

Future Search for Watershed Development Projects in India – Priorities for Policy and Practice¹

Relevance of Watershed Development Projects:

From river valley projects (1960s) to Common Guidelines (2008), the watershed development projects travelled a long distance in India. The Watershed Guidelines (1994) could be considered as a turning point in the policy, practice and discourse of watershed approaches in India. Subsequently, each new policy/ guidelines of watershed development projects had a specific thrust (Refer **Annexure No 1**) and also complicated the practice in some ways.

The watershed development projects are akin to the story of elephant and blind men. Each group of stakeholders has a particular point of view and opinion on the relevance and impacts of watershed development projects. Compared to major irrigation projects/ untargeted subsidy driven agricultural schemes, the demand for watershed projects is fairly low. The watershed development projects gained popularity for all wrong reasons. They also carry the burden of “unsustainable impacts” in the eyes of ministers/ administrators. While there is some reality in these arguments, the causative factors behind this apparently low performance are rarely analyzed. On the other hand, effectively implemented watershed development projects could demonstrate the relevance of these approaches in rainfed conditions, beyond doubt. This paper is based on such evidences where sound implementation of good policies made a real difference on the ground. (Refer

Box No 1

Evidences of Positive Impacts of WSD Projects – Key Findings from Different Studies

Studies conducted by ICRISAT; GIDR; DSC; WASSAN; TERI; AKRSPI; TARU; Water Conservation Mission, GoAP; WOTR and others indicate that

- Soil loss and surface runoff reduced by 52% and 58% respectively, in completed watersheds.
- Area under irrigation increased in almost all watersheds. The extent of this increment ranged from 34% to 100% in different watersheds.
- The area under sowing increased. The cropping intensity increased.
- Productivity/ yields of crops increased and the net returns also increased (up to 63%).
- The Benefit Cost Ratio of watershed project interventions was influenced by type of intervention and type of crops grown. However, all studies clearly indicated a positive Benefit Cost Ratio –which ranged from 1.10 to 15.72 (in different parts of the country), depending on the above factors.
- The availability of drinking water improved in all project villages. The ground water situation also improved in all project villages.
- Other benefits such as fodder availability, employment opportunities (and also equal wages in limited number of cases) and income generation opportunities improved significantly in all villages where watershed projects were implemented.

¹ 1st Draft – MV Rama Chandrudu WASSAN 13 Dec 2010

Box No 1). The paper argues for a better deal for watershed based approaches in policy and practice.

Future watershed development projects have to find themselves in the midst of – changing global equations; changing technology; climate change related issues; deteriorating soil fertility; diminishing forest covers; depleting ground water; increasing urbanization; decreasing productivity of several crops (irrigated/ rainfed crops); newer aspirations of younger generations in rural areas; increasing disparity between rich & poor in the society; conflicting agriculture and land use policies (corporatization of agriculture; special economic zones; increasing mono-cropping; others); breaking institutional arrangements for rural/ agriculture finances; increasing landlessness and further fragmentation of land; low level of political support for agriculture/ rainfed crops – the list seems to be endless. Some of these issues are age-old, while several other issues are increasingly becoming important and more visible in recent past. This inventory of issues is useful in the current discussion on “Future Search of Watershed Projects in India – Policy and Practice”, which is meant for conceptualizing the input for approach paper for 12th Five Year Plan. When the Government of India is setting its priorities and designing its programs, “what are the design inputs that voluntary organizations could give for shaping future watershed development projects in India?” is the current question for the members of National Forum of Civil Society Organizations for Watershed Based Development Processes in India. This paper is an attempt to provide necessary support in this process.

What does this paper do?

This paper is organized into four sections. Each section tries to answer a set of pertinent questions.

- Part 1: This part of the paper articulates some of the issues and concerns (bottlenecks) in promoting and protecting rural livelihoods through watershed development projects.
- Part 2: This part of the paper identifies missing links in the current policy and practice of watershed development projects
- Part 3: This part of the paper systematically consolidates the lessons from good practices in watershed approaches
- Part 4: This part of the paper identifies thrust areas, funding priorities, recommendations for future watershed development projects in India.

