

Report of Study on

**Potential of Community Based Organisations  
to undertake WSD and NRM programmes**

**JULY 2004**



**Watershed Support Services And Activities Network (WASSAN)**  
12-13-452, Street No. 1, Tarnaka, Secunderabad – 500 017  
Ph: 040 – 2701 5295



## Report of Study on Potential of Community Based Organisations to undertake WSD and NRM programmes

### 1. Introduction to the study

WASSAN has been working with community based organisations (CBOs) of the poor, to enhance their capacities to conserve the natural resource base of their members and their community, and enhance its productivity. WASSAN's interest in CBOs arises from its understanding that:

1. the government invests substantially in watershed development;
2. the poor should benefit from such investment, and they can do so only by being fully involved with related programmes;
3. self-help groups (SHGs), their village organisations (VOs), and their mandal mahila samakhyas (MMSs) have an active and large membership, drawn from the poorer sections, and, therefore, their engagement with natural resource management will benefit the poor;
4. therefore, where watershed development (WSD) and natural resource management (NRM) programmes are managed by VOs and MFs, they could effectively impact the livelihoods of large sections of the poor in the area.

WASSAN has already begun work with CBOs helping build their capacities to design and manage WSD and NRM projects. Although these experiences are of recent origin, WASSAN wished to step back and study closely the potential that CBOs have in undertaking WSD and NRM programmes, the conditions under which this potential can be enhanced, and the role that WASSAN and others may have to play to enhance the potential.

Keeping all these in mind, WASSAN has initiated a study to determine

- a. the potential for CBOs to act as facilitators of NRM/WSD programmes/projects
- b. the roles that others, in particular, voluntary development organisations (VDOs), known also as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and governmental organisations (GOs), could perform in strengthening VOs and MMSs for NRM/WSD work without corrupting their organisational integrity or subverting their agenda
- c. the support (policy, financial, capacity building, other) that VOs and MMSs might need, to facilitate NRM/WSD work
- d. key processes that need to be adopted at each level for the NRM/WSD work to be effective
- e. a set of conditions (in the form of a check list) that must exist in a VO/MMS, for WASSAN to choose to work with it.

### 2. Methodology

The study began towards the end of April 2004, with a small meeting at Wassan, to outline the methodology and scope, and set up a small team. Two persons from within Wassan, and one external activist were selected to take responsibility for the study, with Shri MV Ramachandrudu, Programme Executive, Wassan coordinating the study.



Shri S Srinivas, Capacity Building Coordinator, Mahila Abhivruddhi Society Andhra Pradesh (APMAS), Shri Ravindra, Secretary, Dr Sanghi, Advisor, Smt Poorna Chandrika, Senior Programme Officer and Smt Bhagyalakshmi, Programme Officer of Wassan interacted closely with the study team, travelling with them to different field sites, and providing insights into NRM/WSD and institutional development work.

In all, 6 CBOs (at Daulatabad, Kosgi, Orvakal, Peddapalem, Edakulapalli, and Nallacharuvu), located in Mahbubnagar (2), Kurnool (1), Chittoor (1), Medak (1) and Anantapur (1) districts were visited, all of which had only women as members, and all of which had, in one manner or other, engaged in NRM/WSD activity. At Daulatabad, Kosgi, Orvakal, Peddapalem and Nallacharuvu, the CBOs visited were federations of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), at levels beyond the village. At Edakulapalli, interactions were with the village SHG. Each of the CBOs visited was being nurtured by a VDO/NGO. The VDOs/NGOs that had promoted and were supporting these CBOs were Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP), Outreach, Deccan Development Society (DDS), and Myrada. Discussions were also held with field representatives of the VDOs/NGOs.

During the visits to each CBO, an attempt was made to meet as many of the elected Directors as possible, at a formal meeting held for the purpose, at the CBO. Interactions were also held with sub-committees and staff in the CBOs responsible for NRM/WSD work. Visits were made to one or more of the sites where work on NRM/WSD had taken place in the area, with the involvement of the CBOs, and/or their leaders.

Interactions were held with local male leadership in some areas, to assess their perception of women CBOs in NRM work. The CBOs themselves presented their perspective on whether or not they should be involved in NRM work, and what advantages/disadvantages, if any, they had in undertaking this work, and what support they felt they needed.

The study was informed primarily by the women CBOs' information about their own interests in NRM/WSD work, their assessment of their capacities, their perceptions of advantages and disadvantages in the work being undertaken by them, and the work actually undertaken by them in the field. In order to assess organisational sustainability, a quick look was taken at the financial status of most of the CBOs visited.

In order to learn from the experiences and perceptions of others interested in watersheds and rural women's organisations, meetings were held also with Mr Jagannath Reddy, DDS-Pastapur, Mr Shankar Naik, Project Coordinator, Outreach, Mr Vijay Kumar, CEO of SERP, Ms CS Ramalakshmi, Commissioner, Women's Empowerment and Self Employment, Mr CS Reddy, CEO of Mahila Abhivruddhi Society (APMAS), Dr Rukmini Rao, Trustee of DDS, Mr BN Yugandhar, Managing Trustee, Wassan, Mr Bhaskar Reddy, Project Coordinator, Myrada, Mr Anil Punetha Commissioner, Rural Development, Mr SP Tucker, Secretary (Rural Development and Panchayati Raj) and MS C Suvarna, Director (DWCRA), Women's Empowerment and Self-Employment.

Every organisation and individual visited, provided readily all the information and insights required for the study, and helped the study team explore issues of concern to it. They shared their own perspectives and concerns on the matter, with passion and clarity, and helped the team understand the diversity and richness of the approaches being adopted.



The schedule of tasks undertaken by the study team was as follows.

Date District	Place	Tasks undertaken
19.04.04 Hyderabad	Wassan	Discussions at Wassan on scope of study
15.05.04 Mahbubnagar	1. Allapur 2. Daulatabad	1. Visited seed storage bins at Allapur 2. Interacted with local SHG members and MMS staff regarding the incomplete storage bins and local WSD project 3. Interacted with MMS Daulatabad leaders, staff and WSD committee members
18.05.04 Mahbubnagar	3. Kosgi 4. Togapur	1. Interacted with Kosgi MMS leaders, staff and WSD committee members 2. Visited WSD project supported by UNDP at Togapur with VO/MMS leaders and MMS staff 3. Interacted with local women leaders and former sarpanch
19.05.04 Kurnool	5. Ketavaram 6. Orvakal	1. Interacted with VO leaders and staff at Ketavaram 2. Visited WSD project at Ketavaram with VO leaders 3. Interacted with MMS Orvakal leaders and staff at Orvakal 4. Interacted with Mahila Bank leaders and staff at Orvakal
20.05.04 Chittoor	7. Peddapalem	1. Interacted with Outreach staff 2. Visited WSD project at Peddapalem with Outreach staff 3. Interacted with cluster association leaders and Outreach field staff at Peddapalem
21.05.04 Medak	8. Edakulapalli 9. Pastapur	1. Visited SHG at Edakulapalli 2. Visited WSD project with women leaders and DDS staff, at Edakulapalli 3. Interacted with DDS staff and women leaders at Pastapur
27.05.04 Anantapur	10. Kadiri 11. Jowkala 12. Nallacharuvu 13. Kammavaripalli	1. Interacted with Myrada staff at Kadiri 2. Visited Jowkala WSD project 3. Interacted with women leaders and Myrada staff at Resource Centre, Nallacharuvu 4. Visited Kammavaripalli for interactions with men leaders on WSD project
22.05.04 Hyderabad	SERP	Discussions with key persons experienced in institutional development, women's development, watershed development and livelihoods development
25.05.04 Hyderabad	Commissioner, Women's Empowerment; Deccan Development Society; APMAS; Chairman, Wassan	
11.06.04 Hyderabad	Commissioner, Rural Development; Principal Secretary, Panchayat Raj and Rural Development	
16.06.04	Ms Suvarna, Director, DWCRA, WESE	
31.05.04 Hyderabad	Wassan	Discussions at Wassan on glimpses from field visits
26.06.04 Hyderabad		Presentation of draft report to Wassan for feedback



