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Role of Women in Groundwater Management: A Case Study of Rural Northern Gujarat, India

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Abstract

It was only after 1991 that community based management and initiatives in natural resource management and development began to be revived in the development policy of India. A significant step for participatory and decentralised forms of decision making and fund allocation was started with the comprehensive common guidelines which were evolved for all programmes with the recommendation of the Hanumantha Rao Committee in 1994. The watershed guidelines of 1994 advocated the need for different institutional arrangements at various levels to fulfil the task of community based watershed management and to begin State-NGOs partnership to address environmental problem, to achieve best possible utilisation of natural resources, employment generation, and restoration of ecological balance and to alleviate poverty through community based watershed management. This paper illustrates a village based case study from Gujarat, India which has relatively poor endowment of water resources and suffers from permanent water scarcity due to uncertain rainfall pattern. Watershed Development Programmes (WDPs) has become a key strategy for economic development in Gujarat due to its frequent facing of droughts, dwindling groundwater resources, increasingly salinity and loss of vegetations.

This paper seek to explain the role of women in the maintenance of the water retaining structures ‘check dams’ build by the farmers who organised themselves in User groups, as part of the watershed activity in the case study. The watershed main activity for the village was to build water retaining structures as groundwater is the source of irrigation and for drinking water, with no government water supply in the village.

This paper uses the micro level village based case study; employing qualitative methods for data collection such as semi-structured interviews, participation observation, focused group discussions, narratives. The study is based on ten months of ethnographic investigation carried out in Northern Rural Gujarat, India. This analysis helps in realising the role that local community (especially women) can play in using scarce natural resources.

Keywords: Community management, gender, groundwater management, India