

Visit to Vikas Sansthan, Kolyari (VSK) field area

Participants: Vishnu Sharma, Kaushik Rawal, Ramkumar, Nana Lal Sharma (VSK), Jessy Thomas (VSK)

The team members interacted with the VSK functionaries to get an orientation about the principles and approaches of the organization for watershed management. The major activity of the organization was to develop the capacities of Self Help Groups (SHGs) in their area. The process of community involvement was through continuous dialogue and reacting to their needs. The idea is to promote a process of self-reliance and confidence. Through these SHGs various developmental activities were undertaken by establishing linkages with the banks, government officials and programs. The activities include water harvesting structures, agriculture, microfinance and livestock production. The organization is also promoting cultivation of “Safed Musli”, a type of medicinal plant, and facilitating market linkages for the product.

One of the traditional water harvesting systems observed in one of the villages viz Amod was the “Haran system”. It is a system where small dam like structure is installed to collect water to a certain height and divert it as gravity flow through unlined channels towards arable land that is in proximity for irrigation. Water is distributed among the landholders equally due to equal land distribution pattern. One characteristic feature of the location was that each farmer who had land in the head region also had equal amount of land in the tail region. This arrangement in the distribution of land helped in fair distribution of water.

The team made a transect walk in the village Kherad to understand the topography, type of water harvesting structures and to interact with the community. Low cost check dams along the main drainage lines were in place that helped recharge the adjacent wells. The impact was clearly visible in terms of increased area under cultivation and the improved awareness among the community members regarding the limited availability of arable land and the requirement for increasing production through better input use.

One of the key reasons for the success of these watershed activities was the active involvement of the community who actively participated in the decision making and construction process. The participation of community was voluntary and based on their needs and hence a sense of ownership prevails.

Regarding experiences of working with government departments, it was felt that it depends on the nature of the official or individual holding the position. In the present situation, they have good working relation with the government

department. But otherwise, it was felt that organizations involved in the projects are treated as receivers rather than as partners. Corruption is also widely prevalent and mostly the departments are interested in NGO collaboration only if they are not in a position to work on their own.

Visit to Prayatna Samiti and SPWD field area

Participants: Viren Iyengar (SPWD), Mohan Dangi (Prayatna Samiti), Vishnu Sharma, Kaushik Rawal, Ramkumar and community members

The major focus was on pastureland protection. Protected area comprised of both common lands and private lands. The protected area was about 3 years old. No grass has been cut so far in the protected commons. Natural regeneration occurred which will be shared among the community in the near future. The team interacted with local community to get their opinion on the activities, their involvement, gender role and livestock activities such as dairy in the village and the initiatives taken by the villagers to protect the lands mainly from encroachment from neighboring villages. This was followed by an in-depth experience sharing by Mr. Mohan Dangi.

Based on the interaction, some of the reasons for social protection that came out are: (1) Prevention of encroachments; (2) Wage employment through labor; and (3) Fodder for livestock holders. Usually interest to protect declines over the period once the encroachments are removed. Therefore, livestock production activities are promoted to maintain demand for fodder and also the interest to continue protection of pastureland.

The process of removing encroachments involves application of a kind of social pressure in the form of convincing of encroachers through the SHG members from within the group and through panchayat meetings (sometimes it also involves conflict with government agencies as it creates unnecessary problems to them). The entire land is not protected but only certain percentage of land is protected. The site selected for protection is usually located on the upper part of the valley and sometimes it is also based on where encroachments occur.

Currently a federation of SHGs belonging to all the villages in the river basin is being proposed (with the respective NGOs coming together). The federation is expected to focus on natural resources in the basin. A map identifying the nallas, pastures, forests etc. in each village, is being planned.

Limitations for self-motivated, self-replication of pastureland protection

- Cost factor (Costs of maintenance etc. are higher than the immediate benefits)
- Village dynamics play an important role
- Some amount of cooperation or handholding is expected from the NGO. Even though over a period of time this may decline but it remains even if only at 10 percent. As long as the organization is working in the same

region, this is possible otherwise it is difficult to spare resources. One alternative to this is to form a network of villages to support themselves.

- Agricultural land versus tree production: It was felt that if agricultural land is increased, interest remains for replication of such protection. For tree production it is not that much. During grazing protection, expectations are only for grass grazing and not much for tree production.

One suggestion was to create different types of models (from experiences of NGOs) and kept before the communities for adoption of model that is suitable to their needs.