### 3. Learnings from CBOs visited

#### 3.1 Daulatabad, Mahbubnagar district:

*The Daulatabad Mandal Mahila Samakhya, registered as a cooperative, is situated at Daulatabad in Mahbubnagar district. Although it has recently been made PIA, the former PIA is yet to hand over charge to the MMS. The MMS has, however, begun mobilising the local community for identification of WSD projects, and is upgrading its skills to meet the new challenge. The source of funds for the watershed programmes in the area is DWMA, Mahbubnagar. In the past, the MMS has engaged with UNDP funds in some NRM activities. The MMS and its member-VOs are supported for their organisational development by SERP, and related district agencies.*

A visit to Allapur village covered by the Daulatabad MMS revealed that a project for establishing seed storage bins had been initiated almost a year ago. Work on the bins had not been completed, and local SHG leaders were unhappy about it. They reported that they had opposed the design, and had wanted to get involved in the design, costing and implementation of the seed storage initiative. They had been informed that the project was either to be implemented in the manner in which it was being offered, or not at all. Finally, the members worked on it as labourers. Members complained that even as labourers, they had not received wages for all the days that they had worked, and that the accounts were not yet settled, though funds had been exhausted. The project was managed by the staff of MMS, and the key staff member had since left the MMS, without handing over accounts related to the project. A part of the grant from the project was expected to be used as a revolving fund among members, for land improvement and agriculture. Members shared the amount equally among themselves for land improvement works (silt application, bunding, stone removal and so on). The amount, however, was not revolved among them.

At Allapur, WSD work, too, had been taken up by a village committee (largely consisting of men in the village). This project was supported by District Water Management Agency, Mahbubnagar, and women said that it did not invest in improving waste/ fallow lands of the members of the SHGs. Members could not even access employment benefits under the project. Apparently, repairs were now required to be undertaken, but had not been taken up.

At MMS Daulatabad, women leaders spoke of their on-going battle to take charge from the ex-PIA (ex-Project Implementation Agency), whose coordinator was not only refusing to hand over accounts for work already done, but was also, apparently, showing as completed, work that the MMS, as the new PIA was expecting to take up. Women tended to speak of the individual rather than the organisation as PIA. The leader of the WSD committee was well informed about the role of the PIA. The women were emphatic that projects undertaken with the MMS as PIA would be pro-poor, arrived at in a highly participative manner, and transparently negotiated, in the matter of work undertaken and for expenses incurred. They spoke of the Allapur experience in seed storage bins as a set of problems arising out of direct negotiation by external agents with the VO, without a role for the MMS. However, the accounts were handled by MMS staff and project supervision, too, had been in their hands.



MMS leaders felt that the right agency to lead an NRM/WSD project would be the VO, with overall supervision lying with MMS. They spoke of the need for training and mentioned that they had valued the training received in project planning and WSD from Wassan. They felt that VOs and MMSs were most likely to make best use of the resources, for maximum benefit to the disadvantaged.

A look at the accounts books and audited financial statements indicated that there was high cash in hand over months; that the general body had been orally presented an annual report but that the audited accounts were not provided to them; that the all male staff of the MMS had large amounts of advances in their names for months. The auditors had shown capital grants for corpus and revolving funds as income and, therefore, the audited statements were misleading. The cooperative appeared to be running on losses. Board members of the MMS appeared not to be aware of the financial status of their cooperative, and appeared to think that it was reasonably sound. The cash book was not written up to date.

An intervention that they had successfully managed was that of marketing of red gram produced by their members. Their intervention over 2 seasons had had significant impact on the Tandur market, which raised the procurement price well above previous years. As a result, the MMS had not felt the need to intervene in red gram procurement in the current year.

### 3.2 Kosgi, Mahbubnagar district:

***The Kosgi Mandal Mahila Samakhya, registered as a cooperative, is situated in Kosgi in Mahbubnagar district. The MMS has helped implement NRM works with UNDP SAPAP funds with member-VOs. Actual work was implemented with the involvement of the local sarpanch and benefiting farmers (including VO leaders). The MMS and VOs are supported for their organisational development by SERP and related district agencies.***

The Board members of Kosgi MMS were articulate about the functioning of their MMS. They spoke of a number of interventions that the MMS was engaged in, in the fields of women's legal rights, jogins, health, credit, child labour, education, and NRM. Here, too, red gram had been marketed with significant gain to the members and the organisation.

Mention was made of 50 member-SHG's being helped to clear dry lands for cultivation. They also spoke of scheduled caste women being helped to form an SHG in order to get their contiguous lands cleared for agricultural operations.

When field projects on WSD were discussed, women who had been quiet till then, spoke forcefully about the work that they had done. The study team was taken by two women, both non-literate, to their village Togapur and shown the earthen bund with masonry waste weir, constructed across a stream. Under the supervision of the VO, three such structures were constructed in the village, with the support of UNDP. They were able to discuss the project in some detail, starting with the conceptualisation of the project, the selection of the area, the money spent, the numbers of persons who had worked, the roles of local farmers, the local sarpanch, and the women themselves, and even about the actual design of the WSD, the acres and people served by it, etc.



There appeared to be a sense of ownership over it, and an ability to deal with the external world.

When the issue of maintenance work was discussed, however, the same sense of ownership was missing, although the women did accept that they needed to address maintenance issues. Further, when speaking of benefits of the WSD, women spoke of how bore wells could now be dug/deepened in the acreage benefited. What was clear was that where MMS leaders spoke of other interventions in great detail, when it came to WSD, it was the VO leaders who had directly benefited who had greater information and interest in the project.

The VO leaders took the study team to the home of the former sarpanch, who spoke of the value of the exposure visit that he, along with MMS leaders had been on, to DDS in Zaheerabad. The former sarpanch acknowledged the role played by the women, but appeared also to have played an important role as watchdog and facilitator for WSD projects in the village, as was acknowledged by the women.

At Kosgi, too, the women leaders recommended that the MMS play a supervisory and facilitating role in WSD/NRM, while the VOs lead the actual field operations. They spoke of the need for an engineer to be at the MMS. They felt that the MMS needed to get engaged in multipurpose functions, as long as grants for such work could be accessed. They felt that provision of loans from the MMS to VOs was necessary, if VOs were to have cause to interact with the MMS.

When leaders were asked whether the Gram Panchayat was not a better organisation to handle WSD work than the VO, they responded saying that the gram panchayat did not usually look at the interests of the poor, that the work it undertakes does not always get completed, that they are not able to withstand corruption. In all these respects, the VO/MMS combine was superior, the leaders felt. When asked about their level of competence, they said that they felt the need for training in the actual technology and in preparing estimates for projects.

A quick look at the MMS books of accounts revealed that here, too, the auditor had shown capital grants as income. Without this, the cooperative may have been running on loss. Several VOs were in default and interest earnings were low. The MMS discussed default regularly, but action had not been taken against default. The staff of the MMS was all male.

### 3.3 Orvakal, Kurnool district:

***The Orvakal Mandal Mahila Samakhya, registered as a society, is situated in Orvakal, in Kurnool district. It is the PIA for watershed projects funded by DWMA, Kurnool. It has a small multi-disciplinary team to supervise the projects, which are implemented with the active assistance of member-VOs. Apart from the Board of Directors, it has a small WSD committee. The MMS and its member-VOs are supported by Serp and related district agencies for their organisational development.***

The meeting at Ketavaram, a village covered by Orvakal MMS, was not a planned one. Yet, leaders and staff of the VO came to meet the study team and provided information on the VO and WSD works undertaken. The area



was of rocky terrain with low rainfall. VO leaders were able to provide information on 4 check dams, with details on expenses, acres benefited, farmers benefited, etc. As in the case of Togapur, the women took the study team to the field site and showed the team the work done. Even on the technology of the work actually done, the women were reasonably well informed. Again, as in Kosgi, the women spoke of the benefit to bore wells, and to those wishing to dig bore wells. Some unfinished levelling, some removal of silt which was required, had not been undertaken by the women.

