

The CE members, Mr. Vishnu Sharma, Mr. Kalyan Shetti, Mr. Kaushik Rawal and Mr. Ramkumar visited Utthan's field area, as was part of the CE subactivities.

MAHITI Rural Development Center, Dhanduka Taluk, Ahmedabad District, Gujarat

Location

The location is the Bhal area of Gujarat, which is a resource poor region on the coastal belt and characterized by acute water scarcity through out the year, saline soils and prone to natural calamities.

About Mahiti

Mahiti is an organization that evolved from the local women residing in the nearby villages. It originated as part of Utthan's work but after realizing the capacities and abilities of the members, it was registered as an autonomous non-profit development organization in 1994 and Utthan wound up its activities in the area and Mahiti took over.

Approach to work

The focus is on developing collective leadership so that people can carry on and manage the process there after.

Focus areas

Micro finance, Promoting village level institutions, Social justice, Health care and sanitation, Disaster mitigation and Networking and policy advocacy.

Work

During annual meetings it was decided to take loans from among themselves (from a group with surplus savings) rather than taking from an external agency at a higher interest rate. This spurred the idea to federate.

Till date, Mahiti successfully organized the village women groups into an Area Level Women's Savings and Credit Cooperative in the Ahmedabad region covering 50 villages. Similar process has been initiated in Bhavnagar region covering 25 villages.

Question of linkages

Regarding the question of associating with national banks and other institutions, concerns about complex procedures and corruption were identified as the major constraints that keep them away from such linkages. After a brief discussion, it was also felt that linkages with institutions rather than individuals have better scope for stable linkages.

They are in the process of linking up with government scheme (Total Sanitation Program) where government provides subsidy to build structures for below poverty level families and the organization would provide loan for the rest of the expenditure.

Reason for successful collaboration within the members

The groups worked based on trust. When asked how this trust evolved in such a heterogeneous group, they explained that individual trust slowly transformed into community level trust over a period of time. Trust based on social issues translated into financial trust. Small successes and



General topography of the area: Flat, water logged with predominantly saline alkaline soils. In the backdrop, bunding can be seen as part of soil and water conservation measure.



Interaction with the members of Mahiti



At Mahiti center with Devubhen, Executive trustee

results one or two villages had a cascading effect on neighboring villages over a period of time (5-15 years).

Meeting with Utthan's staff at Bhavnagar

The CE team interacted with the Mr. Bharatbhai, Heerabhai, Sangeethaben and Mansukbhai who have rich experiences in the area. They shared their experiences and challenges in tackling the problems and the history behind the village level organizations that evolved. They provided a brief idea of how drinking water is managed by the communities and specifically involvement of women in forming Pani Samithis, associations that take over the role of managing and distributing the water. They also explained the backdrop in which these samithis evolved about Water and Sanitation Management Organization (WASMO).

About WASMO: WASMO was set up in 2002 as an autonomous institution by the Government of Gujarat, to facilitate communities to demand, build, operate, maintain and manage their in-village drinking water supply and sanitation facilities. It works in partnership with more than 34 NGOs that work as Implementation Support Agencies in program villages. Pani samithis were formed as a sub-committee of the panchayat that is responsible for the in-village drinking water and sanitation systems.

Pani samithi at Neswada

- Pani Samithi is a subcommittee of the Panchayat and president of the samithi is the sarpanch. The composition is 4 women and 3 men.
- Fund disbursement is from WASMO→Panchayat→Pani Samithi
- Institutional understanding involved a MoU signed between Sarpanch and WASMO executive director to transfer responsibility to Pani Samithi. Account is in the name of Pani Samithi and not Panchayat.
- Pani samithi Members undertook pre-construction training
- Strict no to heavy machines for digging trenches for laying pipelines
- Constant monitoring of construction activities by the members
- In general, role of Pani Samithi is that of:
 - a watch dog
 - Pressure group
 - Involvement in implementation
 - Monitoring



Pani Samithi at Avania

Avania is a much bigger village as compared to Neswada with about 450 households and 12 different castes and provides a different perspective. The Pani samithi had completed the construction activities and water is supplied efficiently. Water supply has progressed from initial distribution through stand posts to taps in individual houses. They are also planning to introduce water charges based on volume rather than a standard rate but it may take time to arrive at a consensus.

Most of the decisions and conflict resolutions happen in the gram sabhas. There are two women self help groups, mainly centered on health issues. Role of women was very limited in the decision-making processes as compared with Neswada. But based on the history and culture of the place, the women feel that the change has been significant.



