

Invited Article

Decentralised Governance, Gender & Affirmative Action in Rural Drinking Water Management

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Based on principles of contribution to the capital cost and full cost recovery from users, Pani Samiti (Village Water & Sanitation Committee-VWSC) is meant to address management inefficiencies through participatory planning and inclusive decision-making. Mandatory 50 percent seats are reserved for women in the Pani Samiti and among them Dalit women too claim 15 percent reservation, corresponding to Dalit men in the rest of the samiti. Women's and other marginalized groups' participation is seen as integral part of this process. The present paper assesses whether this process empowers women and what more is needed to make this affirmative action become meaningful for strengthening women's agency as a rightful citizen being able to manage the affairs which concern them the most.

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The Project

This research project looks at the gendered terrain of water governance in India where decentralization policies coupled with water sector reforms from the early 1990s sought to shift the role of the state from a supply driven provider of water services to one which is facilitating demand and enabling community management. At the core of this process of institutional restructuring is the realization that water is no longer a free good and that decentralized governance is the only way to ensure sustainable, equitable and efficient water delivery. Based on the principles of cost recovery from users, the new institution- *Pani Samiti* (Village Water & Sanitation Committee-VWSC) is meant to address management inefficiencies through participatory planning and inclusive decision-making. Mandatory 50 percent seats are reserved for women in the *Pani Samiti* and among them *Dalit* women too claim 15 percent reservation, corresponding to *Dalit* men in the rest of the *samiti*. Women's and other marginalized groups' participation is seen as integral part of this process. Our concern is to

assess whether this process empowers women and what more is needed to make this affirmative action become meaningful for strengthening women's agency as a rightful citizen being able to manage the affairs which concern them the most.

Decentralisation

It has been noted by several authors that the simultaneous concentration of power at the global level and the localisation of politics in development is not a matter of coincidence. There has been an animated debate about whether democratic decentralization improves development performance because it provides impetus for popular participation and accountability into local governance, which forces it to be more responsive to citizen desires and more effective in service delivery. The study by Blair (2000) from six countries (Karnataka being from India) found that democratic local government increases participation and representation but does not necessarily enhance the empowerment of non-elite groups. Nor does it make the distribution of benefits more equitable or reduce poverty. The problem, as pointed out by Mukhopadhyay (2005), is that the discourse on decentralization assumes, to a large extent, that once the institutions of governance have been engineered to bring these closer to localities, participation and voice will follow. Non-elite groups in society will automatically raise their voice and demand accountability and share in public goods. Mukhopadhyay cites Heller (2000)

saying that it is a technocratic vision. Alternately, what is required is that decentralisation has to be driven by social movements, not by political parties or by labour unions, but by action which would build the local capacity, grass-root institutions and extra-parliamentary arenas of participation. Heller posits that there are two polarized assumptions; one from the world of technocrats and another from anarcho-communitarians. The truth rests somewhere in between. On the one hand, decentralisation entails complex changes in administrative, financial and decision making systems that require a high level of technical expertise and coordination. On the other, the basic premise of decentralization that is brought closer to people and therefore is more responsive to real people's needs and interests is undermined without strategies to mobilize 'voice' of subordinate groups in society, and the forging of institutionalized spaces for participation and accountability.

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Decentralisation & Gender

Most work on gender dimensions of decentralization focuses on the connection between the subordinate power of women in the private domain and possibilities and limits to the exercise of power in the public sphere,

in the world of politics, decision making and governance. Some studies (e.g. Evertzen 2001) assumed that local politics is easier for women because eligibility criteria at the local level are less stringent and local government is the closest to women's spheres of life, and easier to combine with rearing of children (Beall 2006). Many other studies contradict this view, however. Goetz (2004) argues that local government is always hierarchical and more embedded in local social and power structures and so it is difficult for women to penetrate as independent political actors, or for them to raise controversial gender issues. Whether or not women would be effective in the exercise of participation and power depends, to a greater extent, on the terms of their inclusion. Many a times, role and influence of traditional authorities are mapped on to the new form of formal local government structures introduced by decentralisation.

Whereas the active agency of civil and political society builds participation and mobilization from below (read NGOs and party activists), state creates channels, opportunities and incentives (or disincentives) for collective action construct citizen capacity from above.

Creating institutional spaces is also not enough, but what is required is that the 'construction of interest as also the construction of voice' is seen as a political project, building citizen

capacity to collectively engage local powers as well as the state. This capacity is constructed through the simultaneous process of engagement from below and above. Heller (2001) maintains that whereas the active agency of civil and political society builds participation and mobilization from below (read NGOs and party activists), state creates channels, opportunities and incentives (or disincentives) for collective action construct citizen capacity from above. A caution warranted by many writers is that decentralization is supposed to be increasing accountability and participation of women, but politics at the local level is far more embedded in local social structures where traditional authorities and elites hold sway. At the same time institution building and planning capacity is weaker.

