

88a. GENDER ISSUES IN WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT IN INDIA

Vasudha Lokur Pangare

88b. WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT—CREATING SPACE FOR WOMEN

Marcella d'Souza

Central and State governments, donors and NGOs have all been involved in implementing watershed programmes in India. Although the details vary with different projects, the basic institutional structures are similar. Money flows to a project implementing agency (either a government or non-government organisation) which works closely with a village-level body—a watershed committee—to design and implement project activities. Evidence suggests that certain social groups have consistently been marginalised by watershed development projects. These include the landless, families in the upper levels of catchments, marginalised tribal groups and women. The two papers in this volume assess the level of involvement of women in watershed projects and describe the impact of watershed development on their roles and responsibilities. Both papers emphasise that unless women play a central role in the decision-making process, the long-term sustainability of development efforts is threatened. Paper 88a reviews a number of government and non-government projects in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. It argues strongly that unless we progress from a view where women are treated as a 'disadvantaged group' to a point where they are treated as integral members of the community, development efforts will continue to sideline women's concerns. It emphasises the need to ensure that watershed development activities are compatible with women's livelihood strategies. Paper 88b looks in detail at a German-funded project in Maharashtra. It advocates the need for a sectoral approach to meeting women's needs. Both papers provide practical suggestions on how to ensure that watershed development programmes respond to the concerns of women.

Vasudha Lokur Pangare is a specialist in rural development and gender issues. She can be contacted at:
OIKOS Consultants
4 Sai Krupa 34/4
Prabhat Road, Pune 411 004 INDIA
Fax: 91 212 344 075 Email: inrem@jwbbs.com

Dr Marcella D'Souza is the Coordinator of the Women's Development Sector of the Indo-German Watershed Development Program. She can be contacted at:
Watershed Organisation Trust (WOTR)
"Paryavaran" Behind Market Yard
Ahmednagar 414 001
Maharashtra INDIA
Fax: 91 241 343 312 Email: wotr.anagar@gems.vsnl.net.in

The Agricultural Research and Extension Network is sponsored by the UK Department for International Development (DFID)
The opinions expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect those of DFID.
We are happy for this material to be reproduced on a not-for-profit basis. The Network Coordinator would appreciate receiving details of any use of this material in training, research or programme design, implementation or evaluation.



Network Coordinator: Cathryn Turton Assistant Coordinator: John Farrington Administrator: Helen Suich

88b. WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT—CREATING SPACE FOR WOMEN

Marcella d'Souza

Abstract

A previous article, "Gender and Watershed Development", published in the July 1997 edition of the AgREN newsletter, described the impact of watershed development on women's lives and on gender relationships. It indicated that while watershed development does initially lead to an increase in women's workloads, it can also offer them unique opportunities to improve their economic situation as well as enhance their status in society. Specifically, watershed development has a notable impact on employment and income opportunities, food security, fodder, fuel and water availability and access to credit. Socially, impacts relate to migration rates and the status and self-confidence of women. The degree to which impacts are positive varies in time (with benefits becoming evident three to four years after initiation of programmes) and the extent to which development plans and allows for women's empowerment.

This paper focuses on some options for mitigating the negative impacts of watershed development and to enable women to become more self-reliant and more self confident. It addresses two key issues:

- *How to capitalise on the opportunities offered and mitigate some of the key problems arising from watershed development activities; and*
- *The approach, the organisational framework and mechanisms adopted by the Indo-German Watershed Project to create space for women in watershed development.*

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper draws on experiences from watershed development projects being implemented by the Indo-German Watershed Development Programme (IGWDP) in Maharashtra, India. The majority of watersheds are characterised by the following conditions:

- they are 500 to 1,500 hectares in size and are located in drought-prone areas, with an annual rainfall ranging from 150 to 800 mm;
- hills and wastelands have sparse vegetative cover and are mainly barren and degraded;
- agriculture is largely rainfed and the main crops are coarse cereals.

