

Social Constraints to and Institutional Solutions for Rural Women's Participation in Natural Resource Management: A case study of the Water First Project of the National Organisation for Sustainable Development Anand, Gujarat State, India.

by

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Abstract.

Instead of taking U turn to make any effort more sustainable in development sector there is need to involve women since beginning of the project. This case study emphasis that women being 50% of the population, resides in the same area and do have knowledge, skill, experience to manage resources in and around their surroundings. Moreover, there are significant differences in the use, access and management of natural resources between men and women. To make project related to natural resources sustainable there is need to incorporate views of both men and women. But because, these women live in a deeply patriarchal rural society and face structural and cultural constraints which in turn restrict their participation in the development project. This case study of Water First Project tries to analyse women's contribution in the field of natural resources, constraints they face which become hindrance to their participation in the project and how these constraints have been deconstructed in the framework of existing social, cultural and traditional practices and addressed in such a manner that it enhances women's capacity to raise issues and participation in the Water First Project.

1. INTRODUCTION

India's economy is based on traditional farming, modern agriculture, handicraft, modern services and industries. Today 70% of the population in India resides in rural areas. Three fifths of the work force is concentrated in agriculture and more than 50% of the labor force is women. This sector accounts 28% of India's economy (India, 2007). The crucial role and immense contribution of women is still not being recognized. As stated by United Nation (1997) that "rural women produce more than 55 % of all food grown and make up 31% of the official labour force in developing countries" (n.p.). According to Mies (1986) in Andhra Pradesh during the agriculture season, women work 15 hours per day whereas her male counterpart works for seven to eight hours.

Indian women also played an important role in India's independence struggle, women of India still face a set of traditional and cultural constraints and struggles for the recognition of her work in society. On the contrary, modern culture also failed to recognize women's contribution in society. As pointed out by Boserup in 1970 development projects often introduced "new technology [that] actually lowered women's status by reducing their access to productive work and, since cash crops and wage jobs were only available to men, women were increasingly relegated to the subsistence economy"(cited in Dhar,1996, n.p.). As a result, the benefits of rural development projects did not reach the whole community because they were not addressed and designed according to the need and requirements of 50% of the user i.e. women.

1.1 Women and Culture

Culture is a set of practices developed through a process in a particular environment by a particular community. Culture is a basic substance of every society. It provides a path for a society to behave in certain manner. Culture of a society shape the daily life lived by a family and shapes the roles of men and women in the community.

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Men and women face different sets of cultural and religious practices which define their role in the society. Cultural traditions have been used by men to keep distant women from power. Culture has thus been used as a double standard to suppress women

As the Cambodian saying indicates that men are a piece of gold, and women are a piece of cloth. The piece of gold, when it is dropped in mud, is still a piece of gold. But a piece of cloth, once it's stained, it's stained forever. But men, whether they are criminal or have cheated on their wives, they are still a piece of gold (Schalkwyk, 2000, n.p.).

When such sayings exist in the culture of a society, cultural values and ideology require change or revision. There is need to deconstruct and educate people to interpret the true sense of religious and cultural philosophies. Culture is not static in nature; it changes with the influences of external factors like education, transportation, new inventions, environmental changes, and conflict, globalisation, and development projects. For instance Kabeer Naila claims that

due to changes in trade policies, large number of women joined the labour force of garment industry. Thus, this process has gradually changed the cultural practice of purdah (female seclusion) for women and families engaged in the garment industry. This change has been reflected in many instances in cities such as Dhaka and has also influenced peoples' perceptions of the woman's role in the family and the workplace (Schalkwyk, 2000).

Voices are being raised at forums in different countries about discrimination against women in the name of culture. These voices are being heard and adopted to modify social policies to address the social and cultural constraints women faces in the society. The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has been ratified by about ¾ of UN members. The Convention includes articles requiring states to take action "to modify social and cultural attitudes and practices that disadvantage women" (CEDAW, 1989). Such reforms in rules and regulation create new social, political and cultural and traditional values in the society.

1.2. Women and Agriculture

The nature of women's involvement in agriculture varies from place to place in India. It ranges from farm management to landless labours. Thirty five percent of women work as cultivators, 43.56 % as agriculture labour and as 4.63 % as in livestock, fishery and forest labours. Rural women contribute 60% of the employment in the agriculture sector (CEDAW, 2006, n.p.) In the Gujarat state of India, women represent more than 50 percent of the labour force in rural areas (Project proposal, NOSD, 2002). "In the Indian Himalayas a pair of bullocks works 1064 hours, a man 1212 hours and a woman 3485 hours in a year on one-hectare farm, illustrating the significant contribution of women in agricultural production" (Navdanya, n.d.).