The assumptions underlying women's agency need to be critically examined because of the high value placed on the active participation of marginalised people and women in community institutions around collective resources. Agency is the ability to define one's goal and act upon it, but agency is more than 'observable action' as it also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose that individuals bring to their activity, or in other words, 'the power within'. Agency tends to be operationalized as decision-making, but it can take a variety of forms including bargaining and negotiation, resistance and intangible cognitive processes of reflection and analysis by individuals and groups (Kabeer1999:3). Thus, while agency is largely prescribed by what is

culturally appropriate many would argue that compliance is not complicity and that women do challenge hegemonies, even in the organisation of water, in ways that do not necessarily constitute overt resistance (Agarwal 1997).

Gender Impact Assessment

Against this background, we undertook an impact assessment research project in terms of empowerment of women through the process of decentralisation. It was a project where Gujarat was involved in assessing the impact of similar kind of project designs; *Ghogha* project, Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Project and *Swajaldhara* project. In Maharashtra we had selected *Jalswarajya* and *Aple Pani* projects, both rural drinking water projects, and also added the newly launched Maharashtra Water Sector Improvement Programme in Irrigation sector through Irrigation Cooperatives and women's participation. It's a collaborative research between SOPPECOM, TISS and UTHHAN and funded by International Development Research Centre (IDRC), sponsored by Canadian Government. This paper presents the primary data only on the *Jalswarajya* experience, along with some analysis of decentralised administration. Official statistics which focuses on women's participation for all the five districts selected by us in the five regions are given in Annexure 1. Qualitative analysis emanates from the primary data collection through interviews of 114 women executive committee members in 18 villages in six districts as well as

through the Focused Groups Discussions (FGDs).

Maharashtra's *Jalswarajya* Project

The project started in April 2002 and will come to an end in 2009. It covers 3080 Gram Panchayats and 4392 villages and 5269 padas in Maharashtra's 26 districts. Total population covered is 2.16 lacs. Demand driven approach was ensured by advertising in local papers about the new approach of the project, particularly the fact that 10 percent contribution towards capital cost was necessary for the recipient of the project, whereby the funds would come to the *Pani Samiti* constituted in the Gramsabha, and not to the Gram Panchayat account. Separate account has to be maintained for O&M also. For short listing of the villages a few criteria were used to ensure that real needy villages and also villages with sizable population of SC and ST are covered. The Project Implementation Plan was elaborately worked out and the project introduced some elements of market transactions such as the Engineer to be appointed through advertising. The tender for the contractor to be issued before selection was also a new idea. Also, double entry accounting system, never observed in the government before was introduced, making villagers aware that there would not be any subsidy anymore and they can spend on O&M only when they would collect money from the users, and only up to the amount which is collected. For women who are mostly illiterate or semi-literate to be able to understand all the procedures, take decisions and monitor them, particularly

to check corruption as well as pose alternative views were a huge task. Average cost of the Village Action Plan, i.e. the construction cost, which included well, Elevated Storage Reservoir (ESR), pipelines, pump sets etc. was Rs. 25 Lacs. None of the Gram Panchayat has budget comparable to this amount.

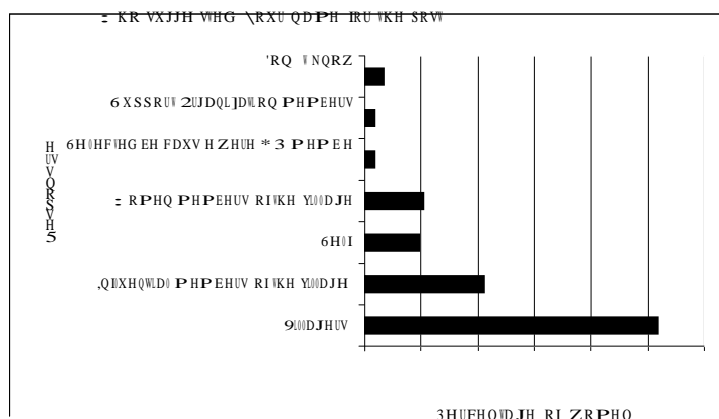
Empowerment of Women

There are three parts of our questionnaire; i) profile, ii) status of participation and iii) knowledge about the roles. In every village, along with *Pani Samiti* (VWSC), Social Audit Committee (SAC) and Women's Development Committee (WDC) were constituted. Each committee had separate functions and hence it was interesting to know whether they were aware of the nuanced procedures. Special development fund for women's capability building was offered along with a small amount as a revolving fund to encourage women to form Self Help Groups (SHGs). In none of the villages the schemes were completed