The projects have the following characteristics:

- they are implemented by those living within the watershed, through a village watershed committee (WC) supported by an NGO. The WC is a representative body nominated through consensus by the *gram sabha*¹. Rehabilitation is planned and implemented using external and local expertise;
- a ridge to valley approach is followed with an emphasis on soil and water conservation and biomass development. Controlled grazing and a ban on tree felling are enforced in project areas;
- total time taken for project implementation, including a capacity building phase, is approximately five to six years.

There is no denying that watershed development, at least in the initial years, does lead to an increase in women's workloads. Nevertheless, women indicate their willingness to shoulder these extra burdens, provided it leads to the fulfillment of four basic needs:

- access to a reliable source of safe drinking water within a reasonable distance and improvement in health and hygiene status;
- access to a steady flow of income to ensure food, fuel and financial security. The latter is especially important in times of crisis—for instance if abandoned by their husbands or widowed;
- a future for their children through education;
- participation in household decision-making (in decisions regarding utilisation of funds, upbringing of their children, farming decisions) and in village affairs and acceptance in and respect of society.

This paper focuses on some possibilities for mitigating the negative impacts of watershed development on women. Sections two to six provide some practical examples of options and mechanisms for capitalising on opportunities created by watershed development efforts. Sections seven and eight outline the IGWDP approach to 'creating space' for women in watershed development.

Laxmibai of Kasare village, Ahmednagar district (project completed in 1995):

Before watershed work, we had no work in summer—we would rest long under the trees—but we were worried and unhappy because we did not know whether we would be able to get by the coming days securely. Now however, we have no time as we have regular work, both from the project and increased farm production. We don't mind this since we now have a sense of security of food and income and also the possibility of making a future.

2 FINANCIAL SECURITY

In the context of rural Maharashtra, financial security comes from: wages (preferably a regular source within the village); and returns on investments and inputs.

Wages

A desirable wage is one which not only meets survival and social needs, but also enables investment for further contingencies—sickness and old age—and acquisition of income-generating assets such as milch cattle. Employment should preferably be available within the village.

At the start of a project in a village in Jalna district, women were initially able to save only Rs10/person/month². However, as the programme was paying higher than the "minimum wage" (survival wage), household needs were met and investible surpluses increased. The saving rate increased to Rs25 within a period of six months.

It is important therefore, that any watershed development effort should provide a wage that is sufficient to ensure that savings can provide some buffer for the period following the end of the project, as well as allowing for investments in livestock and other livelihood/income generating assets. Moreover, it should also allow for increased travel, participation in social, cultural and religious and other events which contribute to a widening of horizons and increasing self-confidence.

Many of the inhabitants of Khodpakhindi, a remote tribal village in Yavatmal district, had never ventured beyond their district headquarters, about 40 km away. However, within three years of project implementation some of the villagers (including women) undertook a tour by hired vehicle for pilgrimage and social purposes—covering approximately 1,200 km—at their own expense.

The local agricultural wage is generally lower than the project-assisted wage. Post-watershed development agricultural wages however tend to be higher (assuming favourable agro-meteorological conditions), due to an increase in net irrigated area, increased agricultural and land productivity and withdrawal from the labour force of some small and marginal farmers who revert to their own farms once their productivity increases. To ensure that at least a fair wage is available, it is important that the measures adopted during the project lead to a substantial increase in land productivity. Soil and water conservation activities are not enough; a substantial portion of arable land should be able to produce at least two crops a year.

Return on investments

This comes generally from 4 sources: (i) income from private farms; (ii) farm-based activities; (iii) non-farm activities; and (iv) Self help group (SHG) activities.

Income from private farms

While increases in agricultural productivity might occur as a result of watershed development, on-farm gains are usually appropriated by men and increased drudgery is disproportionately borne by women. Although this is difficult to change, it is possible to introduce improved agricultural implements and mechanisation that will reduce drudgery and save women's time; much remains to be done in the area of improving and disseminating non-mechanized agricultural implements. On common land or private fallow land, grass production and cutting is generally perceived as a woman's chore. This can also provide income for women especially when, through project intervention, intensive cultivation and management of nutritious and improved fodder species is undertaken. Introduction of effective cutting implements is possible.

