

Role of NGOs in implementing recharge programme

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Paper submitted to:
Central Ground Water Board
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Role of NGOs in implementing recharge programme¹

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(The paper describes the catalyst role of NGO for success of the any of the government schemes for social development. The author has made an effort to explain the crucial role of NGO in context with 'scheme on artificial recharge to groundwater through dugwells'. The scheme has a noble motive and its three years period will end by March 2010. It is a matter of debate whether the goal has been achieved or the scheme has faltered in absence of meaningful participation by NGOs – particularly those who are in the area of recharging for many years and have demonstrated their strengths in the subject).

Scheme on Artificial Recharge to Ground Water through dug wells

A State Sector Scheme on “Artificial Recharge to Ground Water through dug wells” during XI Plan is under implementation in 1180 over-exploited, critical and semi-critical blocks in the seven States namely, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat & Madhya Pradesh at an estimated cost of Rs. 1798.71 crores. Out of the total cost, the subsidy component will be Rs. 1499.27 crores.

Total number of irrigation dug wells proposed for recharge is 4.45 million of which 2.72 million owned by small and marginal farmers and 1.73 million owned by other farmers. Average cost of recharge structure per well is Rs. 4000. The beneficiaries would be farmers having own well in their agricultural land. Provision has been made for 100% subsidy to small and marginal farmers and 50% subsidy to other farmers.

Constraints to implementing dug well recharging by farmers

Dug well recharge offers one option at water supply augmentation locally, an option that involves the ultimate stakeholder – the farmer – quite deeply. The farmer, through this mode of supply augmentation by his own efforts, would perhaps also get attuned to thinking about demand management. Till now, groundwater was always sourced from recharge naturally through rainfall or ponds, or from canals. But once the farmer gets involved in water supply, it could change his thinking forever. In that vein, dug well recharge should be seen within a broader framework of how to address groundwater governance locally and not in isolation. Dug well recharge also could potentially become an instrument through which access and record of the millions of dug wells can be sequenced and maintained in a database. It could be a means of information exchange, both from farmer and to the farmer. Crucial hydro geological and hydraulic data can be passed by the farmer, whereas, scientific and policy information can be passed down to the farmer. If this idea is utilized towards these objectives and strengthened through appropriate institutions at different levels, then there is much that can be gained through this programme. Dug well recharge can be a backbone of a mass scientific experimentation involving millions of farmers and giving an opportunity to test many of the new ICT innovations.

¹ Paper submitted for the Workshop on Dug well Recharge – Efficiency and Efficacy, to be held on February 22, 2010 by CGWB (west central region), Ahmedabad

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The scheme at the outset appears to be a pretty good solution to the continuously decreasing groundwater level due to over extraction of ground water in hard rock areas of the seven states where scheme is being implemented. The problem of decreasing groundwater level is a serious one and the solution offered under the scheme is though scientific and logical but is having serious constraints too. To achieve the desired results, these constraints may need to be addressed.

If the solution was as simple as that prescribed under the scheme, then the question is why the farmers themselves are not implementing recharge structures when they come to know about it. The question now is what are the constraints to going ahead for recharge? If the farmer feels that this would be beneficial, they would have gone ahead by themselves. As compared to costs of the well itself of enhancements to the well such as deepening and boring, the cost of constructing a recharge structure are not too high.

So, what prevents them from doing so?

The farmers see a greater expectation of loss of water to neighbour rather than gain from neighbours by recharging. This is a sure impediment to recharge. Unless the neighbour also recharges, the present farmer would not take much effort towards recharging. Further, the returns from recharging are not as directly evident as that from say, well deepening. There is always the risk that the water that is being recharged would not be available to oneself. Well deepening is psychologically an accepted proposition for an individual private well owner to invest on for increasing well yield.

Here some points of comparison can be made between recharging and well deepening as investments for increasing well yield. The more the farmer invests on a well, his risk is increasing. Each additional investment is a sort of “protection” for all earlier investments made on the well. There is always a chance that with one additional deepening, the well yield suddenly increases significantly. The farmer is playing a risky game, and with each additional investment, the game gets riskier. Additionally, the more number of farmers invest in deepening; the benefit to individual farmer reduces.

This logic gets reversed in the case of well recharging. If farmers recharge instead of deepen, there is increasing individual benefit when more farmers recharge. One gains when others invest too. Up to a limit, there is decrease in risk with each additional investment. Therefore, the economics of well deepening and recharging go contrary to each other. Somewhere there is a balance, which is currently tilted towards well deepening. The space is therefore set for more recharging.

Source: (Is it possible to revive dug wells in hard rock India through recharge?)

Discussion from studies in ten districts of the country

Sunderrajan Krishnan, Rajnarayan Indu, Tushaar Shah,

Channappa Hittalamani, Banderrao Patwari, Deepak Sharma, Laxman Chauhan, Vivek

Kher, Hirudia Raj, Upendrasinh Mahida, Shankar M and Krishna Sharma)

Role of NGOs

The NGOs had a very vital role to play for the success of the scheme but unfortunately it has not happened.

