The Dynamics of People's Participation & Contribution in the Kawad Project

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Abstract: In rural development, people's contribution is a beacon of participation and sustainability in any project. The DFID funded KAWAD project has generated substantial contribution from the farmers. This has been made possible by nurturing "people's institutions" at the grass-roots level. The paper shows how even poor farmers have contributed an average of 40% of project costs for assets developed on their lands. Their preference for mechanized earth moving (while sacrificing opportunities for wage labour) is not without reason. The paper also brings out the innovative mechanisms devised by communities for raising resources towards community assets. The KAWAD project believes that this contribution is extremely important for building stake and injecting equity. To preserve the stake of rural communities, the project has been constantly searching for new approaches.
Keywords: Karnataka, watersheds, contribution, sustainability, structures, community and dynamics

1 People's contribution- an indicator of quality & sustainability

Karnataka is a State in the southern part of India with only about 24% area being irrigated. Dry-land farming and watershed development thus form an important part of the state's strategy for development of agriculture. Out of the 8.2 million ha. of dry land in the state, only about 2 million ha. have already been treated during the last 15 years. Not all initial improvements have been sustained. There is evidence that many older watersheds have degenerated gradually. Today, we realize that treatment of watersheds is not about thrusting soil & water conservation packages down the throats of farmers but about working in concert with them. At the present rate, this task of developing watersheds would go on for two generations. The two major challenges that confront the state are:

(a) To bring down the cost per hectare of watershed development by increasing the participation, contribution and stake of farmers.

(b) To ensure the sustainability of physical structures and institutions at the micro-watershed level, so that developed watersheds do not deteriorate over time.

Contribution by the farmers (monetary or otherwise) and other stakeholders to a watershed project is perhaps the most important indicator of its sustainability. There is substantial evidence to show that in the rural tracts of Karnataka, even villagers living on the brink of poverty have successfully sustained temples and other places of worship for centuries without government assistance. There is also evidence to show that farmers in Karnataka maintained irrigation tanks a century ago. In fact, many irrigation systems degenerated when the government took over their maintenance and the people no longer contributed directly for their upkeep.

The quality of soil & water conservation measures is also directly related to the ownership built in rural communities. This again shows up in the form of contribution by these communities.

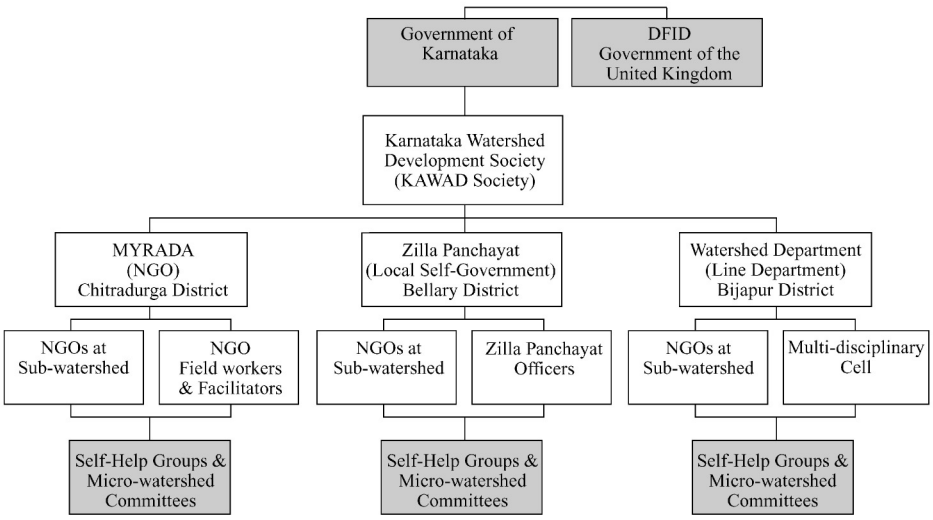
2 The KAWAD project & the 3 institutional models

Though Karnataka spends a sizeable amount from its own resources on watersheds, projects funded by foreign donors have played an extremely important role in the state. More than contributing to the financial effort of the state, they encourage innovation by all stakeholders. The KAWAD project is one

such project funded by the DFID (Government of the United Kingdom). It has the mandate to develop 3 large watersheds (of about 18,000 ha. each) in 3 districts of the state. The watersheds are all resource-poor having an annual precipitation of about 500mm. The project design encompasses soil & water conservation, non land-based activities, direct funding of people's groups, participatory technology development, development of common property resources and all other ingredients and signatures of a livelihood approach. However, the KAWAD project is unique in as much as it attempts to experiment with institutional models in search of sustainability.

