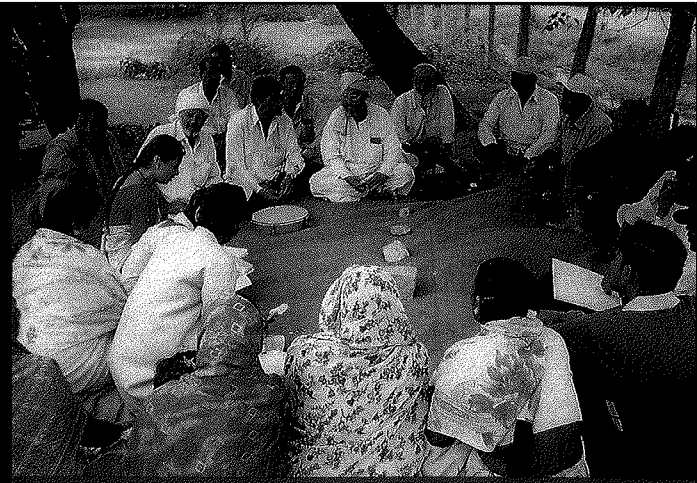
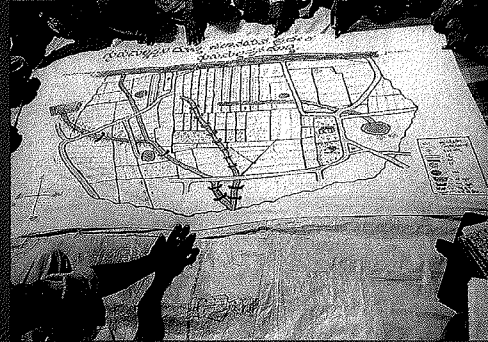


THE MYRADA EXPERIENCE



People's Institutions Managing Natural Resources in the Context of a Watershed Strategy

Aloysius P. Fernandez



MISSION STATEMENT

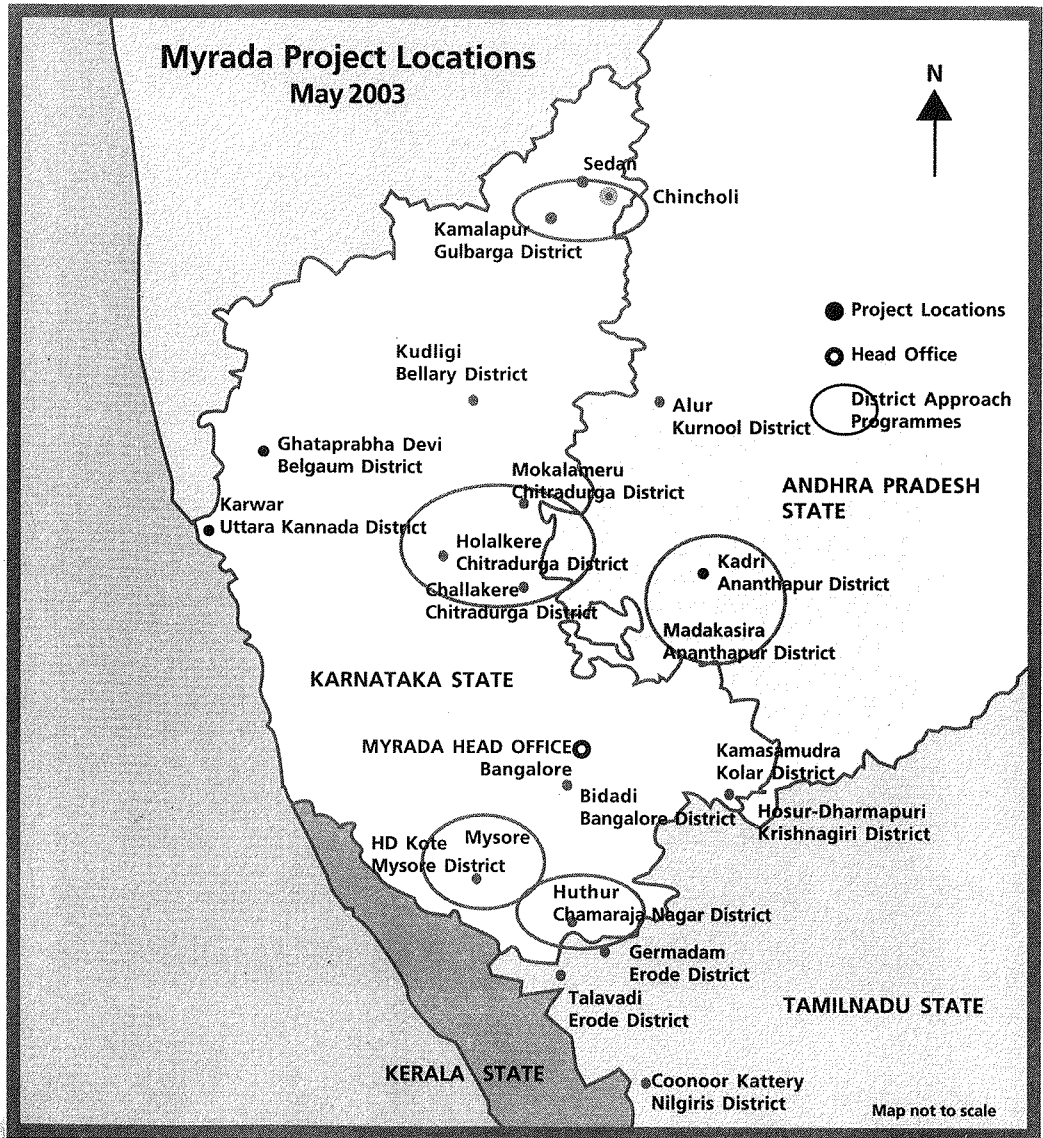
- To foster a process of ongoing change in favour of the rural poor in a way in which this process can be sustained by them through building and managing appropriate and innovative local level institutions rooted in values of justice, equity and mutual support.
- To recreate a self-sustaining habitat based on a balanced perspective of the relationship between natural resources and the legitimate needs of people.
 - To promote strategies through which the full potential of women and children are realized.
 - To influence public policies in favour of the poor.
 - To strengthen networks and linkages between and among formal and informal institutions that can foster and sustain the impact of development initiatives.

The key statement which guides
MYRADA'S role is:
"Building Poor People's Institutions"

This paper is a revised edition of a keynote for a Workshop organised by the India Canada Environment Facility in September 2003. Its current form addresses several concerns and issues related to the practice of forming people's groups for natural resource management. This is in the context of watershed projects promoted by the Government and NGOs and the role envisaged for Panchayat Raj Institutions in watershed management in the Hariyali Guidelines.

People's Institutions Managing
Natural Resources in the Context of
a Watershed Strategy

*Aloysius P. Fernandez,
Executive Director, MYRADA*



Foreword

This paper attempts to analyse the impact of several government guidelines related to watershed management on the people's institutions that have emerged in watershed programmes where NGOs have a role. It began as a keynote for a workshop but was later developed in response to requests from MYRADA staff to cover the implications of the latest guidelines called "Hariyali" which became effective in April 2003.

The Hariyali Guidelines identify the people's institutions which support the watershed programmes in the country. The institutions identified in Hariyali are 1) Representative Institutions like the Panchayat Raj Institutions at the District and Mandal levels and the Gram Panchayat and 2) Participatory Institutions where all the stakeholders are members. These are a) the Self Help groups (or what MYRADA calls the Self Help Affinity groups –SAGs), b) the User Groups whose members have a degree of homogeneity and comprise stakeholders in a micro watershed or micro catchment — this leaves the choice to the implementing agency to form smaller groups covering a micro catchment of 150-200 ha as well as larger groups covering a micro watershed of approx 500 ha depending on the topography and land ownership pattern — and c) the Gram Sabhas. MYRADA believes that both representative as well as participatory institutions are required for a watershed programme with the objectives of equity and sustainability to be achieved as well as for a vibrant democracy.

The Hariyali Guidelines however have been criticised for doing away with the Watershed Committee at the 500 ha level which was responsible, under earlier guidelines, for implementing the programme and managing funds. In its place the Hariyali Guidelines identifies the Gram Panchayat through which funds will flow and which takes the lead in managing the watershed programme. The problem is that in the Gram Panchayat, party politics and short term interests often take precedence over watershed management objectives which are achieved in the long term and which require prior investment in capacity building of peoples institutions rather than immediate and direct hand outs as grants. MYRADA's experience indicates that this Watershed Committee is not an appropriate institution to achieve the objectives of the watershed programme; it is also equally vulnerable to political pressures as the PRI institutions. MYRADA proposes that the experience of KAWAD (Karnataka Watershed Development Society) be considered, as a possible strategy to reduce the weakness that the Panchayat tends to introduce. KAWAD's project in Bellary which started in 1998 identified the Zilla Panchayat as the Implementing Agency but formed a separate Steering Committee to manage the watershed programme at the Zilla Panchayat level which included members from NGOs and Gram Panchayats involved in the programme. This experience has been replicated in most of the Districts in Karnataka. This paper suggests that a similar Steering Committee should be set up also at the Gram Panchayat level which is dedicated to managing the watershed programme.

MYRADA's experience also indicates that below the 500 ha level there are several micro catchments which families earning a livelihood from cultivation and from the resources of these micro catchments are prepared to manage. This opens the door to the formation of a Watershed Management Association of approximately 30 families involved in a micro catchment of approx 200 ha which has a higher level of ownership and affinity among members than the Committee at the 500 ha level. The SUJALA watershed project in Karnataka recognises these smaller WMAs and gives them a role though they are not eligible to receive and manage funds. The Hariyali guidelines also provide an opening for these smaller WMAs to be introduced.

Finally this paper identifies several people's institutions set up by various Government Agencies as well as by NGOs which tend to perform overlapping tasks and which encroach on the space of the Gram Panchayats; the value and functions of these institutions need to be assessed keeping in mind the need to build viable institutions with the potential for sustainability.

This paper focuses, therefore, on the institutional scaffolding of the watershed programme. It identifies several pilot experiments in which people's institutions were fostered in watershed programmes in which both Government and NGOs played a role. The author hopes that it may promote reflection and debate both among policy makers as well as implementers.

October 2003

Aloysius P. Fernandez
MYRADA

Index

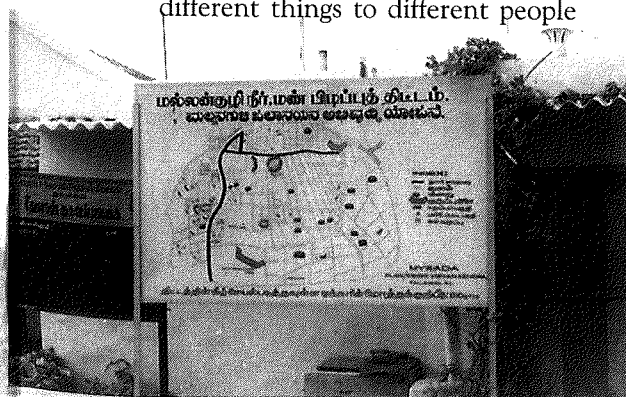
Foreword	
1. Introduction	1
2. Sources	3
3. Institutions promoted by NGOs in Watershed programmes	5
3.1. Self help Affinity Groups	5
3.1.1. Impact of SAGs on People's Institutions managing natural resources	6
3.1.2. How sustainable are SAGs?	10
3.2. Water Users Groups	12
3.2.1. How sustainable are Water User's Groups?	13
3.3. Women Pattadhar Groups	17
3.4. Watershed Management Groups/User Groups/ Area Groups	18
4. Village Level Groups formed by Government Departments to manage natural resources	27
4.1. Village Forest Committees (VFCs)	27
4.1.1. How sustainable are VFCs.?	28
4.2. Watershed Committees (Executive Committees) at the 500 – 700 ha level	28
5. People's Institutions promoted in Watershed projects under the Hariyali Guidelines	30
6. Relationship between groups promoted under Watershed projects and Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs)	37
6.1. The Hariyali Guidelines and the PRIs	37
6.2. How effective are Watershed Institutions in sustaining project investments?	46
7. SUJALA and KAWAD – Innovations	48



PEOPLE'S INSTITUTIONS MANAGING NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE CONTEXT OF A WATERSHED STRATEGY

1. Introduction

Analysing and reflecting on community institutions is a rather difficult undertaking. An economist friend of mine found the village too messy; it could not be analysed, dissected and fitted into pre determined boxes or formulae. Institutions are similar. They are not quantifiable; they are diverse - ranging from Official to "unofficial", from representative to participatory; they cannot be captured on photographs; they tend to depend on "intangibles" like conventions, values and quality of governance; they do not fit easily into log frames or lend themselves to be monitored by input, output, outcome and impact indicators. Like "participation" or "god" for that matter, they mean different things to different people



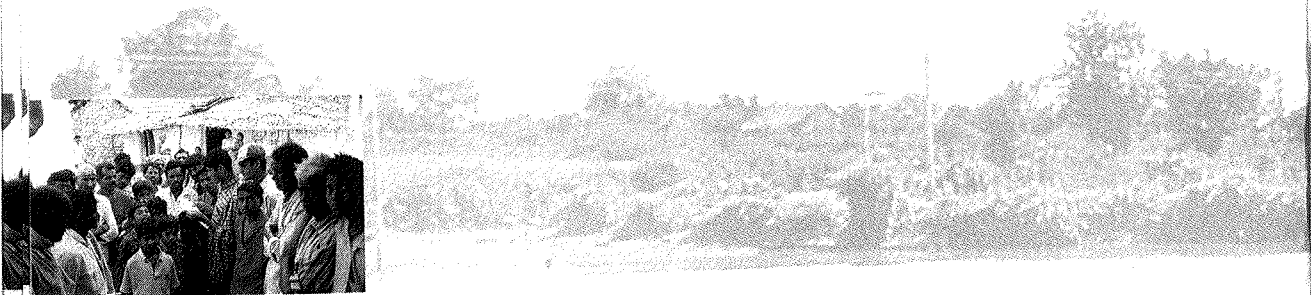
Watershed Map in Malanguli Village

who tend to interpret them to suit their needs and convenience. This adventure to put together some organised (hopefully) thoughts on community institutions in the context of natural resource management, therefore, needs the reader's indulgence, patience and active co-operation both to share in this adventure and to carry it a step forward.