and thus collection of water tariff has not started in most of the cases. Our sample size was small but drawn from the constituency of women belonging to all castes, as per their proportion in the population. 49 percent belonged to the landless class, which represents state composition. Against this background it is interesting to see what the degree of their participation is. The answers denote basically their own perceptions. Our major themes were; selection process, nature of participation, degree of activeness (agency), perception about conducive atmosphere, constraining and facilitating factors (family), impact on changing status at household level, at community level, views on capital contribution and water tariff, and lastly views on the water source and location of stand post.

Selection Process

About 60 percent respondents decided to participate because of their self interest. 14 percent participated after



influential people in the community persuaded them. 10 percent reported that the villagers suggested names in the Gramsabha convened in the beginning of the project. Only 5 percent women referred that their family was keen that they should be part of this activity and 2 percent women became a part of the committee because of their membership of Grampachayat and it was mandatory.

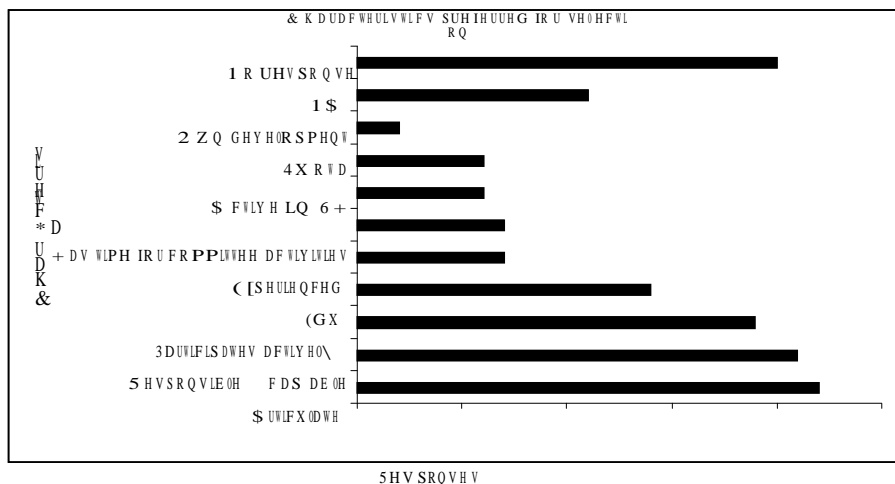
Education could be said as having some connection with the 'self interest'. Undergraduate and graduate women answered affirmatively, those with 8-10th standard showed a promising percentage of 76. Those with 5-7th standard had a 63 percentage score. Other categories had women claiming self interest were below 50 percent. Surprisingly, OBC, SC and Open category women showed 'self interest' in the percentage sequence of 80, 64 and 56. This is significant because the membership here did not carry much financial power or political clout except some prestige. May be they had seen no

heavy contest in the space for themselves to learn about public life and governance issues. Also they are less likely to have opposition from the family, compared to their counterparts from the high castes. Prior membership of other institutions could have been another reason for their activeness in this field. However, very few women had any membership experience, 33 percent were SHG members and 21 percent had been GP members, not mutually exclusive. But 70 percent women out of those who had membership experience affirmed their self interest in taking initiative in the selection process.

SHG was the only prominent collective activity available to women in the village

Thus, SHG was the only prominent collective activity available to women in the village, which was given boost by the *Jalaswarajya* project. There was

Responses (Percentages)



some disappointment that the revolving fund was not big enough to take care of the loans for enterprises for all. The fund was for just motivating them to come together and learn to act collectively. Only in one village a Mahasangh was set up i.e. confederation of all 20 SHGs and collecting shares from the members for setting up a core fund so that the bank would allow four times overdraw, which could be then distributed as loan to the SHGs that would take the responsibility to distribute loans to individuals.

Many times women's participation and concerns got restricted to this activity and thus got diverted from the main processes of the scheme. Many SOs too did not understand the limited role of this activity as far as the water scheme was concerned, and thus got women bogged down with the SHG activities only. In one case, the DFT bought machines such as Dal processing; Chilli pounding etc. out of the revolving fund allotted to the WDC, without having any discussion on how the machine would be run either cooperatively or individually and how the profit would be shared etc. This has robbed the opportunity for women to take decision and manage money collectively. The DFT should have followed the principle of 'Let women make mistakes and learn

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Those who showed self interest for them the next question tried to probe further about the motivational factors. 13 percent women were concerned about the water crisis in the village. 14 percent wanted to do something for the village whereas 4 percent wanted to work for reducing the burden of women. 12 percent women sought to develop communication with other women. 10 percent women showed interest in social work. Only 3 percent were clear that they had interest in water management issues.

