Problems Confronting Equitable and Sustainable Development in Bhil Adivasi Villages in Jhabua district in Madhya Pradesh and their Communitarian Solution.

ABSTRACT

The western Madhya Pradesh region of India, which is largely populated by Bhil adivasi (indigenous people) peasants, is typical of other such adivasi regions of the country in that fragmentation of landholdings coupled with the neglect of dryland agriculture has severely jeopardised the livelihoods of the people and forced them to further mine their immediate environment for subsistence needs. In such a scenario systematic work to bring about equitable and sustainable development is hindered by the fact that common property resources are most often privatised and people who are in control do not want to let go of them. This paper details how an NGO SAMPARK creatively overcame this through inspiring communitarian problem solving and the building up of social capital. However the paper concludes by underlining the fact that widespread equitable and sustainable development through the replication of such one off successes is prevented due to the lack of political capital needed on a larger scale to challenge the dominant paradigms of governance and development.

Problems Confronting Equitable and Sustainable Development in Bhil Adivasi Villages in Jhabua district in Madhya Pradesh and their Communitarian Solution.

I. Introductory Background

Agricultural land is an important natural resource in India where around seventy percent of the population is directly dependent on agriculture for their living. Unfortunately the demographically numerous rural poor are mostly either landless or hold title to marginal plots of unfertile and unirrigated land situated in the upper watershed regions. Consequently they are not able to use their abundant labour power to conserve and develop this vital resource in a proper manner leading to an increasingly vicious circle of rural poverty all over the country. Western Madhya Pradesh, which is home to Bhil adivasi (indigenous people) peasants, bears tragic witness to this sordid reality.

The destruction of the Bhils' agricultural base and their loss of control over the crucial natural resources of land, water and forests, in fact, have a long history. The Bhils traditionally lived by practising shifting agriculture and hunting and gathering but from the time of the Mughals they have suffered discrimination and displacement. They had to give up the more fertile lands of the Malwa plateau and Nimar plains bordering the lower Narmada river valley and recede into the forested hills to cultivate sub-optimal lands. This process gained in momentum with the increase in trade and settled agriculture as more and more forests were cleared and brought under the plough. The British accelerated this transformation by laying railway lines from the decade of the 1860s and thus opening up these areas further to trade leading to the penetration of sahukars or moneylender traders who also doubled as tax collectors into the remotest regions. This combination of loss of access to the important resources of forests and agricultural lands, the burden of heavy taxes and the exploitation of the sahukars had destituted the Bhils even prior to independence (Banerjee, 2003).

Following on the national policy in this regard the concentration of government finances after independence on the promotion of green revolution agriculture on the more fertile lands belonging to non-adivasi farmers in the river valleys to the neglect of the much wider dryland areas of the Bhils in the upper watersheds has further skewed the resource access pattern of the region against them. The benefits of the green revolution were cornered by the traders, who traded in the inputs and the increased output. The large farmers too benefited immensely by earning huge surpluses from low production costs due to state subsidised supply of inputs and the use of their extra-economic powers over the adivasis to keep wage levels depressed (Banerjee, op cit).

This weakening of the primary agricultural base of the Bhils combined with ill conceived and even more badly implemented poverty alleviation schemes of the government to provide supplementary incomes which have invariably failed has meant that the adivasis have remained in the clutches of sahukars who dominate the rural markets of the region exploiting the former through unremunerative prices for their produce, exorbitant prices for the agricultural inputs and usurious interest rates on loans advanced to them (Aurora, 1972). Consequently most of the Bhil adivasi peasants have to rely on migration either permanent or seasonal to make ends meet (Mosse et al, 2002). It has now become fairly well established from qualitative analysis of tribal development policies within the larger area of scholarship of the adivasi predicament in India that the institutions set up under

the provisions of the Constitution of India and the various laws enacted from time to time for the protection of the adivasis have not functioned properly primarily due to the wrong development policies adopted by the state which have tended to strengthen rather than weaken the political and economic power of the non-adivasis vis-a-vis the adivasis (Sharma, 2001).