Farm-based activities

Bans on free grazing, pasture development through tree and grass planting and soil and water conservation (SWC) measures lead to an increase in fodder production on both common and private lands and increased availability of drinking water. This can lead to an increase in the number of cross-bred animals and stall-fed goat rearing. Pisciculture, using water in the check-dams, is another potential source of income and also serves as a nutritious diet supplement. Smaller animals—such as goats—are usually the preserve of women and income from goat production is often retained by the women. Care should be undertaken to ensure that small ruminant livestock are penned and, as far as possible, managed collectively. This denies men the excuse of taking over the management of these livestock assets on grounds of alleged incompetence and destruction of plantations 'they' have raised due to free grazing. It also provides some assurance that the earnings generated will remain with the women themselves.

Non-farm livelihood activities

Due to the heavy demand for forest and horticultural species during project implementation, nursery raising can provide substantial income to women. Nurseries also provide a training ground in the dynamics of group management and functioning through acquisition of skills in negotiation, conflict resolution, bargaining and management, which are necessary to successfully run any micro enterprise. Once the project is completed, the demand for trees declines (if external markets have not been obtained), although the demand for high value horticultural species is likely to remain. It is therefore essential that nurseries should be of a composite nature. Appropriate skills and training in seed selection, nursery raising and grafting should be given to women.

In Malegaon Pathar village of Ahmednagar district, the women's SHG comprising 60 members took a loan of Rs6000 to start a nursery in 1995. In 1996, they made a net profit of Rs10,000 through the sale of plants and re-invested Rs6000 towards another nursery. This they sold in 1997, for a profit of Rs47,000, made possible for such a large group by their effective management and accounting system.

With the increasing demand for organically-grown crops and food products, the production of compost manures, bio-fertilizers, vermi-composting, bio-pesticides (for example the collection and processing of seeds of Neem and other locally available plants) can provide income as well as inputs to improve land quality and productivity. Fortuitously, this is an area that is traditionally viewed as women's work. NGOs need to provide technology, management and marketing support from the outset of the project to ensure efficient group functioning.

Establishing income-generating activities is a more difficult proposition for remote villages. Non-farm activities are especially important during the lean period when there is less work in the fields or when there are elderly people at home. These activities should be based on locally available raw materials and where there is a demand for the end product. Possible options include mushroom cultivation and plate production.

Saving and Credit activities

Saving and credit activities provide an important means through which women can control their own finances. Individual savings are pooled to form group capital. This is used to provide loans to meet productive and consumptive needs. It is important that groups understand that 'cash floating is cash alive'. That is, cash given in loans multiplies. Women themselves can have control over access to their funds when taught simple accounting and maintenance of their ledgers³. Training can also assist women to take decisions over the prioritisation of loans and enable them to withstand pressure from men by claiming helplessness in the face of group ownership.

3 FOOD AND FUEL SECURITY

With an increase in land productivity, men frequently choose to increase the production of cash crops such as sugarcane, timber and cotton. It is important therefore that women are included in decision about land use and crop planning to ensure that household food requirements (vegetables, fruit and a variety of grains) are adequately provided. It is important that both men and women be given information about the nutritive value of various foods and their importance to health, so that the family readily sets aside a sufficient amount for home consumption. As fuel for cooking is a scarce commodity in rural areas, women a need to be involved in the selection of fuel and fodder species. The distribution of interim and end products from these plantations can be handled by women and SHGs.

4 EDUCATION

Women lay great store in education for their children and the acquisition of information, knowledge and skills for themselves. Middle and secondary schools and higher education centres are often located far from the village, limiting attendance particularly of female children. Cultural norms and poverty necessitate that female children attend to the household chores and look after younger siblings. Sources of income provided by

the project and related developments can help reverse the situation. As watershed projects work with the community, the opportunity to promote education, especially for female children, should not be missed.

In a village in Nanded district an NGO has started a "Kishori Varg" (classes for teenage girls) where they are taught home management skills. The girls have, in turn, started literacy sessions for the illiterate women of the village.

