Capitalization of Experiences: Water, Land and People in India: Important Lessons

The main objectives of Capitalization of Experiences: Water, Land and People in India (CE-WLP) were to access lessons across regions and evolve strategies to institutionalize and scale up success factors, understand the constraints and challenges in water management and generate knowledge that can contribute towards improved program design and policy dialogues. Sharing of knowledge and lessons learned among the learning group members formed the basis for the CE process. Innovative methods such as a narrative story telling process was adopted for sharing of experiences and identifying focus areas. Lessons that emerged from the process not only pertain to the thematic domain but also to the entire CE-WLP process itself.

A. Lessons pertaining to the focus areas under the broad subject of "Institutional dimensions of water resource management"

The focus areas identified based on the story telling method by the learning group members for further deepening of experiences included: Rules, regulations and systems for improved water resource management; Bridging information asymmetries to strengthen community organizations; Models for convergence, linkages and collaborations among institutions (for sustainability and upscaling); and experiences of watershed development for growth. The lessons based on the subgroup members experiences, interactions and discussions include:

Focus area 1: Rules, regulations and systems for improved water resource management
- In general
    - Common properties are best taken care of by the common people
    - Strong community organization can be the basis for local priority setting
    - Most often participation in development processes (coming together and being a part of a process) itself leads to empowerment
    - Empowered communities can negotiate with multiple stakeholders to protect their interests and also plan for their future
    - Promotion of leadership that is efficient, transparent and accountable to the common people
    - Overarching framework of human rights and gender empowerment, as well as instruments like rules and regulations, helps in inclusion of vulnerable, increasing their power of negotiation
    - Gender sensitiveness means a balanced approach that is inclusive of both women and men

- Social regulations and adherence to these norms important for management of natural resources and common property resources such as groundwater, tank water, common pasturelands
- Village level institutions are good grooming ground for prospective leaders
- Investments in human and institutional development can lead to sustainable outcomes much beyond project duration
- Regarding groundwater management
  - It is time to shift focus from development to management of water resources by improving water management mechanisms to address quantity and quality issues associated with competition for a finite resource such as groundwater
  - A paradigm of water sharing enables food and income security during water scarce situations
  - Community level agreements form the basis to put in place water sharing systems
- Regarding tank management
  - Watershed development must be tank centric, radiating from the water body outwards and integrating management of soil, water and forests.
  - Traditional tank management systems have existed to ensure food security. Modern tank management institutions can be built on these systems.

Groundwater management: From competition to water sharing

Madirepalle is a village located in Ananthapur district of Andhra Pradesh, a semi-arid region with annual rainfall of less than 500mm. Due to frequent droughts farmers started relying more and more on groundwater for irrigation. Water intensive crop such as paddy was the main crop. The situation became grave when borewells started to fail. Farmers competed with each other to drill borewells to greater depths. Distance between two borewells at some places was only few meters from each other. Debts increased due to failed tubewells. This laid the basis for collective decision by the village water committee to adopt certain social regulations and sharing of groundwater use.

Message: Community level agreements form the basis to put in place water sharing systems. These agreements are the result of experiences from a specific problem in a location. But they do provide indicators towards larger groundwater governance issues.

Focus area 2: Bridging information asymmetries to strengthen community organizations

The main focus was on demystification of technologies and provision of technical skills and information to the community. Some lessons:
- Given space and encouragement, technical complexities can be demystified and managed by the communities

- The notion that women and illiteracy are the stumbling block for undertaking various activities (financial and technical) can be dispelled through appropriate training. Illiteracy need not be a barrier.
- Simple techniques help in making monitoring and management of intangible resources easier for communities
- A combination of measurement devices provides for improved information for farmers to make cropping decisions
- Capacity building activities in one program can benefit and have impact in many other ways and programs (generation of positive externalities)
- Smaller scale interventions, conceptualized by the local communities, can keep external interest groups (contractors) away and at the same time have larger impacts at local level and better ownership

---

Towards empowerment: Story of Devaki

Devaki is a landless laborer from Sugur village, Gulbarga district in the state of Karnataka. She belongs to the oppressed and downtrodden social group (Dalit). She came into the watershed development activities as a daily wage laborer. One such activity was to dig trenches with specific dimensions. Her work was very precise and she was also able to guide other laborers. This caught the attention of the watershed committee members. The members motivated her to take construction related trainings to understand measurements and other technical details. She has now become the community technical resource person who provides guidance for constructing soil and water conservation structures. She also commands respect and confidence of the community members irrespective of caste status.

Message: Given space and encouragement, technical complexities can be demystified and managed by communities.

