



Watershed and Development – A Qualitative Study of a Tribal Village

* Prashant Chaudhry

* Senior Research Fellow in Department of Social Work, Jamia Millia Islamia

ABSTRACT

The theme of this paper is based on my experience of conducting a sociological analysis of watershed development project in a small tribal village of Maharashtra during my M.Phil at Department of Humanities and Social Science, IIT, Bombay. The primary objective of sociological analysis was to inquire about the problems and changes in social relations that have emerged in community due to water scarcity in due course of time.

Keywords : Watershed, Community, Mobilization, Check-dam, Village.

Introduction:

Gudwanwadi is a small tribal village based in Karjat taluka of Raigad district, Maharashtra. The place is known for its natural beauty and closely located hill stations such as Matheran and Bhimashankar. The region is inhabited by many popular tribal groups of Maharashtra. Despite the natural beauty and heavy rainfall in the region (more than 300 mm) many of the tribal hamlets in the area faces acute water crises during summers.

The project of constructing check-dam in Gudwanwadi village was initiated by the centre for technology alternatives for rural areas (CTARA) of Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay in collaboration with Academy of Development Studies (ADS). The main objective of the project was to hold enough water through constructing check-dam in the village, so that the drinking water needs of the villagers and their livestock are met for the whole year.

Objective of the Study:

The main objective of conducting the sociological analysis is to develop a conceptual understanding of the emerging socio-economic issues and also to understand the role of project as a catalyst in building social networks (community organization) among the villagers.

Methodology

Case study method has been used to conduct the Qualitative Research. The data for the study has been collected using snowball and convenience sampling method. Apart from that techniques like PRA (participatory rural appraisal), FGD (focus group discussion), interviewing has also been used. The data of the study is thematically analysed keeping the nature and maintaining the qualitative content of the study.

Concept of Watershed Development

A watershed can be defined as the drainage basin or catchment area of a particular stream or river. Watershed development refers to the conservation, regeneration and the judicious use of all the natural resources (land, water, plant, animals etc) and human within a particular watershed. Watershed management tries to bring about the best possible balance in the environment between natural resources on the one side and human and other living being on the other. The components of watershed development are as following:

- Community development
- Soil and land management
- Water management
- Afforestation

- Pasture/fodder development
- Livestock management
- Farm and non-farm value addition activities

Findings of the study:

Emerging Socio Economic Issues in the Village

- The scarcity of water in the Gudwanwadi resulted in emergence of various socio-economic issues related to daily life of people. A brief analysis of such issues is presented as.
- The lack of water availability in the region has resulted in shortage of drinking water in the village.
- It has increased burden on women as they have to walk 6-8 Kms daily to fetch the drinking water. The parents usually engage their daughters in such work. Due to that education level of girl child is low because parents are not inclined to send their daughters to school.
- The non-availability of drinking water resulted in spread of various waterborne diseases like jaundice, dehydration etc.
- Low agricultural production also resulted due to non-availability of water for irrigation purpose.
- The low water level for agricultural purposes also resulted in lack of fodder production and even the common pasture land in the area dried up in the summer season. This has severely affected the health condition of livestock in the village.
- The scarcity of drinking water also resulted in changes in the social relations of the community. Now people from outside villages do not prefer to marry their daughter in Gudwanwadi village. They felt that if they marry their daughter in the village then her entire life would be finished in fetching the water.
- The poor agricultural production due to low water level resulted in large scale migration of village people. Most of the people migrate to city area with their families to work in construction or brick kilns etc.
- The low agricultural production and rampant poverty in the village has forced many people to take loans on higher interest rate from moneylenders and indebted themselves. This has resulted in poor psychological and health status of people in the village.
- The lack water availability and rampant poverty in the village has caused low social status of the village in the region.
- The water scarcity and rampant poverty in the village has caused lack of social awareness among people about their problems and lack of participatory approach for resolution of problems.

Community Mobilization Process:

The initiation of watershed development programme aims at improving the livelihood of people and its strategies works as amending agent in building capacities of people for providing sustainability to the project. For the success of public good projects like watershed development it is very essential that people participation must be derived for the implementation of the project. In the present section, the process of community mobilization is discussed.