At Orvakal MMS office, the women clarified that they had established 2 organisations – the MMS as a society under the Societies Registration Act, and a Mahila “Bank”, as a cooperative. The President of the MMS introduced herself as the PIA, and was referred to as the PIA by others. When asked whether she was PIA in her own right, or whether it was the MMS that was the PIA, the women explained that the MMS was PIA, and that the President was the coordinator. The leader of the WSD committee was not well versed with WSD issues, and other VO leaders with experience in WSD took the lead in the discussions.

Several cases of WSD work were then discussed by leaders from different VOs. In Bairamapuram village, the VO had made every attempt to be made the watershed committee. However, the sarpanch called for a meeting in the village, and finally, the work was handled by a village committee consisting of men members. Here, too, the women spoke of the individual, and not a body of persons as the committee.

In Orvakal and in Kalva, WSD work relating to farm ponds, horticulture, check dams, bunding, etc had been undertaken by the local VO. The women were able to provide details of work undertaken, benefits, costs, etc, indicating their active involvement with WSD work in their respective villages. Women of one village were not able to provide information on WSD work in another village, even though they were responsible, as members of the sub committee for watershed projects in the MMS.

The leaders felt that if MMS got involved with WSD, then, one could expect timely payment to labourers, quality work, no bribes, no deductions for disputed measurement of work done. They felt that the watershed development team that they employed for the work at the MMS, had a high turnover, as engineers were used to taking bribes, and did not wish to work for the MMS, as a result.

When selecting WSD projects, they said that they first looked for villages with a good track record, with good books of accounts. They mentioned that several people spoke of good performance of their VOs and SHGs, but only a look at the books gave proof of their real financial status. They thought the age and experience of the VO, too, was important. An assessment of unity/disunity was necessary before selection of a VO for project implementation. They saw the MMS as the link and buffer between the VO and the government. They felt that it was not enough if only women were involved – the whole village needed to be involved in WSD/NRM work.

Under areas of support needed, they felt that the political environment had to be favourable to women’s organisations, for which political parties needed to be supportive. Further, technology training, exposure visits, and funds were required for the work to be successful.



The books of accounts and financial statements of the MMS revealed that here, too, the society was probably running on loss, but the audited statements were misleading, as they showed as income, capital grants. As against the MMS, the Mahila "Bank" working fully with its own members' funds, was clearly running profitably. Although many of its expenses were being met by MMS, it had, in turn been asked by the MMS to use its profits for common good. If, therefore, all costs incurred by it had indeed been directly met by it, and if it had not been required to play a charitable role, it would probably have still been in clear profit. Where the books of accounts of the "Bank" were readily produced, those of MMS were not. Women leaders and staff appeared not to be familiar with the differences in legal form of the 2 organisations. While the Mahila "Bank" was staffed by women recruited locally by the MMS leaders, the MMS itself had mainly male staff.

#### 3.4 Peddapalem, Chittoor district:

***At Madanapalle in Chittoor district, the Voluntary Development Organisation Outreach was the PIA for watershed projects supported by DWMA, Chittoor. The VDO concentrated on WSD work in the area, and watershed committees consisting of representatives of user groups assisted in the implementation of the work in the area. SHGs were formed around watersheds, and Outreach supported the SHGs and their cluster associations in organisational development.***

At Peddapalem, the study team first visited the WSD site. The promoting agency, Outreach, which was also the PIA for the WSD work, had a woman engineer on its Watershed Development Team. The engineer accompanied the team to the field site. Check dams, farm ponds, rock field checks, etc had been worked on, and had obviously benefited several acres and families. The work appeared to have been thought through for maximum benefit. The approach of Outreach was to work intensively in a village, and to work equally intensively in villages around it. The long-term effects of such focussed work in a small area, was likely to be very high.

A meeting was then held with leaders of the cluster association, and the Outreach staff. The women spoke of work in other villages nearby – in Bipagarepalli, in Chennaigaripalli, in Kotauru, and in Thumannaatta. Different women leaders spoke of work in their own villages. As on previous visits, cluster leaders had little comprehension of WSD/NRM work elsewhere, but each was familiar with work in her own village. Women spoke of diversion drains, trenches, farm ponds, check dams, waste weirs, percolation tanks, gully checks, and horticulture being built into the projects being undertaken by them.

Women were not familiar with estimates, and Outreach field staff (mostly male) working in the area, provided the figures. In each village discussed, between 250 and 300 acres had benefited, and around 13-14 lakhs of rupees had been spent. Because of the systematic coverage of the area, women spoke of the impact of the WSD/NRM interventions, not only on agriculture related livelihoods, but also on non-agricultural trade and services in the area. As with other CBOs visited, the sense of ownership that they exhibited towards the implementation of the project, was missing when it came to post project work. A walk through the village had indicated that repairs that needed to be undertaken had not been attended to.



The women spoke of clear benefit to them, saying that now they worked on their own farm, instead of going to work on someone else's farm. They also mentioned the recharging of bore wells in area, fodder for animals, stoppage of soil erosion, etc. They said that the SHGs had been formed around the watershed. That is, women had been mobilised first for the watershed, and then into SHGs for mutual savings and credit. The relationship between the woman engineer and the leaders was one of camaraderie.

Outreach had been the PIA, and cluster association committees had played the role of watershed committees in the area. The women thought that the advantage of having all-women watershed committees was that costs were considerably less, that there were no quarrels, that more labour was involved, that there was concentrated work in the area. They felt that the disadvantages were that the work load was heavy, that they could not undertake as many supervisory field visits as might be needed, that there were some delays as a result.

On the other hand, they said that all-men committees would have had the advantages of better quality work and timely completion, but there would have been excessive politics, excessive expenditure, and outside labour would have been brought in, denying local communities employment opportunities.

They further said that panchayats, too, could act as watershed committees, but then contractors would get involved, that benefits would go to relatives, but that good work could be done by them, too.

Of support needed, they felt that training and funds from Outreach had been very helpful, and thought that if the government, too, would provide similar support and insist that only women's organisations should handle such work, then it would be helpful. They advised the study team to assess when entering new areas, before initiating WSD/NRM work, whether the women leaders and members were good, enthusiastic, enlightened, whether the CBO had enough poor members likely to benefit, and whether the project would provide enough work opportunity for the local community. They felt that participatory processes were essential for every WSD/NRM project, from appraisal to completion.

The Project Coordinator of Outreach met the team separately and in response to the team's questions spoke of the need for careful selection of an NGO by the government to act as PIA. At any rate, he felt that even where a good NGO was the PIA, it was important that CBOs were closely involved with actual implementation of the work. For this, intensive training of the CBOs was required, he felt. The fact that leadership of women CBOs was elected and, therefore, likely to change from time to time, and that the CBOs were engaged on multiple fronts with multiple interests made it difficult for them to be effective PIAs, he felt. They made good watershed committees. On the other hand, every NGO was not automatically a good PIA – NGOs that were committed to, focussed on and specialised in ecological issues, WSD/NRM included, were suitable to be PIAs, especially as the persons trained and experienced in the NGOs held appointed and not elected posts, and were, therefore, likely to be available as a constant resource to the area.

The books of accounts of the CBOs were not looked at in this CBO. However, as with the other cases, women did not know the approximate total savings in



their groups/cluster, amounts lying as loans outstanding, default rate, and other key information on the financial status of the groups/cluster.

### 3.5 Edakulapalli, Medak district:

***At Pastapur near Zaheerabad in Medak district, Deccan Development Society was the PIA for both government supported and other donor supported WSD/NRM projects. DDS had promoted SHGs in the area but had chosen not to form federations. Its WSD work was primarily through SHGs, and mainly among Dalit communities.***

At Edakulapalli, near Pastapur, the lands were dry and barren and poor farmers had been willing to sell these lands to a chemical factory, when they went through a participatory exercise with DDS on what their land could do for them. The project is known as Dalit Watershed, and is supported entirely by DDS. The lands owned by Dalits in the area, were barren and required more investment than other lands. This resulted in 95 acres of land belonging to around 36 Dalit families, of whom 20 were members of the local SHG, getting cleared for cultivation. Rocks and stones were removed. Bunds, gully plugs and drains were prepared. Organic manure application was an important intervention to help improve the fertility of the soil. Though, trees were planted on bunds, the survival rate was reported to be low. Work on the land was backed by seed preservation and distribution, and by organic farming measures.