Visit to Sahyog Sansthan field area

Participants: Heeralal Sharma (Sahyog Sansthan), Prem kumar (Sahyog Sansthan), Vishnu Sharma, Kaushik Rawal, Ramkumar and community members

In the first village viz. Daikheda, the team witnessed the recharge in the groundwater due to construction of subsurface water harvesting structures along the main drainage line of the rivulet. These type of structures retain the surface flows for a short period and check subsurface flows and facilitates recharge of adjacent wells located downstream. As aptly put by Vishnu Sharma, these structures take into account the geological, hydrological and thermal factors into consideration. The team also had a small meeting with the community that provided insights into activities and processes that made their participation possible. When the community members were asked what they consider as important elements in the implementation of watershed activities, the community members listed out the following: (1) organize community into samitis; (2) have regular meetings; (3) identify interventions that are suitable to the local topography, slope and village needs. The facilitating organization felt that implementation should be broken into phases and then slowly build upon the sequence. It was also felt that trust and confidence in an institution or organization helps the community to participate but then it should not lead the community towards dependency.

In the other village viz. Khedsiya, protection of common lands, watershed management, livestock activities such as dairy were the important activities. Interaction with the local community provided insights into various issues and interventions initiated in their village. When the community was asked what made them participate in the activities, they replied that need was the driving force. Severe water shortage forced the community to think of alternatives for their betterment. Initially the community wanted a tubewell dug but the facilitating NGO made a survey of the village topography with the help of hydrologists and convinced the villagers that there is no proper aquifer in their area and that watershed activities were the best alternative for them. This initiated the process of constructing soil and water conservation structures. Gradually the community got into livestock production activities by purchasing buffaloes through SHG and bank linkages. This also motivated them to protect and develop their common

pasturelands. Once their immediate needs were fulfilled, the community started to look into the educational aspects of their children. Since there was no school in the village, the villagers started their own school and fought for government recognition of the school. This itself is a big step towards self development.

The next visit was to the Gangeswar watershed area in the Bhinder block of Udaipur district. The watershed has an area of about 900 hectares comprising of 4 villages. Majority of the locals belong to the tribal community with no stable income source. The area is characterized by undulating terrain with a main drainage in the form of river Gomti. As is common in these areas, the river/rivulets are seasonal. The watershed activities are currently underway. But the important points for learning is the process in which watershed interventions were undertaken. It took about 1.5-2 years to prepare the community to organize themselves and to get their willingness to undertake some of the activities. The community needs were identified, land utilization pattern in the watershed was put up in the form of a map and socioeconomic profiling of the community was also undertaken in all the 4 villages. Next, the watershed structures (small, medium and large structures along the main drainage line) were planned systematically in the form of a map. An engineer was hired to draw out where different structures would go and also color-coding was done to follow the progress in the completion of the structures. There was good coordination with the government department especially with regards to the type of construction activities to be undertaken as part of the Food for Work program. Instead of building inconsequential structures, the government officials were guided to construct some of the masonry checkdams along the main drainage and a good integration of watershed program and a specific government program was seen.

Some of the key points as shared by Heeralal Sharma on the watershed activities and rural development in general are:

- Preparation of the community to organize and develop accountability towards the resources is extremely important and it takes about 1-2 years to get to that point.
- It is first advisable to test the community in its capacity or willingness to take initiative in undertaking / organizing its priorities and also its willingness to undertake some of the activities. If the community does not take initiative, then, it is better to withdraw from the location even if temporarily.
- Voluntary organization means to build the capacities community or SHGs to undertake their own works or planning process and develop confidence and not simple provision of relief to community.
- Treat poor as an asset and not as a liability in the society and create a positive social capital
- Regarding collaborations and linkages from their field experiences including experiences from PAWDI, some of the constraints identified in the process are:

- Technological recommendations were often not suited to local conditions
- Differences in opinions/ideologies and approaches among the stakeholders (government, NGOs and among NGOs)
- Absence of decision-makers in the government departments at meetings
- Most often timely inputs are not available due to poor understanding of the field situation by the department.
- Lack of proper feedback system in the process

Visit to Action for food production (AFPRO), Udaipur Office

Mr. Datta, Unit Manager, AFPRO, Udaipur, shared information and learnings regarding their experiences in working with NGO partners and government. Some of the important points pertaining to linkages are:

- Strategies to improve linkages with government department: AFPRO provides services to the Ministry of Rural Development of the Union Government in the District Level Monitoring Programme. Their experiences during the process, some of the constraints and solutions to overcome them were shared. For example, one way for successful collaboration was to actively involve the key decision making personnel in the department.
- They consider enhancement of community awareness as key to channel government programs
- One of the roles of AFPRO is to perform that of an escorting role for other NGO partners where AFPRO builds the capacities of the NGOs in undertaking a project (eg. helps them at various stages from developing the proposals to implementing the project).
- They also provide donor linkages to the smaller NGO partners