1. Part 1: Issues and Concerns in execution of Watershed Development Projects:

There are several issues and concerns in the process of executing the watershed development projects. The Mid Term Review of 11th Five Year Plan also made few critical remarks on the achievements and gaps in the process of operationalizing Common Guidelines. (Please Refer **Annexure No 2**). It is evident that the new Common Guidelines for Watershed Development Projects (2008) were not effectively launched in the country and the process is taking some more time. There are several reasons for this slow progress. In fact, it is good to take some time to establish systems for effective execution of watershed development projects on a large scale in the country, rather than hurrying the processes and spending money. However, it is important to reflect on “what kind of systems is being set up and whether these systems are in tune with the current and future demands of watershed development projects in the country?”. In this section of the paper, some of the issues and concerns of watershed development projects are mentioned.

1.1. Issue No 1: Adaptation to Climate Change – Shift from Projects to Programs:

Though several expert groups² made an assessment of exact area that deserves watershed treatment in India, there is a consensus that at least 55 Million Hact land is yet to be treated under watershed development projects in the country. The process of land degradation, desertification is being accelerated due to climate change. Several newer areas are being subjected to moisture distress and unpredictable rain-fall patterns. It is important to realize that old and already treated areas are also unable to sustain the impacts for a longer period, due to the implications of climate change; unsustainable resource use (Eg: over exploitation of groundwater). It is becoming increasingly imperative that “adaptation to climate change” has to be core concern of future watershed development projects in the country. This understanding basically tells that

- There is already huge area that needs to be treated under watershed principles. Newer areas that need watershed development approach are increasing
- There is a need for continuous interventions in rain-fed/ moisture distressed areas and “project mode” is not the answer. Watershed Approaches cannot be executed in a “Project” mode.
- There is need for designing “series of interventions or/and packages of interventions” and delivering them in an orchestrated and phased manner at village level so that the positive impacts are sustained.
- Investments and Institutional Arrangements have to be based on long term perspective

² Please refer Annexure No 3 for details.

Current thinking on these issues seems to be not with this kind of vision. The current focus and priorities are on “projects”, which is essential to begin with. But there is no “design” to take “series of interventions”/ “packages of projects”, into those villages, where the watershed development projects are already/ being executed. This is a serious concern.

1.2. Issue No 2: Concerns related to Institutional Base of the Watershed Approaches:

Thanks to Common Guidelines for Watershed Development Projects (2008), a serious thought is given to dedicated institutional arrangements for watershed development projects in the country. However, the execution of these policy provisions and practices on the ground needs considerable improvements.

1.2.1. How are the State Level Nodal Agencies functioning?

It is observed that most of the state governments followed the norms and established SLNA as per Common Guidelines for Watershed Development Projects (2008). However, there are huge variations in the size, profile, role, functions performed and effectiveness of these SLNA teams, in different states. While the need for a dedicated arrangement is absolutely appreciated, these variations need to be carefully looked into. It is important to overcome several of bottlenecks (largely administrative and financial) at SLNA level. It is important to contextualize these SLNAs within each state, without compromising the very purpose of the SLNA. This requires considerable negotiations between State Governments and Department of Land Resources, GoI. It is a concern that these negotiations are not happening adequately, which impacts on the effectiveness of SLNAs. Many of the SLNA members are not completely familiar with participatory process of watershed based approaches. They need to pick up necessary skills and attitudes. It is important to invest on these teams and build the capacities of these members.

1.2.2. Can Government Departments function as Project Implementing Agencies?

Majority of the states have identified Line Departments as PIAs. Forest Department, Soil Conservation Department, Agriculture Department, others – are the prominent among them. These departments are either reluctant to take up the responsibilities of PIA or have dubious intensions or low level of capacities to function as PIA or unprepared. In some states, identified Line Departments have not yet confirmed their willingness to function as PIAs, even now. In several states, SLNAs have allocated 100% of projects to line departments. With the current level of preparedness of these PIAs, it is really doubtful whether the promises of watershed development projects are delivered.

