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practitioner notes

Undertaking Decentralised Water Management in Korba District – Intervention Steps

The water journey

On December 2011 PRIA, in collaboration with partner SROUT, an NGO, and with the support of Arghyam, Bangalore, initiated a two year pilot intervention in five panchayats of Korba District of Chhattisgarh, which falls under the Schedule V area. The panchayats covered in the Korba block were Jambhar, Sonpuri, Chuhiya, Songurha and Dondaro. The selection of the 5 panchayats was based on the past work of SROUT in those panchayats, and the existence of water problems in those panchayats. The main objective was to demonstrate, through the help of a pilot initiative, the engagement of gram sabha and gram panchayats in Schedule V areas, and in the management of water resources in their panchayats. Building on this pilot initiative, the programme aimed to build pressure on the Government of Chhattisgarh to ensure the community's, as well as panchayats' active participation in water management in Schedule V (tribal areas).

The main achievement of this pilot intervention in Korba District includes mobilisation of approximately Rs. 1,40,00,000 by the panchayats, to effectively implement the water management plan in a participatory manner; out of the sanctioned work nearly Rs. 94,17,822.00 worth of work on water structures has been completed in five panchayats, with the participation of PRI elected representative and gram sabha members while work on the others is underway; ensuring sustainability of water structures and processes through the active participation of gram sabha members and panchayats during each stage of the water cycle; and growing recognition by the government on the relevance of multistakeholder engagement in addressing water issues.

Intervention steps

- **Capacity Building of the Panchayats (February 2012):** Orientation of the PRI elected representatives and gram sabha representatives was undertaken on their role and the significance of their participation in the effective management of water. The advantages of decentralised planning were discussed during the orientation, and insights on methodology and principles of participatory planning were provided.
- **Baseline Study (March-May 2012):** A baseline study was undertaken in the five intervention panchayats on the demographic profile, local governance structures, development facilities, available water resources and the status of water and the problems related to water. It was facilitated with the help of PRA methods like social and resource mapping and questionnaires. The baseline report was shared and verified with the panchayat and gram sabha members of the five intervention panchayats.
- **Preparation for the Vision Process (June 2012):** The date, time and place for the community meeting were decided in consultation with the sarpanch and other ward panches of the panchayat. A formal letter from the

sarpanch was given to all ward panches, Panchayat Secretaries, Rojgar Sahayak, and field level functionaries of PHED, water related departments and Agriculture Department and BALCO (Bharat Aluminium Company Ltd.). Information about the visioning exercise was shared by notices being pasted in important places of the panchayats / villages, beating a drum through the Kotwar, and by visiting each household.

- Vision process at gram panchayat level (July 2012):** Village level meetings were organised for developing the panchayat's vision on water management. The active participation of the gram sabha members and village panchayat representatives was facilitated during the verification of the baseline report on water, identification and prioritisation of problem areas related to water by the community and discussions on the strength, weakness, and opportunity and threats (SWOT) of the panchayats on water management issues, and developing a vision for their panchayat after five years on water management issues.


- Engagement of Technical Support Group (July 2012):** A Technical Support Group (TSG) was formed to strengthen engagement with relevant line departments, and incorporate technical aspects in the planning process. The TSG included panchayat elected representatives, gram sabha members, Panchayat Secretaries, Rojgar Sahayaks, ground level staff from the PHED and Agriculture Department and Sub-Engineer of the panchayat. During the TSG meetings the panchayat's vision statement and annual plans were finalised, including the water structure and conservation requirement of each panchayat, and the water schemes and possible resources to fulfil the panchayat's requirements.
- Sharing panchayat's vision and proposed annual activities in the gram sabha (August 2012):** The gram sabha mobilisation activities were facilitated for the mandated August gram sabhas of the state. Inclusion of discussions on water issues in the gram sabha agenda and sharing of the vision and proposed activities for the next financial year was undertaken. A special gram sabha was organised in one panchayat to hold specific discussions on the issue of water. The panchayat's vision and one year plan on water was approved in the gram sabha meeting for all the five panchayats.
- Finalisation and ownership of water vision documents by panchayats (September 2012):** The visioning and planning process was compiled in the form of five panchayat vision documents by PRIA and SROUT. The vision documents included: panchayat details, the water sources available, water problems, SWOT of the panchayat; and the vision and one year plan of the panchayat. The annual action plan of water management and the vision statement was then approved during the gram panchayat meetings, and the vision documents handed over to sarpanches of the five panchayats.


- Preparation of Budget of the Panchayat's Annual Plan of Water (October 2012):** Elected representatives of panchayats coordinated with the Sub Engineer of Janpad Panchayat-Korba for preparing the budget. The Sub Engineer prepared the budget, by visiting the site and undertaking measurements. The annual water budget of each panchayat plan ranged from Rs 21 lakhs for the Sonpuri Panchayat to nearly Rs. 2 crores for the Dondaro Panchayat (as per the water works specified).