NGOs has an important role in any civil society but very often even the people sitting at the decision making level in the government have been found having a very narrow concept of NGO role as a charity organization collecting donations from the people and offering free or subsidized services to the economically disadvantaged people or people in need of specific services.

It is a fact that NGOs have played a major role in pushing for sustainable development at the international level and the national level as well.

The term NGO may be an ubiquitous term, but it is used to describe a bewildering array of groups and organizations - from activist groups 'reclaiming the streets' to development organizations delivering aid and providing essential public services. Other NGOs are research-driven policy organizations, looking to engage with decision-makers. Still others see themselves as watchdogs, casting a critical eye over current events.

It is more common to define NGOs as those organizations which pursue some sort of public interest or public good, rather than individual or commercial interests.

Even then, the NGO community remains a diverse constellation. Some groups may pursue a single policy objective - for example access to AIDS drugs in developing countries or press freedom. Others will pursue more sweeping policy goals such as poverty eradication or human rights protection.

However, one characteristic these diverse organizations share is that their non-profit status means they are not hindered by short-term financial objectives. Accordingly, they are able to devote themselves to issues which occur across longer time horizons, such as climate change, malaria prevention or a global ban on landmines. Public surveys reveal that NGOs often enjoy a high degree of public trust, which can make them a useful - but not always sufficient - proxy for the concerns of society and stakeholders.

NGOs also have a wealth of expertise in sustainable development issues. Joint Forest Management, participatory irrigation management, watershed development through participatory approach are some of the examples of NGOs expertise in sustainable development issues, particularly in the area of natural resource management

NGO have the advantage of selecting particular places for innovative projects and specify in advance the length of time which they will be supporting the project - overcoming some of the shortcomings that governments face in this respect. NGOs can also be pilots for larger government projects by virtue of their ability to act more quickly than the government bureaucracy.

NGOs use its own interpersonal methods of communication, and study the right entry points whereby they gain the trust of the community they seek to benefit. They would also have a good idea of the feasibility of the projects they take up. The significance of this role to the government is that NGOs can communicate to the policy-making levels of government, information about the lives, capabilities, attitudes and cultural characteristics of people at the local level.

NGOs can facilitate communication upward from people to the government and downward from the government to the people. Communication upward involves informing government about what local people are thinking, doing and feeling while communication downward involves informing local people about what the government is planning and doing. NGOs are also in a unique position to share information horizontally, networking between other organizations doing similar work.

In some cases, NGOs become spokespersons or ombudsmen for the people and attempt to influence government policies and programmes on their behalf. This may be done through a variety of means ranging from demonstration and pilot projects to participation in public forums and the formulation of government policy and plans, to publicizing research results and case studies. Thus NGOs play roles from advocates for the people to implementers of government programmes; from agitators and critics to partners and advisors; from sponsors of pilot projects to mediators.

Looking to the diverse role of NGOs in articulating and implementing rural development programme, government needs a fresh look towards NGOs while incorporating NGOs to its programme. The 'constructive criticism' is a healthy sign of any matured democracy and civil society. The Indian constitution must provide rightful place to the NGO structure which very often serves as a pro-active opposition party whenever the ruling party undermines the rights of the people or takes decisions in favor of the vested interests overlooking the large majority of people in absence of strong opposition party.

Role of NGOs in implementing recharge programme

The NGOs had a very vital role to play for the success of the scheme but unfortunately it has not happened in author's view. The government should have seriously consulted NGOs while seeking their participation for the success of the scheme since this has extremely far reaching results for improving groundwater level and thereby affecting the whole economy of the country through improving water availability for irrigation leading to improved agriculture production thereby improving farmers socio-economic conditions and society as a whole.

In this case, author feels that government decided without having any meaningful dialogues with the NGOs about what their role would be in implementing the scheme and what the government has to offer to NGOs to meet their cost of services. The paltry sum offered by the government to NGO services is far less than the expenses involved to be incurred by NGOs to fulfill the obligations prescribed by the state government. Further, the payment schedule offered by the government also made it clear that the government was least interested in the involvement of the NGOs of repute who can deliver the results with sincerity and commitment towards achieving the goal.

Secondly, it has to be remembered by the government that the NGOs are partners in the area of social development because of their expertise and grass roots network working for benefits of the society at large and not the contractors for implementing government schemes for their commercial interests.

The NGOs, in this case, could have taken up the responsibility, if entrusted by the government in right spirit, of motivating and encouraging the farmer community to come forward for groundwater recharging through artificial recharge of their dug wells as social mobilizing is a proven and accepted expertise of the NGOs. Further, the NGOs could have provided region or site specific technical inputs to the farmers apart from effectively monitoring the physical construction of recharge structures.

By providing adequate financial support to NGOs as partner institutes, the scheme would have achieved its goal to a larger extent and the excellent motive behind the scheme would have succeeded for the benefit, not only of the farmers but for the entire country.