Nature of Participation

Women were enthusiastic to assert that they attended the meetings of all the committees and mainly of gramsabhas. They felt that it was their obligation to attend the meetings once they are selected as a member of the committee. Out of 114 women respondents 94 were positive. 77 of them also participated in training programmes and exposure tours organized by SOs. 32 of them were aware that the minutes were recorded for all the meetings and those who were also executive committee members signed them. 22 of them took initiative to collect capital contribution from the villagers. Dissemination of the committee decisions was another activity, which was undertaken by 22 of them. 21 respondents reported that they had been part of the committee to supervise construction. However, when asked whether any one of them went to purchase the material

there was silence. Conflict resolution was another area where nobody had taken responsibility. Surprisingly not many women mentioned about their participation in cleaning activity of the village in their personal responses. Sanitation activity was given some weightage while making selection of the villages. Women might not have perceived sanitation activity as a part of their role as committee members of the *Jalswarajya* despite the scheme had a sanitation agenda. It had offered funds for drainage system in the village, with 20 percent contribution as a precondition. Very few villages had opted for it.

Degree of Activeness

When so many women joined the committees out of self interest, it was interesting to see what kind of initiative they have. Only 49 percent women came forward on their own to take up responsibilities and 28 percent have not taken any responsibility so far, whereas 18 percent undertook only activities assigned to them. Could assignment of activities be classified as a typical gender role? 13 percent answered positively but 63 percent were emphatically negative where as 24 percent could not articulate themselves. Very few answered (13.%) the question whether their willingness to carry out certain activity is noticed by the men committee members. However, probe into the possibility of raising women's issues around water yielded good response (44%). 45 % responded positively to whether interaction with other women is carried out to get more strength to raise the issues.

Rajput women were well aware of the scheme and also were active, but Bhil women were totally unaware.

Our Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) revealed that Rajput women were well aware of the scheme and also were active, but Bhil women were totally unaware. Almost six months they migrate for work to Gujarat and thus could not keep track of what is happening in the village. It appears that Support Organisation had not performed well to bring marginalised groups like women into the process of participation. In fact all the villages where the women's participation was significant and inclusive of all women it has to do with having a good SO as one of the factors.

Conducive Atmosphere (Committees)

Women require a conducive atmosphere for active participation and it is a duty of the SO and men folk to see to it that encouraging atmosphere is created by providing space, physical and also psychological to them. Suitable timing and location was one such factor, which definitely allows more space for women to attend the meetings. Overwhelming 83 percent women responded positively that their preference for the date and time for the meeting was taken into account. Also the opinions of 57 percent were sought for and accepted. They could raise some issues as priority (55 %) in the meetings. Women in villages were very positive and articulate about men's cooperation for their participation. In one village, all the

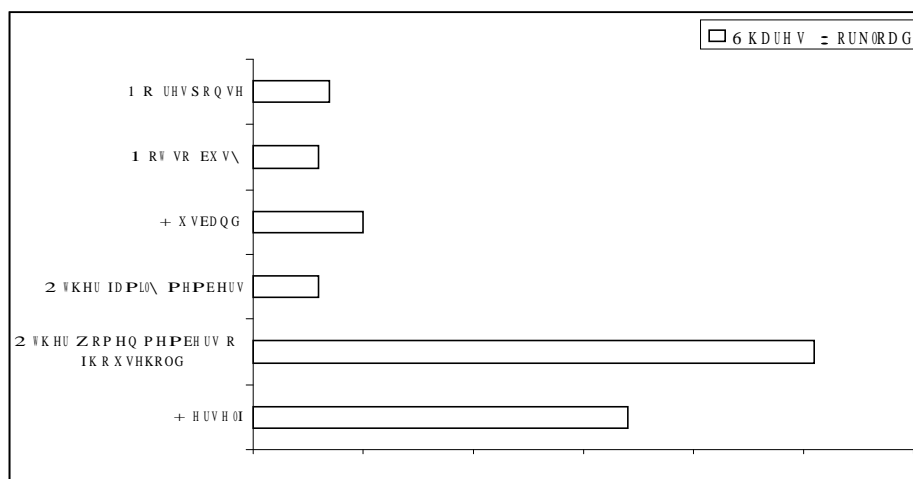
committee members were carrying an information brochure about the facts and figures related to the scheme. Some of them also maintained a diary to note down the dates of some important decisions. Woman sarpanch and VWSC president being the same person had created a positive atmosphere. No conflict of roles was experienced. Women's as also of men's educational background had a positive impact. Multiple answers from those who did not attend meetings and did not contribute to the process of participation include lack of confidence (15), lack of information about the meeting's timings and venue (10), unable to understand discussions (6), have to go for wage labour (8) and did not feel need to talk (1).