It is not only the contribution by the women, but also the type of field work they perform that is more strenuous than men. Transplanting and weeding, for example, require working under the hot sun and in the muddy soil for whole day. Men are responsible for tasks which are carried out only in the mornings and evenings like ploughing and watering the fields. When men migrate to nearby towns in search of livelihood, women and children remain in the villages to face degraded environmental conditions. Women works double as they do domestic work and produce the food consumed locally. Therefore, women are involved in every stage of the food production.

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As Shiva said “the Green Revolution, which focused on increasing yields of rice and wheat, entailed a shift in inputs from human to technical. Women’s participation, knowledge and inputs were marginalized, and their role shift from being ‘primary producers to subsidiary workers’” (cited in Coonrod, 1998, n.p.). Women are no longer considered knowledgeable people in the field of agriculture. The use of the threshing machine is an example that shows this shift of work responsibility. Earlier thrashing the grain was exclusively a woman’s job. Now as threshing machines are being operated by men, women are no longer considered suitable for this work (Ibid).

Women are facing dual challenges from both traditional and modern social practices. Women in rural areas face customary and cultural constraints which restrict and bias their participation in the development. On other hand, the intervention of technology and commercialisation of agriculture is slowly shifting women’s role from producer to receiver. This has resulted in a loss of recognition of women’s knowledge and an increase in alienation from their association with natural resources.

1.3 Women and Water

Water and land are the basis of human civilisation. Water scarcity is growing rapidly worldwide. Bandyopadhyay pointed out that “Water is only a renewable resource if we respect the ecological processes that maintain and give stability to the water cycle” (as cited in Postel, S.1992, p. 36). There is a need to manage water supplies and land productivity judiciously to make the livelihoods sustainable.

“Women produce 80 % of the food consumed in the poorest parts of the world, in some places, 95 %. To do this they first produce ‘Water’ (IIAV, 2000). In summer season in rain fed villages in India and in Water First Project area women and girls spend 9 to10 hours a day in finding water resources and collecting water. Carrying water is an arduous activity, absorbing much of women’s time and energy.

Women play different roles in the society, socially they are mothers, housewives, and cooks. Traditionally, they are the managers of the land, water, vegetation and cattle. Culturally they have received proper recognition in folk songs and stories. In recognition of religion many Indian rivers were named after women such as Ganga and Yamuna. There are historical events like Chipko Movement where rural women of Pauri Garwal area in the Himalayas of Uttranchal state did not allow forest personnel to cut the trees in their area (Shiva and Mies, 1993).

In spite of all this recognition, women are not involve with or given equal partnership in the projects which address the issues related to development, proper management and efficient use of land, water and vegetation. The NOSD believes that the participation of women in the development process is crucial for achieving the goals of sustainable development. Investment in women means widening their choices of resource-related managerial strategies and reducing their dependence on society.

2.0 PROJECT BACKGROUND: Water First Project (WFP)

The project selected for this case study was , “Water First: Sustainable Development of village watersheds to alleviate poverty in rain fed areas of Gujarat state, India,”. The project was based on the watershed approach. This approach recognizes that human communities in the world over have two things in common: we all live in watersheds and we depend on them for our daily survival. The project area selected was Pali block, Thasra Taluka of the Kheda District, Gujarat. The WFP villages Chetarsumbha, Vithalpura and Rewalia comprised 1447 ha, of which 1219 ha are un-irrigated and 229 ha are uncultivable (Kheda census report, 2000). The villages were selected on the following criteria i.e. above 80% of

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the marginal small farmers were without adequate water, the majority of the workforce were woman whose husband had departed to the towns and cities in search of work; 13 %of the people belonged to schedule castes (untouchables) and schedule tribes and the literacy rate of women and other disadvantaged groups was very low (Baseline Study Report, 2003).

3.0. METHODOLOGY

There is no blue print available to measure the impact of social, cultural and traditional constraints on women in society. To address such constraints and to understand village dynamics proper time was required. Therefore, the three-year project was divided into three phases:

Baseline investigation and detailed project development (Trust Building)	- 8 months (February 2003)
Implementation of the project	-16 months (October 2003)
Monitoring and Evaluation	- 12 month, Ongoing (February 2005)

A time period of 8 months for the Baseline investigation was utilised to develop personal contacts to understand the people's views on village politics, village leadership, dynamics of the caste system, status of rural women, social, traditional and cultural practices, and the functions of the village-level institution named Village Panchayat (Local Governing council). In turn, it also gives time to village community to build trust with different caste groups, village leaders, school teachers and women. Baseline data was collected with different methods like survey, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), interview and field observations etc.