Women leaders left a village wedding to take the study team to look at the lands on which work had been done. While they were articulate about the work that had taken place, some of them spoke of themselves more as labourers on their own fields than as owners, and leaders of a challenging initiative. The terrain was indeed difficult, and the women seemed to think that more work was needed on parts of it, before they could get significant benefit from it.

A walk around the village took the study team to a member who was preserving and distributing traditional seeds to other members. Women members mentioned that they identified the interventions needed for their lands, and DDS provided the financial support. The member contributed 25% towards the cost of investments, 50% was subsidised by DDS, and the remaining 25% was expected to be returned to the SHGs.

Prior to the site visit, a look at the books of accounts of the SHG indicated that members did not repay loans regularly. Each member had several simultaneous loans. Although the SHG was not linked to any bank, DDS made funds available to the SHG.

A meeting at the DDS office in Pastapur with senior women leaders and the staff of DDS indicated that DDS worked almost exclusively with Dalit women around WSD/NRM, in around 73 villages. There were 80 SHGs in all, each with membership ranging from 18 to 50. DDS felt that women were sensitive to the needs of the poorest. The SHGs were not federated, and related directly to DDS.

Because of the higher wages paid under the DDS supported projects which were labour intensive, increase in local wage rates was one of the first benefits that the WSD/NRM projects brought in. Both DDS and the community



presented the work as DDS initiated with a high participation of the local community. The SHGs known as Sanghams executed all the programmes of DDS – credit and WSD/NRM included.

Government supported WSD work began in 1995, which was anchored by Krishi Vignana Kendra of DDS. Around 12 watershed projects, each covering 500 hectares were implemented by DDS and KVK. Each project cost around Rs 20 lakhs. This programme covered all sections of the village, unlike the earlier experience in Edakulapalli, with the “Dalit” Watershed.

The lands owned by Dalits were barren and required more investment than other lands. While the actual WSD intervention did help retain water in the land, this alone was found to be insufficient. Investment in soil improvement was required, hard ploughing was needed, and good traditional seeds capable of surviving the unrelenting environment were needed. Much more investment, therefore, was needed for the WSD to result in actual benefit to the families. Financial assistance was sought outside the WSD scheme for all these, which were in fact essential to the WSD project, but were not in-built. The cost per cubic metre, too, needed to be more than standard rates, as the terrain was hard, and required much more effort than elsewhere to prepare trenches.

Selection of lands was done through watershed committees that had members and non-members of SHGs on it. Local contributions were taken from wages paid. As in this instance, the labourers were also the owners of the farms, it appeared reasonable to have them contribute by way of labour. As with most other areas visited, here, too, there was an expectation that post-project support would continue to be forthcoming from external agencies.

### 3.6 Nallacharuvu, Anantapur district:

***At Kadiri in Anantapur district, Myrada, a voluntary development organisation had undertaken WSD/NRM projects, largely with funds raised from governmental and non-governmental donors. Myrada had promoted several SHGs in the area and these were networked into Resource Centres. These centres did not engage in providing financial services to member-SHGs. WSD projects were supervised by Myrada with help from the Resource Centre and watershed committees made of SHG leaders and others.***

Myrada began its work in Kadiri area with the resettlement of bonded labourers. Several WSD projects had been undertaken by Myrada with financial assistance from various donors. Work on forest, common and private lands had been undertaken in several villages. A visit was made to Jowkala with the project coordinator, where 150 acres of revenue land and 200 acres of private land had benefited, with Rs 12 lakhs of investment. Information on other areas, too, was provided, and photographs of some of the areas, taken before and after WSD/NRM work indicated clearly the effectiveness of the work undertaken.

The study team then interacted with women leaders of the Resource Centre at Nallacharuvu, along with the staff of the centre, who were mostly male, and drawn from the promoting agency, Myrada. Three women spoke of WSD/NRM work in their respective villages – Digrivapalli, Gorlavandlapalli and Uparapalli.



The watershed committees usually had 9 members, with 6 representatives from SHGs and 3 from others, and a woman as Chairperson. The watershed implementation committees (WIC) usually engaged, with PIA assistance, in participatory methods for site selection. Bank accounts were operated jointly by a representative of Myrada and of the WIC. Several thousand metres of bunding, contour trenches, foothill boulder walls, along with nurseries, silt application, and other measures were taken as part of WSD projects. In the case of restoration of old tanks, user groups formed committees. The funds in WDF were expected to be managed by the WIC.

When selecting areas for watersheds, Myrada usually looked for sloping hillsides and for projects with high potential to be labour intensive. Measurements were done by Myrada, and there did appear to be some irritations, as with all the other cases, on this front. The role played by the promoting agency included design, supervision, measurement, payment and training. Local rates were lower than in the formal schedule of rates and the projects usually cost less, as a result.

The women leaders were articulate about their SHGs and about the overall work done on the WSD in their area, but were not familiar with details of the WSD/NRM work undertaken, or with its costs, even in their own areas. Much of the detailed information was provided by Resource Centre staff.

A visit to Kammavaripalli in the Resource Centre area provided some insights into a project undertaken with governmental funding and Myrada as a facilitator. The Collector had released funds into the bank account of the watershed committee in the village, and the key actors were men. While 100 acres had benefited significantly, here, too, there was a clear expectation that post project repairs which were required were the responsibility of some external agency.

The Resource Centre covered 150 SHGs in 45 villages, and expected to be fully supported by the SHGs in due course. The committee managing the centre had representatives from 17 VOs. The Resource Centre monitored SHG accounts, and its own. However, the management information systems which formed the basis of the reviews, did not indicate what the total savings of the SHGs were, what the total loans outstanding were, what the default rates were. Although an attempt was made to monitor cash on hand on a regular basis, without the financial statements for any given period, the basis on which cash on hand was arrived at was not clear. The Resource Centre did not engage in lending. Books of accounts were not available at the village visited, to ascertain the financial status of the SHGs in the village.

#### **4. Learnings from other meetings**

The meetings with key persons in SERP, Women's Empowerment and Self Employment, Deccan Development Society, APMAS, Panchayati Raj and Rural Development, and Wassan, and discussions with field staff of SERP, Outreach, DDS and Myrada provided several insights into the role that rural women's organisations could/could not play in the field of WSD/NRM. Some key issues that arose in these meetings are listed below. Differing views were expressed by different individuals, and as these differences were educative, in this section, even conflicting views are being presented, so that the team could look at issues and concerns from different perspectives, before arriving at its own position. The learnings have been categorised for better assimilation of the views expressed.



## The context

- 4.1 A successful watershed is one which results finally in food security for all. It is not enough if water retention takes place – optimum use of that water is essential. Watersheds often result in new cropping patterns, which initially bring in high returns, but subsequently prove to be unsustainable.
- 4.2 Men tend to equate watersheds with civil works and construction material, whereas women tend to equate them with nature and productivity. As a result, women can be helped to get involved with related life (cattle, fish, trees, crops, etc) and livelihood, when designing watersheds. Otherwise only check dams get constructed and even these, not in a sustainable manner.
- 4.3 Far too much is spent of WSD funds in bunding on private lands. This must stop.
- 4.4 ***Against the view expressed in 4.3, another view expressed was as follows:*** Public investment in private land is much lower than public investment in major irrigation systems. Therefore, there should be no hesitation about the use of public funds in WSD in private lands, especially in the lands of poorer families.
- 4.5 When thinking of watersheds, we have yet to train ourselves to look at the larger canvas. We do not plan for work across streams and rivers – at best we look at one hillside, in one village, and within that we do a ridge-to-valley plan. We need to be more water oriented – not just soil oriented as we are today.
- 4.6 The issue of having only women engaged in WSD projects is debatable. Given the gender inequality, they ought not to be suddenly expected to manage natural resources. Where women's organisations are very militant, too, they do not make for good negotiators with the government. Where social issues are being addressed alongside, the NRM/WSD work tends to be better managed. Some confrontation and some ability to work with others are essential for good work.
- 4.7 What we do needs not just to succeed, but to be replicable. Therefore, whatever processes we adopt in watersheds, we need to be sure that they are not the exception – that they can be replicated.
- 4.8 Currently, WSD projects are supply driven. We need to make the shift, step-by-step, to a demand driven approach. The latter always makes for better performance.
- 4.9 Gram Panchayats handle just Rs 2 lakhs of funds, whereas WSD projects can be up to Rs 30 lakhs – by not routing the latter through Gram Panchayats, line departments undermine them.
- 4.10 A Gram Panchayat covers a larger area than a watershed. Therefore, the Gram Panchayat should handle WSD projects, and funds should be routed through them. Watershed associations of potential users can then be formed to ensure that the Gram Panchayat functions in a sensitive and accountable manner.
- 4.11 Currently, watershed development is seen as a programme, and livelihoods development as an approach. We should change this to having livelihoods development as the programme, so that we can target livelihoods of the disadvantaged, and use watershed as an approach to doing so.
- 4.12 Watersheds today are mainly about irrigation – they need to address drinking water problems, too. So, too, we think only of rural watersheds – work on urban watersheds, too, needs to be undertaken.