1.2.3. What are the roles of Apex Level Institutions and how are they performing?

The Apex Bodies such as National Rainfed Areas Authority, Department of Land Resources, SLNAs in several states are busy with house-keeping activities. This process is essential considering the fact that huge backlogs (completion of on-going projects, etc), data gaps, administrative issues and coordination problems (states and central level departments) dominate the day-to-day affairs of these institutes. The watershed development projects require huge energies and administrative acumen for establishing the right systems and also open-up newer windows for future winds. Currently the entire system seems to be locked up in administrative procedures of approving plans and not more than this. The “teething troubles” of NRAA is already acknowledged by reports of Mid Term Review of 11th Five Year Plan, by Planning Commission, GoI. It is important to give adequate attention to the administrative aspects of the program, which was missing so far. With the SLNA/ DWDU/ dedicated teams at DoLR, this situation is likely to improve. However, the main concern is the pressure of the administrative requirements on NLNA/ SLNA/ DWDU. They just do not have time to spend time for creative thinking; exploring newer strategies; effective partnerships; facilitate innovations. A major program like watershed project could not be limited to administrative procedures.

1.2.4. What is the space for Voluntary Organizations?

In spite of providing space in the Common Guidelines for Watershed Development Projects (2008) for Voluntary Organizations, majority of SLNAs has actually considered this as an option that could be easily ignored. This is a clear position of the governments in several states to keep a safe distance from voluntary organizations. This choice is also easy for the state administration, which serves its own interest. It is also sad that several states do not have strong networks of NGOs to lobby for their legitimate space. In case of some states, these NGO networks were able to get some space and partnerships, after prolonged negotiations. SLNAs in several states/ DoLR/ NRAA – take a passive role on this issue and perpetuate the “departmentalization” of watershed development projects. Interestingly, all these members are completely knowledgeable about the voluntary sectors and their contribution in their respective states. This apathy at higher levels (at SLNA/ DoLR/ NRAA) towards the partnerships with voluntary sector should be a major cause of concern for the watershed development projects, civil society organizations and also for the administrators. The usual suspects are – large number of dubious NGOs who work closely with people’s representatives/ ministers. Instead of dealing with these problems with policy & administrative instruments, these apex bodies are busy with “business-as-usual”

approach and piles of files. Committed NGOs in natural resource management expertise are also indifferent to these issues and are reluctant to be part of networking. They consider that the process of engagement is too tiring and does not yield desired results. This apathy from NGO sector is also major cause of concern.

1.3. Issue No 3: Content of Watershed Development Projects:

1.3.1. How to regulate the use natural resources?

Unregulated use of conserved and augmented natural resources (particularly groundwater) is pushing the positive impacts into brink of sustainability. Institutions that are being established as part of watershed projects have a short term vision and “implementation of works” dominates their agenda. As soon as the execution of work is completed, these institutions collapse. Resource management and governance is not perceived as part of their agenda. State level policies and programs also do not support the cause of regulated use of natural resources. Absence of regulations at community level and state level (policy/ programmatic) instruments is major concern in the projects.

1.3.2. How to define livelihoods and production systems in the context of watershed development projects?

Fortunately or unfortunately, the definitions of livelihoods and production systems are not well defined in the Common Guidelines for Watershed Development Projects (2008). However, in the light of National Rural Livelihoods Mission/ several other initiatives such as Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, etc, it is a good idea to define the broad contours of “livelihoods and production systems” in the watershed development projects. This clarity would help in planning, executing and monitoring these components within watershed development projects. Currently, this clarity is expected to emerge in State Specific Process Guidelines. However, many SLNAs are not in a position to perceive the need for State Specific Process Guidelines. In fact, the recent workshop at DoLR (Oct 2010) recommended to reduce the budget allocation for livelihoods/ production systems from 23% to 15%. Instead of developing clarity on the agenda, necessary capacities and establishing sound practices, DoLR/ SLNAs collectively decided to reduce the budget allocations for important components such as livelihoods/ production systems. This decision to reduce budgets is a major cause of concern, coupled with absence of clarity on the details of these components.

1.3.3. Can NREGS and Watershed Projects be converged on the ground?

The idea of converging NREGS and watershed development projects has been discussed several times in several occasions. However, the real life examples of this convergence are very limited (Eg: Watershed Development Projects in Madhya Pradesh using NREGS). The objectives, funding norms, institutional arrangements (including responsible departments) and time frames are different for both the projects. Only point of convergence is the list of activities under both the projects. It is important for state/ central governments to evolve a common ground between these two streams. The enabling conditions for convergence are not part of the discussions and discourse. This naïve approach to the concept of convergence is a cause of concern. In fact, these two streams also conflict with each other due to the differences in the operating norms. Watershed development projects seek contribution from the users, while the NREGS does not need any contribution. Planning processes are expected to be on watershed basis in case of watershed development projects, while the planning for shelf of works is demand driven in case of NREGS. Though several of these points could be harmonized, there are limited efforts to facilitate this process on the ground. In the process of evolving common ground between these two streams, what could be compromised in each stream? – is a major concern.

