

Samyukt Mahila Samiti: Powerful Institutional Tool to Make Women Prominent in the Watershed Development

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Context

- Women are mostly excluded from resource ownership and decision making process of developing and managing natural resources and services.
- Samyukt Mahila Samiti (SMS) emerged as a powerful policy tool which provide the institutional space to women for mobilising and uniting them for addressing their concerns.
- This paper highlight the need of integrating SMS strategy in over all watershed development and management approach in India.

Women Participation in Watershed Development

- **Watershed development-** a potential engine for agricultural growth and development and one of the largest single development initiatives in India
- **The key provisions about women's participation-** reservation of seats to them in village level institutions and mandatory formation of women's SHGs.
- These **provisions proved either insufficient or inadequate** to involve them in decision-making processes to address their concerns.

The Brief History of SMS

The Problem-

- In watershed project, men were taking most of the decisions whereas women were doing a large percentage of the hard labour work.
- Benefits of watershed development was adding disproportionately to women's workload and potentially increasing their distress.

Towards Solution-

- Mainstreaming gender through federating SHGs into SMS to make women proactive in watershed projects.

The Process of SMS Formation...

- Formation of SHGs in the second or third month of the project cycle.
- SHGs are generally composed of 13-20 members.
- WOTR strongly focus to involve at least one woman from each family in SHGs.

- Each SHG nominates one or two of its members to represent it on the SMS
- The SMS chooses a president, vice president, treasurer and secretary from its members, and the members and leaders rotate regularly.



The Process of SMS Formation

- **Financial Assistance-** Rs. 60000 during the initial phase and five percent of the project cost in full implementation phase for activities for improving the quality of life and for reducing the women's drudgery.
- **Training and capacity building-** Continuous process during the project cycle tailored to their needs
- It provide **institutional space and opportunity** to women to build their capacities and confidence by providing trainings and exposures to them.
- This platform helps women to address their concerns such as domestic water, health and sanitation, nutrition, etc,.

Field Experiences...

Case Study 1: Bhoyare Khurd, Ahemadnagar

- First time in the history of the IGWDP SMS in Bhoyare successfully implemented the micro watershed.
- This initiative proved the benchmark to women in surrounding villages to come forward in Watershed projects.
- SMS helped many families through the microfinance

Case Study 2: Hairkani Samyukt Mahila Samiti, Kachner Tanda 2, Auranagabad

- The SMS through the entry point activity initiated *Gramswachhata Abhiyan* (Total Sanitation Campaign) in their village.
- Constructed bathrooms and installed solar home light system.
- Laid a drinking water pipeline to each household. Now each household is getting water from private tap.



Field Experiences...

Case Study 3: Gadiwat IGWDP, Auranagabad

- Using the women development fund (Rs60000) SMS installed the flourmill unit in one of the hamlet of the village
- Women were forced to fetch drinking water from the common well. Utilising amount made available in FIP of Rs.250000 SMS implemented drinking water scheme in village

Case Study 4: Kachner Tanda 6, Auranagabad

- The case of Suman depicts how SMS helped to boost the women's confidence and changed their quality of life.
- Suman took a loan of Rs.5000 from the SMS and started a grocery shop in the village. Currently Suman get a weekly net profit of Rs.4000.

Field Experiences



Case Study 5: Wankute Village, Sangamner, Ahemadnagar

- For drinking water women and children were forced to cross sloppy hill with heavy water pots on their heads
- It was time consuming, risky and extremely painful exercise
- With active community participation (SMS and VDC) constructed the dug well for drinking water in this hamlet
- Women and children escaped from painful exercise of climbing the sloppy hill with heavy water pots.
- Women purchased solar lamps, hot water and smokeless Chulhas to reduce their dependence on wood



Recommendations

- For meaningful inclusion and participation of women, it is not necessarily needed to blindly 'include' women in larger and mixed village level watershed institutions and committees. There is very less comfortable space to express women.
- Separate spaces in form of sub-institutions or sub-committees (such as SMS) with financial autonomy and well-defined decision-making process are necessary for raising voices of women in watershed programs.
- With few relevant and appropriate modifications the SMS should be integrated as an institutional tool in Integrated Watershed Management Program in India.



Thanks