- **Blocks Panchayat level sharing of vision document and one year action plan for water management (November 2012):** The meeting was attended by representatives of the President and members of the Janpad Panchayat, government officials, elected representatives of the five respective gram panchayats, representatives from CSOs, industries (CSRs) and the media. The sarpanches of all the respective gram panchayats shared their one year plan for water management, followed by a discussion on each aspect of the water management plan. The vision document and one year plans were submitted by the respective sarpanches to the President of the Janpad Panchayat for implementation.

- **District level consultation on water management in Korba (November 2012):** A district level consultation was organised in collaboration with the Zila Panchayat to develop a vision and strategy for the effective management of water for Korba District. Fifty participants representing water related line departments, CSR representatives from BALCO, AFPRO (Action for Food Production), and PRI elected representatives from the intervention panchayats, Block and District Panchayat, and CSOs were part of the intervention.



- **Interface meetings and consultations between panchayats, line departments and industry to get panchayat planned activities implemented (Jan- March 2013):** SROUT and panchayat representatives contacted the MGNREGA Officer, Janpad Engineer, PHED, Water Resource Department and officials of BALCO and AFPRO, on a regular basis and shared and submitted the plans to those line departments. The World Water Day was also used as a platform by sarpanches to give the panchayat's water plan to the Executive Engineer of the PHED and to get a commitment/assurance for the inclusion of this plan in the PHED plan. Most of the panchayat's annual work plan has been included in the activities of MGNREGA. NABARD-BALCO agreed to include some work on dabris, wells and stop dams under their Watershed Project and work on those have been implemented.

- **Implementation of the water plans (March –October 2013):** Information about the annual plan was pasted in the Panchayat Bhawan so that everyone would be aware of the plan's proposed activities and would make an effort for the implementation of the same. Of the planned work of Rs 4,14,29,000, across the five intervention panchayats, Rs. 1,40,32,000 has already been sanctioned till October 2013, and work on the same begun. Of the sanctioned work, nearly Rs. 94,17,822.00 worth of work has been completed in five panchayats with the participation of PRI elected representative and gram sabha members. Work on others is underway. They include revival of traditional water conservation structures like dabris, wells, ponds, dhondis, as well as the building of stop dams. Elected representatives monitored the work done by contractors, and the panchayat provided volunteers for the construction of wells.



- **Strengthening institutional structures of the intervention panchayats to work on water issues:** The monthly meeting of panchayats has been ensured, with the panchayat's information being disclosed through wall writings. Efforts have been made to strengthen women's role in panchayats and in water management, and capacity building of the panchayat's Standing Committees (Education, Health & Social Welfare) on their roles and on ensuring the community's active participation in the operation and maintenance of the water structures has been done. Interventions to activate the Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC)

members as standing committee members of the Panchayats were initiated. Facilitation and hand holding support has been provided to panchayat / elected representatives so that they can interact with line departments.

- **Initiatives to strengthen gramsabha's participation in the operation and maintenance of the water structures:** In almost all the MGNREGA work, the communities have proactively participated by contributing labour and money for the construction of wells, and participating in the social audit exercise. Ongoing efforts have been made to build linkages between the panchayats and the community groups to maintain the water structures (traditional and scheme related). These include making efforts to activate the Village Water and Sanitation Committees (VHSC) and proactively working with women and youth groups to engage them in the maintenance of the existing and current water structures.

For example, in Sonpuri and Chuhiya Panchayats, gram sabha members, as members of the Watershed Management Committee, are monitoring the work on creating dabris (farm ponds) under the Watershed Programme. In Jambahar Panchayat a youth committee is playing an active role in maintaining cleanliness around the hand pumps. Citizens have been involved in cleaning the dhondis, and the wells, and monitoring the MGNREGA work i.e. deepening of ponds, etc.

Deepening the Practice : Role of facilitators

To further deepen and sustain the decentralised management processes in the 5 intervened panchayats of Korba district, participation of the gram sabha, as well as village panchayats in all stages of the water cycle (ie implementation, maintenance, monitoring and evaluation of the planned water structures) needs to be facilitated on an ongoing basis. Structured and ongoing efforts need to be made to empower Gram sabha, with focus on strengthening community leadership, especially women's leadership and collectives to be partners in implementation and monitoring of water structures.

While strengthening engagements of all the three tiers of the panchayats in planning as well as in implementation of the decentralised plans, structured interventions to strengthen capacities of panchayats to negotiate and access government and industry resources for plan implementation are needed on an ongoing basis. In addition efforts need to be made to activate and strengthen programme committee (ie VWSC, Watershed committees -whose memberships have been merged with the panchayat standing committee) and strengthen standing committee of panchayats for plan implementation and monitoring of implementation of plans. In additional institutional spaces for multi stakeholder engagements and negotiations for plan implementation and for monitoring at panchayat, block, district as well as state level need to be created and nurtured on an ongoing basis.

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