The state has also failed to provide good and adequate education services which has resulted in the adivasis remaining unequipped to negotiate the complexities of the modern centralised system of governance into which they have been forcefully integrated (Rahul & Subhadra, 2001). The poverty induced by these development policies has adversely affected the nutritional levels of the food intake of the adivasis and combined with the lack of good and cheap health services has led to a decline in their general health. Moreover, the even greater lack of both education and health services for the women has meant that they have not been able to smash age-old patriarchal structures and their consequent lack of reproductive rights has led to a population explosion putting further pressure on already scarce resources (Rahul, 1999). Combined with the agricultural development policies described earlier these have produced a scenario wherein adivasis are continually suffering from the imperfections of the modern market system, which has increasingly penetrated into their subsistence lifestyles forcing them to live on the edge and mine rather than conserve environmental resources vital to their survival. The common property resources (CPRs) have become so scarce that there is tremendous competition to privatise and denude them. Thus in Jhabua district some of the land under the forest department and most of the other cultivable common lands, have been encroached on by adivasi peasants for cultivation. The land being mostly hilly this indiscriminate extension of agriculture to sub-optimal lands has led to heavy deforestation and soil erosion and consequent resource depletion.

II. Organisational Profile

This is the context in which the NGO, SAMPARK, began work with the Bhil and Patelia adivasis of Petlawad tehsil in 1987. Initially stopdams were built on streams, wells dug and field bunding done in an isolated manner with funds from the Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART). However, it soon became clear that this kind of intervention was not making any sustained dent in the poverty of the Bhils due to the larger systemic problems described earlier which had led to the following local obstacles to sustainable development –

1. Fragmentation of land holdings had resulted in most adivasis being left with unviable holdings of 1 ha or less in area.
2. Village common lands were progressively being encroached upon for agriculture and so were not easily available for restorative treatment.
3. The stranglehold of the sahukars, moneylender traders, over the lives of the adivasis resulting in the latter being unable to make any savings and investments.
4. The decay of the traditional community gram sabha leading to an escalation in disputes and a degeneration of customs of communitarian labour and sharing of costs of social functions.

5. Lack of adequate education and health services which adversely affected the capacity of the people to work.

There was a rethinking in the beginning of the decade of the 1990s all over the country with regard to the implementation of sustainable development programmes for rural areas. The result was the popularisation of watershed development emerging as the anchor of such programmes and the adoption of the "ridge to valley" approach as opposed to the treatment of isolated areas and the active involvement of the beneficiaries in planning, implementation and post project maintenance of the created structures (Shah, 1993, GOI, 1994). The Government of Madhya Pradesh (GOMP) initiated the ambitious Rajiv Gandhi Watershed Development Mission (RGWM) in 1994 incorporating these new ideas by pooling all the funds being made available to it by the Government of India for poverty alleviation and treatment of drought prone areas under various schemes. This increased stress on watershed development on the part of the government came from the realisation that since the state is situated across a drainage divide involving as many as six river basins, the terrain is undulating and water storage in the natural system is low. Moreover the state has only a limited share in the river waters since the state lies on the upper catchment. Thus conventional dam centred water resources development adopted thus far had proved costly and inefficient (RGWM/TARU 2001).

In the light of these developments a review of the obstacles mentioned above was undertaken in 1995 by SAMPARK (SAMPARK, 1995) leading it to lay more stress on resolving these socio-economic problems before embarking in a big way on implementing physical watershed development work. The important thing was to mobilise the people to battle the control of the sahukars and then use this unity to overcome internecine squabbles among the adivasis over the control of CPRs, which was preventing the implementation of sustainable watershed development. Thus the traditional gram sabhas were activated once again and initiatives were launched in the fields of micro-finance, cheap resolution of disputes, revival of traditional labour pooling customs, reduction of the cost of social functions such as weddings and rites of passage, primary education and primary health and physical watershed development works were continued only in a low key manner. It has been established through practice that successful community based micro-finance is one of the more important desiderata for broadbased rural development (NABARD, 1999).