For tribals living in remote areas, problems are particularly acute. Apathy and a lack of hope in obtaining productive employment results from poverty and their isolation from society in general. In mixed villages—where tribals and other cultural groups live together—working side by side on watershed work, attending WC meetings and *gram sabhas* and SHGs and *Mahila Mandal* (MMs, womens' organisation) breaks down barriers and encourages tribals to take advantage of development and send their children to school. However, in homogeneous tribal villages, special attention and efforts have to be made to promote education.

The increasing integration of urban and rural areas, market development and the widespread use of mass media (radio and television) is leading to the breakdown of traditional thought patterns. Women even in remote areas, are increasingly aware that they are being bypassed by progress and are therefore unable to enjoy the benefits of modern development; as such, they are becoming more vocal about their rights. Fortunately women are beginning to be supported in their quest by men, who are gradually realising that their home situation is a reflection and consequence of the level of knowledge, information and skills women possess. If women are active and capably manage the home, the status of men is also increased, particularly in the larger society with which they socialise or conduct commerce. A man's status in rural society is increasingly measured by the image his wife presents socially. While previously women themselves would not think of spending a night away from the family, men increasingly allow women to participate in training of two to three days outside their villages.

When the IGWDP initiated measures for women's promotion, the NGOs and WCs insisted that training should consist of one day sessions, with women returning home in the early evening. Two years later, however, the picture has changed. The project has now conducted over 18 training programmes (for 691 women) and 15 exposure visits (involving 830 women) with overnight stays of two to three days outside the village. Men actively endorse their participation.

The experience of IGWDP shows that the demand for 'literacy', comes later, usually two to three years after the beginning of the project. Women's initial priority is for information, knowledge and skills related to their daily responsibilities. NGO field workers need to be sensitive to this need and short, 'action-oriented-learning' sessions should be organised accordingly.

In Tondoli watershed in Ahmednagar district, waste water from households flowed freely into the roads between houses. The children played in this and contracted diseases. Women were taught the relationship between children's sicknesses and waste water. As a result they dug soak pits which absorbed the water underground. This opened up another possibility—kitchen gardens or planting of vegetable creepers/fruit trees around these pits—thus obtaining a nutritious supplement to the household diet.

Exposure visits, training programmes and *melawas* (social gatherings) give women opportunities to express themselves in public and improve their self confidence. As confidence increases leadership emerges. These leaders or *Mahila Pravartaks* (MPs, village women promoters) need to be identified and trained to conduct women's group meetings and sessions. This will ensure continuity and functioning of women's groups after the project period is completed.

5 WATER, HEALTH AND HYGIENE

While watershed development can lead to an increase in ground water levels and ensure water is available in the village for longer periods, obtaining water for household needs still consumes on average, one and a half to three hours of a woman's day and water sources (especially open wells) are often unhygienic. Attention should be given to this aspect, by providing women with information on the causes of drinking water contamination, its consequences for health and simple ways of purification. Water sources (open wells, hand pumps, springs) that are susceptible to contamination should be protected by building masonry aprons or structures. Wherever possible, a piped drinking water scheme within the village should be established by government schemes, other projects or community contributions. Formation of village level committees or habitation-wise user group committees can be established (preferably of women) to ensure that water sources are well maintained and protected.

Women bear the burden of the ill health of their family. The health and nutrition of women and female children are usually the last priority. Through the provision of information, nutritional status can be improved. Hence efforts along the lines of 'action-oriented-learning' sessions concerning health, hygiene, sanitation, family planning and nutrition are important. Interventions such as raising kitchen gardens or homestead poultry and latrine building can help address some of these needs. Establishment of soak pits to drain waste water, as well as improve the hygiene of surroundings, can reduce skin and diarrhoeal infections. The use of improved energy conserving *chulhas* (earthen stoves) and biogas units can reduce time and energy spent on fuel collection (on an average, eight hours a week), as well as reduce smoke levels in the kitchen (the cause of many respiratory illnesses) where women and small children usually sit.