For this paper, the description of an "institution" is taken from the Background Paper circulated by ICEF in preparation for this Experience Sharing Workshop. It states: **"let us agree on a workable definition, taking institutions to be a stable pattern of relationship of norms and shared values"** (I would add- *with supporting systems and conventions*) **"fully internalised among the partners who agree to follow the norms and values while conducting their activities towards a shared goal."** The ability and willingness to conduct regular self/participatory assessments in order to strengthen the institution through continuous learning is also an important feature. "Sustaining" institutions is a major concern. Briefly, the key words that underlie **"sustainability"** are "stable pattern", "fully internalised" and "

continuous learning" (all drawn from the description given above). It follows that institutions are not formed in the short term; besides all interveners do not have the skills, culture and capacity to build institutions.

Briefly, what is usually formed in most projects which adopt a group strategy are "groups" of beneficiaries who remain in a group in order to receive some benefits, or who are used as part of the delivery mechanism to deliver and monitor a programme. Very little investment is made in building these groups into institutions with their own vision, mission, strategy and supporting systems. In fact this investment builds the basis for their independence as genuine civil society institutions, which government (and many NGOs) are not comfortable with. An official from a Government finance institution recently made this comment with a degree of exasperation: "How can the Watershed Committees decide on their own when we have given the funds"? However, this paper does not focus on the process required to build an institution, nor does it dwell on the appropriate social structure of an institution which lays the basis for the institution to survive. This paper focuses on the appropriateness of the institutions identified by Government Guidelines to manage a watershed programme and on the relationship between the various institutions set up under various projects related to the management of natural resources. Given the thrust of most NGOs to focus on equity in all their programmes, this paper will also include comments on strategies to introduce "equity" in watershed programmes particularly on the impact of the SAGs (Self-help Affinity Groups) on other watershed institutions.



2. Sources

The comments in this paper are based on 1) the reports/assessments of several ICEF projects including the ICEF project implemented and managed by MYRADA Kadiri together with several NGO partners

2) MYRADA's experience in several similar watershed projects implemented by MYRADA on its own (where we cover around 95,000 ha) particularly in Huthur, Kadiri, Kamasamudram and Holalkere where several innovative approaches have emerged in watershed programmes during the past ten years, and 3) MYRADA's experience in collaboration with other institutions including NGOs in Government sponsored

watershed projects. Among these projects learnings have been drawn particularly from a) SUJALA (pure water) and b) KAWAD¹ in which several innovations have been incorporated into official watershed strategy by Government Departments managing these projects; both are Watershed Projects of the Government of Karnataka in which MYRADA is involved in implementation as well as in providing professional support in specific areas. 4) The revised Watershed Guidelines called "Hariyali" issued by the Department of Land Resources, Ministry of Rural Development which came into force in March 2003; these Guidelines gave a central role to the PRIs² in watershed management.



¹ KAWAD – Karnataka Watershed Development Society

² PRI – Panchayat Raj Institutions

References are made to institutions/groups promoted by the Forest Department like the Village Forest Committees which play a role in natural resource management but which are controlled by a Forester and tend to overlap with the functions of the PRIs and watershed groups. References are also made and to institutions/groups promoted by NGOs in tank management which in some projects are included as part of an integrated watershed strategy but which need to relate with the Tank Management Associations set up by the Irrigation Department as well as with other institutions/groups in the watershed.

This paper also describes the impact that SAGs have had on Watershed Institutions particularly in promoting equity, transparency and sustainability.



3. Institutions promoted mainly by NGOs in Government sponsored Watershed Programmes in the context of National, Multilateral and Bilateral Projects as well as where NGOs manage watershed programmes on their own.

Government projects and NGOs have promoted and adopted several people's groups related to the management of natural resources in a watershed strategy and in the promotion of equity. **Examples are given below.** The questions to be asked are: Are these groups sustainable? Do they promote equity? How do they relate with other groups/institutions in the watershed and outside?

3.1. Self Help Affinity Groups. In the initial years (late 80s and early 90s), the SAGs had no place in watershed management strategy. MYRADA's experience in the late 80s however indicated that they could play a significant role in promoting equity and self-reliance and in developing the supporting systems required for an institution to survive. Today the place of the SAGs in watershed strategy is accepted. The revised guidelines called Hariyali of the MoRD, Government of India, recognise the role of SAGs in watershed management. Membership in SAGs is of the poor (landless, near landless) and women (marginalised sector). The primary objectives of the SAGs are to promote "equity" through empowerment of the poor and marginalised and to provide livelihood support (credit, skills and marketing).

There are several studies, which provide evidence that these SAGs provide space for the poor and marginalised to grow in confidence and skills to improve their livelihood base as well as to influence changes in society. (For further reading refer to "Putting Institutions First- Even in Micro Finance" by the Author.) As far as their impact on watershed institutions is concerned, since the experience in the MYRADA projects extends over several years and provides a larger number of opportunities for learning, the impact of SAGs on the Watershed institutions will be drawn mainly from MYRADA's experience.

The first Government sponsored Watershed Programme which gave the SAGs a role in watershed strategy was KAWAD (Karnataka Watershed Development Society). The KAWAD project design ensured that SAGs were formed and trained much before the watershed programme was introduced or the Watershed Committee at the 500 ha level formed. Each SAG in the watershed area was given the right to have one representative on the Watershed Committee. In some cases where the SAGs were few, they had two representatives each on the Committee. As a result, almost half the Committee members were from SAGs. The SAGs were given the responsibility to monitor the work done under the watershed programme.

3.1.1. Impact of SAGs on People's Institutions managing natural resources

● **SAGs promote equity:** Since watershed programmes tend to focus on the landed and to benefit to a greater extent those with lands in the lower reaches of the watershed – which are generally owned and cultivated by better off families – equitable distribution of benefits through watershed programmes has been a major concern.

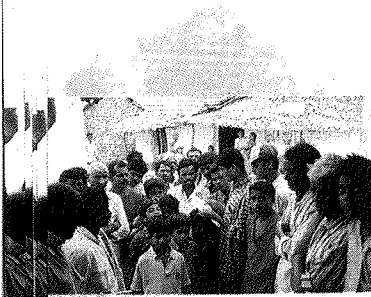
Several studies indicate that the SAGs play a key role in introducing the objective of equity in watershed programmes. However, it is crucial that adequate time and investment is made in SAG institutional capacity building. Forming and building SAGs takes time. The members are from poorer families and are largely women. The SAGs need to be exposed to at least 14 training modules offered over a period of time to the entire SAG (not only to the leaders) which focus on institutional capacity building. These modules include: a structural analysis of society, unity-affinity in action, building a vision, group goals, developing rules and regulations, responsibilities of group members, conflict resolution, need to maintain proper books and to audit, consensus or collective decision making, common fund management, self assessment, linkages, credit plus activities.



Women's Day Celebrations

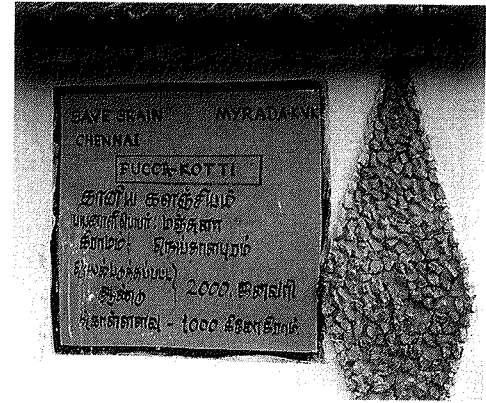
Often the mistake is made to train only the leaders of several groups together or to restrict the training to bookkeeping or individual livelihood skills. The entire SAG needs to be exposed to each module and to refresher courses when required.

When the Watershed programme started, this writer had a visual experience of some of the issues involved that related to equity. A meeting was called of the families living and/or farming in the watershed. When all the people had gathered and settled down, the picture that emerged projected the class distinctions that operated. On the floor, in front, sat those farmers who had lands in the lower reaches of the watershed which were (in this watershed) the most fertile and benefited from protective irrigation. Behind them sat or stood those farmers with lands in the middle reaches; their lands were not as productive; besides they were more vulnerable to drought and



long dry spells as protective irrigation was not available. People who stood behind on the periphery were mostly tribals and those with holdings on the upper reaches. The landless hung around. There were no women present initially but as the meeting went on they strolled in, more as inquisitive bystanders than as participants. The discussions were initiated and dominated by the farmers with holdings in the lower reaches who were sitting in front of the group. They also belonged to a caste higher than the others.

It was evident that if the marginalised groups were to be given an opportunity to participate effectively, they would have to meet in a different situation and to organise themselves in a way so that they could exert their influence on the programme in a sustainable manner. It is not enough to teach the people to fish when they cannot reach the river due to several obstacles on the way – these obstacles were based on dependency for jobs and loans and on social compulsions arising from caste and community. It was here that we discovered that the Self Help Affinity Groups could play a significant role. They did play a role after a year of their formation. MYRADA's experience indicates that the SAGs did promote equity as well as sustainability of the WMAs³. (Note: The WMAs referred to here are the people's institutions formed in micro catchments covering between 150-200 ha. They are participatory institutions, which means that all the stakeholders –land owners in the



SAGs also Promote Proper Storage

catchment and the landless who use common lands to extract fodder, fibre, food, etc- are members. The WMAs are not the Watershed Committees at the 500 ha level.) The following are a few examples:

The SAGs have influenced the WMAs to permit the landless to harvest fodder from areas which the WMA had protected. These protected areas were of two types. The first consisted of private lands lying fallow because the farmer had migrated. Since the title of the land was clear and it was not used by others, the SAGs did not anticipate any conflict which would have arisen if common lands had been targeted. The SAGs proposed that these fallow areas could be regenerated. This would help to conserve soil and water, to provide vegetative cover and to provide fodder. The SAGs suggested that the WMAs enter into a contract with the absentee owner and they helped to negotiate the agreement. The WMA agreed to fence the land with a boulder wall (funds for labour were provided by the project). Biomass

³ WMA – Watershed Management Associations

could and did regenerate in these protected areas. It was agreed that the trees would remain the property of the owner while the lopped branches and fodder grasses would be used by the village. **The SAGs lobbied with the WMAs to give the landless the right to harvest fodder from these areas. As a result of their access to fodder, the landless were able to purchase cattle with loans from their SAG.** This strategy has not only helped to provide a livelihood base for the landless and near landless but also converted neglected lands which added to soil erosion into regenerated parks which increased biomass and played an effective role in managing soil erosion and water run-off. The second category of "protected areas" consisted of the common lands, largely severely degraded hills. In the MYRADA project in Kadiri supported by NOVIB⁴, HIDA⁵ and ICEF, these wastelands were protected by the WMAs, in many cases by the construction of several kms. of stonewalls around the base of hills constructed partly through *shramdaan* (voluntary action), and partly through daily wages during drought periods. The protected areas regenerated, with a large number of custard apple trees among other flora. The SAGs were able to ensure that all their members, especially the landless, could share in the harvest of these fruits.

Further, most of the loans for consumption which the poor required and for which they had to depend on the bigger farmers of the watershed are now given by the SAGs; this has a direct impact on reducing the level of dependence of the poor families on bigger farmers. The poor took consumption loans from the larger farmers and in turn were "bonded" to labour on their fields. With the SAGs providing the poor with regular loans, they were in a position to bargain for higher wages and to exert their rights more effectively during watershed meetings.

● **SAGs influence the management of WMAs:** The members of SAGs have acquired considerable management experience while conducting the affairs of the SAGs. They learned to set priorities, to take decisions and to manage risks, to draw up rules of behaviour, to resolve conflicts and to apply sanctions effectively for non-compliance. They learned the art of consensus and co-operation. They acquired the skills required to sustain co-operation by setting up and maintaining the support systems necessary to sustain consensus and co-operation. These same skills and systems are absolutely necessary for



⁴ NOVIB – An NGO from the Netherlands

⁵ HIDA – A Canadian NGO

managing the resources of a watershed. They cannot be easily acquired during a watershed programme since the pressures to start treatment works is very strong and the process still heavily guided and influenced by interveners who insist on technical specifications and standard guidelines. In MYRADA's watershed projects, the self-help groups are formed at least 4 to 6 months before the watershed programme commences; the members have participated in several capacity building sessions before being involved in watershed management. Besides, the management of savings and credit itself is an instrument of confidence and skill building. Successful management of their common fund gives the groups confidence that they can achieve certain objectives provided they were willing to observe certain rules and create a culture that motivates people to support each other. MYRADA's experience indicates that **the SAGs promote an institutional culture and introduce the financial and management systems in the WMAs that lay the basis for the resources of a watershed to be managed in a sustainable and equitable manner.** It must be noted however, that further training modules for WMAs specific to their functions are required.