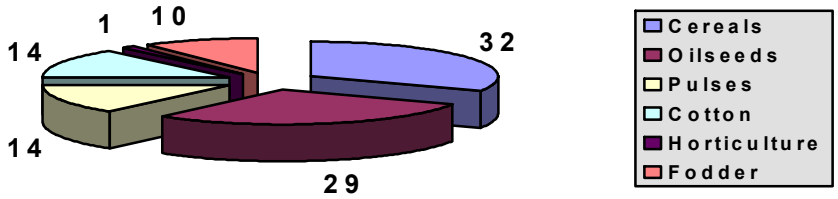
Only when these efforts began to bear fruit in the form of greater social cohesion and a gradual liberation from the clutches of the sahukars was largescale watershed development launched again from 1998 onwards. Work has been done in five different watersheds inhabited by about 8000 Bhil and Patelia adivasis in sixteen villages spread over an area of 7580 hectares in Petlawad tehsil of Jhabua district in Madhya Pradesh with funds provided by CASA and Action Aid funding agencies. In addition to this SAMPARK is also responsible for the social mobilisation of the beneficiaries in the DANIDA funded Comprehensive Watershed Development Project (CWDP) in the tehsil in which the physical works are carried out by agencies of the GOMP. Thus the work of the organization has run parallel to that of the RGWM in other parts of the state. The RGWM has not been implemented in Petlawad tehsil because the DANIDA CWDP is in operation there. We shall now first give details of the district and tehsil characteristics

and then describe how the organisation has dealt with the problem of distribution of costs and benefits in watershed development with the example of one watershed.

III. District and Tehsil Characteristics

The Roopapada village in the Kalighati Panchayat is situated in Petlawad tehsil of Jhabua district. The district lies in the Vindhya ranges at the edge of the Malwa plateau and the land is hilly without much tree cover and prone to heavy erosion. Petlawad tehsil is drained by the Mahi river which forms the northern boundary of the district. Geologically five rock formations are found in the district. These are Deccan Trap, Alluvium, Cretaceous-Lameta, Aravalis and Banded Gneissic Complex. The whole of Petlawad tehsil has the Deccan Trap formation which is also known as the Malwa Trap. It falls in the Malwa plateau agroclimatic zone with medium to black medium soils of medium levels of the three main nutrients of Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Potassium.

Fig. 1: Cropping Pattern of Petlawad Tehsil in %

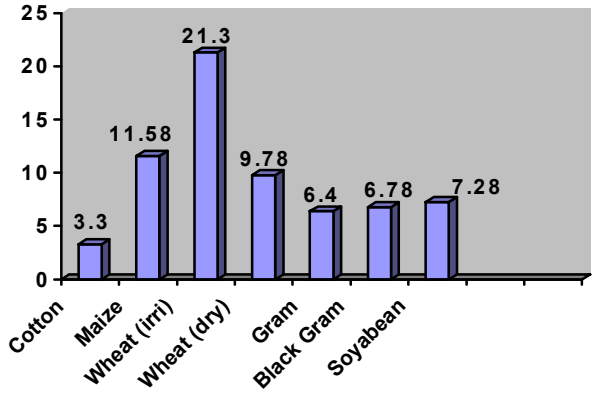


Source : District Statistical Handbook 2000, Department of Economics and Statistics, GOMP

The better quality lands in the tehsil are held mostly by the non-adivasis while the 75 % majority adivasis have the lower quality lands which are mostly unirrigated and lie in the upper watershed regions. Thus the break up of crop production for the whole petlawad tehsil shown in Fig. 1 does not adequately reflect the crop mix of the adivasis which has a higher proportion of cereals and pulses and less of cotton, oilseeds and fodder. Unfortunately disaggregated data showing this difference is not available in collated form with the government. The yields of crops in the tehsil are shown in Fig. 2 and as is evident these are below the national average.

Some Human Development Indicators for Jhabua district along with its rank among the forty five districts of Madhya Pradesh are given below in Table 1. Clearly the district is very backward. The poverty ranking is not that bad because the people migrate to nearby developed areas and earn supplementary incomes. The per capita food production ranking too is high because there are no big towns and cities in the district, which can push up the percentage of the non-food producing population.

Fig 2: Crop Yields in Petlawad Tehsil in Qu./Ha



Source : District Statistical Handbook 2000, Department of Economics and Statistics, GOMP

Table 1: Selected Human Development Indicators for Jhabua District

No.	Indicator	Value	Rank Among 45 Districts
1.	Human Development Index	0.372	45
2.	Gender Development Index	0.450	43
3.	Population Dependent on Agriculture (%)	90.6	2
4.	Infant Mortality Rate	130	42
5.	Life Expectancy (2001)	55.8	30
6.	Total Fertility Rate	7.0	45
7.	Below Poverty Line (%)	31.2	20
8.	Annual Per Capita Food Production (kgs)	268.22	21

Source: Third Human Development Report Madhya Pradesh 2002, GOMP.