Constraining & Facilitating Factors (family)

In the case of woman coming out in the public sphere is a big step for herself as an individual as well as for the family

who needs to adjust to her absence from work at times for the domestic chores. For panchayat raj it has become mandatory to include 33 percent seats for women, and many families vie for those seats since they are seen as having power and prestige. Water committees had only the status of a training ground to be a candidate for the next elections. 93 percent women admitted that the family members showed considerable understanding while the woman is busy with the committee work. For 97 percent there is no opposition from the family. Only 4 percent complained that family members do not understand their role in the committee and hence sometimes create problems.

Who shares her domestic chores because of her business with the committees? 45 percent admitted that co-sister or daughter-in-law or daughter share that work. 9 percent were positive about husband's cooperation and 30 percent were confident that they could



Multiple responses, number of women

manage everything themselves and had never asked anybody's help.

Impact on Women at Household Level

Participation of women for 18 months of intensive activity must have generated some awareness among women respondents of their dignity and independence in decision making. Amartya Sen criticizes the utilitarian approaches, which measure increased well being in terms of 'adaptive preferences', i.e. preferences adjusted to their second class status (Nuusbaum 2006). We tried to go beyond this utilitarian approach to find out whether women have the feeling that the milieu where they are situated has changed. There were three kinds of responses for each issue. One was positive response of change for children's education (24). Second was that the pre-scheme treatment was bad enough and it has not changed much (48). The third was that there was some acceptance from the beginning but it has not increased (27). Health issues too had a similar lukewarm response. The response on the third issue of decision to spend money for children and parents was the worst. Only 20 women noticed any change in this respect while 52 reported that their earlier bad experience continued. 25 had continued leverage in this respect.

Only 5 percent felt more confident about their authority over the family income. 63 percent could not muster courage to establish authority and 18 percent had some authority earlier, which did not change much.

Increased respect among family members got a better response (41%), whereas negative response was about 32%. Very few (6 %) thought that they had sufficient respect earlier too. Abstract questions as these do not evoke everybody and thus 25 percent women did not answer the question. Increased acceptance of opinions also drew somewhat lukewarm response. But 30 percent regarded that their mobility has increased due to participation in the scheme. 34 percent women were negative and 9 percent thought that it was irrelevant to them because they had sufficient mobility earlier too.

Impact on Women at Community Level

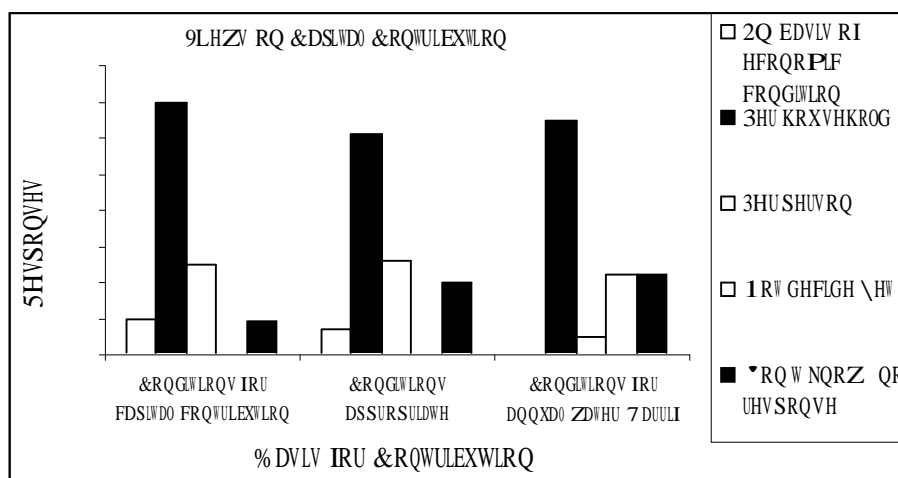
Questionnaire included women's perception but the group discussion with men in the committees also complied with women's observations. More respect was stated by 62 percent women, having a say in the community decisions was reported by 48 percent, and taking interest and visiting other local institutions was reported by 29 percent. Whether the project gave opportunity to develop leadership qualities was a crucial question, which had a positive answer from 40 percent women. In the group discussions too women asserted that the project gave them opportunity to learn governance aspects of the drinking water facility and procedures required in the process. To the question whether the capacity to articulate women's concerns increased or not, 51 percent responded positively. Whether the campaign against alcohol was

motivated due to the increased concern elicited only 27 percent response. However, when specifically asked about any experience of ‘backlash’ due to the new euphoria of empowered women 95 percent answered negatively.