- **SAGs promote and monitor the transparent management of cash transactions in the WMAs:**

Handling funds and making decisions on the quality and quantity of work are crucial areas for effective and sustained participation of people in a

MYRADA is now urging that the SAGs be allowed to play a role in monitoring the Measurement Book maintained by the Agricultural Assistant in watershed projects sponsored under Government programmes. These Measurement Books are the basis on which the Watershed Committees at the 500 ha level make payments to individual farmers; feedback from several groups indicates that the present practice of maintaining the Measurement Book gives rise to several malpractices which affects the functioning of the watershed institutions and undermines the trust among the members.

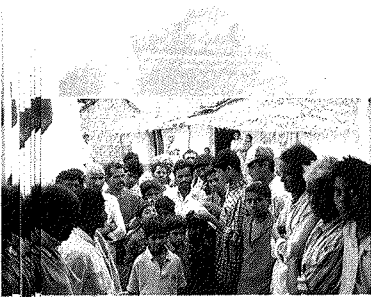
watershed programme; the process of making these decisions and developing the supporting records and systems must therefore be transparent and seen to be fair and just. In many areas where watershed treatment measures and plantations had been undertaken under previous projects, people are not aware of budgets and expenditure; they often suspect that contractors have been the major beneficiaries. Hence they viewed these measures more as a benefit to others than to them. Their commitment towards maintaining these measures was therefore weakened. The WMAs prompted by the SAGs (which have had the experience of managing their common fund, in deciding on loans and repayments) worked out procedures and systems to be adopted to ensure transparency and quality. The WMA

members begin to understand that transparency in cash transactions is critical to building a sustainable institution. As a result the WMA members have learned to verify the quantity and quality of works carried out in the farmers land; they prepare a statement of works done and the amount to be paid. Sanctions for poor quality or shortfalls are imposed – usually they take the shape of delayed or revised payments.

● **The influence of SAGs in changing the practice of giving grants into loans:** Another impact of the SAGs on the WMAs in MYRADA's projects has been the change from grants to loans for treatment activities on private lands. This has improved the potential for sustaining the treatment measures introduced in the watershed during the project period and for adding new measures. The SAGs are accustomed to manage all their credit needs as loans (without any subsidy). They questioned the practice of providing all funds for watershed treatment and plantations as grants, with some percentage of contribution. They felt that loans introduce a higher sense of ownership than contributions. Further, they brought up the problem that resulted from the requirement that contributions must be paid up front and in one instalment; they showed that this was difficult for the farmer who had to borrow the amount from private sources, especially since these contributions had to be made during the dry season. The SAGs suggested that the farmers take the entire amount as a loan for treatment on private lands only. This suggestion was accepted by the WMAs. The loans are returned to the WMAs and held as a fund for further investment and maintenance. MYRADA's experience indicates that the introduction of loans has lowered the cost of treatment measures and plantations, improved the quality and maintenance and in some cases encouraged the diversification of crops.



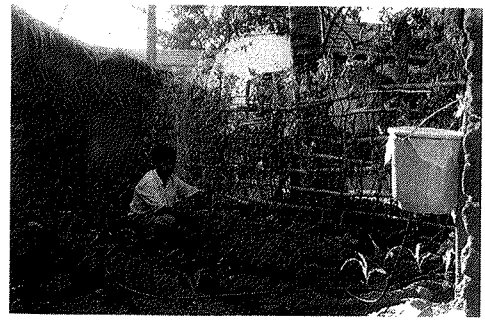
Loans for Vermi Compost



3.1.2. How sustainable are SAGs?

This is a critical question, given the role they play in the WMAs. Several studies initiated by MYRADA indicate that after

In MYRADA's experience SAGs form the base institution in a watershed strategy; they need to be formed at least 4-6 months before the watershed programme is introduced. During this period all the members in each SAG need to be trained in institutional capacity building which includes modules in structural analysis of society, unity-affinity in action, building a vision, group goals, developing rules and conventions, responsibilities of group members, consensus or collective decision making, common fund management, self assessment and managing supporting records and systems. The WMAs also require a set of modules specific to their function. MYRADA has brought out a training manual for building watershed associations including WMAs.



Loans for Drip Irrigation on Homesteads



MYRADA withdraws from the area, the SAGs continue to function. However, in some areas especially where the groups were not mature enough, about 10% of the SAGs have collapsed mainly due to conflicts. During the period that MYRADA managed programmes in an area, the SAGs were encouraged to form Federations with the objective of improving the basis of their sustainability. The SAGs decided on the number in each Federation and on the rules and functions. Over 200 such Federations have emerged in MYRADA's projects. In no case did the SAGs allow the Federations to manage funds. Their role was restricted to lobbying, conflict resolution and as a platform to

mobilise concerted action to influence Government for social change or to put pressure to redress grievances and ensure protection of women. However, after MYRADA withdrew from the area, it was found that the federations were not adequate to cope with emerging needs. MYRADA then experimented with Resource Centres. The basic idea was that since community based organisations like SAGs and Watershed Institutions had been promoted and were functioning well, they should now begin to support a Resource Centre financially and to pay for additional services. Over 40 Resource Centres have been promoted in areas from where MYRADA has withdrawn. These RCs are staffed by an experienced MYRADA Officer trusted by people. The RCs support about 120-150 CBOs, mostly SAGs but also other groups including Watershed Institutions. Each of these CBOs is assessed yearly to ensure that it qualifies to be a member of the RC. Each CBO contributes monthly a fixed sum and also pays for all new services which it requires from the RC. They are linked with Banks and other financial Institutions with which they interact regularly; the SAGs are also monitored by them. They are also

linked with Resource Centres and in some project areas with Federations. It can be concluded therefore, that given the appropriate support systems, the SAGs have shown a high degree of sustainability.

3.2. Water Users Groups. In most watershed projects, the management of an irrigation tank if it exists is not included as a component. Most watershed management projects focus on the catchment where the poorer farmers cultivate mainly drylands. However, there are some projects where the management of irrigation tanks is included in watershed programmes. In such cases, Water Users Groups are formed which focus on the command area of an irrigation tank. The members comprise all those farmers with lands in the command area. So far, MYRADA has not worked with the command area groups (since its focus is on drylands and on the poorer and more vulnerable farmers). Given the growing need to use water efficiently, however, MYRADA is also now moving towards an increasing involvement with these water user groups in command areas.

These Water User Groups have been given different names in



Pond for Irrigation on Private Land

various projects but they all focus on the use of water for irrigation from tanks (or from flow irrigation from major reservoirs which is not included in this paper). The tanks exist in the watershed but have not been maintained resulting in decreased inflow and storage

capacity as well as wastage during irrigation and inequitable distribution. There is also a Tank Management Committee set up several years ago by the Irrigation Department which is supposed to address these issues, but it is usually non-functional.

Since MYRADA is not involved with the command area farmers, these comments are drawn from studies carried out of projects



promoted in the ICEF programme and from a study by KV Raju of the Tank Users Groups in Andhra Pradesh. According to these reports, the major objectives of the Water Users Group are a) to promote participatory regeneration and sustained management of traditional water sources used for irrigation b) to ensure that water is more equitably shared especially by the tail-enders. The Water User Groups in an ICEF project promoted by NGOs include not only farmers in the command or irrigated area but also the landless, dalits and women. An evaluation of the ICEF project however concludes that the benefits accruing to these weaker sections through their membership in the WUAs are limited; it is also questionable whether they will continue to receive them after the NGO withdraws or the project is over. Further experimentation and analysis is required to ascertain whether these participatory groups which are heterogeneous are appropriate to promote equity and whether they will be sustainable. MYRADA's assumption is that they will not promote the interests of the landless; besides the interests of the command area farmers who are divided into several groups like share croppers, owner/farmers, those with lands at the head of the irrigation system and those with lands at the tail end are often in conflict; this in turn undermines sustainability.

A study of the impact after the formation of the Water User Associations (WUAs) under the AP Farmers Management and Irrigation

Systems Act (passed in 1997) could throw up several useful learnings.⁶

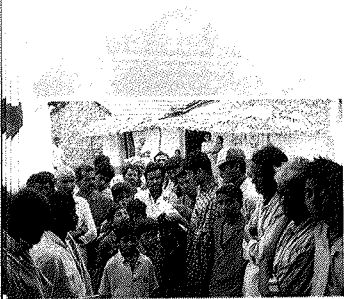
3.2.1. How sustainable are Water Users Groups in Tank Irrigation?

WUGs are expected to have a degree of control either directly or indirectly on the catchment area (to prevent erosion), on the tank foreshore (to prevent encroachments and to manage plantations), on the tank bed (desilting, weeds clearance), on the supply channels (silt and weed clearance), on the bund, on the sluice gates and on the water flow and distribution channels, on the water requirement and rotation of crops and the collection of water charges. In reality the WUGs have little control over any of these resources, activities or domains. The least that these groups can be expected to manage is the water flow so that it reaches all the farmers fields and to assist in collection of water charges. All other activities including desilting of the tank and inflow channels are considered to be beneficial to others in the community, not only to the farmers in the command area. Therefore, the latter argue - all should contribute to the maintenance of the watersheds resources, not only those who benefit from the irrigation. Though the command area farmers may be willing to take the lead and even to invest in some of these activities especially in clearance of inflow channels and repair of the bunds and sluice gates, they are not willing to invest in desilting and much less in soil erosion control in the catchment area or even in plantations on the foreshore of the tank. Funds

⁶ Irrigation Management Transfer in AP" by KV Raju.

There are examples where WUAs have been able to promote the objective of equity in water sharing both during the project and after it is over; but this has been due mainly to the continuing presence and involvement of an NGO after the project is over and adequate investment in institutional capacity building. In such cases the tail-enders and the sharecroppers have been able to protect their interests. Where no NGO is involved, the Andhra Pradesh study by KV Raju indicates that the WUAs (mainly those benefiting from major irrigation projects) have been able to improve quality of works and reduce costs by excluding contractors, they have been able to improve the availability of water by tail enders, and to take up desiltation of channels and increase collection of water charges from 54% (1997-998) to 65% (1998-1999t). However where tank irrigation is involved, it is clear from all studies that major investments in maintenance of the tank (which involves desilting at least once in 5 years), of in flow channels and of irrigation channels requires funds from Government. The costs of maintenance cannot be met from incremental increases in agricultural production as a result of with better-managed irrigation.

WUAs and NGOs have generally failed to motivate farmers to change their crops from rice/sugarcane (usually preferred crops in the command) which have a heavy demand on water to crops requiring less water or even to rice varieties and cultivating methods where water requirement is reduced. The situation of sharecroppers is a major issue that is left unresolved especially with regard to the proportion of the crop lawfully due to the sharecropper; raising this issue in the WUAs will conflict directly with land owners many of whom have given part of their lands to sharecroppers.



from these activities are expected to come from Government or donors. The incremental increase in their irrigation potential in the command area resulting from tank desilting and catchment maintenance is not adequate to cover the costs involved in maintaining the tank and catchment.

The list of farmers owning lands in the command area is held by the Irrigation Department and is usually outdated. The Irrigation Department has formed and registered a Tank Maintenance Committee which includes the original owners of lands in the command. In most cases it does not coincide with the present owners and cultivators. It is not clear whether those pattadhars not on the list since they acquired lands after the list was formed, have voting rights. None of the WUAs have their command area map with survey numbers. They also lack simple formats to collect information regarding cropping patterns, area, etc in order to levy water charges in a fair and transparent manner.

Even among the command area farmers, interests differ. Those at the head of the irrigation system see no reason to invest in channel clearance and maintenance lower down. The share-croppers (who in many cases comprise over 30% of the those cultivating in the command area) do not and often cannot invest in maintenance of the irrigation system since their share from the crop is far less than prescribed by law. (The share prescribed by law is itself often inadequate to cover costs of

cultivation). These sharecroppers also do not have voting rights in the traditional WUAs. Their membership in the WUAs adds to its heterogeneity and in turn undermines its sustainability.

In some Districts a large number of tanks have been converted into percolation tanks. The sluice gates have been closed and farmers dig open wells or install bore wells in the command to irrigate their own lands. In such areas, the WUAs have little reason to function while each farmer draws as much water as he/she can. There is no restriction on the cropping pattern; some cultivate sugarcane while others can only cultivate dry crops; the cost of power and its irregularity add to the lack of interest in the efficient use of water, both equity and water use efficiency suffer.

The study by KV Raju entitled "Irrigation Management in Andhra Pradesh" records the following unintended impact: "Before the WUA formation, local informal committees or groups (both in tanks and canal systems) used to mobilise both labour (one acre/ household) and money (Rs.10-50/acre/household) for essential works like cleaning canals before the crop season began, desilting and some essential repairs. After the formation of WUAs, all farmers think that since the Government is giving money, let the WUA president and Tank Committee (TC) members do all the works. Farmers, in general, contribute neither labour or money. The new initiative of the Government has weakened the local initiatives and participation. The new initiatives are

Watershed Management Associations (WMAs): So far in this paper the name Watershed Management Associations has been used to describe groups of stakeholders in a catchment area of 150 ha - 200 ha. These groups emerged in MYRADA in the late 80s. They are comparatively small since the cultivating families who are members, number around 30; there are a few landless families who use the common resources; these are also included as members in the WMAs. The WMAs are participatory groups – all the stakeholders (landed and landless) are members and participate in all meetings. Each of these catchments has at least one SAG functioning; hence all the SAG members are also members of the WMA.

These WMAs are also called Watershed Development Associations as well as Area Groups in some MYRADA projects. These WMAs in MYRADA'S projects manage funds for treatment measures in the catchment. They decide on whether to convert the grants into loans, on the schedule of repayments etc. When the Official Guidelines of MoRD came into force the Committee at the 500 ha level took over all financial management functions and transferred funds directly to the individual farmers. Where the WMAs existed, their role was reduced to mobilising people to attend PRA exercises for watershed planning or to be a contact point for the Committee.