IV. Roopapada Watershed

The land use pattern of the watershed is as shown in Table 2 below. In reality after accounting for the encroachments for habitation and cultivation there are only about 45 ha of village common land available for protection and development work. There are two tanks in the village built by the government, which are used mainly for recharging purposes and sometimes for occasional protective irrigation for a cotton crop.

Table 2: Landuse Pattern in Roopapada Watershed (ha)

Total Area	Forest Area	Irrigated Area	Unirrigated Area	Uncultivable Wasteland	Wasteland
239.08	19.10	20.16	129.23	26.05	44.54

Source: Sampark Records

There are 67 families with a population of 402 of whom 207 are males and 195 females all engaged in agriculture. Fifteen of these belong to the Patelia tribe and the rest to the Bhil tribe. The Patelias consider themselves to be socially superior to the Bhils and practise untouchability with them. The Patelias are slightly better off economically than the Bhils but the biggest landholder who is also the Patel or headman of the village has only about 3 ha of land and is a Bhil. Thus they are more or less all below the poverty

line. The patel has been successful in acquiring a tractor through a loan given by the government.

The land near the ridgeline belongs to the forest department. There is one patch of common wasteland just below the ridgeline of about 19 ha and two patches of 15 and 10 ha lower down in the watershed. There is a small hamlet of seven Bhil families on the ridgeline and these were in control of the uppermost wasteland. Another hamlet of 8 Bhil families were in control of the lowermost patch of 10 ha. These 15 families all owed allegiance to the Patel Rama. The15 ha patch in between was free for all. Given the severe shortage of agricultural land there is a tendency throughout western Madhya Pradesh of bringing common wastelands under the plough. Thus some of the land in the uppermost patch was being cultivated by some of the families in the nearby hamlet and it was being used for cattle grazing by some thirty families. Grazing was being done on the forestland nearby also. Watershed work could not be started as long as the ridgeline CPR remained under private control. The problem thus was that due to the heavy deprivation being suffered by all of them some of the people in the village who were slightly more powerful in social and economic terms were appropriating the use of the CPRs to the further detriment of the ecology and economic viability of the watershed as a whole. This is a typical situation of conflict between gainers and losers in watersheds which vitiates proper watershed development that has been noted in many places (Kerr, 2002).

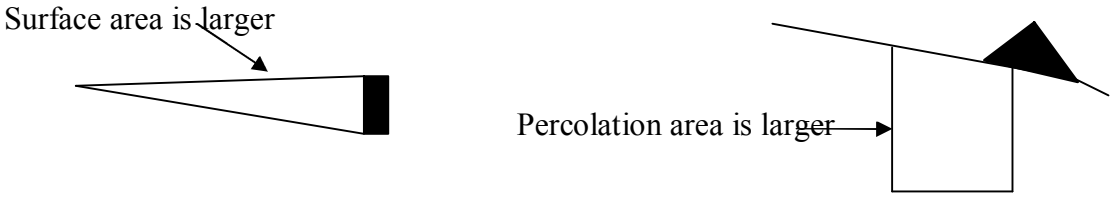
The strategy adopted by SAMPARK when it first entered the village in 1996 was to form a self-help group with twenty Bhil families. The successful running of this SHG resulted in 29 more Bhil families deciding to form another SHG in 1997. All these families then began reviving their traditional customs of labour pooling and community dispute resolution. There are at present two women's and one men's SHGs with a combined membership of 72 and savings of Rs 1,74,783 and freedom from the debt of sahukars.

A group of people from these SHGs were then taken on an exposure tour to see the work of Tarun Bharat Sangh in Alwar in Rajasthan and that of Anna Hazare in Ralegan Shiddhi in Maharashtra. These people then came back and related to the whole group their experiences and they then began to together exert pressure on the Patel and his kinsmen to stop grazing the ridgeline patch so that it could be treated and planted. Seeing that the Patel was not amenable to the social fencing and protection of the common lands the rest of the villagers decided to go ahead without his consent and protect the land from free grazing anyway.