Watershed committee at Chaya village, Ghoga Tehsil, Gujarat

The watershed consists of six other villages along with Chaya and the water conservation structures were constructed along the main drainage simultaneously. It took about a year for the villagers to get convinced and form the watershed committee. A needs assessment was undertaken through baseline surveys and site identification for check dams and bunds was based on slope and other scientific information. Watershed committee and Pani Samithi consist of the same members.

Even though the watershed was treated as a whole, the villagers maintained their individual identities regarding the specific activities and decisions. The common lands and village boundaries were clearly demarcated and therefore conflicts with the other villages were minimized. The impact was felt in terms of increased irrigated area. There were also increased number of borewells and no specific restrictions exist on borewells.

Regarding operation and maintenance during the post-project period, repairs to the structures and desiltation were undertaken through contributions and own labor.

Reflections of the CE members

- It is important to develop a resource base of persons and institutions and to create a platform at the village level for convergence of institutions (Utthan is in the process of creating area resource groups through various training activities).
- Linkages of SHG federations (such as Mahiti) with national banks is important for sustainability of community institutions and training activities for the officers to understand and work with the communities is also an area for focus.
- Clarity on responsibilities and issues pertaining to gender balance, equity and linkages should happen prior to the implementation of a project.
- Fate of institutions created, beyond project period, is also an important issue to be considered in the watershed plus activities (apart from livelihood activities)
- Facilitation during transfer of leadership in the institutions and committees is an important factor for transparency and smooth working of these institutions.

Meeting at Water and Sanitation Management Organization (WASMO)

The learning group members had a meeting with Mr. R.K. Sama, Project Director, WASMO. He shared his experiences and views regarding the project, its partnership, successes and constraints. He was of the opinion that the requirements for supply of water were from outside source, supply of healthy water and community participation.

Another view was that there will always be a limit to the quantity of water supplied since water requirements will keep rising due to many other activities (for example, water for livestock drinking purposes in the stalls), it is important that there should be dual supply sources (source within the village complemented by external source). There is also a view that drinking water should be separated from water for other domestic purposes while estimating the water demand.



According to Mr. Sama, the basic elements for success of the project were trust among the partners and rules of genuine partnership. The agreements (within the staff, with NGOs and the community) were in principle rather than any paper arrangements.

Meeting at Utthan, Ahmedabad

Ms. Nafisa explained the challenges in bringing together communities spread across four different villages in a river basin onto a common platform to interact and discuss their problems collectively. This finally led to a kind of arrangement or agreement based on the demands of the downstream farmers, whereby the farmers in upstream areas restricted their water use and made some changes in their cropping pattern (reduced area under water intensive cash crops). This in itself could be a case that describes the process of bringing together different villages and form rules that create balance between upstream and downstream areas.

She also stressed on the importance of legal sanctity of the agreements. Such legal binding would keep the rules in place and helps in compliance at a later stage. One such case/story could be of 'Mittimari pani samithi members' from Utthan's field area.

Outputs planned

Case studies: It was tentatively planned to broadly divide the existing ideas on case studies into three sub-themes: (i) Collaborations/partnerships of institutions during project management or project implementation; (ii) sustainability during post-project period; and (iii) equity issues. Some other sub-themes may change or new ones may be added at a later stage depending on the type of cases documented. Each sub-theme could be a booklet or a folder with short cases. The design and format are yet to be decided.

Under the sub-theme, collaborations/partnerships of institutions..., the following could be the key questions answered in the case studies:

- Why do we need collaborations?
- Under what situations do collaborations work?
- What are the conditions for successful collaborations/partnerships? (Financial, Administrative, physical)
- What is the type of flexibility among the partners?
- How is the clarity in the roles and responsibilities in the collaboration/partnership?
- How is the element of trust in the partnership?
- Key lessons

For the sub-theme, sustainability during post-project period, the key question could be how the institutions formed evolved or adapted to changing objectives and focuses?

Under equity issue, social, gender, economic equities and rights issues addressed through the community institutions and self help groups would be looked into and how the concerns of the weaker sections of the society were taken into account in the decision making processes.

The case studies planned would cover Karnataka, Gujarat and Rajasthan. The cases can be short (2-3 pages) or longer version 10-12 pages depending on the choice of respective members.

Story format: It was also proposed to record in story format wherever possible. One example is a narration by Devubhen of Mahiti, about evolution of grassroot level organization. Another could be on the adaptation of a village level institution to changing focus (how an institution created for a project was also used to take care of other project or issues due to improved capacities).

Another could be from Rajasthan (Sahyog sansthan and any other case) on the community involvement and planning in the watershed development activities and the process of linkages established between the local community, NGO and the government department.

It was felt that the first drafts of the case studies and any other outputs could be shared and discussed in the second week of October during a field visit to Karnataka that is tentatively planned.