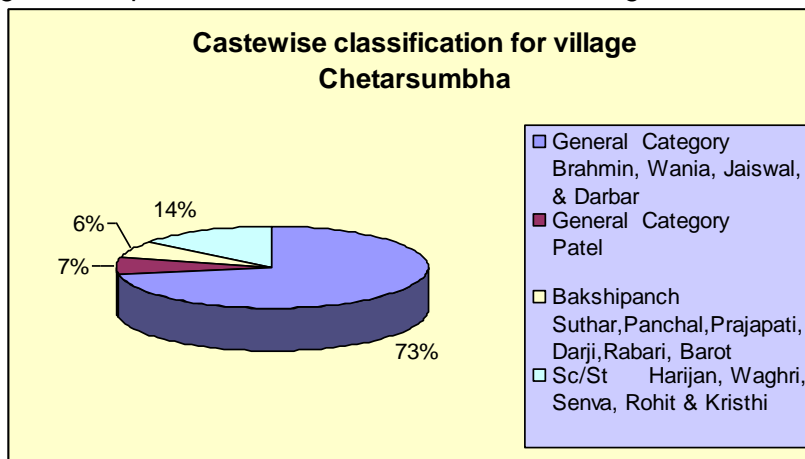
Political leaders of the villages initially tried to build pressure on the NOSD team members so that they can influence the decision but NOSD team resisted the pressure by not going to the houses of local and political leaders, not conducting any meetings in their houses, and not using their facilities for staying in the villages. This process slowly eliminated the political influence over project activities and NOSD team members. This procedure took three to four months but NOSD could create an atmosphere for the village community from every caste, class and gender to participate in the project activities. This was another step towards building trust.

4.0 MAJOR CONSTRAINTS

4.1 Caste and Religion

The social dynamics of the WFP villages of Chetarsumbha, Vithalpura/Devnagar and Rewalia are very complicated due to caste, class system culture, and religion. The caste system remains so entrenched in the villages that, notwithstanding anti-caste laws introduced since Indian independence, caste relationships still rule.

The caste system of hierarchical social relationships exists in all the three project villages. Caste dogma and ideology are about maintaining the purity of a caste by restricting inter-caste contact and marriage. It also serves to restrict access to particular livelihoods and occupations as well as social, economic and cultural resources (Baseline Study Report, NOSD, 2003). Few influential higher caste people like Patel, Darbar in WFP villages dominated the decision making process of the community. The caste system also prevalent in temple worship and allocating wells for drinking water. Low caste men and women were generally kept away from the village temples and the most accessible water wells. The Graph 1 below shows the percentage of different types of caste existing in village Chetarsumbha.



Graph 1 Source: Baseline Study Report (N OSD),2003

In the village Chetarsumbha, there are 587 households and these households are divided into 16 types of the castes, as shown in the Graph 1. The majority of people belong to the Hindu religion, but there are different types of Hindu. In Hindu also people follow different religious practices. As shown in Graph 1 that while 73% of the population belongs to the general category (higher caste), 7% are from the highest caste, known as Patel, and 14% belong to the lowest caste, also known as the Untouchables. Along with the caste system, there are further social classifications like Bakshipanch, a subgroup which is considered socially and economically a “backward class” (Kheda Census Report, GOG 2000). This subgroup forms 6% of the caste system in the village Chetarsumbha (Baseline Report N OSD, 2003). The higher caste is made up of rich farmers and political leaders, and is well connected with the state political leaders and government offices. Their interests influence the village community decisions because people of other castes are resource poor and dependent upon the Patel. Resource poor people must borrow money from rich farmers for seeds, fertilisers, marriages and many other occasions. Therefore, because of the loans most of the time lower caste people cannot raise their voice against influential leaders of higher caste people in the village.

Understanding the role of the caste system in society helped the implementation team make rapport with different communities. It was realised to have representation of each caste, class and gender in project management.

4.2 Gender dimension

In Indian culture “gender discrimination is another vertical thread woven into the social hierarchy of village life” (EOA Report, N OSD, 2005, p 53). Property is owned by the head of the household—the man. Only when a woman is widowed and her male children are still young, will property pass to her ownership. Culturally women and girls still ‘hide’ behind the sari, covering their heads in the presence of men and older women. They are barely seen, let alone heard. Yet every day they care for the household, the children and the livestock, carrying cattle feed from the fields and water from the well to the house several times a day. Girls too, participate in domestic tasks so that they are underrepresented at school. Despite this role of caretaker and resource-user, women’s and girl’s opinions are generally not asked for or heard. In meetings, should they be present, they sit quietly in the background, listening, wondering, uncertain, and yet deeply and profoundly imbued with significant cultural intelligence. Decisions were made by men (Baseline Report, N OSD, 2003).