Capital Contribution towards the Scheme

Everybody was convinced that to generate a feeling of ownership, contribution towards capital expenditure of the scheme was necessary. However, the criterion applied for the contribution, particularly when there are large disparities in the village society was a critical issue. Every village had been given freedom to arrive at this criterion in their own manner, which was in a way dangerous, considering the social and

political power the rich holds in the village, which nullifies the effect of formal democratic structures. We asked them whether they were aware of the different criteria discussed in their meetings. 9 % came out with the idea that economic condition of the families was the basic criterion and only 6 % could make a judgment whether the criterion chosen for differential contribution was appropriate or not. Majority (61 %) reported that their committee chose the criterion of ‘per household’ contribution and minority (22%) reported that it was ‘per person’ in the family. In 19 % responses the criterion was not yet evolved and 8 % women did not know what was the criterion followed. Fewer could really judge whether what was decided was appropriate or not (54 %) and (23 %) respectively.



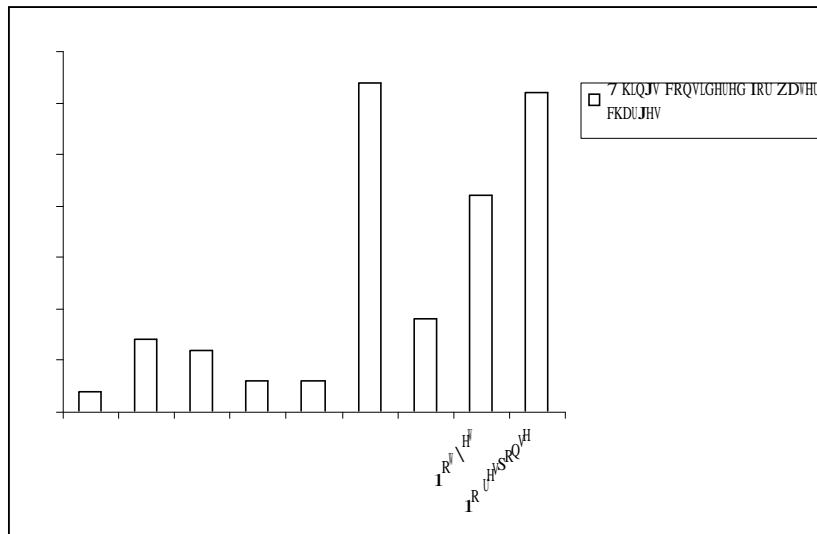
To the question whether the capital contribution was a good idea and who should pay it, 76 percent women were affirmative. 3 percent said that every-

body cannot afford it. 23 percent had no opinion of their own. Unless the first mandatory 5 percent was collected Village Action Plan could not be

prepared and the funds also could not flow in. In many villages a large part of the first 5 percent contribution came from the rich or from the migrants whose relatives have salaried jobs in Mumbai but want to maintain their roots in the village. However, even where only 5 percent contribution was required, being tribal villages, every household had paid some contribution, which was not the case in others where the tribals were excluded from the process altogether.

Views on Water Tariff

In the case of water tariff the same per household and per person criteria were reported by 57 percent and 4 percent women respectively. 19 percent women did not know what was decided. Very low reporting may be because water has not reached yet and hence the discussions might not have been intense. In FGDs it was revealed that in some areas tariffs had already



Numbers

been collected for three months so that the scheme could be handed over to them as per the preconditions. There were concerns about the high tariff expressed by many women in all the villages, although they were convinced that old rates were outdated and they need to be increased. Tariff was going to be high also because of government forcing for private connections. Women also preferred the idea of

private connection because of two reasons; first, no fetching of water from a distance, and second, no conflicts on the stand posts. They were also convinced that private connection helps collect tariff from the households, who cannot deny that they are using the facility. Resistance was regarding the cost of installation and monthly payment, which was found too high.

Women were convinced that it would help measuring of water and allow the family to decide how much water they can afford. The question whether they know about how the formula for water tariff is calculated, only 8 percent women reported all the four major components such as electricity bill, salary of the person, repairs and maintenance charges and others such as TCL powder etc. 28 percent reported three of them, and another 27 percent gave no response. To the question whether the decision to base the tariff on these components was right or not 51 percent women reported that it was the right way to do it. Thus, they grasped the management issue perfectly. A large number of women (64 percent) said that people must pay and take the responsibility of maintenance. However, 3 percent women felt that the government should jointly pay with the household, i.e. there should be subsidy.