6 DECISION MAKING

Women repeatedly stress that any change in gender relations must be obtained in a manner that does not threaten the harmony of their homes or their security. To create space for women in society, sessions on gender sensitivity therefore need to be organized for men. The approach and method adopted for awareness generation and integration should be consensual, even if at times change appears imperceptible and slow in occurring.

An analogy of the household that is useful, is that of the two-wheeled bullock cart. It moves ahead only if both the wheels are of the same dimension. The cart represents a family and the husband and wife, who bear equal responsibility, each represent a wheel. If the wheel which represents the woman is much smaller than the other, the family and in fact the entire village community makes no headway. Only when the women are encouraged and respected can she take her place as an equal; only then will both shoulders (wheels of the household) be equal and the family progress. Along with the family, the village and the community also develops.

Some accompanying initiatives that can prove helpful in accelerating the inclusion of women in decision-making roles include:

- strengthening women's participation in the *gram sabha*. This requires a determined effort in encouraging women to actively share their problems and seek solutions within their own SHGs. Savings and credit operations can be a 'nursery' for the acquisition of crucial management, negotiation and bargaining skills
- ensuring a minimum of 33 per cent representation of women in the WC. While a 50 per cent representation is preferred, this may not be immediately achievable
- active participation in landuse and crop planning as well as selection of plantation species and raising of nurseries
- fostering and facilitation of activities of women's groups and SHGs

7 IGWDP AND THE WOMEN'S SECTOR

When IGWDP was launched in 1993, women were included in the overall programme strategy, but not as a separate sector. It rapidly became clear that unless they were given special attention, their effective contribution in watershed development would not be realised. Moreover, it was recognised that, without the active participation of women in all aspects of the project, the sustainability of the watershed development was questionable. The Womens Promotion Sector was therefore introduced in late 1995. This late insertion has had several disadvantages:

- Several of the projects which had begun in 1993 focused on land and water problems. Issues of concern to women had been taken up by only a few projects,

mainly at the initiative of NGOs. Since land and water issues are primarily the domain of men, women played practically no role in the decision making process. At an early stage therefore, watershed development unintentionally became a male-dominated programme. By the end of 1995, only eight out of 43 projects had undertaken some women's activities (kitchen gardens, nursery raising, women's group meetings etc.) and only five had established savings and credit groups.

- The focus of the NGOs and villagers was on getting work done and enhancing the productive status of the land. Introducing an intervention for women's promotion was perceived by many as an unnecessary distraction. Where it was accepted, it was viewed as a sectoral intervention, isolated from the main effort of natural resource management and therefore unrelated to the processes of decision making in the project.

- Not all NGOs give equal priority to women's development as they do to land, water and income-generating activities. They do not extend equal support to women staff, resulting in a loss of enthusiasm, inefficiency and discouragement. *Mahila Samaj Sevika*—MSS (female social workers) face particular difficulties. Village women are only free to meet at night and young MSS are unable to travel to the village alone and must be

accompanied by another staff member. Hence this sector is viewed as a burden by some NGOs. Staff turnover is also high (particularly if the MSS is young and unmarried), resulting in a lack of continuity.

The challenge facing IGWDP was therefore how to “organize a meaningful and productive effort for women's integration and involvement for sustainable watershed development, in a manner that elicits men's interest and active support?”

Towards women's integration: A graduated response

The goal of intervention in the women's sector is to develop the capacity of women to enable them to actively participate and take up responsibilities for integrated and sustainable development of their watershed. The objectives are:

- to enhance financial and food security and improve health, hygiene, nutritional and living conditions;
- to reduce drudgery and mitigate some of the effects of the additional workload;
- to improve women's input into decision making processes in families, institutions and village life.

To achieve this, IGWDP has adopted several guiding principles (Box 1).

Box 1 IGWDP guiding principles

In order to empower women, men must be taken into confidence. Hence, the focus will not be on women *per se* but on the family. Without the support of men, they will make little or no progress.

Strength is derived from fellowship and partnerships which arise from group formation and organization. Women are therefore encouraged to organize themselves into groups. Activities, even when individually undertaken, will be promoted and supported by their group.