The Patel refused to agree with this and sent his daughter to graze his animals in the protected area. When she was stopped by the chowkidar Babu then the Patel's son went and beat him up. The villagers responded by calling a traditional panchayat meeting in which the Patel also came. A fine of Rs 500 was imposed on the Patel's son for his misdemeanour but the Patel refused to pay up. Then the villagers decided to boycott the Patel's family as is the traditional custom on non-compliance with panchayat rulings. Initially the Patel refused to be cowed down but eventually he found it extremely difficult as no one would come to his house or to work on his field. Then he called a meeting of the panchayat and paid up the fine. Finally good sense prevailed and a compromise was reached that the seven families on the ridgeline would stop free grazing on the wasteland but they would retain their small plots of agricultural land within it.

After this in 1998 contour trenching, gully plugging and pasture development work was started on public land as also field bunding work on some of the private agricultural land. Plantation work was done through community contribution of labour and social fencing was employed for protection. The fodder was cut by the whole village and distributed equally among all villagers irrespective of whether they were members of the SHGs or not at a nominal price of Rs 2 per bundle of grass. As the work progressed and the benefits of the treatment works became manifest it became clear that these accrued differentially to the upper and lower watershed inhabitants in terms of water availability. While the wells in the lower watershed and the two tanks there began to have more water those in the upper watershed did not show similar recharge.

Fig. 3: Difference Between Heading and Sunken Water Retaining Structures



i) Heading Structure ii) Sunken Structure

Table 3: Physical Work done in Roopapada Watershed

Year	Work Done	Area (ha)	Beneficiary Households
1998	Field bunding on private farm land	9	12
1999	Contour trenching and gully plugging on public land	20	38
2000	Gabian Structures on nullahs	3	25
2001	Gully plugs and dugouts on public land	13	29
2002	Gully plugs and dugouts on public land	34	40
2003	Gully plugs and dugouts on public land	3	19

Source: Sampark Records

This problem was solved by borrowing from the expertise of the DANIDA CWDP, which, as mentioned earlier, was being implemented in another part of the tehsil. The DANIDA project had considered this problem at the design stage itself and come up with a novel solution for it. Most watershed structures are “heading” ones with larger surface water area in which the evaporation loss is high and the percolation low. To reverse this

the DANIDA project had designed a new "sunken" structure called the dugout in which the soil and rock are dugout to a depth and so the surface and head available for percolation is much more than that for evaporation (Fig 3). Thus good technology too can help when the basic social mobilisation is good. The added advantage is that the percolating water immediately recharges the nearby wells (GOMP, 1997). The details of the physical works done are given in Table 3.

While the work done upto 2001 was funded by CASA the work done in 2002 and 2003 was done totally through shramdan or community labour. In 2002, 399 person days of labour were contributed while in 2003, 180 person days of labour were contributed. This is what is crucial as for sunken structures it is absolutely a must that they be cleaned each year if they are to retain their efficacy as water rechargers and this is possible only if the user group is well organised and conscious about its responsibilities of maintenance. In addition to this as many as 30,000 saplings have been planted over the years with a survival rate upwards of 90%. The villagers have refurbished their traditional simple stone monument to their village God on the top of the ridge in the regenerated forest and they celebrate their monsoon Diwasa festival, which is a thanksgiving to God for having provided them with the means of livelihood, with fanfare there. Finally the villagers have also revived their traditional custom of "adji-padji" under which they pool their labour together for the labour intensive agricultural operation of weeding. 600 person days of community labour were thus generated in 2003.

Thus a conflict situation in which the more powerful group of adivasis were preventing the sustainable use of the CPRs by privatising them was amicably resolved basically through the revival of the traditional gram sabha which in turn gained its strength from the successful battle against the control of the sahukars through the means of the SHGs. The visible benefits in terms of fodder availability and groundwater recharge then enthused the other hamlet of adivasis lower down in the watershed to agree to give up control of the patch of 10 ha that they had with them and here too watershed development and plantation work has been carried out. The 15 ha patch in the middle has also been treated but plantation work has not been carried out in it. A situation in which conflicts had arisen between the poor hailing from the same socio-economic background but residing in the upper and lower reaches of the watershed because of deprivation caused by negative external forces had been resolved by reducing this deprivation, primarily through the creation of what has come to be called "social capital"(D'Silva & Pai, 2003).