### **Planning for WSD**

- 4.13 Projects and decisions need to evolve. Women need to be involved in planning, implementing, monitoring, wage payment, and in sharing tasks equitably with men. Records need to be maintained well.
- 4.14 WSD/NRM projects, while looking at an entire area, may need to divide the village into smaller viable units, over which the VOs/SHGs have more effective control. There is also need to control the subsequent use of the contributions.
- 4.15 Along with all the formal criteria for selection of villages for WSD, we need also to assess whether the village is ridden with political factions, or not; whether the village is ready to work in a participatory manner; whether it is ready to look at farming which is sustainable; what traditional water bodies already exist in the area, and their status.
- 4.16 However carefully we plan for a watershed, we should be willing to revisit the plan from time to time – otherwise, we miss on opportunities for greater effectiveness.
- 4.17 It is possible to start a watershed involving user groups from the beginning.

### **WSD/NRM and the poor**

- 4.18 The poor have greater stake than absentee landlords in the development of land, water and common property resources. Therefore, WSD projects need to address their needs.
- 4.19 Poverty is greater in drought prone areas. Diversification is needed in such areas, and, therefore, investment in development of natural resources is closely linked to the needs of the poor.
- 4.20 For direct benefit to the poor, the VO/MMS need to be involved. If, however, common property resources, larger and smaller landholdings of members and others are involved, as is the case with many watersheds, then perhaps VO/MMS should not take the lead in such projects. Gram Panchayats might be the more appropriate implementers.
- 4.21 WDP/NRM projects should aim at bio-mass enhancement, in which even the landless have a stake. If a project is expected to be comprehensive, then, loans should be sought for the better off, with grants being made available to the poor.
- 4.22 The poorer the women, the more important it is to ensure that issues of ownership of land, trees, usufruct rights, etc, are dealt with during the design of the project. What will belong to whom, and who will have what responsibility at the end of the project needs to be thought through from the beginning.
- 4.23 The lands of the poor need more investment than the lands of others. Banks and other institutions are not reaching the poor. Watershed projects need to take into consideration the additional investment required in highly degraded land, which is what the poor own.
- 4.24 Watershed is an area development programme, not a poverty alleviation programme, even if it does address poverty. The idea is to ensure that through increased economic activities (agriculture, fishery, forestry, animal husbandry, etc) because of WSD, the local economy will get a boost, new employment opportunities will rise, both in production as well as in the service sector. These opportunities are expected to impact local wage structure, too.



## Role of MMS/VO

***Views on the roles of MMS and VO varied widely, and as can be seen from the following views expressed by different people, even clearly conflicting views were relevant in the context in which they were said.***

- 4.25 In villages with factions and strong political divisions, women's organisations have played an important role in WSD projects.
- 4.26 ***Against the view expressed in 4.25, was another view:*** It is important that women are not brought in as palliatives, because then they either are puppets, or spend all their energy on not being puppets. Women should be involved in watersheds, because they are farmers, they have rights over common property resources, they are capable, and they have a lot to offer at every stage of the process.
- 4.27 MMSs tend to have staff who were earlier promoters of federations. As a result, there are serious accountability issues.
- 4.28 Community owned organisations ought not to be overloaded. While issue based interventions may be taken up by MMSs and VOs, watersheds need consistent engagement and technical knowledge, and require key persons to deal with a very hostile environment.
- 4.29 CBOs are treated as delivery mechanisms for the agenda of external agencies. It is not correct to force our agendas on CBOs.
- 4.30 VDOs/NGOs might be better placed than MMSs/VOs to take up WSD/NRM work. The former might have watersheds built into their mandate – the latter will find that they are working only with some members and not with others, or, that they are working with some non-members as well.
- 4.31 Whether to work with non-members or not is the prerogative of the women's organisations.
- 4.32 Being democratic organisations sensitive to and controlled by members, VOs and MMSs ought not to get engaged in overall village vision building – they need to focus on member needs and priorities, even in WSD/NRM.
- 4.33 If an MMS is PIA, then what should the VO be – the watershed committee? The watershed association? Should the latter not consist only of those with continued stake in the resource? If VO is the committee, then what about non-members who might have a greater stake in the project? Ideally if the Gram Panchayat and the VO worked in collaboration, it would be best.
- 4.34 MMS leaders and staff can be good trainers in WSD processes, even if not in actual technology.
- 4.35 Current experience of working with VOs as watershed committees, may lead to them being selected as PIAs subsequently, for neighbouring villages.

## Finance and CBOs

- 4.36 If an MMS is seriously engaged in financial services, then perhaps it ought not to engage in any work that might dilute its financial discipline. If, however, it has a strong social intermediation role, then it could engage in WSD/MMS interventions.
- 4.37 MMSs that are primarily engaged in financial services ought not to engage in WSD projects. However, MMSs which engage mainly in social intermediation could get involved – only with mentoring and participatory processes in place. All the same, WSD/NRM work could be a burden, could undermine the main objective, could dilute on-going work, and could corrupt the leadership because of the sums involved.
- 4.38 Conventional watersheds are a source of big money and can lead to corruption among the leadership, unless it is member-centric.



- 4.39 Community owned organisations are often formal institutions without formal systems. Reporting and accountability to members are rarely taken seriously.

#### **Post-project arrangements**

- 4.40 There is a post project role for VOs in increasing soil productivity, in providing credit, marketing services, etc, without which the initial investment in WSD may not yield the desired results. However, post project management needs to be handled by the beneficiaries of the WSD, not by the VO. For subsequent repairs, regular contributions from every harvest need to be made by those benefiting.
- 4.41 Use of water needs to be regulated. Otherwise, the very success of a watershed can result in further fall in water table, with every user exploiting ground water indiscriminately. A well implemented WSD project results in farmers growing irrigated crops every season. Regulation needs to be introduced through law on use of ground water.
- 4.42 The tendency to grow cash crops, and to invest heavily in them, once water becomes available, also results in heavy debt and subsequent disaster for families, when such crops fail. What is needed is education and support on sustainable agriculture, if the poor are to have long term benefits from WSD projects.
- 4.43 When Afforestation takes place as a part of WSD, it should be possible to provide usufructs rights in a manner that permits 50% income to the Gram Panchayat, and 50% for distribution among user groups. When the project comes to a close, these earnings can help maintain the assets created.

#### **Support needed**

- 4.44 Women need to be trained in the technology of watersheds. Knowledge development in women is as important as watershed development for their area.
- 4.45 When women's organisations enter the WSD arena, they need not only to manage the project, but to be equipped to also deal with male hostility – at home and village levels. Women face sexual aggression when they enter public spaces, and this needs to be acknowledged and addressed.
- 4.46 As SHGs, VOS, and MMSs are perceived as "financial" institutions, there is need for systematic support and tools to orient them towards the agenda of sustainable agriculture, NRM and WSD.

### **5. Assumptions examined**

Wassan and several other support organisations have been keen to involve community based organisations in WSD work, on the basis of a number of stated and unstated assumptions. In the light of our learnings from the field, we have tried to examine some of these assumptions.