Views on Water Sources

Location of water sources was a critical issue for women; firstly for the sake of sustainability and secondly, because they care for the distance of the stand post. About 43 percent women were positive about the current selected source. About 8 percent felt that it was not acceptable. 32 percent did not respond. 39 percent reported that the decision regarding the location was taken in gramsabha. 4 percent reported that it was basically a decision of the ground water experts (GSDA). Large number did not know how the decision was taken. Although it was not part of

the project, the government officials forced the people to get private connections because in the past there was a tendency not to pay for the stand post. The argument was that once the connection was inside the house the responsibility of paying increases. Majority of the women (63%) were of the same opinion. 18 percent asked for the stand post, which was understandable, since the expenses for taking the connection inside was also to be borne by the household itself and also the water tariff was likely to be increased. 9 percent women suggested that one stand post could be shared among 10 households. 15 percent were happy about the current locations. 36 percent felt that one stand post could be shared by 3 households. The suggestions were not complying with the government norm of 40 households per stand post. In some places the men committee members explained that they were trying to come out with differing water tariff so that poor would get the same facility but would pay less. Majority of women were found happy to get water once a day, i.e. in the morning (54 %). 18 % women opined that it should be twice a day, since some of them did not have enough storage capacity to fill water at one go. Also they have to go for work in the morning and hence they preferred to get water in the evening.

The question about whether differences of opinion between men and women existed regarding sources of water, location of stand post and toilets, water charges etc., 97 percent answered that there were differences. However,

conflicts were reported by only 5 percent women and 86 percent answered negatively. They did not feel that institutional mechanism was really necessary at this stage.

Decentralisation & Women's Empowerment

Although women's knowledge base was found limited since they could not comprehend abstract concepts many of them recalled their participation in major events. They were well aware of some key decisions of the scheme. The statements about their empowerment in the text have to be taken in the comparative context of total seclusion from the public life as it existed in Maharashtra in recent past, despite the reservation of women in PRIs since the 73rd amendment in 1994. For women to get engaged in the public life and concentrate their attention for a long span of more than two years was commendable. Many of them were better versed with the complex procedures of the scheme than the women panchayat members who do not generally handle such big budget activities. Appreciation for decentralisation and vesting the responsibility of such a big budget activity with the community was expressed in many Focused Group Discussions (FGDs). That the drinking water project happened to be closer to the heart of women was also noticed in the FGDs. Mandatory 50 percent seats for women in all the committees was too a point of appreciation. Men were given credit to create conducive and co-operative atmosphere.

However, they were also apologetic that they did not do justice to their selection to a large extent. Women felt that they learned a lot through the project. Their participation was correlated more with the Women's Development Committee and the special revolving fund for the SHG activity rather than in the mainstream activity of VWSC and SAC. This perception was prevalent with the women as well as with the SOs. That the revolving fund was a carrot and was not the main component did not get strongly communicated to them.

Impact of Decentralisation on Participation & Empowerment

The findings reveal that the main objective of decentralisation was largely achieved in the project. The funds were transferred to VWSC. Devolution of money power took place. Hands-on-training about how to deal with the markets was given in terms of tender process for the Technical Support Person as well as the contractor. Double entry bookkeeping practice was introduced first time at the village level. The need to keep the water tariff account separate from the gram panchayat account so that the maintenance of the piped water scheme would never face problem of sustainability, was convincingly communicated. The sense of ownership was inculcated through the public contribution. Thus, all the institutional strengthening goals set up in the project proposal were achieved in a manner of procedure, but it was observed that the spirit of sharing power collectively with women and other marginalised had

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not emerged. The marginalized people did not have the feeling of accessibility to the vital governance processes. Their endemic disbelief about the traditional power appropriating democratic processes, despite providing tremendous transparency in the design of the project did not get abolished. Thus, the quality of social processes involved in decentralisation remained short of desired level. All the shortcomings noted in the findings on de-centralization had impacted the level of participation of women and marginalised communities. It was noticed that the expediency of completing the scheme in the given timeframe has led to compromising on the social processes, which are time consuming and demanding patient listening.

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Social processes

It is essential that women, half the population, primarily involved in water collection remain engaged in all the activities of governance as rightful citizens of India. However, they need to be informed citizens to exercise their right. To increase their capability to assert democratic values was the critical

part of this project, which was somewhat overlooked in the overall design by not selecting capable Support Organisations and by not providing them appropriate funding to operate. Their agency was not fully developed as a 'power within'. We did not get to know single incident of bargaining, negotiation or resistance, while having interviews, which sometimes lasted for two and half hours.