In Hariyali Guidelines (HGs) there is no specific description of these smaller groups covering a catchment of 150-200 ha; but the description of the groups which are called User Groups is broad enough to encompass these WMAs. In any case the Hariyali Guidelines also do not give any financial powers to these User Groups. The HGs do away with the Committee at the 500 ha level (which is a representative institution) and put the Gram Panchayat at the Centre of the programme; the GP takes over all the financial and administrative functions of the Committee including the formation of the SAGs and User groups with the help of the Watershed development Team (set up at the Project Implementing Agency (PIA) level. The role of the Gram Sabha is also limited; "it will meet at least twice a year to approve/improve the watershed development plan, monitor and review its progress, approve the statement of accounts, form User Groups/SAGs resolve differences ... approve arrangement for the collection of public/voluntary donations, lay down procedures for the operation and maintenance of assets and approve the activities that can be taken up with money available in the Watershed Development Fund" (Hariyali Guidelines) Evidently with no administrative or financial powers, the Gram Sabha will have to follow the Panchayat and the WDT of the PIA.





Land Treatment on Upper Reaches

designed to be participatory; but the approach is different. The new approach was imposed from outside and has little member-contribution and control, while the traditional approach was locally evolved and member-controlled." pg 28)

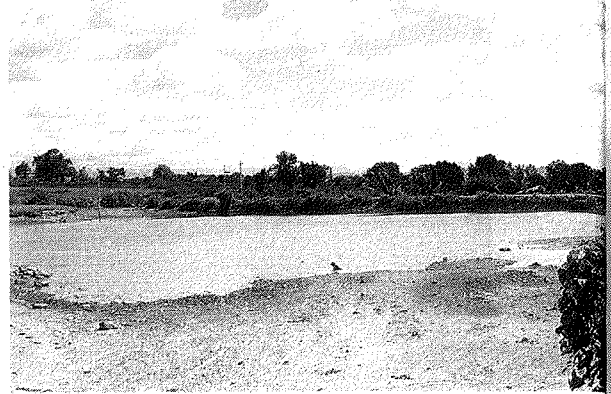
3.3. Women Pattadhar groups in the Command and Catchment areas:

These groups have been formed by NGOs in some projects. The objective is to give women a role in decision-making in the Water Users Groups formed in the command which tend to be made up of men and controlled by them. Similar groups have also been promoted in the catchment area by some NGOs to influence the WMAs. However, the appropriate membership and functions of such groups are still unclear. Experience in some projects indicates that their functions can be taken on more effectively by existing groups of women. If the major objective is to support women to play

an effective role in the WUAs or WMAs, then this could be achieved (and has been achieved in many projects) by women from the SAGs who have been included as full members of the WUAs/WMAs. Priority is given to selecting SAG women representatives from landless and near-landless families to be members of the WUAs/WMAs. Several WUAs/WMAs also have two members from each land owing family –one man and one woman - as full-fledged members. If the household is a women headed household, the woman will be a member of the WUA/WMA.

The reports from ICEF projects where Women Pattadhar Groups have been formed in the command area indicate that the members are landowners in the command area; they could therefore become members of the WUAs as they would fall in one or the other category mentioned above. If for example the WUA includes two

members from each family (one man and one woman), women would automatically become members; if it is a woman headed household, she would be a member. However, experience has shown that these decisions to include women require that the promoting institution/NGO introduces the idea and pursues the objective systematically. Left to themselves the WUAs/WMAs will not include women. If the policy to include women in WUGs/WMAs is pursued, then it would not be necessary to start a new group of women pattadhars. The reports/assessments of the ICEF projects also suggest that the impact of the Women Pattadhar Groups on the WUAs, is limited.



Rehabilitated Tank for Domestic Use

On the other hand experience in MYRADA indicates that the impact potential of SAG members on the functioning of the WMAs in terms of achieving the objective of equitable sharing of natural resources and the objective of providing space for women's concerns to be addressed, is far greater than that of a Women Pattadhar Group whose members own land in the command. However, more trials in the field are required to ascertain whether the women pattadhar groups really have a unique role to play in promoting women's interests in the command and catchment areas which cannot be achieved by existing SAGs.

3.4. Watershed Management Associations/Groups (WMAs)/ User Groups/Area groups

The WMAs/User Groups focus on the micro catchment area (150ha-200ha) which does not benefit from the flow irrigation, it is not part of the command area of any tank. They comprise farmers and others who have a stake in the common resources or own land in the catchment area where most, if not all of the agricultural lands, are under dryland farming. They are called User Groups in the Hariyali Guidelines (to be distinguished from Water User Groups which comprise farmers in the command area).



The guidelines for formation of these WMAs/User Groups which MYRADA promotes are the following: a) they should be small (approx. 40 members); b) they should include both men and women; c) the members of the SAG should be included as full members (there is usually only one SAG in a micro catchment, d) An invitee from the Gram Sabha (the elected person to the Gram Panchayat in whose constituency the project falls could be an invitee since his/her influence/support will be critical to support initiatives taken by the Watershed Management Association to manage common lands and later in the maintenance of some watershed structures which serve a common purpose).

A criticism is sometimes made regarding the inclusion of landless in the WMAs/User Groups. It is said that they do not attend meetings since most of the discussions relate to treatment of lands which they do not have. It is also said that their inclusion weakens the WMAs/User Groups since it undermines the homogeneity of the groups which is one of the reasons why this paper holds the position that Water Users Groups in the command are not sustainable. On the other hand while it is difficult to maintain the interest of landless in the priorities of the WMA/User Groups, it can be done by ensuring that they benefit from loans through the SAG, from selection of species for planting, from labour during treatment of the watershed, from a share in fodder promoted on common or private lands left fallow, etc., and from a sense of participation in decision making in matters from which they were hitherto excluded; MYRADA also notices that if they are members of SAGs, their opinions have a greater chance of being respected. The comparison with the Water Users Groups is not valid. The latter share one resource namely water - which is in short supply; hence they need to share and to perceive to share water fairly; they also need to start from a level playing field - if some are share croppers and others not, the former cannot be asked to share the cost of water equally; hence the Water User Groups do not share features of "homogeneity" in terms of assets, inputs and benefits. The landless in the WMAs/UGs do not have these constraints. They benefit from regenerated common resources and from increased demand for labour on private lands as well as from being members of the SAGs. However, they need to lobby the WMAs/UGs to provide them with labour and to access these resources; this is where the SAGs play a role.

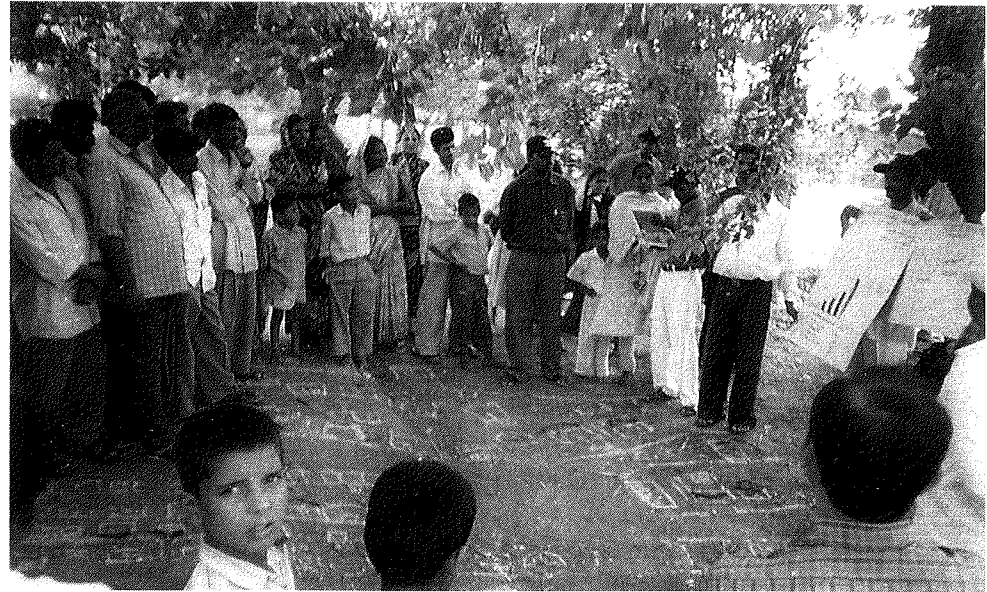
These groups do not cover the entire village or Gram Sabha, but only those families who have lands in the micro-catchment and others who use its resources. However, it often requires the intervention of the NGO involved to include the landless families who use the micro watershed's resources like the common lands, and trees as members of the WMAs. The inclusion of the landless in MYRADA's projects also occurs since the WMAs are motivated to include all the members of the SAGs which include the landless as well. The WMAs/User Groups at the 150-200 ha level are participatory groups (all the stakeholders are members of the groups) while the Committees at the 500 ha level formed under the common guidelines of the Government, are composed of representatives from various groups and sectors of the population in the watershed.

The membership of these WMAs/User Groups differs in various projects. Some WMAs/User Groups include all stakeholders in a micro catchment (landed and landless using natural resources from common lands like fuel, fodder, fibre and fruits); some include only those who have land; others include all landowners in the catchment as well as representatives from the SAGs (landless or near landless) and from the Gram Panchayat or Gram Sabha in whose area the micro catchment falls. Some WMAs/User Groups include two (man and woman) from each family; others mainly men.

These WMAs/User Groups are promoted in all watershed projects where MYRADA is involved. Initially they were not included in the institutional strategy of major Government sponsored watershed programmes but increasingly they are finding a place since the Committees at the 500 ha level have proved that they are vulnerable to party politics and unable to manage several of the functions given to them effectively.

Freedom to manage funds plays an important role in building institutions. In MYRADA projects, funds are transferred to the WMA/User Groups on the basis of a watershed management plan. However the group is free to make adjustments in order to respond to individual differences and needs. Where the WMAs have advanced loans to individuals for treatment on private lands, the recoveries are held in the WMAs common fund. The WMA has the freedom to decide on future policy regarding management of this common fund. Where MYRADA is managing watershed programmes sponsored by Government in which the Committees at 500 ha. level have been formed, the WMAs/User Groups have made the following decisions in many cases in order





A WMA/User Group in a Planning Session

to arrive at a working solution: a) the contribution required from each farmer is paid to the Committee at the 500ha level b) the WMA/User Groups decide at their meetings whether to convert the grant or part of it as a loan since it has now become a practice in some projects to introduce a loan component for works on private lands. c) All the repayments are held with the WMAs/User Groups for future lending

The positive features of the WMAs/ User Groups/Area Groups covering 150-200 ha are:

- They are small: This ensures that being participatory bodies all the stakeholders participate in meetings and have a chance of interacting and intervening.
- They are not representative bodies (like the Committees established to cover a watershed of 500 ha); this helps to give the WMAs/User Groups a higher degree of

ownership of the programme and to be more effective in managing and co-ordinating certain activities and in promoting transparency in its functioning.

- They are more effective than the Committees at the 500n ha level in keeping out party politics: Unlike the Committees at the 500 ha level, these WMAs tend to give importance to leaders who are traditionally respected and who have not stood for election; these leaders generally place the concerns of the village ahead of their own interests. Once they stand for election they have their sights fixed on higher political positions and increasingly draw their strength from their ability to access Government resources and patronage rather than from successful involvement in managing local programmes.
- Since they include all the

stakeholder families in the micro-catchment, co-ordination in planning contributions and in making treatment plans is more readily achieved, provided the external intervener ensures that adequate training and supporting systems are in place. For example when the Committees at the 500 ha level are the only bodies promoted in a programme, they advance grants to individuals directly provided these individuals have given their share of contribution up front. Often only a few farmers can do this within a short time; as a result treatment work is done in patches. The WMAs are able to avoid this by involving all members directly and exerting pressure on them to fulfil their obligations. The WMAs, therefore tend to be more effective in co-ordinating planning and supervising implementation of the watershed treatment plan on private lands than the Committee of representatives at the 500 ha level.



Another Planning Session

- They are more flexible than the Committees at the 500 ha level. For example, it often happens that funds for treatment measures arrive late; in such cases the WMAs are able to respond by advancing their own funds (built up from recoveries) and deciding on works which they give priority to. Many WMAs/User Groups in MYRADA's projects where they manage funds which they receive as grants, have decided to change the grants they receive for works on private lands into loans to individuals. As a result they are able to build up a common fund which is managed at the WMA level where it is more transparent, readily accessible and more responsive to their needs. They also make allowances for share croppers who cannot contribute as much as others.



- The WMAs/User Groups manage degraded common lands more effectively than the Committee at the 500 ha level. For example in most watersheds there are patches of lands mostly on the upper reaches, which are under the control of

For the present MYRADA recommends that the WMAs/User Groups should be empowered to receive funds (either from the Gram Panchayat or directly from the PIA) and to manage the programme both on private and common lands. If they have to be registered as societies to entitle them to receive and manage funds, then this should be promoted as part of organisational strategy. It may be pointed out that, these WMAs have an affinity with the Gram Sabha which is the only PRI institution which is participatory. The WMA/User Groups and the Gram Sabhas can work together to manage, monitor and maintain management systems and structures both on common lands and on private lands. But more on this later in this paper.