- 5.1 Assumption: CBOs have large numbers of members from poorer sections of the community. Therefore, they can be expected to be responsive to the needs of the poor. Without them playing a lead role in WSD/NRM projects, the interests of the poor might not get addressed.**

In most of the CBOs visited, this assumption did appear to be validated. Lands of the poor were treated and benefited when MMSs and VOs



became involved with WSD/NRM projects. However, in most of the projects studied, where the poor benefited significantly, it was not with mainstream WSD work – non-governmental donor funds made available to the promoting agency had been used. Otherwise, the PIA was the promoting agency that actually dealt with the government and was sensitive to the needs of the poor. The community based organisations, in the latter case, helped in selection of work and in actual implementation. That is, the promoting agency did play a key role, whether formally or not, in ensuring that the poor benefited from WSD/NRM work.

It appeared highly unlikely to the study team that the very poor who had benefited from the projects would have done so without the active involvement of their own organisations, the CBOs. The benefits to the poor were not only in terms of work on their lands, or benefit to their lands, but also in ensuring that employment was given to them and not to outsiders for the WSD work, and also in wages provided. Although SSR rates were higher than local wage rates in most places, at least in some areas, agricultural wage rates, too, increased because of the WSD work.

Regardless of who managed the WSD work, and who benefited from it, it appeared that wages of labourers were deducted to show “local contribution” in most places visited. While this is not unreasonable where the labourer is also a direct beneficiary, (that is, an owner or user of assets developed), of the results of the WSD project, it is exploitative where the beneficiaries are other landholders.

Except in one case, in all others, the WSD work benefited not just the poorest, but also others, some of whom appeared to have informally played a major role in organising the actual work.

### **5.2 Assumption: WSD projects undertaken by community-based organisations will be controlled by them.**

In only one instance (Orvakal) did it appear that the WSD project was controlled by the community based organisation, with the leaders taking full responsibility for appointing and supervising necessary staff for the purpose. In most of the other cases, while they influenced it significantly, the reins lay with the promoting agency, and local male leaders.

This was not necessarily a bad thing, as the subject did require knowledge and capacities not fully available with the women leaders. Further, the projects did not disregard the interests or ideas of the women leaders, or of potential beneficiaries.

In most of the cases, the real influence came from community owned organisations at the village level, and not at more distant levels. Information about the work undertaken, and in some areas, about amounts spent, etc, were available more at the village level than at cluster or mandal levels.

### **5.3 Assumption: CBOs are already experienced in social issues, and this will be helpful in WSD.**

The study team met several people within CBOs and outside who stressed on the need for the CBO to have already dealt with gender issues, class issues, caste issues, etc, before it worked on WSD. Indeed, most of the CBOs



visited had dealt with these issues, and it did appear to have strengthened them.

Apart from such experience having a bearing on the WSD work, earlier work of the CBOs had already helped make them visible and vocal. These were necessary for them to assert their right to influence/handle different parts of the project/s. Most projects visited were inclusive of the most disadvantaged, and it is unlikely that this could have happened without the previous history of the CBOs in addressing social inequalities. So, too, most projects visited had ensured that the WSD project had a high labour component and that the work went to local labourers.

**5.4 Assumption: CBOs consist largely of women with appropriate leadership – therefore, they can be expected to be sensitive to the interests of women in a WSD project.**

The leadership of CBOs does consist of women drawn from among members of SHGs. Leaders of CBOs who were actually affected by the WSD projects were indeed sensitive to their own interests, but as was seen in the field, at times even the members of the WSD sub-committees were not knowledgeable about the WSD work in their own area. One possible cause was the practice of rotational leadership, which might be good for the individual, but resulted in discontinuity in organisational decision making, knowledge and competence.

Another perhaps lay in the process of election of leadership. Although the leadership of VOs and MMSs is expected to be drawn from among the elected leaders of SHGs, elections at the grassroots (SHGs) are either not held regularly, or, not held in a systematic fashion, whether by show of hands or not. Further, qualifications for getting elected are not prescribed, and there are defaulters on the Boards of VOs and MMSs, who can hardly be expected to provide credible leadership.

As VOs and MMSs do have access to external funds, often significantly larger than their members' funds, the leaders begin to see themselves as benefactors, as agents of the external agencies that provided them with funds, and with opportunities to grow – not as agents of their members, accountable to them.

It is important that we distinguish between leaders in an organisation and the collective leadership of the organisation. While individual leaders were indeed sensitive to the needs of this or that area/section, the leadership, that is, as a Board, did not appear consciously and concertedly sensitive to the NRM needs of the poorest of their members. The most vocal and articulate leaders on the subject of WSD, were not always those entrusted formally with responsibility for the work, but those who benefited from the work and seized the opportunity to influence the process.

**5.5 Assumption: CBOs have credibility and linkages with government agencies. They can sustain political pressures.**

Where CBOs had actually dealt directly with governmental agencies, they indeed were treated cautiously and with some deference by these agencies. The CBOs were now particularly concerned that the change in government might result in change in attitudes towards them.



In at least one place visited, the CBO itself had become so closely aligned with one political party that it was highly unlikely that it would be able to sustain political pressures in the new regime. Indeed, during the course of the study, the MMS was stripped of its responsibilities in the WSD project. The earlier position was subsequently restored at the instance of the promoting agency.

Many of the women leaders felt that government should frame policy requiring women's organisations to be PIAs. This may not necessarily be a good thing, as CBOs should have the qualities required to merit becoming PIAs. The issuing of a fiat in this direction may result in them becoming just like all other ineffective PIAs.

**5.6 Assumption: It is easy for women's CBOs to mobilise people around intricate issues such as regulation of use of natural resources.**

The study team was taken aback by the fact that in many of the places visited, one of the benefits mentioned was the potential for digging or deepening of bore wells in the area. On reflecting further, it was felt that unless the issue of post-project regulations were in place at the start of the project, such desires would be inevitable, and difficult to manage.

Given the mix of lands covered by most projects, (common property and private property of members and non-members, and of the poor and not necessarily poor), it may not be reasonable to expect that the VO or MMS or Cluster Association or Resource Centre will be in a position to influence use of resources after completion of project. User associations appeared inevitable, and unless they were in place at the start of the project, it appeared unlikely that they would be able to introduce regulations after completion of the work.

Regulation of use of natural resources also fell in the domain of the Gram Panchayats with the actual regulation perhaps introduced through legislation, and it was unlikely that any one set of people in a village could monitor the use of natural resources, even if they could influence it through education.

In this context, the members of the CBOs themselves needed to be educated on the subject, before they could mobilise others around it.

**5.7 Assumption: Community owned organisations are mature financial institutions with required discipline and systems, and these strengths will lend themselves to WSD interventions.**

In almost every instance, except in the case of the Mahila "Bank" in Orvakal, what was apparent was that community owned organisations were not mature financial organisations, and that they did not have the discipline required for financial well-being. In most CBOs, formal accountability to members did not take place.

The key elected functionaries appeared to depend mainly on male staff borrowed from promoting agencies, and were not trained in even understanding their own financial statements. The manner in which the financial statements were prepared was misleading, and organisations that appeared to be running profitably were probably running on losses, and



neither the leaders nor the members appeared aware of this. It is likely that the staff, too, was not well trained in accounting, even though that may or may not have been the reason for bad accounting and poor financial management.

The minimum financial discipline required of keeping low amounts of cash on hand, and of keeping the cash book up to date were not adhered to in most CBOs. Loan defaults were significant, and it was likely that capital grants were being eroded as a result.

It appeared unlikely that the lack of financial discipline in these organisations would translate into financial rigour in WSD projects. However, what was significant in most of the cases was that there was transparency in payment of wages to labour, although there was some lack of it in the conversion of some days of labour into "local contribution". Further, where the MMS was the PIA, it handled relatively manageable sums of money. It was the WSD committees that handled significant amounts for project implementation. Lack of financial rigour, and worse, lack of current ability/capacity to introduce financial rigour in their institutions could result, in the long run, in VOs becoming corrupt in their WSD work.

In one instance, not directly WSD related, even where community based organisations were involved, misappropriation of funds appeared to have taken place.

**5.8 Assumption: The corpus of funds available with the CBOs will help absorb some costs.**

There was indeed some corpus of funds available with some of the CBOs visited. As has already been mentioned, however, the corpus was probably being eaten into because of default, of low recovery of interest, and because of financial indiscipline.