In the 1st watershed in Chitradurga district (the Chinnahagari watershed), the entire implementation is piloted by MYRADA (a NGO). The 2nd watershed (Upparahalla watershed in Bellary district) has the "Zilla Panchayat" (the elected local self-government) as the implementing agency. The 3rd watershed in Bijapur district (the Doddahalla watershed) is handled by the watershed line-department of the government. The following diagram gives a picture of the organisational structure of the project. Local NGOs facilitate the process of planning and implementation at all the sub-watersheds. At the apex level, the project is administered by a registered society (the KAWAD society). The society gives the project flexibility, and freedom from bureaucratic control without sacrificing accountability. The KAWAD society arranges inputs from external agencies and consultants. It also facilitates networking between other projects. Each watershed is further divided into sub-watersheds. One local NGO is associated with the activities in each sub-watershed. The poorer people are organised into self-help groups and they primarily engage in cycles of "thrift & credit". Micro-watershed development committees are formed out of representation from self-help groups as well as from among the larger farmers. While the soil & water conservation measures are implemented through the micro-watershed committees, non land-based activities are the responsibility of self-help groups.

ORGANISATION CHART OF THE KAWAD PROJECT



3 Dynamics of contribution in relation to sensitization of the community

Even before the KAWAD project was taken up, it was known that rural communities would have to be prepared sufficiently, before the flavour of participative planning in a watershed really set in. Contribution would start to come in when the farmers really start to plan for a micro-watershed. Let it be clearly understood that it is not natural in Karnataka that the village community should contribute at all, when there are countless schemes being run by the State where the poor are directly subsidised. Thus, the village community has to be raised above the prevailing "mind-set" to motivate them to participate and contribute. It is interesting to compare the highest contribution of the people seen in some projects in Karnataka taking the "lead-time for community preparation" as a basis for comparison. (See Table 1). The available data supports our gut feeling that a rural community" sensitized" for a longer period is more

likely to make higher contributions. In the KAWAD project this sensitization was achieved by a series of "entry point activities" designed to gain the confidence of the community. Besides, a substantial amount of money has been invested by the project towards development of capacities of the "community based groups".

Table 1 Highest contribution by farmers in watershed projects in Karnataka as related to time devoted to "community preparation" (Source: review documents produced by these projects)

Project (Funding)	Districts where in operation (in Karnataka)	Time period	Average time for preparation of communities	Highest % of contribution for assets created on private lands
Kabbalanala (World Bank)	Bangalore rural	1984—90	None	No contribution
DPAP[i] (Government of India)	All	1996—	3—6 months	10%, mostly in the form of labour
PIDOW (Swiss Dev Corp)	Gulbarga	1984—1992	6—9 months	10%—30% in the form of labour
KAWAD (DFID)	Bellary, Chitradurga & Bijapur	1998—	18 months	60 % for orchard horticulture
MYRADA (German Agro Action)	Chitradurga	1996—	24 months	100% taken as loan[ii] by farmer for land development.

4 Contribution for assets created on private land

It has been seen in the KAWAD project that farmers willingly contribute for assets created on their lands. It has been seen from past projects[iii] that the farmers sustain these assets even if they have not contributed for them in the first place. In the KAWAD project the contributions are far higher than in comparable projects because:

(i) The contributions are determined[iv] and collected by the micro-watershed committees and almost always in advance.

(ii) The contributions are retained at these committees as "pool funds" of the community in the micro-catchments and do go towards reducing the cost of the KAWAD project. (i.e. the money is not paid back to KAWAD)

(iii) The farmers themselves manage the soil and water conservation work on their land, which enhances the dimension of ownership.

Table 2 shows an analysis of the kind the contribution made by the farmers in 3 sub-watersheds of one of the watersheds of the KAWAD project. The sample is representative of all the 3 watersheds of the project. It is evident that the maximum contribution (60% of cost) has come from horticulture. In this area, horticulture provides the best bet for a sustained livelihood over a long period. The KAWAD project has provided the opportunity to small and marginal farmers to level their lands something that is not considered a core activity by many watershed projects. The average contribution of 43% points to the importance attached to this activity by even poor farmers. For orchard horticulture, almost all of the labour went into digging of pits for the fruit trees. It is surprising that most farmers have chosen "mechanized earthmoving" as opposed to the opportunity for labour in their own lands. This is evidenced by the extremely low proportion of contribution in the form of labour in field bunding, reclamation and leveling of lands. (Table 2). The lower costs and the quality and speed of work have

been deciding factors for most of the cash contribution. This leads to the suspicion that in projects where the contribution comes purely as labour, it actually emerges from the difference between the "government determined" (higher) standard wage-rate and the prevailing (lower) "market" wage-rate. The contribution in all such cases remains purely notional and does not add to the stake or the common-pool of the community.