In all the WFP villages the ratio of men to women was 52% and 48% (Kheda Census Report, 2000). The difference in the population of men and women shows that women do face discrimination in the society. According to Census of India 2001, there are 933 females per 1000 males. There are over 35 million less women than men in India (Gajiwala, 2005).

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Sen states further that “in countries where women do not face discrimination, sex ratio is about 105 women to 100 men” which means more women than men (cited in Gajiwala, 2005). Therefore the difference in the populations of men and women shows that in WFP villages women do face discrimination in form of sex selective abortions or neglect to health of the girl child.

The resident population ratio also changes during drought, flood and failure of crops because men migrate to nearby towns in search of livelihood. Women are left behind to face the effects of the degraded environment. Women not only have to work harder to collect water, fuel and fodder but also take on the additional responsibilities of the male family member. Women of higher caste like Patel are better educated and have freedom to go out and participate in the meeting in all WFP villages. Whereas women from other castes like Wania, Jaiswal, Darbar and Panchal, are less educated, resource poor and have less access to knowledge. Schedule caste and tribe women are illiterate and have no access and information about any development project. Socially, lower caste men and women are prevented to attend meeting or gathering. In such situation women have few options but to follow cultural and traditional customs.

4.3 Cultural sensitivity in approaching the village

In traditional Indian culture, communities are divided on the basis of caste, language and religion. Every village has different percentages of caste therefore language, religion and cultural values changes from village to village.. It is culture which defines the “correct” behaviour of a community and for families and shapes the prescribed role of men and women in societies. The role of men and women are strictly defined as , women take care of household chores, children, and other tasks like grazing cattle, making cattle-dung cake, collecting fuel, fodder, water and works in their own farm. Men work in the fields.. The men are the decision makers in the family.

In the villages of Gujarat state , due to influence of town life, films and education, some young boys and girls have rebelled against the social values related to caste, class and gender. Their behaviour has threatened the social order of the community. This generates trends that either promote positive change or make the community more resistant to change. One example is how intercaste love affairs and marriages can result in rural families’ resistance to allow their daughters to go for higher studies. On the other hand, the example of an educated girl supporting her old parents encourages other parents to look more positively at educating girls. These rapid changes are challenging deep rooted traditional values of the community which may often makes villagers more suspicious of outsiders and the prospect of change.

4.4 Perception of rural women about constraints WOMEN face.

As men’s and women’s roles and responsibilities are defined in different communities in different manners there are no blue prints for addressing these issues. The NOSD recognized this reality and the team conducted a sample interview with the rural women to know their perception about the social, cultural and traditional constraints exist in their society and how it affect participation of village women in project activities. A set of quests were asked and it was found true that such constraints are barriers for women’s participation and needs to be addressed at very beginning of the project..

Women’s active participation in development projects is inhibited by traditional customs like the veil system and the prohibition against men and women sitting together to engage in discussions. One hundred percent of the women interviewed in a survey conducted by the author agreed that traditional customs have prevented their participation in development projects. In addition 33 % of the women interviewed indicated that lower caste (untouchable)

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women are not allowed to sit together with higher caste women. Customs such as these prevents lower caste women participation in the projects.

In response to a question in the interviews conducted for this study one hundred percent of the women answered that social constraints affect their participation in the development project. Further, it was revealed by 93% women that men (husbands) do not allow them to participate in development project. Sixty percent women felt that illiteracy prevent them from participating in the development project because they do not understand technical and policy issues of the projects. It was interesting to note that none of the higher caste women realized caste as social constraint because they have not faced any caste discrimination themselves whereas 40% women from lower caste have observed caste as social constraints.

A question was asked about the interviewee's point of view on what type of traditions constraint their participation in the development project. Traditional customs such as women are not allowed to sit and talk in front of men and the required use of the veil identified as those which prevented their participation in the development projects were rated as rigid traditions by 100% women. Thirty three percent women of untouchable caste realized that lower caste creates barrier for them to attend meeting with higher caste men and women. None of the women observed widowhood as social constraints for the participation of women. On the contrary 15 years ago, widowhood was considered a rigid traditional constraint in the Indian society. Such changes in the deep rooted cultural and traditional practices showed that society adopt changes as per the need and requirement of the situation.

In response to a question about how women came to know about NOSD, 40% women said through NOSD team member, 26% said through NOSD member and village people, 20% women said through friends and 6.6 % women said from husband and motivational program. The results revealed that implementing organization has to play major role to ensure proper involvement of women in the project. Friends, husband and communication programs would provide additional support in dissemination of the information.