2. Part 2: Missing Dimensions

Discussions and discourse on watershed development projects is largely misinformed. Several dimensions of watershed projects that enhance the theory and practice of watershed development projects are hidden. This section of the paper tries to unearth these hidden dimensions of watershed development projects.

2.1. Missing Dimension 1: Absence of Data Bases

The information and data bases about watershed development projects are absent. The physical and financial progress related data bases are also incomplete in some ways. These data collection responsibilities are scattered all over and the related systems are weak. The Common Guidelines for Watershed Development Projects (2008) have strongly recommended the establishment of data centres, which are being set up in each state/ district. The base line data for watershed development projects is a major gap in the project design and policy formulation processes. Since base line data is not available, measuring impacts is also difficult. In the light of climate change and its implications, it is an important requirement for the project to develop data bases on a variety of parameters. Making use of these data bases for “community centric decision making processes” is another major challenge.

2.2. State Specific Guidelines

As already indicated in the previous section, there is little appreciation for the need of state specific “Process Guidelines”. The SLNA teams are not in a position to completely visualize the relevance of defining processes and norms that are relevant for each state. In the absence of such state specific policy framework, there is a gross generalization of program content and practice. This approach could potentially kill the local level innovations in watershed development projects. Absence of such guidelines could also hinder the creative energies of state/ district administration.

2.3. Absence of Capacity Building Service Delivery Mechanism

Watershed development projects are unique in several ways. This is the first rural development project that has inbuilt budget for capacity building purpose. However, there is a huge gap in designing the capacity building service delivery mechanism for the project. It is assumed that PIA itself would provide capacity building inputs to communities/ project facilitators for a long period. In the absence of such any delivery mechanism, the budgets allocated for capacity building purpose were largely underutilized or misused. Instead of finding of appropriate solutions to this problem, the DoLR reduced the budget allocations for the project. This policy of reducing budgets (for want to appropriate operational strategies) is in practice for watershed development projects for long period now and it extended to livelihoods/ production systems component also. Though there are several models that demonstrated effective delivery of capacity building services and some of these good practices are integrated into Common Guidelines for Watershed Development Projects (2008), the delivery system is effectively not in place.

2.4. Absence of Professionals:

There is a huge shortage of human resources at different levels in the watershed development sector. The professionals with engineering/ social work/ agriculture/ other disciplines are not opting for watershed development projects as their career. The low salary for watershed development team members is a major deterrent in the project. There are no professional colleges/ universities that offer professional courses for young professionals, who might want to consider watershed development as a career. The recent initiative by DoLR in collaboration with Open University is a beginning in this direction. Considering the huge requirement of professionals for watershed based approaches, there is a huge need for professional programs on watershed development projects in the country. There are no such efforts so far, by anyone in this direction.

2.5. Forest Lands, Tanks, Livestock, Fisheries:

Usually ridge areas are covered with forest lands, in many watersheds. The forest lands are not included in watershed development projects by choice. Ministry of Rural Development,

Govt likes to spend its funds in rural areas and not on forest lands. It is expected that the Ministry of Forests & Environment spends funds for reviving degraded forest lands. Theoretically, this division of responsibilities is reasonable, if works. There is no convergence of policies, plans and funds at the village level. Both the ministries would have spent crores of rupees without converging with each other. The ridge areas (where forest lands are generally there) are largely left and areas below forests are treated under watershed development projects. As a result, the investments got washed off in the valley portions in many watershed projects. On the other hand, forest lands were conserved by forest protection committees and valley portion (revenue lands of village – public and private lands) were not treated by forest department. This mismatch is a common practice and there is no shift in this position. As a result of the recent Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2007, rights over forest lands are allocated to individuals and they are now “technically” private lands. Villages where forest lands are predominant, exclusion of forest lands is a common practice.