Table 2 Table showing an analysis of contribution by farmers for assets created on their lands (Source: The MICROSOFT ACCESS database of the Directorate of Watershed Development, Bijapur)

Watershed: Doddahalla, Sub-watersheds I, II and III

Implementing Agency: Department of Watershed Development.

Facilitating NGOs: ISEER & BIRD

Time period: Jan 2000 to Dec 2000

Type of work	Number of farmers	Total cost Rs.(thousands) Rs.50=1 US$	% Average contribution (Cash)	% Average contribution (Labour)	% Average contribution (Materials)	Total % contribu-tion
Field bunding	517	2825.6	34.48	1.52	1.41	37.41
Land leveling	145	613.6	39.26	1.89	1.89	43.04
Reclamation of waste land	8	21.4	28.06	0.00	0.00	28.06
Orchard horticulture	59	340.1	23.07	37.40	0.22	60.69
Farm forestry	5	17.6	18.01	15.00	5.10	38.11
	734	3818.3	Overall % contribution			40.00

5 Contribution for assets created on common lands

The contribution for development of private lands is relatively easier to raise. It is a much tougher task for a project to coax contributions for work taken up on common lands. The story has been no different at the KAWAD project where during the 1st year; the rural community could be persuaded to contribute for assets created on only the lands of farmers. During the 2nd year, however, micro-watershed committees were able to extract contributions for water-harvesting structures (benefiting a group of farmers) in both private and common lands. It is very interesting to note how the groups have been able to devise innovative and novel mechanisms of apportioning the contribution from farmers deriving benefits from these structures. Table 3 and Table 4 summarise 2 cases studied by us in some detail.

Many projects "sub-consciously" or by design reserve the community fund built up from contributions for the upkeep and repair of water-harvesting structures. In the KAWAD project the "user-groups" have undertaken to maintain all structures themselves. Some have already floated the idea of collecting user-charges. This has been possible on account of 3 main reasons:

(1) The contribution raised for water-harvesting structures in the KAWAD project is substantial and hence only those structures materialize, which are really and sorely needed.

(2) The user groups are trained and nurtured. They are encouraged to develop their own mechanisms of cost sharing.

(3) The structures are physically handed over to the user groups to reinforce the feeling of ownership.

Table 3 Details of contributions by farmers for a Nalabund on private land and their perceived logic.
(Source: Documents & records of ISEER, Oct 2000)

Structure: Nalabund
Micro-watershed: Sh. Karabasaweshwara-III micro in Jigajevani village of the Doddahalla watershed.
Estimated cost: Rs.155695
Actual cost: Rs.130773
People's contribution: Rs.20400
Facilitating NGO: ISEER

Name of farmer	Amount contributed (Rs) Rs.50= 1 US $	Details of land ownership (Area in ha.)		Reasons for contribution as perceived by group for Structure: Nalabund in Karabasaweshwara-III micro watershed
		Irrigated from well	Dry Rain-fed	
V.R.Halshetti	8160		20.39	Big landlord with lands adjacent to nala-bund for which he has donated the land. Has the best scope for creating sources for irrigation.
Shevu.M.Chavan	2000	6.00	2.20	Has 1 open well near the structure. Reasonably well off.
D.M.Chavan	1800	5.00	4.00	Has 1 open well near the structure. Reasonably well off.
Motiram Chavan	1600	3.03		One open well. No dry lands to expand irrigated area.
Dhanasingh Chavan	1400	5.00	5.00	Has 1 open well a little away from the structure.
Reknu.R.Rathod	1200	5.00		Has 1 tube well some distance from the structure. No dry lands.
Shevu.R.Rathod	1200	5.00	1.30	Has 1 tube well at considerable distance.
Gangaram Lamani	1035	4.33	2.00	These farmers have open wells that may benefit very little from recharge. Yet they contributed due to community pressures!
Meetu.C.Chavan	1000	4.30	2.00	
B.G.Rathod	1000	2.10	2.03	
Total:	20400			

Table 4 The inherent logic of community-driven contributions by individual perceived beneficiaries of a check dam[v] constructed on community land.
(Source: Documents & records of the Development Promotion Group, Dec 2000)

Watershed: Upparhalla
Check dam: built at survey# 202/C of Bayalathumbara-Guddi village.
Total cost: Rs.77500.
People's contribution @ 10% of cost: Rs.7750
Execution & Management: Kaplavruksha-II, Micro-watershed Development Committee.
NGO facilitator: Development Promotion Group.