In rural areas in India considerable antagonism exists between the "local state" of petty government officials and the common people who have to approach them as supplicants for services which are their legitimate due (Corbridge et al, 2003). The history of Bhil adivasi deprivation is laced with many tales of woe generated by the inhospitable behaviour of the local state officials within the larger narrative of the unjust policies of the colonial, national and global states. This contradiction has given rise to a different kind of conflict situation in Roopapada of late. The highest reaches of the watershed are controlled by the forest department as mentioned earlier. The people have begun to dig dugouts in this area through shramdan seeing the tremendous importance in terms of immediate recharge benefits. This has led to objections being raised by the local forest guard. At present the dispute is of a muted nature but if the villagers decide to go ahead with more dugouts in future then the conflict might escalate. For the time being the

villagers have told the forest guard that he should go and tell his superiors that they should arrange for funds for the treatment of this land as otherwise they would do this work through shramdan.

V. Scaling up

Experience has shown that mobilising people in a single watershed alone is not enough to ensure sustainability of the gains from watershed development without building up wider networks and institutions that can create a positive counter-culture of change that can challenge the negative attitudes of those ranged against the emancipation of the poor at various levels (Yugandhar, 1999). The Gram Sabha in Roopapada also has health and education committees that take care of primary health and night school education with the help of SAMPARK and also try and see that government services in these spheres improve. There are many other such all purpose gram sabhas and these now total ninety in number. These Gram Sabhas are organised in clusters of five each and then federated together in the form of a mass organisation – Lok Jagriti Manch. This federation has covered villages that have not had watershed work done in them but have SHGs and other communitarian activities. Thus the ground has been prepared for the implementation of watershed programmes on a much larger scale than is being done at present. This federation has tackled common issues of importance as follows –

1. The centralised wholesale sourcing of seeds, fertilisers and pesticides and their subsequent distribution all through voluntary work leading to massive savings on the retail prices of these inputs. In 2001- 2002 the federation bought agricultural inputs worth Rs 7,95,813.00 effecting a saving of Rs 1,46,811.00 on the retail prices of these inputs. Apart from this the saving on the interest that they would have had to pay if they had loaned the inputs from the sahukars is Rs 2,00,000.00.
2. The fixing of rates for bride price and other donations that the bridegroom has to give to the bride's family at the time of marriage. The expenses had reached over Rs fifty thousand and were a major caused of indebtedness. They have now been brought down to around Rs fifteen thousand. Similarly the expenses for the Rakhi festival and rites of passage too have been reduced considerably.
3. Advocacy both at the mass level and at the policy level for better utilisation of natural resources and also for the provision of greater food and employment security. The LJM is an active participant in the national campaigns for food and employment security as well as the campaign for sustainable use of water resources. Given the fact that there is tremendous pressure on land in western Madhya Pradesh and especially among the adivasis in Petlawad, work done on revenue land alone cannot ensure sustainable livelihoods to people. Thus it is most essential that the management of forestland too should be handed over to the people. There have been only desultory efforts in this direction. Unless more positive steps are taken a conflict situation is bound to arise and so the LJM has begun advocacy on this issue also.
4. The conservation and promotion of traditional agricultural practices and seeds that are more suited to dry land areas. This is in line with the findings of state of the art agricultural research, which has established that investment on research,

extension and inputs for the strengthening of dryland agriculture are now higher than that on green revolution agriculture (Fan & Hazell, 1997).

SAMPARK has thus graduated from a narrow technical approach to natural resource management to a more holistic socio-political approach. It has facilitated the setting up of civil society institutions that can not only amicably resolve disputes over natural resource management by ensuring a better distribution of costs and benefits but which can gradually aspire to challenge the hegemony of traders in the market, government officials in the bureaucracy and the politicians in the higher level democratic institutions of the state. Most importantly it has realised the importance of positive participation in the market not only as a sine qua non for the long-term sustenance of successfully implemented watershed development projects but for the overall future development of the adivasis. Given the fact that today markets have become truly universal from the village to the global level and have become more influential than the state it is imperative that adivasis learn to take advantage of the market in what is probably the biggest civilisational change ever faced by any community (Nathan & Kelkar, 2003).