In a similar way, minor irrigation tanks are also excluded from watershed development projects. Rehabilitation/ renovation of minor irrigation tanks (which form the outlet of several micro watersheds) is not included in a typical watershed development project. The minor irrigation department/ Panchayati Raj Department is supposed to take care of these minor irrigation tanks. The link watershed development projects/ minor irrigation & PRI department rarely takes place.

Similar exclusion takes place with fisheries and livestock in watershed development projects. The livestock related interventions are largely limited to vaccination camps. The importance of addressing critical production related problems within livestock/ fisheries sectors is not appropriately appreciated by concerned practitioners of watershed development projects. The policy of watershed development projects is either silent on or neutral to or limited to cursory mention of such components with in watershed development projects. This could be considered as conspiracy of silence. Forests, tanks, livestock and fisheries are the missing dimensions in a typical watershed development projects in rural India.

3. Part 3: Lessons from Good Practices

Luckily there are several good practices in watershed projects, against all odds. These good practices are found largely in those projects that are funded by bilateral projects and are facilitated by voluntary sector. Some practices are not necessarily within the framework of watershed development projects. Some of these good practices could contribute to the policy formulation processes also. Common Guidelines for Watershed Development Projects (2008)

also have picked up several such good practices from the field and converted them into policy and program components. In this section, some of the newer good practices that are relevant to watershed development projects are mentioned.

3.1. NREGS – Social Audits and Transparency Arrangements

The transparency and accountability related arrangement in NREGS is a major breakthrough in a public investment project. Such arrangements are mentioned in the Common Guidelines for Watershed Development Projects (2008) for watershed development projects also. There are also several projects/ agencies that developed similar efforts to make the processes transparent and accountable, through different methods. They also achieved similar results. It is important to evolve systems for establishing transparent and accountable systems for making watershed development projects more effective and free from vested interests.

3.2. Consortia for Supporting Implementation of Watershed Project

Some bilateral projects demonstrated effective institutional mechanisms for delivery of capacity building services to different actors of the watershed development projects. There are also networks of resource organizations that provided capacity building support to PIA/ WDT/ Watershed Communities. Institutionalized capacity building services are provided by establishing livelihoods resource centres for watershed development projects. These experiences are found in Andhra Pradesh; Orissa; Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Gujarat. It is important to realize that these arrangements need additional funding support. These arrangements go a long way in ushering the creative energy of the program partners, by building their vision, capacities, skills/ knowledge/ attitudes.

3.3. Convergence Models

Several efforts were made to demonstrate effective convergence of projects at community level. Prominent among them is experiences of implementing watershed development projects with NREGS funds in Madhya Pradesh. This model is largely adaptation of watershed approaches within NREGS stream. Similar, models also exist in Orissa, where Government of Orissa established Jibika, an independent stream of livelihoods projects based on the experiences of Western Orissa Rural Livelihoods Program.

4. Part 4 - Recommendations

In this section of the paper, an attempt is made to pick threads from the previous sections and conceptualize recommendations for improving the situation. These recommendations could be considered as inputs for preparing approach paper for 12th Five Year Plan by

Planning Commission, Gol. These recommendations are also “priorities for investments and programs” for the governments in future.

4.1. Professional Courses on Watershed Projects (Certificate/ Diploma/ Degree Programs)

Support the process of establishing institutions that offer diploma/ degree programs with a specific focus on watershed approaches; rural livelihoods; rainfed farming systems; rural institutions and management. The students from these institutions/ universities could be awarded certificate/ diplomas/ degrees, based on the duration of the program. This is a long term investment and DoLR and other ministries need to give priority to this agenda.

4.2. Establishing Dedicated Departments for Watershed Development Project

Watershed development projects and approaches are here to stay. The area that requires is changing and old areas also need attention. Given this reality, it is important that dedicated departments are established for executing watershed development projects in the country. To improve the professional capacities and reduce the administrative hassles, these departments could get a status of society or an autonomous mission. This mission/ department should have its own staff at all levels, unlike current practice in some states, where only state level unit is mission and rest of the staff is regular line departments. This department could hire professional staff from open market and also get staff from other departments on deputation. This department/ mission should have adequate funding support from state/ central governments. The choice of establishing these departments/ missions should not be left to state governments.

