what is available under the project and what the farmers needed.

People's Involvement in Local Action Societies—The Doon valley watershed project had a built-in design to work through local action societies (People's organizations or village institutions) created under the project. Success of the project depends on the people's involvement in these local action societies meant to create a new confidence among villagers for team work and group mobilization. The project has a definite goal of creating new local action societies for community participation so that the villagers themselves manage own common resources in the village.

The villagers' responses were strikingly significant in understanding the concerns people express and the reasons they give for their participation and involvement in local action societies. The data provided valuable insights into '*what works and what does not work*' in eliciting people's participation. Some of the key factors which are responsible to sustain the local action societies are - dedication to social cause, concern for long term benefits, creation of socially acceptable norms regular meetings, collective sharing of responsibilities, equitable benefit sharing, planning together, group decision-making, conflict resolution by arbitration and compromise, transparency in credit management, concern for capital growth, participatory monitoring and evaluation, maintenance of community assets by themselves, etc., through community actions and social integration.

Case Studies and Reflections—An attempt was made to analyze and reflect upon the experiences of success and failure of the project activities through case stories and the lessons drawn are:

- A climate of faith, mutual trust and social harmony built on a strong foundation of

openness, transparency, sharing of collective responsibility, and concern for social well-being got generated.

- Entry points proved to be the precursors for project's success in some villages, where the entry point were well identified and prompt actions taken.
- The village institutions through discussions created socially acceptable norms and operative guides for its democratic functioning which gave legitimacy to these local action societies.
- Social achievement orientation of the villagers also played a key role to gauge people's participation.
- Without understanding the internal dynamics of the village communities, the project cannot be successful. Misanthropy and alienation in some caste-based traditional villages which were already suffering from suspicion and prejudice.
- Project functionaries' concern for empowerment and sensitivity to people's needs and their enabling leadership style promoted among the people a sense of self-worth and ownership of the project-created assets.

Lessons for Wasteland Management—

About 15 per cent of the population is practically landless - they do not own cultivated fields - and 42 per cent do not possess private hay lands to nourish their cattle. They have to buy food and fodder. These poor households generally can only rely on few remittances from educated migrant labour. Mostly they are highly indebted (IGCEDP, 1997).

Usually it holds true that the less chances a family has to take up regular outside work, the more they depend on individually owned common property and open access resources.

Common people are more forced to exploit natural resources even beyond non-sustainability limits - but they are also the most affected by the degradation of those resources. To overcome the problems people are to be

organized, oriented, mobilized towards the conservation and development of the fragile ecosystem of wastelands. There are few lessons learnt from the research study which may be applied and considered for mobilizing local people for the wasteland development through people's participation.

- Integrated approach should be adopted through participatory planning with local people that directly address their felt needs.
- Group actions are needed for development of common property resources. It can be possible by organising people to take initiatives for democratic functioning of village institutions.
- Social achievement motivation level of the people is to be enhanced, so that they can come forward for community actions and work with a team spirit for social concerns.
- Mobilization of enabling type of leadership is essential for the villagers.
- Appropriate technologies should be introduced and promoted in finding solutions

to people's problems with adequate application of rural people's indigenous knowledge.

- Sustainability issues can be addressed only through educating the common people, raising mutual faith and harmony in the village towards eco-restoration and wasteland development.
- A transformation is needed among the villagers for community involvement for shouldering responsibilities and ownership of community resources.
- Internal dynamics of the village community is to be considered for wasteland development and achieve the overall objective of ecological stabilization.

From the lessons learnt, we need to develop a strategy for management of wastelands. Future generations will be safe if we hand over the healthy ecosystem and natural resources to them. This will be an invaluable gift to our children if we could do so. This is a challenging task for each one of us.

REFERENCES

1. IGCEDP (1997) *Global challenges- Local Visions* Indo-German Changar Eco-Development Project, Palampur, Himachal Pradesh, India.
2. Santhanam, M. L. (1982) Human and social factor in People's participation. *Journal of Rural Development* . 1(5): 607-23.
3. Singh, Katar (1994) People's participation in micro- watershed management- A case study of an NGOs in Gujarat. *Indian J. of Soil Conservation*. 22(1-2):271-278.
4. Singh, Lakhan (1998) Dynamics of people's participation in Doon valley watershed project-a study (in Hindi) Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Division of Agricultural Extension, Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi.
5. 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 Dec., 1994 organized by Indian Association of Soil Conservationists, Dehra Dun.

• • •