Operational Modality for Facilitation of People's Participation in the Watershed Programme

G. Jaya, N.K. Sanghi, B. Renuka Rani and K. Sai Maheshwari

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of rainfed areas through the watershed approach is currently given high priority at the national level. For this purpose, more than Rs. 1000 crore is invested annually in the country by various ministries and departments at central and state level. Besides this, many non-governmental organizations and international bodies are also supporting the watershed programme in different parts of the country.

It is now widely recognized that active participation of people is crucial for sustainability of development under the watershed programme. Hence, greater emphasis is now laid on a participatory approach in all phases of the programme.   The above funding agencies have identified various factors and operational modalities, which help in facilitation of people's participation. In this paper, an attempt has been made to synthesize these experiences so that it may serve as a resource material for field level functionaries. The above factors have been grouped under four categories, namely: social factors, technological factors, financial factors and management factors. Details about operational modality related to each of these factors have been discussed below.

2.   SOCIAL FACTORS FOR PARTICIPATION

2.1 Mass awareness among different stakeholders about key features of the programme

Mass awareness is obviously a crucial requirement for facilitating the participatory approach. It becomes particularly significant in view of the fact that a large amount of public funds are currently spent on the watershed programme. Mass awareness helps make the programme transparent; improves participation of different stakeholders and minimizes   communication gap as well as conflicts among different stakeholders. Some of the operational steps for facilitation of mass awareness are:

- Publicise the programme widely in urban areas (through mass media such as television, newspapers and web sites) and in rural areas (through indigenous methods of communication like folksongs and street plays).

- Further publicise through wall posters, particularly in villages that have been identified for implementation of the programme.

- Circulate copies of the guidelines for the programme to key stakeholders, namely Project Implementation Agencies, Panchayat Raj Institutions, key persons from the community etc.

- Explain the main features of the new guidelines in small group meetings of community members and office bearers of the new institutional setup being created under the project at the village level.

2.2 Commitment from the community towards the participatory approach

The watershed programme deals with development of natural resources as well as social resources. Equity of resource-poor families (RPF) and empowerment of women are the key components of the programme. Many activities under the project require group action among community members (e.g., construction of community-oriented water harvesting structures, development of perennial vegetation on common land; and organisation of credit and thrift groups). This requires a major change in the mode of operation of members of the community. It is therefore essential to have a written commitment from them about their dedication to participating in such activities, before finalizing   the village under the project. Some of the major aspects regarding resolution from the community include:

- management of project through a new community-based institutional setup at the village level;

- ban on unauthorised grazing and cutting of trees on common land;

- allocation of usufruct over common land resource, preferentially in favour of resource poor families;

- development of new water resource with the clear understanding that this shall be used only for crops with low water requirement ;

- ban on digging of new individual borewells, particularly in areas where the water table has gone down considerably;

- payment of contribution towards private and community works as per the guidelines;

- implementation of the project without involving a contractor;

- maintenance of all records and owning audit responsibility for developmental funds to be released to the proposed registered society at the village level;

- maintenance of community structures after the project is completed; and

- responsibility for resolution of conflicts arising on account of project activities.

The commitment from the community on the above aspects helps provide clarity about the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders; makes it easier for community members to take appropriate decisions and arrive at the required adjustments later on; helps facilitate equity for resource poor families and empowerment of women; helps achieve sustainability beyond the project period. Some of the operational steps for facilitation of these are:

■ Carrying out detailed orientation of the community regarding the main features of the guidelines and the new roles to be played by outside agencies as well as office bearers of the community based organization

■ Circulating copies of the guidelines in the local language to key persons in the proposed villages so that they may study and discuss these separately in their own groups.

■ Facilitating panchayats to discuss the main features of the programme and the type of commitment required from the community during open meetings of the gram sabha.

■ Advising gram panchayats to give the required resolutions in writing to the Project Implementation Agency/funding agency.