4.3. Planning as a tool for convergence (State/ District/ Village Level Plans)

It is practical to think that each department/ ministry would have its own focus and priority. They may want to converge with other department/ ministry, only when it is not very inconvenient for them. It is important to achieve the task of convergence for effective utilization of funds and achieving the objectives. This is possible only when plans are prepared in a comprehensive manner at village/ district/ state level. This process requires considerable professional and organizational skills and capacities, at different levels. The current functioning of planning departments needs to be revamped in such a way that the outputs (in the form of convergence plans) are produced effectively for concerned departments at state/ district/ block/ village level. Each state should have a professional body/ institution which works in close collaboration with State Planning Commission/ District Planning Boards. This planning unit/ institution should be funded and supported through appropriate legal/ administrative instruments. The planning process also has to be financially supported so that adequate professional inputs go in the planning process. Eventually, each village and Grama Panchayati should be able to access funds according to

its own plans and demands. This process requires considerable funds, professional capacities and administrative/ political/ policy support. 12th Five Year Plan should take initiatives for this process.

4.4. Effective Convergence between NREGS and Watershed Approaches

The interventions of watershed development projects and NREGS are almost same. However, the operating norms (objectives, institutional arrangements; implementation processes) are different. Based on the experiences in different states, it is important to develop common operating norms for converging both NREGS and watershed development projects. As an illustration, planning on watershed principles; provision of institutional arrangements for user; wage seekers and a common platform with local professional support; facilitation support in the form of watershed development teams, etc could be common for both NREGS and watershed development projects. In those villages, where watershed projects are being implemented, additional funds could be used for livelihoods and production systems. The transparency and accountability mechanisms could be same for both the streams.

4.5. Components of Watershed Development Projects:

The argument that watershed development projects have to offer comprehensive package of solutions to the problems of drought prone areas is a hackneyed statement. However, given the low level of practice of this well accepted principle, it is worth reiterating this principle again. The focus has to be on – revitalizing rain-fed agriculture and improving resilience of crops/ soils in the advent of climate change. Improving organic content and humus in the soil has to be the main result of all the interventions of watershed development projects. A package of practices such as soil fertility improvement; water management including critical irrigation; diversity of crops; biomass intensification has to be visualized.

Integration of forest lands, tanks, livestock and fisheries in watershed development projects through appropriate convergence plans has to be operating strategy for implementing agencies. The project design and monitoring indicators have to be in tune with this new paradigm in order to actually operationalise the theoretical rhetoric. It is a common knowledge that what is monitored is what is done. If organic content in the soil is monitored, the activities would be in tune with this indicator.

4.6. Groundwater Management and Regulation Policies:

Externalities of watershed development projects such as unregulated use of groundwater, pricing of agricultural outputs; power/ electricity policy – have a strong bearing on the

sustainability of impacts of watershed development projects. State governments need to be encouraged to develop programs/ policies/ norms for regulated use of groundwater and other natural resources in the rural areas. The policy formulation process for this purpose are long drawn and complicated. It is important to establish some evidences before up-scaling them. These processes need to be supported and nurtured.

4.7. Packages of Interventions/ Series of Projects:

In the light of climate change and related implications, it is important to shift from project mode to program mode. Develop packages of practices/ interventions that go into the watershed villages one after another in an orchestrated manner. The convergence plans could define the sequence of these activities/ packages in each village. Even the “covered villages” also should be opened up with these newer interventions.

4.8. Legitimate Roles for Voluntary Organizations:

It is unfortunate that the role of voluntary organizations is passive and their voice is also passive in the watershed development projects. Even after the critical observation in the MTR of 11th Five Year Plan by Planning Commission, the situation/ role of voluntary organizations did not change much. The potential roles of voluntary organizations are already mentioned several times. These are worth mentioning again, as the action could be initiated at least in 12th Five Year Plan. 12th Five Year Plan could open a special stream for “Voluntary Sector Based Watershed Support Systems” for the mainstream projects. This stream could offer support to mainstream projects/ institutions on a variety of themes, which are generally neglected in mainstream projects. These functions/ themes are briefly mentioned here.