In response to how women came to know about the Water First project, 26% women said through NOSD member only, 26% said NOSD and motivational program, 33% through NOSD and village people, whereas 6.6% women said husband and children. In every response NOSD was added which shows that an implementing agency has to work closely with the village community to ensure participation of women in the project. Another important aspect was repetition of information through different sources at different time and places. In the WFP, implementing organisation, communication methods like the street play, song, drama, village people, husband and children collectively made efforts in dissemination of the information about concept of the project.

During interview in response to how to increase rural women's participation in development projects, Eighty-six percent of the women from WFP preferred to have a woman officer to conduct the meetings, trainings, arrange outreach programs, orientation program for women etc. Initially, NOSD team found that absence of woman officer in the team negatively affected the women's participation in WFP project. Therefore, as a long term strategy the NOSD team decided to enhance capacity building of the rural women so that they become capable of taking responsibilities of the WFP management.

In terms of determining the time for conducting meeting with rural women, 60% of the women suggested that meetings should be conducted as per the free time of rural women. NOSD team experienced that women have too many roles to perform at a time and their

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role changes as per the season, festivals, farm work, marriages and other social works. Therefore, an implementing agency should be sensitive to these situations and try to organize meetings as per the availability of the women. Sixty percent of the women also said that men should be sensitized to encourage rural women's participation. Men are decision maker in the villages and most of the women felt that their approval would make them feel free and confident to attend such meetings. One third of the women suggested that there is need to explain the project in detail to the women. This would develop interest among women and would enable them to understand their role in the project. Indirectly, this would give women an opportunity to discuss with their family the need for their participation in the project

On the question related to the type of projects women would like to be involved, 100 % women said a water project, 66 % said an agricultural project and 13% were undecided. Eighty percent women agreed for health project whereas 20% were undecided. On other side 80% women were undecided on sanitation project and 20 % were agreed, on education project, 86% women were undecided and 20% were agreed. Such preference shows that women prioritized water, agriculture and health projects. This is probably because these areas affect them directly. The women believed that projects related to sanitation and educations are responsibility of the government and they cannot contribute anything in these projects.

An implementing agency should create a conducive atmosphere to address these constraints within the cultural framework so that long term impact can be created without disturbing social scenario of the community. These efforts would be accepted by the whole community and would create positive example for the future generation. The NOSD believe in egalitarian, participatory methods, culturally sensitive approach to introduce any change in the existing traditional framework of the society so that change can be evolved within cultural and traditional boundaries. Therefore, different methodology approaches were used to address the constraints in the WFPProject.

5.0 APPROCHES USED TO DECONSTRUCT THE CONSTRAINTS

5.1 Motivational Program Traditional Media Bhavai-a Street Play

The NOSD had a big task to introduce WFP to the village community in such a manner that people from each caste, class and gender felt included in the project. The NOSD was looking for a communication medium which was more interactive, create an atmosphere for listening and learning for the village people and could communicate the message in the local dialect with traditional music. The NOSD explored a traditional medium named *Bhavai* (telling story with music and drama) to educate the village community about the Water First Project. The Bhavai program provided a platform to bring the whole community to one place and encouraged community participation in the Project. . A common place, like a school, where people from every caste, inclusive of the lower caste, could come and watch the program, was selected to conduct the street play.

At the time of the first program, rain created new synergy among the village community. The whole village, along with the NOSD team, watched the program with umbrellas. The message was related to water and rain on the very spot made the program significant. At the end of the program, the village community took a pledge to conserve and make efficient use of water in their village. At the end of the program, men and women, along with NOSD team members and consultants from NZ, performed a traditional dance called *Garba*. Such efforts created an atmosphere where people from every caste, class and gender come together and enjoyed the occasion. This helped in breaking the barrier of constraints. As a

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result rural women showed more curiosity about the project activities and later in the meetings, the presence of both men and women increased.

5.2 Raising men's consciousness of gender issues

The NOSD team believes in creating equal opportunities for men and women in every sphere of life. The ideology of equality for NOSD started with the logo of the organisation. The NOSD logo shows that men and women together can lead to a life of fertility and, in separation, to one of destruction. The same thing happens in nature, if a community lives in consonance with nature, therefore nature survives and grows. While in the absence of this harmony, the environment becomes degraded. NOSD believes in creating opportunities so that women can be empowered through capacity building to help them achieve equality and equity with men in society.

The NOSD team was aware that social, cultural and traditional constraints that existed in the society would not allow rural women to participate in the meetings without the consent of men and elders from the project villages. It was necessary to sensitize village men about involvement of rural women in the WFP.

The issue of involvement of women was discussed with the men in different meetings, in which village men shared their views about why women should not participate in the meetings. They expressed their views as follows:

- women do not attend any meetings
- they do not have time
- they are busy with household work
- they do not understand the development issues
- they know nothing about the environment
- they do not understand the technical aspect of the planning
- they are illiterate
- they should not be allowed to sit with men in the same meeting
- they should not be allowed to speak in front of men
- they should not be allowed to talk to the outsiders.