Government or the Panchayat. The landowners whose lands border these upper reaches (and even others with lands lower down) and users of these common lands are willing to invest in treatment and management of common lands in their catchment especially on lands in the upper reaches since they realise that this has a direct impact on their lands (and wells) lower down and on regenerating natural resources on which their livelihoods depend. Since only a few of the members of the Committee at the 500 ha level have a direct stake in these common lands which lie within a micro catchment of 150-200 ha, they are less interested in making

the effort to manage treatment measures on them; besides it demands their time and resources which they are not able or willing to invest.

There are however several areas of concern related to the functioning of the WMAs/User Groups/Area Groups - which the intervening NGO needs to address. These are the following:

- Left to themselves, the WMAs often leave out or marginalise the landless and near landless. The NGOs have to evolve a strategy to ensure that they are full and effective members; where SAGs function well, the landless who are SAG members develop the skills and confidence to participate effectively in the WMAs/User Groups.
- The WMAs/User Groups often do not incorporate the concerns and needs of women; they do not take positive efforts to reduce their social marginalisation. Once again the intervention of the NGO is required to ensure that the condition of women (in terms of access to resources) as well as their position (in terms of their relationship with men and with society) are improved qualitatively and in a sustainable manner; the SAGs can play a significant role here.
- While the WMA/User Group, has proved to be comparatively the most effective institution to plan and implement the watershed programmes, it has not yet proved

to be effective in a post project situation - in maintaining watershed structures and in providing the support required for the management systems related to common resources that were put in place during the project period to survive and grow in strength; this aspect, therefore has to be explored. MYRADA promotes a pattern of management where the responsibilities for maintenance of structures are divided among the WMAs, SAGs and Gram Sabha/Panchayat depending on their location, size and costs of maintenance. As regards the management of common lands (Revenue and Panchayat) and resources in the micro catchment of 150-200 ha., the Gram Sabha has the potential to emerge as a major or lead player with support from the WMAs, SAGs and Gram Panchayats. The maintenance of structures like small weirs and the management of Panchayat wastelands will require the active involvement of the Gram Panchayat representative. This is why the Gram Panchayat representative in whose constituency the project falls should be involved in the WMA from the very beginning as an invitee. As regards degraded forest lands, MYRADA's position is that these should also be managed by the Gram Panchayat or Gram Sabha; this would require a dissolution of the Village Forest Committees formed by the Forest Department in degraded areas where forests do not play any role (or a very minor one) in providing a livelihood base. In areas like the Western Ghats where forests still provide a support base for fuel (for sale), fodder and non timber products, the VFCs may still have a role to play; but the appropriateness of these institutions to each situation and their relationship with the PRIs have to be worked out carefully. In such forested areas in the Western Ghats the forests provide a much larger livelihood base than in watersheds on the eastern regions of Karnataka where regeneration of these degraded forest areas is the major objective which can be undertaken by the Gram Sabha or Panchayat in a more sustainable manner. More on this subject later in this paper.



- The WMAs/User Groups have started to build up a common fund and to lend. Guidelines to ensure that essential systems are in place to manage this fund and systems to monitor transactions in a transparent and effective manner are still not in place. Further, as regards the purpose of loans, some WMAs have restricted the purposes only to agriculture and on farm activities while others extend loans for health,

trading and asset purchase; this overlaps with the lending pattern of the SAGs and could have a negative though unintended impact on the functioning of the SAGs.

- the WMAs are not registered bodies: this makes it difficult (if not impossible) under the present Government guidelines for the ZP/DRDA to give funds directly to the WMAs even though it is possible for them to function like formal registered societies. It is an anomaly, that the Reserve Bank of India has allowed Banks to lend to SAGs even though they are not formally registered – though the “good” ones function far more transparently than registered societies and cooperatives - while Government is still reluctant to advance funds to the WMAs. If there is no alternative, NGOs should consider suggesting that WMAs/user groups are registered as societies. However the present policy of the Karnataka Government requiring these societies to renew registration annually and to pay a fee of Rs.100/for every Rs.One lakh received will have to be dropped.
- A major administrative procedure which is undermining the growth of the WMAs/User Groups is the policy guiding all Government sponsored watershed projects begun before 2003 that requires the Watershed Committee at the 500 ha level to be the only institution at the watershed level that can receive and manage

funds. This Committee gives funds directly to farmers for works on private land. The WMAs role is reduced to mobilising the farmers to come up with their contribution and to organise participatory planning etc. For work on common lands the Committee is expected to organise the treatment works directly. This usually does not happen, as the Committee members find it too time consuming to organise and supervise works on common lands; further, to expect the Committee to put in place a management system for common lands is unrealistic. In this context, the strategic position and function of the WMA to manage common lands needs to be recognised.

- The revised Hariyali guidelines (effective 2003): have dispensed with the Committee at the 500 ha level though it continues in older projects which are ongoing. This is a good decision since experience has showed that the Committee at the 500 ha level is riddled with politics; being representative, it does not address the concerns of all stakeholders; it tends to marginalise the weaker sectors and does little to build up the WMAs/User Groups; its achievement on common lands is minimal; where it does intervene, contractors play a major role. Questions may be raised: “How are the PRIs different from the Committees at the 500 ha level? Are the PRIs not vulnerable to political pressures, do they not

MYRADA's position is that the Gram Sabha has the potential to play a lead role in managing the regeneration of degraded forestlands. However, the institutional capacity of the GS must be developed systematically and it should be involved in the watershed programme from the very beginning; some of its elected members should also be invited to join the WMAs/User groups as invitees even if they do not own land in the catchment. MYRADA therefore urges that every funded project should invest in building the institutional capacity of the Gram Sabha (or Vasathi Sabha which covers a habitation). This implies that the GS meets at least monthly and participates in training modules ranging from vision building to participatory planning with all the organisational and management support systems required for an institution to function. Several of the modules developed for the SAG capacity training can also be used for the Gram Sabha. The GS as a participatory, democratic body, should not meet because it is required to meet 2-4 times a year by some Government dictat, or only to select beneficiaries for government schemes, but because the members feel it is necessary to meet regularly to resolve their issues and to plan their own lives and surroundings for a better future. MYRADA therefore recommends that the Village Forest Committees in degraded areas should be dissolved and their responsibilities handed over to the Gram Sabhas. If the degraded forest area is large and extends over several Gram Sabhas, the Panchayat can co-ordinate the programme.

marginalise the poor and do they not lack transparency in financial matters?" The role of the PRIs in managing watershed programmes and funds will be discussed later in the paper. Examples of how some projects like KAWAD and SUJALA have coped with these weaknesses provide a basis for innovations which can be incorporated in official watershed management strategy.



4. Village level groups formed by Government Departments to manage natural resources:

4.1 Village Forest Committees:

A major example is the Village Forest Committees (the name changes in some areas) which are widespread and which are expected to participate in regenerating and managing all degraded forest lands and to be involved in managing non timber forest products. The VFCs include one man and one woman from each family. The Forester is the secretary and signs all cheques. The meetings are usually called by the Forester. While the VFC strategy has introduced a degree of participation in managing degraded lands and forest products, it is still looked at as being controlled by the Forest Department and not as a genuine people's institution. Besides the VFC is often too large to foster the effective participation of all. It usually elects a few members to run its affairs. In general, it tends to function with the weakness of a gram panchayat since the power structure in the brain panchayat is reflected in the VFC; decisions on activities and financial transactions are also not taken in a participatory manner and are often not transparent. The VFC also shares the strengths of the PRI since it covers the whole village and is able to co-ordinate activities. The VFC makes a bow to gender issues by including women as members in equal numbers as men. Experience in Forestry projects has shown that in some cases the VFC has taken over the role of outside

MYRADA attempts to promote two approaches to forestlands. 1. In areas like the Western Ghats there is good forest cover in a major part of the watershed and people depend to a significant extent on forest resources for their daily livelihoods. In such areas the VFC approach could work provided; a) far more investment in time and money is made in the VFCs to build their institutional capacity, b) freedom is given to the VFC to conduct meetings (which are presently conducted only when the Forester is available), and to manage funds (which are presently controlled by the Forester). 2. The other approach is in areas where there are forestlands but little sign of forests; this situation is common on the eastern part of the Deccan plateau; in such areas the VFC has little to do. The approach adopted is to regenerate the degraded forest lands either through planting (which MYRADA discourages) or through protection and regeneration (which is the strategy MYRADA adopts in most of its project areas where there are adequate root stumps of local species). In such areas the Gram Sabha could play the lead role supported by the Gram Panchayat, the SAGs and WMAs in planning, implementing and monitoring the regeneration of degraded forestlands which largely lie on the upper reaches of a micro watershed or micro catchment.

contractors in handling Non Timber Forest Products but the position of the poor who were head-loaders did not change.

The issue that needs to be addressed in the context of watershed management is: how does the VFC relate with the PRIs, WMAs/User Group or with the Committees at the 500 ha level. The WMAs or any watershed institution for that matter cannot be recognised as a VFC since the Forester is not involved as Secretary and does not control finances in these institutions. The problem arises when a significant part of the watershed is delineated as degraded forestland. It is necessary to introduce soil and water conservation measures in this forest area as part of an integrated watershed plan, since these degraded areas generally lie on the upper reaches of the watershed. However the Forest Department will not allow any work to be undertaken in the forest area unless it is done by a VFC. In one MYRADA project the Committee at the 500 ha level has resolved the problem by forming a VFC with all the households. The Committee conducts meetings both as a VFC as well as a Watershed Institution. In the former case it invites the Forester. If funds are received from the Forest Department it is kept in a separate account of which the Forester is the signatory. However, it is clear that such a situation is at best a compromise. The VFC meetings are not attended by all the stakeholders in the degraded forest area. The breaking up of the village into several groups to suit the requirements of various Government Departments is not exactly the best approach to integrated watershed development.

4.1.1. How sustainable are VFCs?

It is also becoming evident that the VFCs tend to disappear as soon as a "funded" project is over. A major motivation for their existence was that the VFCs were the channels of development funds from the Forest Department during the project period. Once the project comes to an end, development funds will flow through the PRIs. Whether the VFCs should continue to be promoted or whether the function of managing degraded forest areas should be the responsibility of the Gram Panchayat or Sabha is a question that needs to be considered urgently.

4.2. Watershed Committees at the 500 – 700 ha level:

Watershed Committees (Executive Committees) are representative bodies formed at a micro watershed level (500 – 700 ha); the members are representatives from the SHGs and the WDAs. Other institutions and Departments who have a



stake in the development of the watershed such as the forest/revenue/watershed Departments, the Panchayat and at times NGOs, etc. also find a place on this committee. This is usually a 13 – 17 member body.

The present practice in Government programmes of making the Executive Committee (EC) at the 500 – 700 ha level comprising 13 – 17 persons mainly responsible for the programme has been criticised for the following reasons: (1) In most cases this EC committee is formed before the WDAs and SHGs. As a result, the members are often selected on the basis of political influence and do not truly represent the interests of the WDAs and SHGs. (2) The ECs are representative bodies and often do not give priority to the needs of the WDAs and SHGs. (3) All funds flow through the ECs, which transfer funds directly to individual farmers; these transactions often lack transparency and can be manipulated. (4) The EC members rely on the agricultural

assistant to certify the work done on private lands; they do not have the time to visit all the sites; once again this leads to several malpractices. (5) The EC is responsible for implementing treatment measures on common lands; this takes time and often money, which the EC members cannot offer as required. This Executive Committee is referred to by several names, for e.g. it is called Micro Watershed Development Committee in KAWAD, the Watershed Executive Committee in Sujala and Watershed Implementing Committee in other projects.

It is therefore advisable to form the WDAs at the Micro Catchment level (150 – 200 ha). The number of farmers and other stakeholders at this level is around 30. Such a small body can be fully participatory where all the stakeholders are members and participate directly in all decisions. Experience indicates that these participatory bodies have greater potential for sustainability.



5. People's Institutions promoted in watershed projects under the revised Hariyali Guidelines:

These programmes follow the Common Guidelines issued by the Government of India the latest being Hariyali (which came in force in March 2003). In brief, according to Hariyali, the ZP/DRDA and Taluk/Mandal level PRIs (or an NGO as a last resort) are the Project Implementing Agencies (PIAs). The PIAs are supported by Watershed Development Teams (WDTs) comprising four members from forestry/plant sciences, animal sciences, agricultural engineering and social sciences. At least one should be a woman. Groups managing a micro watershed are called User Groups. According to Hariyali, the members of these User Groups are all the stakeholders in the micro watershed. MYRADA interprets this to include even groups of stakeholders managing micro-catchments of about 150-200ha or even larger areas provided the stakeholders can function in a participatory manner. Since Hariyali does not specify the size of the User Groups (though it says that they are "homogeneous") the description in Hariyali of a User Group is that they "include all those having land holdings in the watershed"; this indicates that they are "participatory institutions" and not "representative". In this case they cannot be too large; if they are, then effective participation is not possible. Hariyali therefore gives space for smaller groups which are similar to the WMAs, described above, which MYRADA has promoted, but which have not yet been accepted fully in several Government sponsored programmes.

However, in Hariyali there is no provision for participation of the landless in the User Groups. This means that even if there are landless who depend on the common resources of the watershed, they do not have a say in the User Group's decisions. Further if they are not full fledged members, then when plans for treatment on common lands are drawn up, it is likely that their concerns will not be taken into consideration. There is no provision for the participation of the members of the Users Groups in decision making at the Gram Panchayat level. There is also no provision for representatives of the User Groups to be involved in the Gram Panchayat meetings at least when the watershed shed programme is discussed.



SAGs find a place in Hariyali as institutions below the User Groups. Their main objective is to promote the interests of the landless, SCs/STs and women; there is no mention about the role

they need to play to influence the decisions taken in the GS or in the User Groups related to the watershed programme; there is no provision for their membership in the User Groups or in the PRIs when their watershed is discussed.