2.3 Organisation of the community into a new institutional setup

Development of watershed requires the full attention of the community-based organisation. The existing institutions at the village level may not be able to assume additional responsibility of planning and implementing work in a participatory manner. Hence, it is essential to create a new institutional setup at the village level that can meet the above requirements. The new setup at the village level may consist of User Groups (UG), Self-Help Groups (SHG), Watershed Association (WA) and Watershed Committee (WC). Creation of this new institutional setup at village level empowers the community to take need-based decisions; enables them to receive funds to implement the project; helps them to facilitate group action and conflict resolution; makes it easier for outsiders to interact with the community; creates adequate space for resource poor families; provides an institutional mechanism for post-project maintenance of assets. Some of the operational steps that will facilitate creation of this type of setup are:

■ Identification and training of village-based motivators for organisation of SHGs and UGs through credit and thrift activity

■ Enrolment of members into socially homogeneous small groups

■ Arranging exposure visits of these members to villages that have successful credit and thrift groups

■ Starting credit and thrift activity in the project village

■ Forming a village-level federation of the above groups

■ Providing a matching revolving fund to mature self-help groups through their federation at the village level

2.4 Use of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools

Preparation of an action plan under the watershed programme requires a detailed analysis of the existing resources as well as the situation. Conventionally, this analysis has been carried out with scientific tools and techniques used for conducting various types of surveys. Field experience has shown that the quality of data collection is improved substantially if PRA tools are used for the purpose. Under this approach, group discussions are facilitated around flexible visuals prepared out of locally available material in such a way that the decision-making process is gradually taken over by the community. This is especially useful in situations where diversity and complexity is high (as in the case of rainfed areas). Use of PRA tools improves participation of people in the programme; helps in joint decision-making between different stakeholders in a decentralised manner; empowers resource poor families, provides an effective means of communication (due to use of flexible visuals during group discussions) and improves transparency in the programme. Some of the operational steps for facilitation of these aspects are:

■ Preparation of a tentative checklist of items pertaining to each theme for initiating group discussion with the community.

■ Identification of appropriate PRA tools to be used for collecting the required information

■ Identification of specific groups of people from whom the required data is to be collected.

■ Carrying out PRA exercises at a common and easily accessible place in the village and using locally available materials for this purpose.

■ Clarifying objectives of group discussions and the operational modality of the proposed PRA exercise to community members so that they can participate in a proper manner.

■ Facilitating group discussion with the help of the checklist of items in order to focus the attention of group members on commonly agreed themes.

■ Encouraging participation of all members during PRA exercises. In case the group is too big and heterogeneous, dividing it into sub-groups with homogenous members. Making sure resource poor farmers, particularly women, get sufficient opportunities to express their views.

■ Gradually giving them the responsibility of carrying the discussion forward.

■ During PRA exercise, the resource person may act as a facilitator particularly with regard to critical issues to be addressed by the community.

■ Advising some members of the community to record proceedings of discussions or reproduce maps (as PRA tools are being used) so that information can be stored for future use.

■ Keeping original copies of maps/information with villagers, with copies to outsiders for further consolidation/ processing.

■ Advising groups to continue with PRA exercises on their own and later collecting new outputs for future consolidation.

2.5. Facilitation of group action and conflict resolution

Group action and conflict resolution are specifically required for sustainability of community-oriented interventions under the watershed programme. Some of the operational steps for facilitation of group action and conflict resolution are:

- Identification of the concerned persons who are likely to be associated with the proposed group-oriented activity
- Educating the members about the overall gains from group action/conflict resolution
- Identifying specific losers and gainers because of a particular intervention.
- Understanding the nature of loss and gain for the concerned persons.
- Identifying a range of options for resolving conflicts through discussion with both types of persons.
- Facilitating the conflict resolution process by allowing concerned parties to make a mutually agreeable choice of options.