We found that very little material was prepared either by SOs or consortia to train the members of different committees in social processes. Social processes include bringing women to the meetings, giving them platform to voice, allowing them to express informed opinions, educating them with information about complex procedures and the reasoning for the same, making them aware of the spaces for corruption and how to question corrupt practices in the gramsabhas and mahila gramsabhas, how to resist patriarchal domination at home and also during the meetings.

Undermining of SOs

SOs' role of monitoring and bringing marginalized communities within participatory mode should have been considered critical in the design. One of the requirements for appointing good SOs was to give them substantive amounts, which would help them to retain good people. Also to strengthen their role in the eyes of the VWSC their payment should have come directly from the DFT and not from the VWSC, who have very little appreciation for the work of mobilisation. They may pay well to

the pravachankar, (religious story teller) but not to the modern educator, who educate them about transparency and accountability. This arrangement would have given more power and status to them vis-à-vis village people. Or joint account holding with VWSC, as it was done by NABARD in the case of watershed development committees, would have added strength to their position to control corrupt practices of VWSC members and TSP. Wherever conducive atmosphere was created such as DFT has given sufficient time, SO has given good training and the VWSC men are educated and cooperative the participation of women is found qualitatively better.

Lost opportunity of sensitisation

DFT was more busy to liaison with CEO and RSPMU and also in paper work. The salaries of DFT were high compared to SOs' staff. SOs feel that DFT officers were bossing over them, and DFT was complaining about non-competence of the SO's staff. Thus, the opportunity of making SOs as extended arms of DFT to carry out functions of community mobilisation, solving community conflicts, and also motivating women and dalits, creating space for them to speak out, was lost because of wrong structural arrangements.

There could have been systematic training programmes on gender and caste issues, which would have strengthened the conviction of the SOs' cadre about interventions required for integrating women and dalits in to the mainstream

activities. Several case studies on the factional conflicts, community conflicts, and patriarchal domination could have been prepared as a part of this activity. It would have helped to deepen the process of participation and democracy. We were surprised to notice that SOs had not done their job of documentation, such as processes of conflict resolutions and also stories of individual empowerment.

Decentralisation of PRIs and the drinking water scheme appear to have slightly different characteristics. The first is a political activity, and although at the local level, it is supposed to be the structure of governance and less known as a seat of power, but it has been politicized a lot in the recent years. Thus, the member of GP has to face all the intersectional pressures of identity of caste, class and also political party which tries to paternalise the panels. Also there is scope for corruption, which is not easy to resist. The second activity of VWSC member has been defined as non-political and is not a statutory body. Thus, there is less pressure exercised from class, caste and party identities. The selection process was much more informal. In this context a quick study should be carried out after the next GP elections whether some women got mentally prepared to enter the public life of governance due to this experience or not. Even when some of them had faced resistance for attending meetings etc. lessening of physical distance through decentralization of decision making process must have given them more space to assert, more friends to encourage since this was a legitimate

activity in the eyes of the community, defined by self interest rather than the political equations.

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Annexure 1

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT COMPONENT																							
District	TOTAL GP	TOTAL NO. OF MEMBERS IN GP	TOTAL NO. OF WOMEN MEMBERS IN GP	NO. OF SARPANCH	NO. OF VICE SARPANCH	TOTAL NO. OF MEMBERS			TOTAL NO. OF WOMEN MEMBERS			PRESIDENT									BEFORE	AFTER	
						VWSC	WDC	SAC	VWSC	WDC	SAC	PRESIDENT			TREASURER			SECRETARY					
												VWSC	WDC	SAC	VWSC	WDC	SAC	VWSC	WDC	SAC			
																							VWSC
NAGPUR																							
CHANDRAPUR	126	898	277	39	21	1561	59	2022	796	1675	1049	3	126	0	1	126	NA	124	126	126	1266	217	
NASHIK																							
NASHIK																							
			JALGAON			143	NA	413	49	12	1844	1884	1830	931	1799	928	37	135	19	4	130	NA	98
	132	117																					
MARATHWADA																							
JALNA	118	920	280	17	9	1561	59	2022	796	1675	1049	3	126	0	1	126	NA	124	126	126	481	808	
PUNE																							
SATARA	153	1207	407	48	12	1461	1357	1316	718	1324	646	9	89	8	24	89	NA	64	89	81	1015	809	
KONKAN																							
SINDHUDURG	78	658	225	16	6	1499	1450	1439	745	1165	719	4	77	8	38	66	NA	56	73	63	449	808	