Drip Irrigation for Homesteads

The Hariyali Guidelines require that the Gram Panchayat and the Watershed Development Team will form (and presumably train) the User Groups and the SAGs. This exhibits **a)** a lack of understanding or refusal to accept that groups of the poorer and marginalised sectors will never develop the independence and space required for them to grow if they are formed by the traditional power holders who control the GP or by the bureaucracy who in general are accustomed to view a people's institution as part of their delivery system and not one which can function on its own and which they need to respect and work with, **b)** that there is no understanding of what inputs are required to train groups in institutional capacity building – as explained earlier MYRADA has to train

these groups (like SAGs) in Vision/Mission building, consensus, leadership, conflict resolution, development of systems etc. (in all requiring 14 modules) before these groups can function with a degree of independence; to expect the bureaucracy to train these groups is unrealistic as officials do not have the skills required, **c)** that by attaching the WDT to the GP, it (the WDT) cannot act independently to build institutions of the poor whose interests often directly come into conflict with the power structure reflected in the GP, **d)** that by having four people with different disciplines in the WDT does not ensure or even lay the basis for an integrated watershed strategy. To have all four staff from different Departments working in a watershed does not ensure integration; it could promote convergence of interventions which do not support one another and at times even undermine one another; this has been the experience in many watersheds. Unless policies, strategies and procedures which each staff has been accustomed to follow in their respective Departments are reviewed, unless they are intensively trained and conditioned to work together and with peoples institutions which are participatory and not just with officials, or with elected leaders of PRIs or with traditional power-brokers whom they prefer to meet in the village, unless they are grounded in methods of participatory planning and implementation, they will not promote an integrated strategy though they may "converge" on one watershed, **e)** that by including a woman, the guidelines adopt the easy way out of

giving representation to women within a structure that the Government has promoted and which continues to reflect the dominant systems in society; in a structure that is heavily biased towards men, real empowerment requires that women have their own independent base in civil society like the SAGs which, if adequately trained and supported, are able to lobby to promote the interests of women in a sustained manner.

The Watershed Committee at the 500 ha level is done away with in Hariyali as far as its roles in a) managing funds, b) monitoring the programme and c) working on common lands is concerned.



Deep Trenches on Waste Lands

of time, many watershed programmes which started earlier, have still retained the Watershed Committee at the 500 ha level through which funds flow. The standard watershed for operational purposes in Government Programmes covers an area of 500 ha in which over 100 families cultivate. There are too many to form a watershed group which promotes effective participation. As a result, they elect representatives and form a Committee to implement the programme. This reduces the level of participation and often marginalizes the poor. Besides, these Committees are vulnerable to be influenced by party politics. MYRADA's experience indicates that the institution managing a watershed needs to be participatory. It therefore needs to be smaller. This is possible since within this area of 500 ha in the Deccan plateau where the land is undulating, there are several small micro watersheds of approx. 150-200 ha. The families cultivating in these micro watershed number around 25 to 30 with about 10 landless. These families form a Watershed





Reclamation of Waste Lands

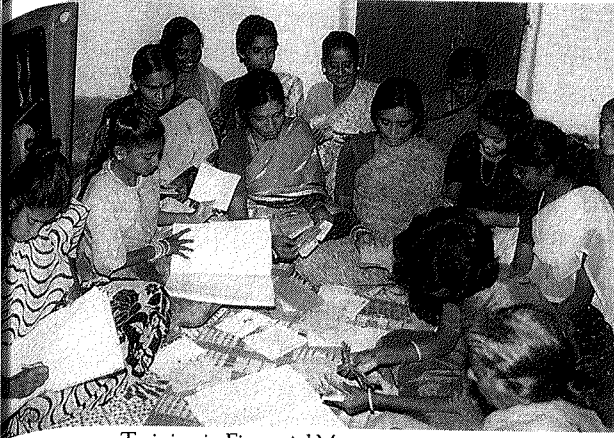
Management Association/User Group which experience indicates is structurally appropriate (being small, with stronger affinity ties among members, and with reduced potential for leadership conflict) to function in a participatory manner; it is able to implement the programme in a more effective, efficient and transparent manner than a representative body at the 500 ha watershed. The Hariyali Guidelines provide a space for these WMAs/User Groups at the 150-200 ha level; this is a welcome step and will help to promote participation and even lay the basis for sustainability of the institution. However, it must be pointed out that if User Groups are formed at the level of the sub-watershed of 500 ha and above, then they will end up being representative bodies since they will be too large for all the members to meet regularly; beside their participation will be limited or restricted due to the size of the group.

Since most on-going projects retain a Watershed Committee at the level of a 500 ha it may be useful to dwell on its composition and functioning. Besides, some lessons could be drawn from its composition which could influence the functioning of the Gram Panchayats which have taken its place under Hariyali where the PRIs have been placed at the centre of watershed strategy. This Watershed Committee at the 500 ha level is composed of the Panchayat member in whose area the project is located, representatives from the WMAs/User Groups and SAGs (with reservations for SCs/STs and Women). In some projects where there are no WMAs/User Groups, a Gram Panchayat is called and the members of the Watershed Committee selected. The need to have this Committee registered before funds can flow from the District (to build the capacity of the SAGs and Area groups) has a negative impact on the selection of

A Brief Note on MYRADA's Position on the PRIs Will Help to Set a Framework

MYRADA's position on the PRIs is as follows: The only participatory institution in the PRI dispensation is the Gram Sabha. The other PRIs are all representative institutions. MYRADA believes that (when compared with representative institutions), participatory institutions a) are more open to and more easily and effectively absorb investment in institutional capacity building; b) are more likely to introduce transparent systems of organisation and financial management; c) have the potential to influence and lobby for change in the traditional and political power structures which do not provide space for social change d) are the most appropriate institutions to monitor elected representatives and representative institutions and to provide the checks and balances required on a daily basis. MYRADA therefore is concerned over two growing influences on the Gram Sabhas. a) Politicisation on the basis of party politics, which undermines the basis of concerned awareness and commitment to promote the public/common good. b) The approach of bureaucracy to make the Gram Sabhas the last link in the delivery chain; this will co-opt the Gram Sabha and restrict their space for independent action and self-growth. The dictat that the GS should meet twice or four times a year should give place to investment in building the institutional capacity of the Gram Sabha. MYRADA's experience with this approach (where it piloted a project with 30 GSs), is that when the members realise their potential to respond to their priorities and after adequate institutional capacity building, the Gram Sabhas meet regularly (at times twice a month) and develop and maintain adequate support systems and linkages to realise their objectives. MYRADA believes that both representative and participatory institutions are required for a democracy to function effectively.





Training in Financial Management

the members in the first instance since the groups have to be formed within a month of the initial intervention and the members are not trained and do not have a clear idea of what qualities and skills are required to be an effective committee member. As a result, the selection/election of the Committee members is done in a hurry and the traditional power holders get a place. Consequently, the objectives of the watershed programme often take a back seat. Politics and self-interest tend to influence decisions with conflicts emerging in many cases. This has been the experience in some areas included in Sujala Watershed Programme where the Watershed Committee at the 500 ha. level continues to function.

Financial management at the 500 ha Committee level: This Committee which manages all funds for the watershed programme which it receives from the ZP/DRDA or Project Implementing Agency, transfers funds for treatment on private lands directly to the farmer concerned and is expected to manage all works on common lands directly; the latter it

finds difficult to achieve. The President and Secretary of the Watershed Committee are the signatories to the cheques in some projects; in others the Agricultural Assistant (a Government Official) is one of the two signatories, the other being the President. In all cases however the Agricultural Assistant is in charge of and maintains the Measurement Book on the basis of which payments are made to individuals for work on private lands. This control of the Measurement Book is often the basis of conflict due to lack of transparency in assessment of work and financial transactions. In many projects the WDAs/User Groups at the 150-200 ha level have emerged as a result of NGO intervention; these institutions need to be given a role to monitor the management of the Measurement Book.

The Hariyali Guidelines allocates 10% of the total budget for "administration overheads". In reality where NGOs are functioning as PIAs they receive between 6 - 8%; the remaining is kept at the ZP or DRDA level for their support. Hariyali also has reduced the allocation for community mobilisation and training from 10% budgeted in previous Guidelines to 5%; this is totally inadequate to train the WDTs, PRIs and the People's Institutions.

Though the revised Hariyali Guidelines does give space for watershed institutions at the level below the 500 ha Committee, calling them User Groups, they are not given the responsibility of managing funds.

In order for them to be effective they must also manage funds and be given adequate space to take decisions that are appropriate to their location and to be flexible to respond to diverse situations caused by type of soils, patterns of rainfall, slope etc, as well as in decisions related to the management of funds, loans and contributions. This may require that they be registered as societies. Besides, they need to have a legitimate voice in the PRIs especially when watershed matters are discussed.

The Hariyali Guidelines have also given a place for SAGs in watershed strategy, though it appears to be more due to the popularity that the SAG strategy has acquired on its own than due to an understanding of how SAGs can impact on watershed institutions as described above as well as on the Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha. However MYRADA's experience indicates that these SAGs must be formed (and trained) at least 4-6 months before the watershed programme is introduced.

How and what adjustments can be made to make the PRIs better equipped to manage watershed programmes is described in the next part. **The experiences of KAWAD and SUJALA, the two watershed programmes managed by the Government of Karnataka (with which MYRADA is involved) provide insights into institutional arrangements and policies that can be considered for inclusion in national policy related to watershed management. There are probably similar projects in other States which can add to the learnings.**



6. Relationship between groups promoted under watershed projects (like WMAs/ User/Area Groups) and the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs).

The questions to be considered here are: 1) Is there an in-built potential for conflict between the PRIs on one hand and institutions promoted by various interveners like WMAs/User Groups in the catchment and Water User Groups in the command on the other? 2) Do the institutions promoted by various interveners related to natural resource management have the potential to raise adequate resources to maintain these resources after the project is over? These questions relate to sustainability of the treatment structures and management systems; and 3) Are the PRIs the appropriate institutions to take the lead in implementing watershed programmes on their own as required under Hariyali? If not what roles can the PRIs play effectively and with which institutions should they collaborate? Given that they have a role, what are their strengths and weaknesses and how do interveners cope with the latter?

6.1. The Hariyali Guidelines and the PRIs, A brief summary of the provisions supporting the central role given to PRIs in the Hariyali Guidelines (HG) issued by MoRD is useful to set the context. In the HG, the ZP/DRDA, is the nodal authority for implementation. It has the authority to approve the selection of the watersheds, to appoint the Project

Implementation Agencies (PIAs) and to approve the action plan for treatment. The CEO (ZP) and PD (DRDA) sign all statutory papers. The ZP/DRDA appoints the Project Implementation Agencies (PIAs). The PIAs can be ZPs, Line Agencies, Agencies of the State government,



Farmers Field Day

Universities and Intermediate Panchayats at the level of Taluk or Mandal; "failing these options, the ZP/DRDA may consider appointing a reputed NGO" (HG)

Extract from Hariyali Guidelines: "At the field level the Gram Panchayats shall implement the projects under the overall supervision and guidance of the Project Implementation Agencies (PIAs). An intermediate Panchayat (Taluk/Block Level) may be the PIA for all the projects sanctioned to a particular Block/Taluk. In case, these Panchayats are not adequately empowered, then the ZP can either act as the PIA itself or may appoint a suitable Line Department like Agriculture, Forestry/Social Forestry, Soil Conservation, etc., or an Agency of the State Government/University/ Institute as

PIA. **Failing these options, the ZP/DRDA may consider appointing a reputed Non Government Organisation (NGO)** in the district with adequate experience and expertise in the implementation of watershed projects or related area development works as the PIA after thoroughly checking its credentials. Nonetheless, the State Government should endeavour to empower the **PRIs and build their capacities so that they may ultimately be in a position to take up the responsibility of independently implementing the watershed development projects as PIAs.** An NGO-PIA shall normally be assigned 10-12 watershed projects covering an area ranging from 5000 – 6000 hectares. However, in exceptional and deserving cases an NGO-PIA may be assigned a maximum of 12,000 hectares at a time including ongoing projects in all the programmes of similar nature in a district and a maximum of 25,000 hectares in the State”.