2.6 Equity for resource-poor families

A major part of land and water resources in the watershed area is likely to be owned by Resource-rich families (RRF). Hence, a proportionate amount of funds under the programme would be used for developing the resources owned by RRF. It is now widely recognized that higher allocation of funds under the public sector (for watershed programme) would not be justified if equity aspects are not kept in the forefront. The following specific steps may therefore be taken to promote equity for resource poor facilities under the watershed programme:

- facilitate preferential allocation of usufruct over the biomass from common land to RPF before starting its planning under the project;
- develop private fallow land, marginal land and surplus land assigned to RPF on a priority basis;
- locate water harvesting structures closer to wells and lands owned by RPF;
- facilitate equity in sharing additional water resource developed under the project;
- give high priority to organisation of SHGs through credit and thrift activity;
- provide support to non-land based livelihoods for improving the income of RPF;
- facilitate convergence of other schemes designed specifically for RPF and women; and
- provide equal wages and employment opportunities for women during implementation of project activities even if estimates are prepared on the basis of the Standard Schedule of Rates.

Consideration towards equity not only justifies investment of public funds under the watershed programme; but it also promotes a harmonious relationship between community members; facilitates social auditing and transparency in the programme; and helps in achieving sustainable development of physical as well as social resources. Some of the operational steps for facilitation of these are:

- Take a resolution from the community regarding its willingness to promote equity before bringing the village under the watershed progrramme.
- Train watershed development team members to plan for equity in favour of RPF, so that the required conviction is built up before initiation of activities under the watershed

programme.
- Sensitise RRF about the need for equity under the programme.
- Organise RPF into SHGs through credit and thrift activities so that they become self reliant and empowered.
- Facilitate proper representation of RPF in WC under the programme.

2.7 Social auditing and transparency

Under the participatory approach, the developmental fund is supposed to be released directly to the WC for implementing the programme. The WC may not have adequate practical experience in handling such a huge sum of money. Intensive training, periodic supervision of personnel and formal auditing of accounts has to be carried out on a regular basis for proper management of funds. It is also crucial to facilitate social auditing and transparency in all transactions through downward accountability of different stakeholders involved in the programme. This helps improve awareness among community members about physical and financial progress under the programme on a regular basis. It also helps increase the accountability of the watershed committee members to the community, thereby providing efficient and cost-effective checks and balances with respect to financial management; helps promote equity for RPF by providing them with their due share in the programme; minimises the risk of social conflicts among community members in the long run; empowers a majority of community members rather than a few influential people; improves participation of poor people in the programme; and creates an atmosphere for sustainable development. Some of the steps that can be taken to facilitate these are:

- Prepare wall posters on important aspects like strategic plans, key features of the scheme, and Standard Schedule of Rates (SSR).
- Organise a number of open meetings of the community in the initial stages to orient members about the above aspects.
- Introduce a formal application system for participating farmers to submit the proposals.
- Prepare technical estimates for each work in consultation with concerned users and make a copy of simplified estimates available to concerned persons.
- Work out specific steps and procedures to maintain transparency in payment during the implementation phase.
- Pay to different service providers through cheques, particularly for water harvesting structures that involve high cost.
- Pay labourers (including men as well as women) as per SSR
- Ensure collection of contributions from concerned users before implementing works (except in cases where the user is expected to contribute as a labourer).

2.8 Capacity building of different stakeholders

Participatory management of the watershed programme involves technical, management, and social aspects. At present, lack of proper capacity (particularly at the level of the implementing agency/watershed committee) is the most critical constraint in achieving the desired objectives. Lack of appropriate attitude and behaviour (particularly among managers at different level) is also a major constraint in facilitating the participatory approach. Adequate investment in

capacity building enables implementing agencies to learn about new roles and responsibilities to be taken up under the proposed participatory approach; helps in building the right attitude and behavior among project managers/supervisors; and encourages transparency in transactions at all levels. Some of the steps that can be taken to facilitate these are:

- Prepare a comprehensive action plan for capacity building of key actors associated with the watershed programme (administrators/managers, implementers, trainers) at different levels

- Allocate sufficient funds at different levels for carrying out orientation courses and skill enhancement courses for the above participants.