Focus area 3: Models for convergence, linkages and collaborations among institutions (for sustainability and upscaling)

- At local village level
    - Enhanced organizational capacities of the community in Village Development Society (VDS) can be transferred to the larger Panchayat system
    - Integration of institutions for mainstreaming of development activities within CBOs for sustainability of activities undertaken as part of various programs
    - Common platform created in the form of gram sabha for involving all the members of the community in decision-making processes especially during the selection of beneficiaries for development programs

- Discussions in the Gram Sabhas on the plan, progress and other project related issues openly ensured that information and decision making on all aspects including finances was in the public domain
- Participation can be understood in many ways. Despite cultural limitations, women can participate and exert their choices through various means (through husbands, sons). Type or extent of participation (of women) may differ among the villages depending on socio-cultural factors but as long as transparency and accountability are maintained in the decision-making processes (through grama sabhas), it is possible to achieve positive results.
- Preparedness of the community to own up the responsibility to manage and maintain

---

From a participant to an elected representative: Story of Khattal Saab

Khattal Saab from Kodli village in Karnataka state in India was an ordinary member of the Village Development Society (VDS), a society formed to undertake watershed development activities under the Indo-Swiss Participatory Watershed Development Program. As part of VDS, he learnt about the functioning of institutions (administrative and financial systems). He worked diligently and took keen interest in various activities. This helped him to gain the confidence of the community. He then contested in the elections for the larger panchayat (a constitutional local governance entity consisting of a cluster of villages). He won the election and is now a panchayat leader. The trainings and experiences that he gained in VDS are now helping him to make decisions and in running the panchayat in a systematic manner.

Message: Village level institutions are good grooming ground for prospective leaders and thereby establish linkages with larger governing systems.

- The key elements for successful collaborations among institutions (Government - NGO) are trust, agreements that are respected, sharing of information, roles and responsibilities and flexibility shown by the institutions to accommodate.

- Requirements for successful collaborations :
  - Transparency is a necessary condition
  - Role and responsibility should be defined clearly
  - Written and documented communication and agreements ensures accountability
  - A clear understanding of strategy and goals amongst stakeholders is necessary

Focus area 4: Experiences of watershed development for growth

- Even small interventions (value addition) can have a multiplier effect when the intervention suits the needs and available local resources are properly utilized (for example, NRM based livelihood activities)
- *Role of NGO/project implementing agency in the post-project period:* The facilitator should be in touch with the communities even after the project period through visitors, trainees, participating in the workshop watershed villages, melas so as to provide stimuli and support for the community based organizations created in the project period to adapt and grow with new opportunities.
- Integration of livestock and farm based livelihood strategies such as horticulture into watershed activities
- Establishing linkages with various institutions / service providers so that the community can avail of services required.

NRM based livelihoods

Burrakayalakota is a village in Chittoor district in the state of Andhra Pradesh consisting of about 450 households. Reddys and Dudekula form the dominant communities. Reddys are usually landed community and the Dudekula are mostly landless laborers who depend on daily wage employment. The area is characterized by large number of tamarind trees, which are found both on private and common lands. The raw tamatind from these trees used to be auctioned off to traders from outside.

One of the villagers while on a visit to neighboring village noticed a tamarind processing activity (converting raw tamarind to pressed cakes). She mooted the idea in the SHG meeting and availed credit for the same. The minimum profit margin was about Rs.3.25 per kg. It also provided about 10 months of employment. The number of households depending on this enterprise increased from 3 in 1999-2000 to 28 in 2005-06.

Message: Easy access to low interest credit and small interventions (value addition to tamarind) that utilize locally available resulted in a viable livelihood alternative to the landless.

B. Lessons from the CE-WLP process itself

Apart from other objectives, building alliances and networking was also looked as a positive offshoot from the whole CE-WLP process.

A broad assessment
- CE provided a platform for different practitioners to come and work together
- A positive environment was created in the sense it provided an openness to discuss and share information

- Innovative methods such as story telling method provided scope for an informal setting that provided a base for active interaction and engagement of the members for the entire duration of the CE process
- The areas identified for focus evolved from the collective experience of the members
- Provided learnings that could be incorporated into the members own field areas
- Cross exchanges proved to be useful to the members in terms of broadening their knowledge base
- Created a network of individuals and there has been to an extent a perspective of contributing towards the focus areas rather than towards an organization.

Platform meeting on tank management for cross learnings

Tank irrigation systems of India are centuries old. Unfortunately, performance of most of these systems has been on a decline due to improper management and policies. The Government of Karnataka (GoK) had initiated a process of reforms in tank management with World Bank support that aims to improve rural livelihoods and reduce poverty by developing and strengthening community-based approaches to improving and managing selected tank systems. A similar project is now being proposed in Andhra Pradesh.

During a joint field visit by the members of the CE-WLP process, it was proposed to have a platform meeting in order to learn from the experiences of NGOs who were involved in the Karnataka Community Based Tank Management project. As a next step to this process of learning and sharing, the CE-WLP subgroup (concerned with rules, regulations and management systems in water management) organized a small meeting at Hyderabad, that brought together individuals and organizations involved and interested in tank management. Experiences of from the tank management project in Karnataka were shared with Andhra Pradesh.

Constraints and limitations
- Participation of all members at all times proved to be difficult due to hectic schedules of the members and also due to large geographical distances.
- The amount of participation and involvement by the members also differed. Some times the since the members held key responsibilities in their respective organizations, it became difficult for them to give their full attention to the commitments towards CE. Participation by the same individual at all times has its own difficulties (question of participation of the organization or the individual may be of relevance)
- Bringing in government officials onto a common platform is also a challenge given the procedures and changes that occur in the government systems. In spite of these constraints, we were successful in having active participation.

Outlook for CE

- Harvested lessons complement various other activities and studies (sharing observations at other national workshops and linking or add value to other CE like experiences)
- The relevance of focus areas is to a wide range of resource management apart from water resources
- The CE process builds a kind of knowledge capital that can be tapped into anytime in the future, as it forges a kind of network within the subgroups.