“Each PIA shall carry out its duties through a multi-disciplinary team designated as the Watershed Development Team (WDT). Each WDT should have at least four members one each from the disciplines of forestry/plant sciences, animal sciences, civil/agricultural engineering and social sciences. At least one member of the WDT should be a woman. Preferable qualification for a WDT member should be a professional degree. However, the qualification can be relaxed by the ZP/DRDA in deserving cases keeping in view the practical field experience of the candidate in the relevant discipline. One of the WDT members shall be designated as the Project Leader. The PIA will be at liberty to either earmark its own staff exclusively for this work, or engage fresh candidates including retired personnel, or take people on deputation from Government or other organisations. The WDT shall be located at the PIA/Block Headquarters/any other town nearest to the cluster of selected villages. Honorarium to the WDT members shall be paid out of the administrative costs as indicated in Annexure I.” (HG)

“**Self-Help Groups (SHGs): The Gram Panchayat shall constitute Self-help Groups (SHGs) in the watershed area with the help of the WDT** from amongst the landless/asset less poor, agricultural labourers, women, shepherds, scheduled castes/scheduled tribe persons and the like. These Groups shall be homogeneous groups having common identity and interest who are dependent on the watershed area for their livelihood. Separate SHGs should be organised for women, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, etc.” (HG)



“**User Groups (UGs): The Gram Panchayat shall also**

constitute User Groups (UGs) in the Watershed area with the help of the WDT. These Groups shall be homogeneous groups of persons most affected by each work/activity and shall include those having land holdings within the watershed areas. Each UG shall consist of landholders who are likely to derive direct benefits from a particular watershed work or activity. The UGs shall be responsible for the operation and maintenance of all the assets created under the project through which they derive direct or indirect individual benefits." (HG)

"Gram Panchayats will execute the works under the guidance and control of the Gram Sabha. In states where there are Ward Sabhas (Palli Sabhas, etc.) and the area to be treated is within the Ward, the Ward Sabha may perform the duties of the Gram Sabha." (HG)

Comments on the above extract: It is clear from the above, that the last priority is given to NGOs, who from experiences in watershed projects implemented during the past five years, have emerged as the most suitable and appropriate institution to form and train people's institutions. In the earlier guidelines, no organisation was given priority. Given the absence of a level playing field, it is obvious that in the selection of PIAs, NGOs will be excluded unless the CEO of the ZP/DRDA is in a position to influence the decision to select an experienced NGO working in the area. However, the Guidelines do not support his/her choice of an NGO and political pressure will draw adequate justification from the Guidelines to exclude NGOs. This statement is

based on MYRADA's experience in the selection of PIAs in several watershed programmes. While it is true that in the past there were cases where NGOs which sprang up over-night, formed mainly by politicians and bureaucrats were selected, with rather disastrous results, it is also true that where the selection was transparent, the influence of NGOs on people's institutions was significant. In reality, if the guidelines do not give preference to NGOs, there is little chance that they will be selected as PIAs. If selected by a CEO, their selection will be questioned openly.

In the earlier guidelines the quality standards expected from each category of PIAs were the same and selection criteria were developed for each category of PIA. A process of selection was followed, like the constitution of an Assessment Committee to select PIAs and a probationary period for each. In Hariyali, the very fact that the PIA is a PRI institution seems to be adequate to ensure its selection. This will surely have an impact on the selection of PIAs and other interveners and on the formation of the people's groups involved in watershed management. One of the objectives of Hariyali, namely to ensure that the interest of the marginalised groups should be protected, will not be achieved.

The Hariyali Guidelines correctly emphasise the need to "empower" the PRIs (what exactly this implies however is not explained;) and to build their capacities to become PIAs. However this is not easily done. Investment in institutional capacity

building of the PRIs is required for them to reach a stage where the members have a vision for the entire area and a long-term strategy to implement this vision. Presently the interests of individual members predominate and the influence of party politics ensures that management by objectives gets little attention. To build the institutional capacity of PRIs requires time, money and adequate resource persons. These inputs have to be factored into plans and budgets. Further, environmental issues with long-term impact do not get priority in ZPs.

Hariyali envisages an intermediate Panchayat (Mandal/Taluk/Block) as a potential PIA. This was not the case in the previous guidelines. To have an intermediate Panchayat as a PIA will once again make the body a representative one, with all the weaknesses described earlier.

The PRIs being decentralised institutions managed by people's representatives are projected as the most suitable to take the lead in implementing watershed programmes, in mobilising participation of all including the poor and marginalised sectors and ensuring sustainability. This is questioned by many interveners. Even Hariyali where the PRIs are given a central place in planning and implementing a watershed project, the responsibility for maintenance is given to the User Groups. "The UGs shall be responsible for the operation and maintenance of all the assets created through the project" (HG)

A distinction was made earlier between institutions of representative democracy and those of participatory democracy. The PRIs (except the Gram Sabha) are an example of the former- namely representative bodies. They are not participatory institutions where every stakeholder is equally entitled to membership. MYRADA holds the position that both types of institutions are required to play a role for effective governance in a society which is divided by class and caste, where the poor and women are marginalised in public institutions and social practices and where relations of exploitation and practices of rent seeking are embedded. Examples of participatory democratic institutions with a bias towards the poor and marginalised in the watershed programme are Self-help groups based on affinity WMAs/UGs/Area Groups in which all stakeholders in a micro watershed are members and play an effective role in decision making.

While it is accepted that the PRIs need to play a role in watershed management since they are statutory bodies, it is also



necessary that participatory democratic institutions like SAGs and watershed institutions be promoted. The SAGs are required to lobby for the rights of the poor, to provide credit for their livelihoods and to ensure that the landless benefit from the investment in natural resources. The Watershed Associations are required to ensure that there is an appropriate institution to manage a micro catchment in which all the members have a stake since they cultivate lands in the area or use its resources. Experience in MYRADA and elsewhere has shown that these participatory institutions which have been recognised by the Hariyali Guidelines are more appropriate to provide space for the poor to grow as well as to maintain the checks and balances required for representatives bodies like the GPs to function effectively. Experience has also shown that it is the NGOs which have the skills, freedom and institutional space to form these participatory institutions; they must therefore be involved from the beginning in the watershed programme.

Reports of on-going projects have also shown that the Official Steering Committee at the District level (Zilla Panchayat) has little experience in selecting proper implementing agencies; politics and rent seeking influence choices. Many members may make the right "noises" but have little interest in promoting and sustaining the strategy, support systems and investment in training required to implement a watershed management programme based on participatory

strategies and people's institutions. (Of course there are notable exceptions). Distributing funds to please all parties normally takes precedence over effective implementation of an integrated watershed programme.

The Hariyali Guidelines have given the responsibility of managing the watershed programme and funds to the Gram Panchayat. While this is a step in the right direction, it is also necessary to invest in the Gram Panchayat in terms of institutional capacity building and to ensure that funds for a particular watershed programme are: a) not dissipated or distributed among Panchayat members for small disjointed watershed measures in each ones area of influence. b) Spent for the purpose sanctioned c) monitored by an independent group of people – for example in many watersheds under Sujala (Karnataka watershed project) groups of youth have emerged with the objective of monitoring the work and have approached MYRADA to give them a place in the programme monitoring process.

It is generally acknowledged that the present functioning of the Gram Panchayat does not make it the appropriate institution to manage a watershed programme effectively. Party politics, the shortage of funds and local priorities which have an immediate impact (unlike watershed programmes that tend to impact in the medium to long term) all influence the decisions taken at the Gram Panchayat level. The management of funds and programmes at the GP level

cannot be effectively monitored from above; they can only be monitored from below by small affinity groups which are participatory. These Civil Society Institutions like the SAGs which have a vision and strategy and supporting systems are participatory groups which provide the checks and balances that representative institutions require to function transparently and with a professional culture to achieve the objectives of the project

Where the management of the tank in the watershed is also included in a watershed strategy, one of the major issues is the need for funds to maintain the entire system including the catchment, the tank foreshore, inflow channels, the tank itself and the irrigation structures and systems of the tank. Most cost benefit analysis studies indicate that unless the WUAs are able to raise and keep the money derived from selling: a) tank silt, b) fishing rights, c) horticulture on the foreshore and on common lands, d) fuel wood from the tank foreshore or common lands, e) from charging for livestock use (drinking, washing, wallowing), g) and for water use for purposes like washing vehicles, etc. - the costs incurred in desilting the tank (every five years) and inflow channels and yearly maintenance cannot be covered, leave alone maintenance of the soil conservation structures in the catchment.. The command farmers cannot meet these costs only from the proceeds of improved irrigation. Most studies recognise that it is difficult to introduce a practice where the funds from all these sources will accrue to the WUAs; in some cases any attempt to do so will cause social conflict. In such a situation, the WUA will have to depend on grants for tank maintenance works. As the investment is not viable, Banks will not be willing to lend. This adds to the instability of the WUA. However, much more work by NGOs is required in this area before a viable model can emerge.

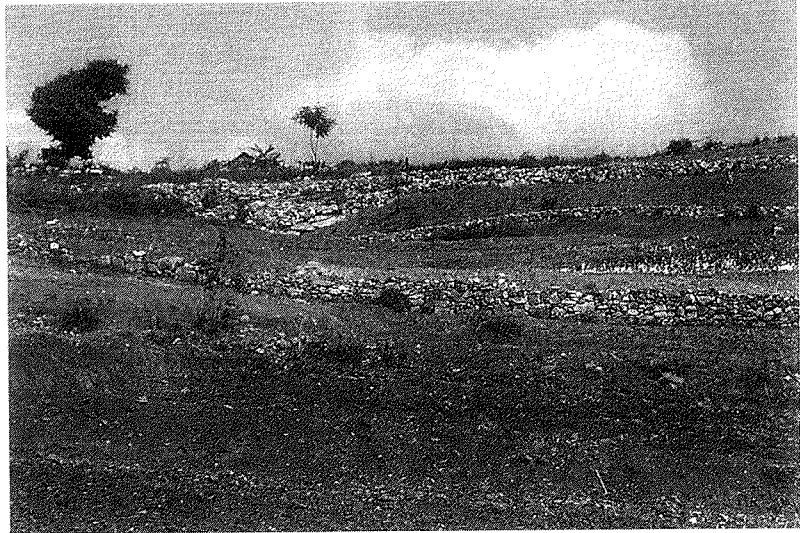
The WDT members require training to enable them to work with the watershed institutions to develop the watershed plan in a participatory manner and to understand the roles that various community institutions play in watershed management. The WDT also needs to be oriented to follow the process required to promote an integrated approach to watershed development. The composition of the WDT consists of technical officers from various disciplines but this does not ensure an integrated approach. It often ends up as different departmental approaches converging on the same watershed. The principles of integration and the driving force for it have to be based on people's



The KAWAD project which started in 1998, went through several years of planning. It adopted three models of management a) The Zilla Panchayat as the Project Implementing Agency (PIA) in Bellary District, b) The NGO as PIA in Chitradurga District and c) The Watershed Development Department (subsequent to the dissolution of the Dryland Development Board) as PIA in Bijapur District. The intention was to assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of three different models of PIAs in managing a watershed programme. The need for a structure to manage watershed programmes at the District level has long been recognised in Karnataka. The Dryland Development Boards fulfilled this need for a while until they were dissolved. During the past two years, several structures - called Steering Committees - have emerged at the District level to manage Government/Multilateral/Bilateral sponsored watershed projects. The trend is to appoint the CEO of the ZP as the Chairperson. The Member Secretary/Nodal Officer is the District Watershed Development Officer who reports to the CEO of the ZP for all nationally sponsored watershed programmes and to the Office at the State level in case of a Multilateral/Bilateral project. Other members include Representatives from the ZP and Line Departments. NGOs also find a place on these Steering Committees in Multilateral/Bilateral sponsored watershed programmes.

participation not just to agree to official plans and policies but to take the lead in developing the watershed plan. This requires flexibility without compromising on technical parameters including quality, and the willingness to incorporate people's suggestions even though they are not foreseen in the official project plan. For example when people found it difficult to contribute upfront 25%-30% of the cost of treatment works on private lands, the people's institutions suggested that they be allowed to take the full amount for treatment on private lands as a loan repayable to the Watershed Management Association/User Group over a period of three years. The officials in one project rejected this suggestion forcing people to borrow to pay their contributions from private sources. In

another instance, the contractor hired by the Watershed Committee for bunding works, deducted the contribution from the wages of labour. The farmer on whose lands the work was done, therefore, was happy since he did not pay any contribution (he found it difficult to mobilise so much money up front), while the labour also was happy since they got jobs at a rate higher than prevailing in the area even after deducting the farmers contribution. In fact the labour begged the NGO who raised this issue to keep quiet. In another case, the use of boulders found on fields to construct bunds was also rejected since work was measured on the quantity of soil dug out of clearly demarcated pits. Therefore only earthen bunds were allowed. If the WDT is the only institution dealing



Treatment of Upper Reaches

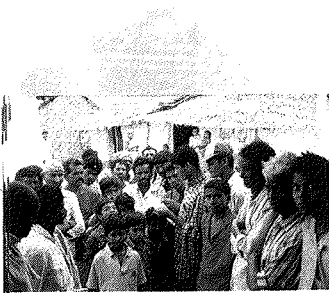
with the groups, there is little chance for them to develop as genuine people's institutions which will be capable of ensuring participation, ownership, and maintenance of the impact of the programme

The WDT also requires training in how to resolve conflicts, how to help the watershed groups to establish linkages and what systems (financial and management) are appropriate to ensure that the structures suggested are maintained. There is no financial provision in most watershed projects for this training. The meagre funds allocated by Hariyali are inadequate.

The study of the Andhra Pradesh Act referred to identifies several positive achievements after the Water Users Associations were formalised. It also points out several problems; for example inter institution conflict increased between the Village Panchayat and the Water Users Associations (which now control large funds), between absentee landlords and sharecroppers particularly in tank irrigated areas; opposition from Line Department officials (engineers and accountants) to the transfer of powers to the WUAs is frequent. How can these officials who form the WDT promote and train people's institutions?

What, then, are the brief answers to the questions raised at the beginning of this part?

1. The interests of the representative bodies of the PRIs and the participatory institutions set up by NGOs like the SAGs and User Groups often do not coincide fully at least in the short run; some may in the long run while others will not. The



checks and balances which these participatory institutions provide in the use of funds by PRIs will cause a degree of tension in society. As a result there is in built potential for tensions to surface. Experience in watershed programmes has shown that these tensions do surface but they need to be and can be managed so that they do not break out into conflict and polarisation of the interest groups. Often, however, the influence of an external agency like an NGO is required. After all people realise that they have to live together and know how far to go before striking a compromise. This is why intensive capacity building training is required for all the members of these institutions, where conflict resolution skills are imparted and linkages among them promoted. There is enough evidence to prove that the NGOs are the best equipped to form and train these participatory institutions. Where tensions did surface but were managed well, the reasons for this success were mature groups, an NGO with experience and without a political agenda and good leadership in Government. Tension is part of change in society and the objectives of equity and even sustainability cannot be achieved without some degree of tension which needs to be well managed by all parties who are committed to a common objective and a mentoring hand provided by an outside institution which has no agenda of its own.