- Special Stream of CB Support Systems in Voluntary Sector
- Large Scale Pilots by Voluntary Organizations/ Research Institutes
- Support for Creating Independent Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Systems
- Policy of Partnerships with Voluntary Organizations
- Special Window for Small NGOs

Conclusions:

This paper basically argues that watershed approaches are essential for sustaining rural livelihoods, which are natural resource based. The paper conducts an analysis of current policy and practice of watershed development projects in the country. As part of this process – issues/ concerns; missing dimensions and lessons from good practices are identified. Based on this understanding, a set of priorities/ programs are proposed in the form of recommendations. The core concern of the paper is to improve the effective implementation of policies of watershed development projects and enhance the space for civil society organizations.

Annexure No 1

Time Line of Policies and Guidelines for Watershed Development Projects in India		
Year	Policy	Thrust Area
1993	Dr Ch Hanumantha Rao' Committee Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrating DPAP, DDP, IWMP Projects and EAS. Micro Watersheds. Area based approach Participatory Platforms Direct funding to Community Based Organizations All types of agencies as Project Implementing Agencies, including NGOs Support for training & community organization
1994	Guidelines for Watershed Development Projects	
1997	CAPART Guidelines for Watershed Development Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voluntary Organizations as PIAs Support Voluntary Organizations for capacity building support
2001	Revised Guidelines for Watershed Development Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased unit costs and budgets
2002	WARASA – Common Guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrated Production Systems and related processes
2003	Hariyali	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focused on Panchayati Raj Institutions No role of other community based organizations/ Voluntary Organizations
2006	Watershed Development Fund – NABARD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only Voluntary Organizations as PIA. Phase wise project implementation Non-Negotiables Integrated
2006	Parthasarathy Committee Report on Watershed Development Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrated Livelihoods; Productivity Enhancement
2008	Common Guidelines for Watershed Development Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restructured the Institutional Framework Increased unit costs Natural Resources Development; Production Systems; Enterprise Promotion Cluster of watersheds
2000-10	<u>Bilateral Projects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural Livelihoods Projects in Andhra Pradesh; Orissa and Madhya Pradesh with DFID I support SUJALA Project in Karnataka Indo German Watershed Development Projects in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, other states Kandi Watershed Projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrated newer and alternative approaches of executing watershed development projects within departments Integrated livelihoods within watershed development projects Promoted institutional models for capacity building service delivery Higher unit costs when compared to other projects Focused on innovations

Annexure No 2

Mid Term Review of 11th Five Year Plan on Watershed Development Projects in India (Extracts from Page 80 onwards)

... New watershed projects were to be implemented in accordance with these Common Guidelines with effect from 1st April 2008. In January 2008, for the first time, a Secretary was posted in the Department of Land Resources. In February 2009, the Desert Development Programme (DDP), Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP) and the Integrated Watershed Development Programme (IWDP) were merged into the Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP). A cost norm of Rs. 12,000 per ha was adopted for the IWMP in line with the recommendations of the Parthasarathy Committee. For hilly and difficult terrains the norm is Rs.15,000 per ha. The Eleventh Plan provided an outlay of Rs. 15,359 crore for IWMP and Rs. 3,095 crore (at 2006-07 prices) for the Rainfed Areas Development Programme of the Ministry of Agriculture. In addition, there are the huge possibilities of convergence with the NREGS, whose primary focus is on watershed-related activities. Thus, there has been a massive hike in outlays compared to the past (Ninth Plan Rs. 2,179 crore and Tenth Plan Rs. 8,256 crore). Indeed, the Eleventh Plan outlay is nearly as much as the entire expenditure on watershed programmes since their inception in India.

Performance Review and the Way Forward

4.44 Given these ambitious objectives, the performance so far has been most disappointing. Till 31 August 2009, an expenditure of nearly Rs. 5,000 crore had been incurred during the Eleventh Plan period but this was entirely on old projects. No watershed projects under the new IWMP had been sanctioned till then. There are still about 16,744 ongoing projects at various stages of completion, which have been unduly delayed on one count or the other. This poses a serious question over where the massively raised outlays for the new IWMP in the Eleventh Plan are going to be spent. What is even more worrisome is that the steps that need to be taken to actualise the potential inherent in the new guidelines have yet to be put into place.