Knowledge and understanding is the key to motivated action and efficiency. Efforts are made to enable women to gain more information and knowledge to manage natural resources and improve managerial skills, increase efficiency and reduce drudgery.

Access to financial resources empowers and gives societal status. Women should increasingly have access to sources of income and control over income earned. In this regard, the potential of women to save will be capitalized upon, particularly on a group basis. Group activities that provide livelihood opportunities will be encouraged.

Possessing skills and competencies that are valued by both the household and the village ensures an active role and a valued membership. The skills and competence of women and groups will improve so that they are able to play a contributory role in project implementation and village and family affairs.

Owning an asset, even a common one (e.g. land), gives a sense of identity and enables alliances for mutual support and advancement. Efforts will be made to transfer land or lease to the name of women's groups. Moreover they will then be able to acquire various income generating assets, which will contribute towards a sense of self-dependence and fulfillment.

“Women-to-women” and “group-to-group” extension is not only effective but offers a learning and feedback mechanism and creates enthusiasm and synergies. Local women as facilitators and mobilisers individually and in groups, should be actively encouraged and employed. They enable quick rapport building and bonding which greatly promotes group function, consensus building and inspires commonality of purpose and enthusiasm.

Work and needs unite. When activities are taken up within the watershed in which everyone can work, caste and social barriers are broken down. This has profound implications both for social dynamics and the quality of life in the village. Women with common needs and concerns from all social groups will be encouraged to come together irrespective of caste, creed or financial status.

Sustainability and replicability is greatly enhanced when local institutional actors, such as government as well as private agencies, are involved in delivery of goods and services. Wherever possible, existing government programmes and networks will be accessed and schemes and other projects utilised. This will help create a sense of “joint ownership” of the project, which is necessary from the point of maintenance and continuity.

In order to ensure sustainability, it is important that lessons learnt and experiences gained be transmitted from one generation to the next. As the future lies with children they should be introduced to the why, the how and the what of environmental regeneration and conservation.

8 PHASE-WISE PROPOSED MEASURES

Since 1993, the IGWDP has consisted of two phases. The first consists of a capacity building phase (CBP), where both NGO and village grapple with the meaning of participatory watershed development, understand its implications and experience the initial benefits. The CBP is supported by the Watershed Organisation Trust (WOTR), assisted financially by GTZ (German Agency for Technical Cooperation). This is followed by the full implementation phase (FIP), when both NGO and village—especially the WC—are deemed capable of undertaking project implementation. This phase is supported by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) assisted by WOTR and financially aided by the KfW (German Bank for Reconstruction and Development).

The capacity building phase (CBP)

The CBP comprises two stages. In stage one, the NGO mobilises the watershed community. Most NGOs entering the programme are small and relatively young, with little experience in large-scale implementation of natural resources management projects. Their experiences are usually restricted to sectoral interventions. Furthermore, even in the case of well experienced NGOs, the initial period following entry into a village is one of uncertainty. An intervention like watershed development, which involves all the social and economic groups of the village, necessarily challenges the existing power structure, as well as existing relationships and transaction arrangements. It creates anxieties, insecurities, expectations and aspirations. In the initial period, the situation is often one of ambiguity and the response of the village is unclear. The entire effort of the NGO is geared towards creating awareness, motivation and mobilizing the village's traditional structures. Given the sensitive nature of 'men/women' relationships, interventions with regard to women's promotion and gender integration must be non-threatening, easily achievable and quickly visible.

Both the NGO and the people have to establish their willingness, basic ability and need to implement a watershed project. One of the crucial activities in this stage is the 'exposure visit' to a successfully completed or on-going project. At this stage, the NGO should encourage the participation of women in the exposure visit as well as initiate dialogues with the men about the importance of including women in the watershed development process.

Stage two consists of 'hands-on' experience through the implementation of soil conservation and tree planting activities in a micro-watershed. This serves the dual purpose of demonstration and training and normally lasts about 10-18 months. At this stage, efforts need to be made to prepare the ground for the involvement of women in decision-making roles. Having obtained the support of men for women's activities during stage one, stage two should be used to strengthen and establish women's organizations and SHGs. A MSS should be appointed, preferably within three months of the pilot activities. Simple activities that bring quick results should be

encouraged such as kitchen gardens, soak-pits, improved *chulhas* (earthen stoves) to motivate women to work together and build group confidence. Savings and credit activities particularly encourage women—and also men to permit their women—to participate in group activities.