In one instance the cash on hand was over one lakh of rupees over months. Large amounts of cash advances lay with the male staff and some leaders, again, over months. The cash books were not maintained, and where they were, cash balances were not always written. Entries in pencil, overwriting, etc, were a fairly regular feature.

Without improved auditing practices, it was difficult to assess the status of the corpus funds available to the CBOs. At any rate, without special institutional development efforts, it was unlikely that income would continue to grow, or that the corpus funds would last.

**5.9 Assumption: Diversification of a financial institution may result in problems. Large scale funding for WSD may destabilise the CBO.**

Given the fact that the only financially disciplined organisation among the financial institutions visited was the Mahila "Bank", indeed the assumption that diversification could be problematic appeared to be correct. It is important to note that in most of the cases, the organisations were indeed vibrant, and the leaders articulate. However, organisational financial performance had taken a beating. Even in the case of the MMS at Orvakal which was primarily meant for non-financial services, there were very large



corpus available with it for lending to member-organisations, and these were at risk.

It is likely that CBOs registered as societies without financial services could function well in the WSD arena, without compromising its financial status. It needs to be mentioned that it is not as if the WSD work had been the cause of the lack of financial rigour – it was probably a mix of factors which included the pursuit of actions on multiple fronts, too many sub-committees without clear lines of accountability, borrowed expensive staff who had earlier been their trainers, non-requirement of financial rigour, as funds flowed in easily. Most important, women leaders had been trained in social mobilisation and in negotiation, but not in organisational or business management.

While it was assumed that large scale funding for WSD might destabilise the CBOs, large scale funding for other projects, too, had already resulted in casual bookkeeping and accounting in most places visited.

#### **5.10 Assumption: Servicing non-members may affect the community based organisation.**

Indeed, in most instances, non-members were served by the WSD project. Some of the non-members were not necessarily poor. Theoretically, this should have affected the internal dynamics, but it did not appear to have done so.

At least one reason for the study team to have had this perception might be that the study team did not interact with poor members who had not benefited. What they might have had to say about others (non-members) benefiting (at their expense) might have revealed schisms, if any, in the organisations.

Further, most of the CBOs are not as yet dependent on member patronage of their services for their survival. They are dependent on external grants for sustenance. This being the case, leaders are perhaps not being challenged by members on why non-members are benefiting.

### **6. Recommendations**

The purpose of the study was to help Wassan determine its future course of action with regard to the use of CBOs in WSD work. These recommendations are aimed primarily at what Wassan needs to do, but touches a little also on what other agencies might do to strengthen WSD/NRM work.

- 6.1 The logic of WSD requires **a vision** which encompasses not just a village or set of villages, but **the course of a river, the range of a forest**, etc. Wassan may wish to initiate research, or may lobby for initiation of research into this larger plan/vision. Even while concentrating on its commitment to ensuring that the most disadvantaged benefit from public investments in WSD/NRM, it could simultaneously ensure that the larger picture, too, is developed. This larger vision needs to be shared with CBOs engaged in WSD/NRM.
- 6.2 The successful “completion” of a watershed project can result in falling water tables. Therefore, Wassan may need to work with VOs/MMSs, VDOs/NGOs and Gram Panchayats on **sustainable use and management of**



**natural resources – water, forests, soil**, etc. This work needs to start, not after project implementation, but at the time of initiation of a WSD/NRM project.

- 6.3 It definitely appears that the **involvement of VOs and MMSs** (and their equivalent in terms of organisations of rural disadvantaged women) ensures that poorer women (along with others) get to benefit from WSD projects, by way of getting work opportunities, through development of their agricultural land, and through other livelihood opportunities associated with a successful watershed. Wassan, therefore, could work with CBOs in its WSD work, keeping the following points in mind, while doing so.
- i. The CBO should be registered as a society, and not as a cooperative. The former could have a mandate for reaching out to the public at large, whereas the latter is expected to be member-focussed. The former is not expected to be a business organisation, though it can engage in business, and even earn profit. The latter is expected to be an enterprise which aims at bringing in financial benefit to its members on core services needed by them. The CBO could also be an unregistered association.
  - ii. The CBO should choose to be involved with WSD. The bylaws should provide for such engagement, or, the General Body should direct the Board to engage on this front. The CBO may need facilitation from an organisation such as Wassan to explore the potential of NRM/WSD interventions, and then arrive at its decision on whether or not to be involved.
  - iii. Whether registered as a society or as a cooperative, if financial services are a major activity of the organisation, then, it is likely that every non-financial activity will serve as an excuse for, or, as cover for poor management of and accounting for funds. Therefore, it would be best if CBOs in WSD/NRM did not have a significant financial services agenda.
  - iv. The presence of a supportive promoting agency is essential. Wassan will need to work in close collaboration with the VDO/NGO.
  - v. The CBO should already have dealt with social and gender inequalities, and its leaders should be capable of negotiating with external agencies.
  - vi. The total investment in common property resources covered by the project should be less than 25% of the total cost of the project, and the bulk of resources should be on private lands owned by members and other poor persons. In other areas, too, VOs/MMSs could be involved if they wished to be involved, but perhaps not in lead roles.
- 6.4 Where the above conditions and the training needs (listed later in this section) are met, **the MMS could prove to be a good PIA**. It is important to mention that as PIAs do not engage in actual implementation of the projects, they might better be termed project facilitation agencies.
- 6.5 Watershed associations appear currently to be casually formed. Watershed associations are formed as voluntary associations of users of watersheds. However, the users of a watershed, are a variety of persons – those whose private lands are covered by the watershed are, of course, users. Alongside them, all who have cattle which drink water from any water body covered by the watershed, all whose cattle graze on common land under the watershed, all those who use grass or pluck produce off trees, who use water for other domestic purposes, whose wells get charged as a result of the watershed, who access fuel and fodder, etc, are users.



It appears unreasonable to set up a voluntary association, when those benefiting from the watershed are involuntarily linked with one another, especially where large common areas are covered, and a large section of the village clearly benefits.

What is required in such instances is that the Gram Panchayat manage the watershed, once completed, through the imposing of such conditions as are agreed upon in the Gram Sabha, applying of such conditions as may be required by related legislation, collection of such fees and fines as are agreed upon for use and misuse, and ensuring that the watershed is well maintained structurally and ecologically. **Wassan may need to train elected panchayat leaders and staff in planning for and management of the ecology. It may also need to facilitate processes by which Gram Panchayats are aware of options available to them for the levying of user fee and of penalties.**

- 6.6 Where, however, the project consists of several small interventions around each of which there are a small group of direct users, then, it is **important that user groups be organised from the very beginning of the project – from the conceptualisation stage**. The MMS, if it is not primarily a financial services cooperative, can help, in such instances, in the formation of the user groups. The VO, too, could be of help, but as the members of the VO would have a history of social and political relations with other sections of the village, they may not be accepted easily in the role of “facilitators”. The facilitating agency would need to get users to arrive at a set of rules for guiding themselves on the use of water, for contributions towards maintenance, for social fencing, where needed, and so on.
- 6.7 Just as members of a user group need to negotiate with the group on the use and maintenance of the resource, so, too, will different user groups need to negotiate with one another. **User groups in an area, therefore, may need to come together to form a watershed association, at the village level.**
- 6.8 Currently, watershed committee members, once elected, appear not to require to renew their mandate, and the result is that they are not particularly accountable to the members. Further, they are elected at the level of the village association. It is necessary that these committees are clearly understood to be watershed project implementation committees with a limited term, co-terminus with the project period. It was noticed during the field visits that the ones most articulate about what had happened in the projects were those who had directly benefited from the project, on long-term basis – that is, those whose private lands had benefited. Therefore, there could be **as many sub-project committees, as there are clustered interventions in an area. Such committees will need to be small, consisting of 3 to 5 members, as clustered interventions often benefit just 10-15 families. The members of the committees will need to be chosen from among, and by, the potential “beneficiaries”, and could be required to renew their mandate once every year, on staggered basis, with some (less than half) members retiring each year.**
- 6.9 As there is a direct conflict of interests among those who do not have lands but provide labour, those who have lands and provide labour, and those who have lands but do not provide labour, it is important that **an organisation such as the VO, with special interests in the landless labourers**



plays an active role in local facilitation during the phase of project implementation.