Sl no:	Name of beneficiary	Contribution (rupees) 50 Rs.= 1 U.S. $	Reasons and remarks
1	T.Revanna	1100	Landlord with 12 cows and an open well.
2	K.Siddalingappa	800	Big farmer with 9 cows.
3	B.Sharanaiah	800	Big farmer with 8 cows and a tube well.

Continued

Watershed: Upparhalla
Check dam: built at survey# 202/C of Bayalathumbara-Guddi village.
Total cost: Rs.77500.
People's contribution @ 10% of cost: Rs.7750
Execution & Management: Kaplavruksha-II, Micro-watershed Development Committee.
NGO facilitator: Development Promotion Group.

Sl no:	Name of beneficiary	Contribution (rupees) 50 Rs.= 1 U.S. $	Reasons and remarks
4	G.Basanna	900	Big farmer with 6 cows and an open well.
5	G.Revanna	600	Small farmer with 5 cows and an open well.
6	R.Veerabhadrappa	600	Small farmer with 6 cows.
7	K.Rudrappa	575	Small farmer with 5 cows and an open well.
8	G.Devendrappa	550	Small farmer with 4 cows and 8 sheep.
9	Mahadevappa	530	Small farmer with 4 cows.
10	K.Ajjappa	520	Small farmer with 3 cows.
11	Revappa	375	Marginal farmer with 2 cows.
12	Sanna Erappa	300	Marginal farmer with 2 cows.
13	Others	200	Landless shepherds.
		7750	

6 Linked issues of "farmers' contribution" & "equity"

The steep rates of contribution for soil & water conservation measures supported and encouraged by us stems from the acute realization that KAWAD is primarily a watershed development programme, aimed at increasing the productivity of natural resources. Agricultural land is the most valuable natural resource in the KAWAD watersheds and is owned by roughly 70% of the families and therefore increases in productivity of lands would not benefit everyone. The project has to address the needs of the landless poor and the larger issue of equity in the community. While pressing for contributions, the intrinsic objective of the KAWAD project is to transform a part of the benefits (potential) accrued to the resource-rich farmers into being a "common pool" for the community. Ultimately this pool is accessed as a shared resource by the project's self-help groups of the project, which are made up of landless villagers, and small or marginal farmers.

7 Considerations of " ridge to the valley" & beyond

Conventional scientific wisdom[vi] dictates that all watersheds should (in general) be "treated" from ridge to valley downwards. The primary and obvious reason for this is that water-harvesting structures and soil traps near the drainage point of a watershed would be soon loaded with silt if the soil and water are not arrested in the upper reaches. It would thus help to reduce the "silt load" on structures if the upper reaches are first treated.

What can be the problem with a ridge to valley approach? The problem lies not with the "ridge to valley" or any other approach, but in its interpretation and field implementation. Unfortunately, all farmers are not motivated to participate in a project at the same time and participation cannot follow a strict "ridge to valley" pattern. So, when a farmer sees farms in a watershed being treated solely on considerations of "ridge to valley" in a time-bound regime, he realizes that the project is bound to treat his land, with or without his participation. He thus holds back his contribution. Once the farmers' contribution is compromised, a major opportunity for participative development is lost.

A State like Karnataka which must treat and conserve more than 7 million hectares of dry land, cannot do without the participation of the farmers. For "watershed development" to sustain in the long run,

it must assume the shape of a snowballing, self-propelled people's movement. Participation of the people cannot be dispensed with or treated lightly. Efforts should be made to disseminate the best available technologies, but we should be prepared to accept a "less than optimal" solution if we can, in the bargain, consolidate the ownership of local communities.

Endnotes:

[1]Drought Prone Areas Programme funded by the Government of India.

[2]The MYRADA work in Holalkere, Chitradurga district, Karnataka.

[3]The author's visit and review of the Kabbalanala and PIDOW watersheds.

[4]The KAWAD project does lay down as to what the minimum contribution should be. The actual contributions collected by the community are always higher.

[5]A small masonry dam across a gully or a stream.

[6]From the practitioners of soil conservation.

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