The Process:

The prime objective of conducting sociological analysis of the village was to generate people participation in the implementation of the project and to make villagers aware about the problems that they are facing in their day today life due to water scarcity. The role of Researcher was to develop community profile of the village and also to work as a catalyst for generating people awareness and participation of women in the implementation of the project.

The researcher when first visited the village, he observed that people are facing the impact of water scarcity on their livelihood but they are not able to recognize the problem. The adherence of traditional tribal culture and the participation of people were not adequate to mobilize them on the water related issues. The first task of researcher was to develop an entry point into the community, which he developed through involving himself in children activities in the village school. He tried to develop facilitative relationship with the children through helping them in their studies, playing games with them and also make them aware about cleanliness and waterborne diseases. After two-three week he observed that villagers were able to recognize him as they felt that the person is doing some good work with their children.

The researcher then tried to approach the community people through conducting meetings for making people aware about the project and also motivating them to participate in the implementation of the project. After a couple of meetings, a group of people approached him and asked him how they can contribute into the project. He explained them that the project aimed to solve the water problem in the village. He informed them that a NGO – Academy of Development Studies, which is running a grain bank in the village, has approached IIT, Bombay to technically help them in construction of check-dam in the village. As the availability of water has become a challenge and it is affecting village people in their day-today life.

The researcher continued to conduct the meetings with the villagers for the next two-three weeks. After that he realized that very few women were attending the meeting. In the very next meeting he discussed this issue with the villagers and as a result, the number of women participants in the meetings was increased. The researcher tried to develop a discontent among the people about the issues related to water availability in the village. He then informed the villagers that the implementation agency wants the participation in the implementation process of the project. He asked the villagers that a group needs to be formed for managing the issues related to implantation of the project.

A water committee was formed in the presence of representatives of IIT, Bombay and Academy of Development Studies through nominating four women and four male members as governing members of the committee. The work assigned to the committee was to manage the labour work and some financial details of the project.

After the formation regular meetings were held with the villagers to discuss the implementation of the project. During the meetings an issue was raised by the women's group that if they are engaged in fetching the water in the day time. They can only work in the construction site during nights. An important negotiation between the women's group and the implementers of the project was derived through the intervention of researcher. The implementers got agreed to supply one tanker of water to the village for their use.

The researcher also discussed with the members of the water committee that some contribution should also be there from the villagers as it is for their sake only, so it was democratically decided by villagers that they would contribute Rs.10/- per day from their earning for constructing the project. It was also decided that villagers would work shift wise at the construction site.

The formation of water committee also helped the village community to recognize the role of women. As a result, many of the male members started coming with their spouses in the water committee meeting. This process helped village community to widely share the discontent related to water among the people. The formation of water committee also increased the interaction among the community members, specifically women group. They share their daily life issues with each other, which helped them to build strong social network among themselves.

Impact Generated by Community Mobilization:

- The following changes have been observed through the process of community mobilization in the village community:
- It has resulted in a positive impact in making people aware about their problems. Earlier there was no such effort made by any NGO or any local group to make people realize the impact of water scarcity in their livelihood.
- The formation of water committee in the village made the village a stakeholder in the project.
- The involvement of women in the water committee has resulted in empowerment and recognition of woman's role in the project implementation work.
- The formation of water committee resulted in increased interaction between women and other social networks.
- The involvement of women in implementation work of the project helped in developing their participation and decision making power.
- The formation of water committee has increased the interaction of female members with male members in the village resulting a change in their social roles and status.
- The project also benefited the village by providing alternative employment facility to the villagers.
- The formation of water committee provide a platform to the villagers to discuss other social issues concerning to the community.
- The intervention of researcher motivated many parents to send their children specifically girl child to school.

Conclusion:

From the above study, we can conclude that for the implementation of technical projects at the community level, a deep understanding of community background is very essential for technical feasibility and people adaptability to a particular technology. The sociological analysis and the process of community mobilization helped the implementing agencies in identifying community resources and evolving community participation for sustainability of the project.

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