- 6.10 Sub-project committees could report formally to their user-groups once every six months during the phase of establishing the watershed – project progress, on expenditure, on design matters. The leader of each user-group could be on the Watershed Management Committee, which may manage the work of the village watershed association. **Watershed associations should hold annual general meetings at which policies to contain inter-group conflicts can be formally taken.**
- 6.11 **Where the development of common property resources forms a significant part of a WSD project**, there, as others in the community, too, have high stakes, the **Gram Panchayat** may be the key player, at the village level.
- 6.12 In such cases, **at completion of the project period, committees may get dissolved, and normal regulatory functions be taken up by the Gram Panchayat. The committees could be replaced, however, by other committees constituted in an appropriate manner for such new agendas as may emerge.**
- 6.13 It is important that the **Gram Panchayat representatives be trained** in participatory processes, accountability, and in equitable development, so that their decisions can be guided by these concerns.
- 6.14 **Exposure visits** to areas where WSD projects have been successful from the point of view of increased and steady water tables, and where the assets of the poor improved as a result, may need to be organised.
- 6.15 Where a **VDO/NGO has a mandate focussed on NRM/WSD**, and specialises in NRM/WSD work, if the Gram Panchayat agrees, the VDO/NGO could be made the PIA. Where a VDO/NGO raises funds of its own accord, there, it goes without saying, it will be the equivalent of the PIA.
- 6.16 The **role of the VO** could be in identification of potential WSD work, in contributing to the design of the project, in mobilising potential beneficiaries, in organising local labour and ensuring that work goes to them, in ensuring accountability for and transparency in amounts spent, in ensuring value for money, in post project education (in optimum use of natural resources) to all, and credit support to members.
- 6.17 CBOs being democratically structured, their leaders are likely to change from time to time. Therefore, **training of leaders needs to be a constant process**, and not a one-time event.
- 6.18 **MMS and VO leaders need training in**
  - a. participatory processes
  - b. skilful negotiation with political parties, district offices and gram panchayats on behalf of their members, especially the poorer members – for every stage of WSD/NRM projects, from design to accountability for amounts spent
  - c. addressing sexual harassment
  - d. the development of a conceptual framework for watersheds in their village, so that WSD projects are at once committed to the



- larger canvas of area development, and to the more focussed intention of ensuring advantage to members
- e. designing watershed projects so that there is value for money and increased livelihood opportunities for the poor
  - f. management of natural resources in a sustainable manner
  - g. identifying new livelihood opportunities, and increased livelihood opportunities arising from the WSD/NRM project/s, and arranging for credit and other input and marketing support services through appropriate agencies
  - h. recruiting and retaining skilled, multi-disciplinary staff, especially at MMS level
  - i. bookkeeping and accounting for the project and for their own organisations, and related accountability
  - j. introducing planning and budgeting, not just for the projects, but also for the organisation as a whole
  - k. increasing member stake in their own organisations
  - l. introducing appropriate monitoring mechanisms for WSD/NRM projects, and for their own organisations.

**It is important that staff of VDOs/NGOs also be trained, and become competent in all that the CBOs are being trained in.**

- 6.19 Any engagement in NRM/WSD by VOs/MMSs is likely to be in a phased manner, and is likely to be effective if in a phased manner. The policy advocacy efforts of Wassan should aim at creating time, space and other support for the following phased interventions, without which the VOs/MMSs are unlikely to perform effectively.
- **Orientation for VO/MMS members and leaders on NRM/WSD opportunities, and the potential that WSD/NRM hold for member growth**
  - **Strengthening institutional and financial systems of MMS/VO interested in WSD/NRM, with help from agencies committed to institutional development, so that the VO/MMS is better prepared to manage the WSD/NRM finances and activities**
  - **Development of vision and strategic planning in VO/MMSs, on NRM/WSD.**
- 6.20 Just as any government needs to be influenced by voluntary associations of citizens engaged in working with the disadvantaged, so, too, the **Gram Panchayat needs to be influenced by associations of and/or working for disadvantaged sections of the community.** It is as much the responsibility of the Gram Panchayat to heed the voices of the VOs and MMSs, as it is of the VOs/MMSs to skilfully influence village/district level processes. Wassan will need to ensure that VOs/MMSs engaged in WSD/NRM acquire sufficient knowledge on the subject, and necessary skills to lobby those that need to be lobbied.
- 6.21 VOs and MMSs are voluntary associations of rural women. Any government fiat bestowing any programme on them will affect organisational integrity, and the accountability of the leaders to the members. Any engagement, on any front, in a democratically structured CBO should be at the instance of its members, and not at the instance of any external agent. Wassan may need to ensure that the **policies of the state/union government** do not preclude women CBOs from engaging actively in WSD projects. The policies could also continue to encourage the use of VOs as implementers of the projects, with guidance and support from various agencies.



## **7. Acknowledgements**

The study team is deeply grateful to the Presidents, Directors, and staff of Daulatabad, Kosgi and Orvakal MMSs, the leaders of the cluster at Peddapalem, of the resource centre at Nallacharuvu, and of the SHG at Edakulapalli for their contribution to this study. The women who led these institutions, and the leaders who worked on specific WSD projects shared all required information and their views on the matter readily, and in a focussed manner, helping the study team understand the issues on hand.

The cooperation, information and support provided by SERP, Outreach, DDS, and Myrada proved invaluable for the study. Special thanks are also due to Mr Vijay Kumar, Mr SP Tucker, Mr Anil Punetha, Ms CS Ramalakshmi, Ms Suvarna, Ms Rukmini Rao, Mr CS Reddy, Mr Srinivas, Mr Shankar Naik, Mr Jagannath Reddy, and Mr Bhaskar Reddy for the generosity with which each gave his/her time, and for the insights provided by each. The Chairman and other senior team members at Wassan provided an intellectually challenging environment in which the team carried out its work, and the study team hopes that this report will be useful to Wassan and to all others who are interested in effective management of natural resources.

**M V Ramachandrudu**

**B Ramachandrudu**

**Shashi Rajagopalan**



Given the range of differing situations looked at, differing views heard, and the results of the examination of assumptions, the Study Team would not like to present a definitive arrangement for implementation and subsequent management of watershed projects. However, it will attempt to present some key findings for easy reference.

1. When a watershed project is to begin in any area, some agency/agencies have to take the lead. The Gram Panchayat needs to be involved. If there is an active organisation of poor women in the area, (VO), and if it would like to get involved, its involvement can ensure that poor women's lands benefit.
2. For a VO to be effective, it needs the support of an active MMS and a supportive external agency (the VDO). VO and MMS leaders need to be well trained as already explained in the report.
3. The VO/Gram Panchayat will need to mobilise the community to identify potential interventions, mobilise potential beneficiaries around each clustered intervention to form user groups, help them elect their sub-project committees, and ensure that the committees report to the user groups formally, every 6 months.
4. External agencies may need to prepare formats for reporting and accounting, and train sub-project committees in their use so that sub-project committees are transparent and up to date in their use of finances, and in reporting project progress.
5. The sub-project committees will be small and have members with staggered terms. Once the project is established, this committee will give way to just 1 or 2 elected leaders from each group representing the group's interests in the watershed management committee, of the village watershed association.
6. A watershed association consisting of all the members of the user groups may need to be formed at the village level, for subsequent management of the structures/assets created, as well as for regulating use of water, and other natural resources. This is not aimed at undermining the role of the Gram Panchayat, but, as with any regulation, without citizen interest, (in this case, without the user groups and association), enforcement of the regulation may be difficult.
7. The PIA could be a VDO/NGO which focuses on WSD/NRM work. In the absence of such a VDO in the area, the MMS could be the PIA, if the conditions listed in this report are first met.
8. Once a watershed is established, a village level association may become necessary. Such an association may need to be set up along with the sub-project committees. Such an association may need to meet formally once a year at the least, where all the members can come together, even while the works are in progress.
9. User-group wise accounts will need to be maintained by the association.
10. Regular elections will need to be held at every level – the user-group level, and the village watershed association level.