The team tried to treat the reasons given by the village communities respectfully as the discussion about women's involvement in the project was a very sensitive issue. The NOSD developed its strategy to address these issues with great care and participatory methodology was used. The process began with meetings where men were asked to draw a chart on the daily activities performed by their own daughters and sons. In this exercise, the list of activities for the daughter was bigger than the son. The outcome of the exercise showed that a girl child gets up at 6 am with the mother and, in addition to her schooling, shares responsibilities like carrying water, cleaning, cooking, taking animals for grazing, taking care of younger brothers and sisters, etc. There is no play time for her. As she grows, she withdraws from school. A boy child gets up later, goes to school and plays. Sometimes he takes the animals for grazing.

An issue was raised that when women are the users of the water resources, work in the field, take care of cattle, and, in case of migration of their men to the nearby town, face the effect of environmental degradation. In such a situation, it becomes necessary that a project, which is for the revival of natural resources in their village, should take care of the opinions and needs of both men and women. The outcome of other PRA exercises like resource mapping, transect walks and venn diagrams also helped village men understand and accept the importance of the role of women in the changing scenario of development.

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PRA exercises worked as ice breakers to initiate discussions. Ideally, After a series of discussions for approximately four months, village men agreed that if NOSD assigned a women officer, she could conduct separate meetings with the rural women of the village.

5.3 Organizing the women

In the beginning of the WFP project, NOSD team had only male members because NOSD could not find suitable women officer for the project. The absence of women officer resulted lack of women participation initially in the meetings and training programs. Out of 30 participants there was only one woman in the first training program conducted in the month of August 2003. Due to social and cultural constraints male members of the NOSD team could not contact village women and brief them about the WFP project activities. NOSD faced problems to find suitable women officer for field work. Educated women do not prefer field job because of security and lack of social acceptance for the field work in the society. Therefore NOSD has to give this responsibility to the women officer who was working for the Drought Proofing Project of NOSD in the Kutch district of Gujarat state.

She developed rapport with the rural women of every caste, religion and class and, as per the availability of time of the rural community She made rural women aware of their role in the decision making process of the project activities, encouraged them to become members of the Watershed Association, Working Group and Self Help Group so that women could take responsibility for the management of the WFP works in their villages. The time for meeting with village women varied during the year. Therefore, throughout the project, the team had to struggle with scheduling meetings with village women.

5.4 Using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) approach

Under WFP, PRA exercises like the resource mapping, transect mapping and developing a venn diagram were used. These gave opportunities for the implementation team to bring village men and women together for discussions to identify the differences of opinion among men and women, provide a platform for women to feel free to discuss issues and share their experiences. Initially during the exercises, women spoke less but as the exercises progressed they gained confidence and participated more actively.. Men preferred the revival of water resources activities which help in the irrigation of fields, whereas women preferred reviving wells for drinking water. People of lower caste groups preferred small ponds to be revived as they were located near to their houses. Conflicts between higher and lower caste people over the use of water resources surfaced. With the help of resources maps these issues were resolved harmoniously. The resource map helped the higher and lower caste people to understand the basic reasons of the conflict. The issues were discussed in detail and a plan to revive the resources was developed with the people.

PRA exercise also helped to make cultural and social constraints flexible in between the caste, class and gender, identify the men and women leaders from the community to be involved in the Watershed Association, Working Groups and Self Help Groups. The following PRA exercises were used to enhance equal participation of the community in the WFP project.

After the PRA exercise, Raiben Mayajeebhai Senva, of village Vithalpur, shared her view that the village women were never asked to tell when they were free for participation in the project activities. Women never had any choice. She said that she felt good when NOSD team asking about convenient times for her to attend a meeting. In turn this enhanced participation of the village community in the WFP project activities. For example, in the first

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session of the training program, there was only one women and by the end of the project, women's participation increased to more then 50 percent.

5.5 MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The PRA exercise Venn Diagram helped NOSD to make people understand about role of village community and importance of representation of each caste, class and gender and their respective roles in the management of village-level institutions. The outcome of the exercise guided NOSD to form a 11 member Watershed Association which has equal representation of people from different local institutions, class, caste and gender. There were 6 women from higher and lower caste groups, one representative from the school, the panchayat and the milk cooperative. Two representatives were from the Bakshipanch.

This exercise presented an example of creating equal representation of community in the management of local level affairs. Men and women of the village community developed trust in the NOSD team. Village men started accepting the changing role of rural women. The process of involvement of women was further enhanced by conducting regular meetings with men and women separately on the management aspect of the project. The meeting minutes reflect that the decisions taken and the activities implemented were made both by the men and women.