2. Can adequate resources be mobilised to sustain watershed structures, systems and institutions?

Many watershed institutions have built up a fund from contributions which farmers pay as a percentage of the project's investment on their lands.. In programmes where the Watershed Committee at the 500 ha level manages these funds, there is still no strategy for their future management. Given the representative nature of these Committees and the speed with which they were formed as well as the inadequate institutional training provided, MYRADA does not have much hope that these funds will be well managed after the project is over.

Funds at the WMA/User group level. These groups cover a micro watershed of 150 -200 ha and are small in size. These groups have also built up a common fund with contributions from farmers as a proportion of project investment on their lands and in MYRADA's case, from recoveries of loans given by the WMA/UGs for treatment on private lands. MYRADA provided funds to the WMAs/UGs as grants but the WMAs/UGs converted them into loans for treatment on private lands only. MYRADA's experience indicates that these loans after they are repaid are being lent for agricultural inputs, for maintaining treatment measures on private lands, for installing irrigation systems and occasionally for promoting shramdaan to clear irrigation channels or nalas -in this case food is supplied. Loans are not provided for works on common lands.

Where plots on common lands have been developed into forested areas either through protection/regeneration and/or planting, it is noticed that these plots are managed by the WMA/UG; the Gram Sabha also supports this initiative. No funds are involved for maintenance; agreements on sharing of income from lopping, fruit and timber have been arrived at in the WMA/UG/Gram Sabha.

A major part of funds for desilting tanks, repairing irrigation channels and maintaining the irrigation system need to come as grants from Government. As mentioned above, improved irrigation alone cannot pay for these costs. The AP study referred to above indicates that "after a gap of several years there was an increase in water collection charges from 54% in 1997-1998 to 65% in 1998-1999". But these are percentages of water charges levied by Government which are already highly subsidised and not of actual maintenance costs which are much higher.

It is also noticed that individual farmers maintain structures along nalas close to their fields since they see the potential for better percolation and the excavation of open wells along the nala for protective irrigation.

Banks and financial institutions are not willing to lend for treatment works on dryland or for tank desilting as they consider these investments unviable. However, the WMAs in MYRADA's projects have shown that lending for treatment works on drylands is a viable proposition given their low overheads and ability to be flexible in lending and recovery.

6.2 How effective are watershed institutions in sustaining project investments?

- a. WMA/User Groups: MYRADA has ample evidence that the Institutions at the 150-200ha are effective in planning, budgeting and implementing the watershed programme; they also provide a loose institutional framework after the project is over, within which many individual farmers maintain structures on their own lands so that their neighbour is not affected. The WMAs in MYRADA's projects provide loans for agricultural related activities. However, there is not enough evidence that these WMAs are effective in managing the watershed resources in an integrated manner after the project is over. There are no doubt a few cases where this has happened; there are also cases where particular assets (like forest plots) have been managed; but nowhere has the



vibrance with which the project was implemented continued to remain at the same high level after the project is over. It seems to require the continued presence



of an outside intervener to motivate the WMA to continue as an active institution after the project is over. This outside intervener could be the NGO. It could also be which intervenes occasionally or the Gram Sabha where the GS meets regularly and leadership is enlightened. As far as treatment measures on common lands are concerned, the GS seems to be the only institution which can take up the responsibility of maintenance; it is doubtful if the WMA/User Groups will do so as envisioned by Hariyali. This in turn means that sufficient investment to build the institutional capacity as well as the financial stability of the GS is required.

- b. There is little evidence to suggest that the Watershed Committee at

the 500 ha level will continue to function after the project is over.

- c. There is ample evidence that the SAGs will continue to function because they are linked together in Federations for overall support, to the Resource Centres in MYRADA for monitoring and to the Banks and Financial Institutions for loans.

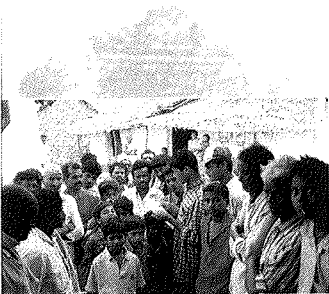
7. Sujala and KAWAD - Innovations

If the PRIs as they function today do not seem to be appropriate institutions to take the lead in implementing watershed programmes on their own, what roles can they play effectively and how do interveners utilise their strengths and cope with their weaknesses?

There are several examples of watershed management programmes which are experimenting with a strategy of intervention that has tried to incorporate the strengths of these PRI institutions and reduce their weaknesses. Two examples from Karnataka with which MYRADA is most familiar will be briefly analysed to glean learnings from the strategy that they adopted in working with PRIs.

1. The Karnataka Watershed Development Society (KAWAD) Model of PRI involvement in Bellary District.

The KAWAD (Karnataka Watershed Development Society) model in Bellary district of Karnataka has the ZP as the Implementing Agency., It was the first to constitute a Steering Committee for the KAWAD programme which is different from the ZP Steering Committee. The Chairman of the KAWAD sponsored Steering Committee is the CEO of the ZP and the Joint Director of Agriculture (subsequently the District Watershed Development Officer) is the Member Secretary. PRI members include the elected Representatives of the Taluk Panchayat and Zilla Panchayat **who represent the area in which the watershed programme is implemented (not others)** and the President of the Gram Panchayat where the watershed project is located. Officials on this Steering Committee include the Deputy Directors of AH, Horticulture, Rural Industries, Fisheries, District Social Welfare Officer, Manager of the Lead Bank and Project Director, DLDO. There are also NGO representatives - one from each watershed. However, the funds flow directly from the Chief Executive Officer/Joint Director to the Watershed Associations formed at the level of the 500 ha watersheds. This is a good example of involving the ZP while at the same time avoiding the weakness that could creep in due to pressures and influences both political and otherwise that often originate from the members of the ZP Steering Committee. The weakness in the institutional strategy is that there is no place for the watershed associations at the micro watershed level of 150 ha. -200 ha. As a result the Association at the 500 ha level transfers funds directly to individual beneficiaries for private



land treatment and livelihood enterprises; the Committee also directly implements works on common lands; this does tend to leave out the groups at the 150-200 ha level whose members are usually the largest stakeholders in the common lands of the micro catchment.

In the Bellary watershed programme there were several elected members of Panchayat Raj Institutions who were also selected to be members in the Watershed Institutions at the 500 ha level. Interviews with the families involved in the watershed programme indicated that they believed that this linkage helps the Watershed Institutions to have direct access to information and resources coming through the Zilla Panchayat.

2. SUJALA, the Watershed Project of the Government of Karnataka supported by the World Bank provides a place for the groups at the 150-200 ha level. These groups called Area Groups (which are similar to the WMAs/UGs) are recognised as the middle tier in the three tier institutional structure supporting the watershed programme in the field, namely a) the SAGs of the poor (15 to 20 members including landless); these are participatory bodies b) the Area Groups comprising all the families cultivating or using resources in the micro catchment of about 150ha – 200 ha; these are also participatory institutions similar to the WMAs and User Groups and c) the Watershed Committees (comprising representatives from SAGs, Area Groups, other stakeholders at the 500 ha level); these are representative institutions.

Funds for treatment on private lands are transferred directly to individual beneficiaries by the Watershed Committees and not through the Area Groups (AGs). However, of late and after considerable debate, the Project Authorities have accepted that the Committee can contract work (largely soil treatment measures) to the Area Group. These groups, therefore have been accepted as contractors. MYRADA has also proposed that all watershed activities in the micro catchment be discussed and approved first by the Area Groups before they are proposed to the Committee. This is a step towards recognising the important role that the Area Groups have the potential to play. But, it is still inadequate since the Area groups are not given the full space they require to function; they are considered more like contractors and given very little flexibility to manage funds.

The dominance of the representative Committee at the 500 ha level opens the door for several of the problems described above that arise from the ZP managing the programme. In fact there are several cases where political party alliances have undermined the formation and functioning of the Committee at the 500 ha level. However, where adequate capacity building training and support is given to the Area groups, they have the potential to increase the level of their participation and to take the lead in programme planning and implementation. This depends to a large extent on the capacity of the NGO providing training and capacity building. MYRADA's experience and intervention

The KAWAD model in Bellary involving the Zilla Panchayat through a dedicated Steering Committee separate from the official Zilla Panchayat Steering Committee has been replicated throughout Karnataka, though NGOs do not find a place unless they are given a role in project design. The SUJALA strategy includes the Watershed Management Associations (Area Groups) at the micro catchment level of 150-200 ha. These two institutions together with the SAGs form an institutional framework that seems to be the most appropriate to achieve the objectives of the watershed programme namely equity, increase in productivity and income and sustainability.

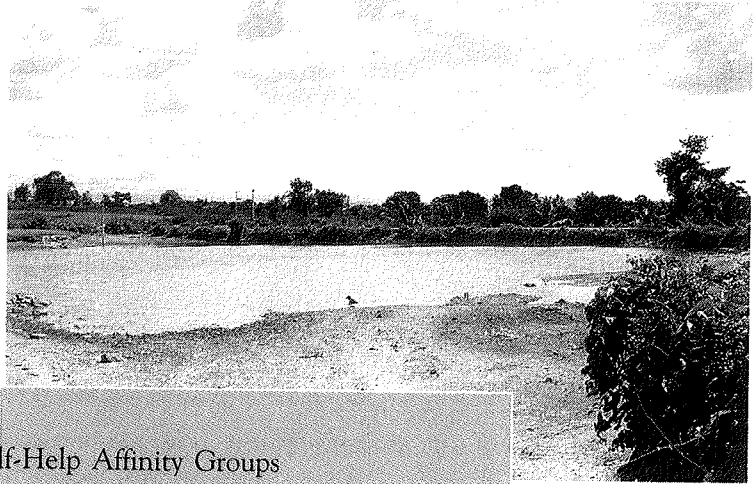
After Hariyali, where the Gram Panchayat has taken over the functions of the Committee at the 500 ha level, it may be useful to consider setting up a Steering Committee dedicated to the watershed programme at the Gram Panchayat level comprising the elected member of the Gram Panchayat in whose area the watershed project is being implemented (who could be Chairperson), representatives from the Area Groups/User groups and SAGs, traditionally respected leaders in the village who have not stood for elections and representatives from the technical departments at Taluk level and the NGO involved in the project. The Member secretary can be either from the DWDO or nominated from among the Taluk level officials. The WMA/ User group must arrange to meet with the Gram Sabha periodically – once in 3 months at least- to report on the progress of the project and to present all records and accounts. This would help the Gram Sabha to be involved in the project and to assume responsibility for supervising and maintaining systems and structures after the project is over.

was largely responsible for inclusion of the Area group at the 150 - 200 ha level as an institution in watershed management strategy in Sujala.



Though the Gram Panchayat is preferable to the Watershed Committee at the 500 ha level, it is necessary to ensure that the Gram Panchayat gives space for the participatory institutions like the Gram Sabhas, SAGs and watershed Groups to grow. The responsibility for forming these participatory groups must be left to NGOs and not to the Government Officials. The Hariyali Guidelines require the GPs to open a separate account for the Watershed Programme. This is necessary but not adequate. It is

advisable that there is also a separate management committee at the GP level, similar to the Steering Committee set up in the KAWAD Programme at the ZP level. This management Committee should be dedicated only to the watershed programme; its members should include representatives from the groups which cover the 150-200 ha micro watershed, the SAGs and NGOs involved in the programme as well as the GP and GS representatives from the watershed project area and other technical officers from the Line Departments at the Taluk level. The Hariyali Guidelines do not provide for this dedicated Steering Committee either at the ZP level or at the Gram Panchayat level. It would be useful to incorporate this innovation of KAWAD and Sujala in the national guidelines.



GLOSSARY

SAG	- Self-Help Affinity Groups
WUGs	- Water User Groups
WUA	- Water User Associations
WMA	- Water Management Association
WDT	- Watershed Development Team
PIA	- Project Implementing
HG	- Hariyali Guidelines
VFC	- Village Forest Committees
UG	- User Groups
DWDO	- District Watershed Development Officer
PRI	- Panchayati Raj Institutions
DRDA	- District Rural Development Agency
HG	- Haryali Guidelines
KAWAD	- Karnataka Watershed Development Society

OUR PARTNERS

Self-Help Affinity Groups	8,012
Watershed Institutions	477
Federations of SAGs	342
Village Development Committees/Councils	30
School Betterment Committees/Parent Teacher Assns.	435
Village Water & Sanitation Committees	63
Farmers Networks	16
Children's Clubs	648
Village Forest Committees	506
Village Health Committees	18
Natural Resource Management Groups	38
Resource Centres managed by CBOs	42
Jana Sabhas (of all families in a habitation)	16
Other	72
Total	10,725

(as on September 2003).

This list does not include institution formed in project where MYRADA has deputed staff or where our staff is providing support on a long-term basis in India and abroad.

Physical assets created

Houses built	22,338
Community Halls	759
Small weirs	1,453
Tanks desilted	382
Wells dug/drilled	> 9,000
Saplings planted	> 20million
Roofwater Harvesting Structures	802
Watershed area treated (in hectares)	95,000 ha
Schoolrooms constructed	1580
Schools provided with drinking water system	165
Village Drinking water & toilet systems	2,439 villages
Health, education, veterinary services, sanitation coverage	1,638 villages
Fully equipped Training Centres (all in rural areas)	11
Resource Centres	25

(as on March 2003).



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