- Identify nearby training organisations (from the government or non-government sector) that will handle the technical, management and social aspects. Preference should be given to those who have proper specialisation and previous experience.

- Adopt a handholding approach in which periodic contact is maintained between trainers and trainees over a long period, so that participants learn as well as practice the new skills.

- Network with other training organisations if it is not possible to cover all aspects by a particular organization.

- Carry out periodic reviews and monitor training programmes so that operational hurdles can be overcome with time.

3. TECHNOLOGICAL FACTORS FOR PARTICIPATION

3.1 Building upon indigenous innovations, initiatives and ideas

Development of land and water resources has conventionally been carried out at the macro-level, wherein the programme was implemented completely at project cost and by adopting exogenous technologies. Macro-level development has its share of advantages and disadvantages. At present, however, development of natural resources is envisaged at the micro-level. This type of development has conventionally been carried out by people themselves at their own cost but on a limited scale. Therefore, a lot of indigenous technical knowledge on natural resource development is available with people but most people have not been able to use this knowledge effectively due to financial and other constraints. Emphasis on indigenous technologies helps in improving community participation; provides a sound base to improve upon the available solutions; helps in developing rapport with people, inculcates respect for indigenous knowledge in the mind of subject specialists; increases chances for collection of contribution from actual beneficiaries; helps in post-project maintenance; helps in finding

out need-based solutions for heterogeneous and complex situations; and prepares the community to accept new ideas later on. Some of the steps that can help facilitate this are:

- Identify specific problems to be addressed under the watershed programme.

- Identify names of persons who have already taken some initiatives or have adopted indigenous innovations to address the problems in their own fields.

- Visit sites where the above innovations have been adopted or are under progress.

- Analyse strengths and weaknesses in the initiatives through focused discussion with the concerned persons.

- Add value to their innovations (wherever possible) and implement it on a small scale in the project area

- Replicate it on a large scale if it has become successful or modify it again for further testing in a smaller area.

3.2. Replication of success stories irrespective of the source of innovation

Under the watershed programme, choice of technologies may vary from place to place due to the wide heterogeneity and complexity in the situations. It has also been observed that in such areas, a number of location-specific success stories have been evolved by innovative farmers, non-government organisations, government departments, etc. Many of these success stories have not spread widely; to do so they would require specific support from external agencies. These successes should, however, be critically analysed with respect to their context, content and processes so that they are replicated properly. This approach of replicating success stories makes it easier for the field staff to carry out development/extension work particularly in complex and heterogeneous areas; helps motivate farmers; makes the best use of earlier efforts of other organisations; provides a sound base to improve upon available solutions; helps build confidence and rapport with the community; increases likelihood of collecting contributions from actual beneficiaries; and also increases chances of post-project maintenance of measures. Some of the operational steps for facilitation of these are:

- Identify specific problems to be addressed under the watershed programme.

- Carry out brainstorming sessions with experienced farmers under the watershed project and enquire about any success stories with respect to the above problems.

- Organise available successes with respect to their context, content and processes.

- Arrange focused exposure visit to the successful communities to motivate participants.

- Use successful farmers as trainers during such visits and also in subsequent training programmes.

- Analyze specific reasons and constraints for why these success stories have not become well known.

- Try to replicate the success stories after addressing the specific constraints identified.

4. FINANCIAL FACTORS FOR PARTICIPATION

4.1. Direct funding to the community against approved action plan

Watershed projects under the public sector were conventionally implemented by development departments and the funds were kept within the government account. This system of financial management perpetuated the top-down approach. Under the

participatory approach, however, empowering the community is essential. Direct funding, particularly of the developmental component, is therefore crucial to facilitation of proper community participation in the decision-making process. This approach helps increase the chances for promoting the concept of 'our participation in their plans' and brings transparency in allocation and utilisation of funds for need-based components. It increases the chances of resource-poor farmers receiving due attention; reduces overhead expenditure in implementation; and avoids delay in payment to labourers and to material suppliers. Direct access to funds also generates a sense of responsibility and builds competence among community members; and ensures timely availability of funds for the programme. Some of the operational steps for facilitation of these aspects are:

■ Organise the community into an appropriate institutional setup.
■ Get it registered under the society act.
■ Release funds against an approved action plan.
■ Evolve detailed procedures for handling the money before its release to the community.
■ Build capability of committee members to maintain physical and financial records.
■ Work out specific modalities about social auditing and transparency in handling of funds.
■ Prepare people to own audit responsibility of developmental funds released to them

4.2. Contributory approach for the developmental component

In many of the ongoing watershed projects, departmental works are implemented using project funds without any contribution from farmers. Even where contribution is taken, it is often too small (5–10%). In such situations, farmers become passive partners and the programme becomes top-down in nature even where many other mechanisms of participation are incorporated. The contributory approach undoubtedly improves the stake of users in the program; empowers the community to demand good quality and need-based services; encourages genuine participation of the community; and minimises social conflict among community members. The approach improves accountability among outsiders; reduces overall cost of developmental works; improves capital formation in villages towards post-project maintenance; and promotes investment on priority components and on proper type of technological measures. Furthermore, it ensures the community's right over benefits emerging due to developmental works under the project. Some of the operational steps that can facilitate these aspects are:

■ Take a written agreement from the community/ *panchayat* regarding the contributory approach of the programme before selecting the village under the watershed programme.
■ Clearly spell out the contributory norms to be followed for each type of measure.
■ Maintain consistency in communication by all members of the watershed development team, multidisciplinary team, district heads etc. regarding norms of contribution.
■ Orient the community repeatedly about the norms of contribution and its operational modality.
■ Allow people to make the final decision about the choice of technology or type of developmental work to be carried out under the project.
■ Prepare an action plan of only those items for which a written proposal has been given by users along with a

commitment to pay the contribution in time.

■ Start preparation of design and estimate only after the users pay a partial contribution. Start implementing works after the balance contribution has been paid by actual users (except by those who propose to pay the contribution in the form of labour during work implementation)
■ Maintain uniformity in collection of contribution from all persons, irrespective of their status.

5. MANAGERIAL FACTORS FOR PARTICIPATION

5.1. Redesigning the steps and procedures for different phases of the project

It has been well recognised that the steps and procedures for planning and implementation of projects through the participatory approach are quite different from those under the top-down approach. Hence, it is necessary to understand these differences and build the capacity of the concerned stakeholders accordingly. This helps in empowerment of the community; makes the programme demand driven; facilitates a contributory approach; helps develop ownership among the community members; and results in need-based and sustainable development. Some of the operational steps accomplishing this and the people responsible for each step are as follows:

A. Planning Phase

■ Documenting technological options including indigenous as well as exogenous solutions (by the Watershed Development Team (WDT))
■ Orienting the community about unknown options through exposure visits to successful examples (by WDT)
■ Selecting appropriate technological options and location (by concerned users)
■ Submitting proposals as per open-ended application form (by concerned users)
■ Preparing design and estimate of proposed structures/ measures (by WDT/private consultant)
■ Providing technical sanction of design and estimate of agreed proposal (by WDT / MDT)
■ Consolidating proposals into an annual action plan (by WC)
■ Facilitating social approval of the consolidated annual action plan (by WA)
■ Providing administrative and financial approval of action plan (by PD)