The acceptance of equal representation of the women and lower caste men and women in the management by the village community may be seen as are small changes but this has allowed the WFP project to sow seeds of hope for a better society for the future.

To accommodate people from different caste, class and gender ,three formal groups were created: the Watershed Association, the Working Group and the Self Help Group (SHG). These groups were designed to ensure the equal representation of every caste and religion in managing the WFP. In a similar manner, the representation of rural women in a Working Groups of Chetrasumbha, Vithalpur/Devnagar and Rewalia was 50%, 38% and 47%, respectively. As the project progressed equal representation of women in the working groups as well as representation of the different castes was achieved.

5.6 Meetings with the village community

Regular meetings with the village community were an integral part of the project management. These meetings provided a place to sit together, discuss issues and decisions taken, resolve disputes and differences and continue the work of the project.

In the beginning of the Water First Project in village Chetarsumbha, the first women's meeting was arranged in the month July 2003 on the premises of a temple in the village. Due to caste constraints women from lower caste could not participate in the meeting. The mistake of conducting a meeting at wrong place was realised by the NOSD team and NOSD apologised to both higher and lower caste women and organised the next meeting at common place under a tree.

During first eight months of the project, women and men met separately. It was the first occasion where two separate meetings were conducted with men and women on the same issue. It never happened in their village earlier under any project. The NOSD adopted a strategy that every issue related to the project would be discussed with the men and women in their respective meetings. The minutes of the meetings were maintained for both the groups. The result of interview strongly suggests that this strategy was effective. Sixty-six percent of women felt that the Water First Project had considered views of men, women

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and elders of different caste during planning stage of the project. Thirty three percent said that their suggestions to improve the water resources like wells, ponds, farm embankments and a selection of tree species were considered. Only about 7 % of women said their opinions did not affect the planning.

5.7 Capacity Building

As mentioned above rural society in India is fragmented with many cultural castes and economic classes of people. Overcoming these divisions involves addressing a range of traditional and psychological barriers. The team gave emphasis to identify training, orientation, motivational, and outreach programs to enable rural people to regain self esteem, identify their own strengths, weaknesses and equip them with important skills and capabilities for developing sustainable rural livelihoods.

The first training program under the WFP was conducted in the month of August 2003. Out of 30 participants there was only one woman. The woman participant was Mrs. Chanchal ben *Senva* who was the village head (*Sarpanch*) of Vithalpura village. She was the sarpanch of the village not by choice of the people but because of the Panchayat Act which reserves 33% seat for women of a total population of particular village for women. This imposed female authority enabled Chanchal ben to utilise her wisdom in managing village affairs. She was a natural leader with independent vision and thought.

When village men and women of all the three villages saw Chanchalben working with NOSD team, two foreign consultants and with their own village men, they appreciated her courage. After the training program when she came back to village, she was surrounded by the village women and shared her experiences she had at training program. As a result NOSD got requests for enrolment for the future training programs in advance from women of the villages. This was the real beginning of the rural women's active participation in the Water First project (Baseline Study Report, NOSD,2003).

5.8 Outreach Study Program

Outreach Study Program provided a learning experience that is stimulating, physical, visual, cognitive and often emotional and spiritual. The purpose of the tour was to provide an opportunity for village men and women of all ages to travel together to another village within and outside the Gujarat state to experience different culture, climate and social life of another community. Further it provided village community an opportunity on how another community is mitigating the effects of drought through the participatory watershed approach and enable villagers to experience a different kind of social interaction (Implementation Training Report, NOSD, 2004).

Two visits were conducted one is to the Indus Valley Harappan Civilisation at Lothal, near Ahmedabad and another visit was to a NGO Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS) Bharatpur district of Rajasthan State. For many women, this was first opportunity to go outside the state of Gujarat. Feedback from some women revealed that this journey gave them new energy, new experience and was a life time achievement for them (Implementation Training Report, NOSD. 2004).

6. RESULTS IN TERMS OF GENDER PERFORMANCE

The first eight months of the project enabled the NOSD implementing agencies to understand geographical area, social, political and cultural system of the WFP villages. Based on these understandings, the NOSD team could analyse traditional roles and responsibilities of village women (EOA report, NOSD, 2005).

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In the WFP equal opportunities were provided for a representative from each caste and class to participate in the meetings, trainings and implementation activities. NOSD has always acted as a neutral party in the decision making process which has created a trusting and respectful atmosphere in the villages.