The performance of SAMPARK can be compared to that of the RGWM, which has been under implementation contemporaneously so as to highlight the crucial parameters of successful implementation of watershed programmes. A critical independent review of the work of the RGWM has brought out the following major deficiencies of the project –

1. The increase in wage employment in the agricultural sector wasn't significant enough to neutralise the accompanying growth in workforce. A tendency to search for more remunerative and stable employment in urban areas was marked, this made a decline in migration levels minimal.
2. Increases in cropped area and crop-mix changes had differentially benefited medium and large farmers. While only 25 percent of marginal farmers had reported crop-mix changes, small landholding sizes and limited capacity to invest in water extraction technologies had constrained their potential benefits.
3. There is a need for special attention towards SHGs and WTCGs given
    (i) requirement of full-time specialised professional input and
    (ii) complex issues relating to repayment, adequacy of capital support, procurement and marketing linkages and profit sharing arrangements that demand serious attention both at the operational and strategic levels.
4. Lack of an initially agreed maintenance strategy which makes the fate of public water harvesting structures contingent on expectation of negotiated settlement later on
5. Inadequately structured initial mobilisation that
    (i) reaches out only to select individuals and ignores the silent majority and risks perpetuating traditional power structures along with their less desirable traits and
    (ii) does not lay upfront the terms of engagement in terms of responsibilities and obligations of various village level groups. (RGWM/TARU op cit)

This review clearly reveals how important it is for equitable and sustainable distribution of benefits in a watershed project to –

i. organise the beneficiaries of the watershed project first before embarking on the physical implementation itself,

ii. generate alternative sources of income to tackle the problem of chronic unemployment which leads to migration and

iii. address the problems related to capital support and market linkages.

Additionally according to the World Bank deeply biased credit systems and the inefficient and non-transparent functioning of regulatory and support institutions result in powerful players in rural markets hurting the poor with their operations (World Bank, 2001). Thus SAMPARK by building up people's institutions that can effectively tackle these problems has clearly scored decisively over the RGWM. The fundamental difference lies in the approach to watershed development. The Government of Madhya Pradesh treats decentralised watershed management and dryland agriculture as adjuncts to modern flood irrigated green revolution agriculture and not as central programmes that should replace it. Moreover the building up of people's institutions that can challenge established power structures within and without the government is beyond it.

The methodology developed by SAMPARK is eminently suited to adivasi regions where there is still extant a traditional communitarian culture even if under threat of disintegration. It can be easily replicated with success in other adivasi areas. Indeed the adivasis in Petlawad have been ingenious enough to make the best of both worlds. The increase in crop yields and livestock earnings has in many cases obviated the need to migrate for work any more. Nevertheless the adivasis in Roopapada do migrate for short spells when there is a lull in activity on their own fields in the kharif season. In this way they earn enough money to defray the expenses of the sowing of the rabi crop. Thus they can hold on to the excess kharif crop instead of selling it immediately and so get a better price for it. Thus nowadays instead of the adivasis going to the traders, it is the latter who come to the village vying with each other to get the adivasis to sell to them. What more eloquent ode can there be to the virtues of well-organised and efficiently implemented comprehensive watershed development as a viable means of bringing about equitable and sustainable development.

VI. Political Economy of Development

The concept of social capital has come to be criticised because it is inadequate when it comes to the design of strategies to counter the larger political economy of modern development (Harris, 2001). The local state and the local power centres may be successfully neutralised in this manner through the formation of social capital in one small area but unless such isolated successes are replicated on a larger scale across dryland adivasi areas there cannot be any widespread change in the developmental situation of the adivasis. Thus the many NGOs and mass organisations of the western Madhya Pradesh region tried to utilise the empowering provisions of the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act 1996 (PESA) to institutionalise such an equitable and sustainable developmental model as developed by SAMPARK and other NGOs all over the region by empowering the panchayats. However, this movement for increasing autonomy of the adivasis was not tolerated by the higher level state and political parties and in a grossly repressive and illegal crackdown this mobilisation was squashed with the killing of four adivasis in police firing in Mehendikhera village in Dewas district in 2001

(Rahul, 2001). Thus the creation of social capital is just a necessary condition of equitable sustainable development and it must be complemented by political capital of the adivasis on a wider scale to be able to influence development policies in their favour. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (NREGA) and the The Right to Information Act 2005 (RTIA) now provide further legal instruments to make this possible but at present there are not enough organisations working to build up a wider mass base of adivasis to take advantage of these provisions in a coherent manner. In fact after the initial fanfare both the NREGA and the RTIA have belied the hopes that were placed on them as tools of ensuring emancipation and justice for the poor.

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