During the CBP, a small fund (up to Rs20,000 in the case of the IGWDP) may be used for activities that will strengthen the group. If it is used for small income-generating activities, women should be encouraged to treat this as a loan and create a revolving fund of the returns. By the end of this phase women should have at least a 33 per cent active representation on the WC.

The full implementation phase (FIP)

The FIP also consists of two stages. Having successfully gone through the CBP, the NGO and WC now prepare a project proposal—the feasibility study—for the entire watershed. This normally takes about six months. The women's groups should have developed a sense of identity, cohesiveness and competence in areas such as managing their finances. By this time too, women's groups would also have seen the benefits accruing from small activities such as kitchen gardens and improved *chulhas*. As a group they should have acquired a measure of confidence in each other and have experienced the possibilities and benefits offered by group action. This should be further strengthened during the feasibility study.

The aim is to ensure that women are involved wherever possible in different aspects of project planning, especially with regard to land use. In this area, men should be encouraged to actively consider the women's point of view, resulting in joint decisions. Having identified and prioritized the needs of women, a project proposal should be developed and incorporated in the feasibility study. This proposal should include activities that will reduce the workload of women, support child care and development and plan for income-generating activities that will be exclusively managed by the women's group. Meanwhile, emerging local women leaders MPs should be identified and given training to conduct their own group meetings and promote various issues and activities.

Implementation is the second stage, beginning with project and feasibility study approval and lasting a maximum of 48 months. Once implementation starts in the CBP it continues without break (assuming favourable conditions), even though a complete project proposal will not have been prepared and formally sanctioned. This is to ensure that there is no break in mobilization, enthusiasm and organisation.

Until now the measures and steps undertaken will have largely been organizational in nature, bringing women together and building confidence. The primary focus of stage two is to strengthen and elaborate on the processes initiated in the CBP and to undertake specific activities which will strengthen technical and managerial capacities, the financial position and ability to collaborate in village decision making processes. Those women not already in SHGs should be motivated to form groups. Men's SHGs should be encouraged as this promotes a better use of saved

income. During this phase, the activities generally consist of training and exposure visits directly or indirectly related to watershed development. Care should be taken that activities do not create additional burdens for women. They should be sequenced to gradually gather momentum so that when the project period is over these activities provide livelihood opportunities. Emphasis is placed on the acquisition of skills by the MPs, MSS, SHGs etc. in planning, implementation and management.

A second objective of this stage is to ensure a reduction in the drudgery and uncertainty in women's lives. Other activities having a bearing on women should also be included (for instance arrangements for obtaining potable water, fuel for cooking and fodder within reachable distance). Sanitation, child care, health and hygiene, as well as non-formal education sessions can also be considered. Progressive inclusion of women who were not earlier involved in the programme is also critical. Linkages with government departments as well as village institutions is actively promoted. Efforts also need to be made to ensure that the dependence of women's groups on NGOs and MSS is progressively reduced. Active thought should be given to transferring these values beyond the project period so that women themselves can manage successfully what they have begun.

The expected outcome of this phase will be a definite improvement in the financial position of women, acquisition of income generating assets where possible and regular and active participation in decision making meetings. A reduction in distress migration, increased food security and increased school attendance of children can also be expected. It is important that active support from the government and political establishment is gained.

9 CONCLUSION

Watershed Development, if addressed in a gender focused and sensitive manner from the beginning, can provide a space for women to capitalise on new opportunities. It calls for an inclusive and sustained effort that brings men to recognise and accept the contribution that self-confident women can bring to society.

ENDNOTES

1 The *gram sabha* or village body consists of all adult voting members of the village

2 \$1 is equivalent to Rs43

3 WOTR has developed a simple but effective system which has received an enthusiastic response from hundreds of SHGs. A manual with an accounts register is available from WOTR.