Slowly and steadily participation of women increased in all the activities of the project. After one year of the project, the NOSD team efforts brought men and women of the villages to sit together and amicably discuss the issues of the project. Although rural women respected their traditions by veiling their face while sitting in the meeting, they also challenged tradition by raising the issues of their concern in front of men. Rural men also accepted their changed roles. The NOSD team had succeeded in changing the cultural values and practices that prevented women from actively participating in meetings and this proves that culture changes as per the time and situation.

Equal participation was achieved in

- the watershed association (WA): Of 11 members of WA, 6 were women.
- training programs: A total of 683 village people participated in different training programs, out of which 299 were men and 383 were women.
- the outreach program; Out of 107 participants, 54 were men and 43 were women.
- works allotted to women included supervision work on wells and farmland restoration.
- the monitoring and evaluation of the activities were allotted to women.
- In addition significant participation of the women was achieved in planning, management and decision making process of the WFP project as follows:
- one hundred percent participation of women was achieved in Self Help Group (SHG).
- thirty three percent participation of women was achieved in adopting organic practices.
- fifteen percent participation in the data collection (While this may seem low, it is significant as due to illiteracy, women could not record the information but they participated in PRA exercises)
- the participation of men and women increased overall and the project achieved equal representation of both genders in attending the meeting.
- women shared the stage with men of the village and raised issues. In every WFP village, women strongly opposed the men when they tried to ignore well renovation work in the project which was the women's priority.
- works and measures were by supervised the women.
- water testing of each well was done by the women and NOSD team facilitated the process It was found that well water is better then any other source of water i.e. tap water, pond water (EOA report, NOSD. 2005). Women also made the rules and regulations for keeping the well clean.
- Maintained records of the meeting minute's book.

During meetings and trainings, rural women, both rich and poor, from higher and lower castes, sat, ate and drank together. This evidences shows that community has begun to accept changes in deep rooted traditions and culture for a better future (EOA report, NOSD, 2005).

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance meaningful participation of women in projects following steps should be ensured

Involvement at planning stage of the project

- Every society has different set of social, political, environmental, cultural and traditional dynamics. Investigate the traditional, cultural customs, taboos and time that constraint

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woman to participate in the project. Implementing agency should understand these practices and formulate a timeframe to conduct Baseline Study so that these issues are identified and addressed properly. This timeframe may vary from project to project and area to area.

- Meet the practical need of the gender and understand the root causes, dynamics and structures of oppression in the project area
- Explore gender issues existed in the project area. Man and woman have different perspective to use the resources therefore there is need to understand these differences and incorporate them in the project at the planning stage. Involve men and women together since beginning of the project as it helps to break the barriers that confront women.
- Bring resource poor women in the development process by formulating effective strategies, policies and designing projects.
- The impact of policy and project activities on both men and women should be addressed and it is therefore imperative to understand different interests roles
- Use a participatory approach to create an atmosphere in the project area, to make village men and village leaders to acknowledge women's knowledge and need of their participation to gain long term effect.
- Reorient man's perspective by arranging visits of the village community to successful example with in the state and outside the state.
- During Baseline Study there is need to create database on gender issues. Gender analysis would further help to explore gender inequalities in a society. Implementing agency should analyse these inequalities and address them during the project to educate village community.
- Involvement of women officer in organising, motivating and creating awareness of the project since beginning of the project.
- The effects of new technology on gender especially to women and society as a whole should be studied before carrying out development projects. This would help to understand the impact of technologies on different user groups.

Ensure equal gender participation

- Enhance equal representation of women at the village level management association under any project.
- Give enough time as per the need and requirement of the community and especially to men to get acquainted with the new values, views in relation to men and women role in a progressive society.
- Exposure by taking them to successful project area to broaden their vision.
- Intervention should be introduced by understanding social, cultural and traditional practices of a society.

Gender Mainstreaming:

- Take into account different needs of men and women at the time of conceptualisation of any project this would enable implementing agency to understand the people's perception and help to solve it .
- Recognize the need to bring changes in the traditional role of men and women in the society by using different participatory approaches and communication methods like street plays, songs and slogans.
- Raise consciousness of the village men that women are equal users of the community resources and they should be involve in the project so that right practices are adopted by the community to maintain the resources on sustainable basis.
- Exchange information about the involvement of women in the project with all the agencies involved in project management from grassroots level to top management. This

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enables a team to conceptualize strategy about the role of women in the project and ensures women's participation in the every activity of the project, decision-making processes and capacity building.

- Empower women by giving direct responsibilities of the project management and decision making.
- Emphasize at organisation level, government level about the need to transform the structure through changes in laws, social and legal and property rights. Such changes would provide basis for women to fight for their own right.

Participatory Processes:

- Take joint actions by all the local level institutions at village level to make implementation of the project benefited to all the caste, class and gender groups of the community.
- Increase women's self reliance and internal strength, enable them to see options and make choices

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