The increase in the duration of the programme owes mainly to its emphasis on a) institutional development and capacity building; b) monitoring and evaluation and c) a livelihoods orientation from the start of the programme. Each of these are quality and process-oriented activities, which demand a whole series of initiatives and partnerships to be put into place. For one, major partnerships have to be built with not only those organisations already listed in the Common Guidelines but many others who can play a crucial role in the national capacity building effort required for the watershed programme. None of this has been done so far, but is absolutely vital if the expanded Preparatory Phase of the IWMP has to have any meaning. Especially the emphasis on and special allocation for Institution Building requires a radically new approach to social mobilization that has been absent in most watershed projects so far and demands partnerships with institutions who have experience in this activity. Indeed, these institutions will need to be deployed to develop many other Master Trainer Organisations (MTOs) especially dedicated to this task if this massive national effort has to be brought to a successful conclusion. A model in this regard is the multiplier-upscaling Support Voluntary Organisation (SVO) concept pioneered by CAPART in the 1990s. SVOs will need to be identified in each state and each SVO will need to develop at least one MTO in each district for proper up-scaling without compromising on quality.

4.46 Similarly, empanelment of credible institutions from academia and the voluntary sector for monitoring, evaluation and social audit is necessary to infuse the programme with accountability and quality. The special financial allocations for each of these activities will lose all meaning if we continue with business-as-usual.

Finally, the *differentia specifica* of the new IWMP approach is its emphasis on livelihoods, especially for asset-less families. This requires a complete reorientation way beyond the merely engineering thrust of most watershed projects. There are many government and non-government organizations in India who have done pioneering work in this regard. The DoLR will need to facilitate partnerships of each state government with carefully selected institutions to carry this process forward with momentum.

4.47 Ideally, of course, these functions should be the role of the NRAA. Unfortunately NRAA continues to face a number of teething problems which have prevented it from performing to full potential. While the NRAA has undertaken a number of useful studies in its short tenure, it is yet to play the kind of overarching role of guidance to the watershed programme that was visualised at its inception. Part of the difficulty is administrative, it has not had full co-operation with implementing ministries. But part lies with the human resource profile of the NRAA which although multi-disciplinary does not have the full complement of the disciplines and has so far unable to rise to the expectations of giving intellectual leadership demanded by an ambitious, inter-sectoral and inter-disciplinary program like watershed development.

4.48 There are some difficulties with the Common Guidelines as well. A reform-oriented document places needless and quite arbitrary restrictions on the choice of the Project Implementing Agency (PIA). Despite it being a well-established fact that voluntary organisations have done some of the best work under the watershed programme, the guidelines mark them out for the harshest conditions, restricting their role in a somewhat capricious manner. The sooner these restrictions are lifted, (even while maintaining the strictest scrutiny of all PIAs), the better.

Annexure No 3

Assessment of Area that deserves Watershed Treatment....

Area that needs investments and watershed approaches....

Out of the total geographical area of the country of 328 Million Hectare (MH), about 146 MH is degraded. This includes degraded land not only under private ownership, but also the one with the departments of revenue and forest. There had been considerable variation in the data regarding extent of degraded land depending upon the definition of wasteland and also the source of information. It varies from 55 MH to 175 MH. The latest attempt to harmonize the above data^ has brought out that the degraded land, which has the potential for development under watershed development projects, amounts to 50 million h.a. of water eroded, 5 million h.a. of wind eroded and 9 million h.a. in notified forests. (Expert Group of ICAR & NRAA for Harmonization of Wasteland Data Chaired by Dr. J.S. Samra (2007).

As per the 25 year - perspective plan of the Planning Commission, 88.5 MH is to be developed under watershed program by the end of 13th Five Year Plan. Out of the above, 22.2 MH has already been developed during 9th and 10th Plan through a watershed approach. Out of the remaining rain fed area of 66.3 MH, it is proposed to develop 36.6 MH during the 11th Plan through integrated watershed approach. The rest of the area ie 29.7 MH would be considered for development in the subsequent two five year plans. (Committee on 25 years Perspective Plan for Development of Rain-fed Areas under Chairmanship of Dr. S.A. Hashim (Planning Commission, 1997)

As per latest estimates of Dr. Samra (2007), 55 M.H. will be prioritized and some lands may also become degraded in due course of time for treatment and that is why the figure of 29.7 ha. has been arrived at as balance after Eleventh Plan.