B. Implementation Phase

■ Preparing monthly schedule for implementation of approved works
■ Collecting genuine contributions from concerned users preferably before starting the implementation of works (except in cases where users propose to work as labourers)
■ Working out the operational modality for implementing the

programme without using contractors

■ Marking the proposed site before beginning construction of structures

■ Maintaining muster roll for labourers and stock register of required material

■ Supervising quality of works during critical stages of construction

■ Writing measurement book at the WC level

■ Maintaining office records at the WC level

■ Certifying work by concerned users

■ Authorising payment by WC

■ Disbursement of wages and other payments by watershed secretary

5.2 Elimination of contractual system during implementation phase

Conventionally, works under the watershed program have been implemented through contractors. Under the participatory approach however, majority of works are likely to be simpler and smaller. Hence, the people themselves could easily implement such works as per approved SSR. This approach increases the involvement of people and leads to a greater ownership of the programme; makes the programme more relevant; reduces the overall cost and at the same time enables labourers to earn their full share as per the SSR; generates greater employment opportunities for the local people; facilitates equity for women with particular reference to equal wages and equal employment; promotes transparency in the programme; and builds the capacity of local people to handle such assignments in future. Some of the operational steps for facilitation of these are:

■ Develop norms and operational procedures for implementation of works by people themselves without having any "contractual" system

■ Orient all committee members, including labourers, about norms and procedures

■ Convert the technically-oriented cost estimate of each structure into a user-friendly cost estimate so that each stake holder can easily understand the unit cost of different items and the amount to be received after completion of works at each stage.

■ Identify concerned stakeholders for carrying out proposed works through an open and competitive process. Likewise, carry out procurement of material/equipment through a similar system.

■ provide due amount particularly to labourers as per SSR.

■ Involve the actual users (for whom the structure is to be made) in the decision-making process regarding choice of labourers, materials and equipment for specific works.

■ Pay each stakeholder separately through cheque (if the amount is high) after verifying the quality and quantity of works; and enter the details into the measurement book after concerned users certify that the work has been satisfactorily completed.

5.3 Flexibility in modifying the action plan

Under the participatory approach, a detailed action plan has to be prepared by integrating indigenous and exogenous technical knowledge. Sometimes new ideas/solutions may emerge after implementing a part of the programme during the first year. It is therefore desirable to suitably modify the plans during the second year after carrying out an internal evaluation of the programme. It may, however, be essential that such modifications be done within the original sanctioned amount for a particular activity. In case additional funds are required for the modified proposal, the concerned farmers should provide it as an additional contribution. Sometimes new ideas that are relevant to local situations may emerge during the implementation phase. Hence, flexibility in action plan helps to build the confidence of farmers, as their perspective is given adequate importance at different stages of project management. This approach promotes the concept of 'participatory evaluation' in a natural manner without even formalising it. Due to such provisions, farmers also become open to new ideas proposed by outsiders. The approach also provides an opportunity for outsiders to learn about farmers' perspectives in a clear manner. Some of the operational steps for facilitation of these aspects are:

■ Orienting farmers during the planning phase about the flexibility to modify the action plan during implementation phase provided it is done without any additional financial commitment on the part of the project.

■ Implementing a part of the programme on each component and sub-component (particularly those items which are new to farmers) during the first year so that it provides an opportunity for them to see and react in a meaningful manner.

■ Carrying out concurrent participatory evaluation of the programme during the implementation phase.

6. CONCLUSION

Operational modality at the field level may vary in time and space. Hence, it is essential to keep it quite flexible so that concerned persons may work it out as per their own situation. It is however desirable to keep on synthesizing the learning on the above aspect so that it could be used as an initial input during training courses for different stake holders

A majority of the above factors and the modalities have already been integrated in the guidelines for watershed programme funded by the Ministry of Rural Development as well as the Ministry of Agriculture, Govt. of India. In the present paper, the available information has been synthesized in a thematic manner so that it may serve as a reference material.

References:

■ Guidelines for watershed development (revised 2001)- Government of India, Ministry of Rural Development – Department of Land Resources, New Delhi.

■ WARASA JAN SAHBHAGITA - Guidelines for watershed development project for rainfed areas (NWDPRA) - Government of India, Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, New Delhi.

About the authors

Dr.G.Jaya is Assistant Director, **Dr.N.K.Sanghi** is Director (NRM), **Dr.B.Renuka Rani** and **Dr.K.Sai Maheswari** are Research Associates, MANAGE, Hyderabad. The last two authors have earlier worked as full time WDT members in Manchal Watershed