

## CHAPTER - IX

### PIM, OFFICIAL MACHINERY AND PANCHAYATS

#### 9.1 Interface Between Farmers' Participation and Official Machinery

- 9.1.1 It need hardly be emphasized that WUA and the local officers dealing with irrigation should work in perfect harmony for formation as well as smooth functioning of WUA. As our case studies indicate, the success of WUA depends on the extent to which this spirit prevails. This is best illustrated in two case studies from Maharashtra namely Vear Savarkar Water Users Society under Palkhed Project Jaikisan Cooperative Water Users Association under Loni Project. The former was a highly successful association, while the latter performed very miserably.
- 9.1.2 In Palkhed irrigation functionaries helped and guided farmers in formation of WUA and cooperated with them in releasing water in time and in adequate quantity. Several joint meetings were held. The officials were of the view that formation of farmers association had considerably reduced their work load on distribution of water as they dealt with association as a whole. This gave them more time to concentrate on the maintenance of the main canal. In Loni project, on the other hand, there was a dearth of suitable I.D. officials with dedication to motivate farmers to form WUA. No effort was made by them at the initial stage to help farmers in forming the association. Afterwards, when the association was formed, they did not put forth adequate efforts towards its successful operation. Their attitude remained lukewarm.
- 9.1.3 Palkhed provided yet another excellent example of I.D. officials helping the WUA even to the extent of relaxing the official rules. Here farmers tried to save as much water in rabi as possible for use in hot weather season for growing high value crops like grapes, sugarcane etc. If water was available for irrigating field in hot weather, Irrigation Department generally did not object to releasing water for hot weather crops after making 30 percent deduction for evaporation and transmission losses. Sugarcane, though annual crop, was also considered for irrigation in hot season in relaxation of rules.
- 9.1.4 Keel Bhvani WUA in the Thindal distributary of the Lower Bhavani Project of Tamilnadu provides an interesting example of the role of official machinery in promotion of WUA. Here the initiative for formation itself came from a top official of the I.D. As mentioned in chapter VI, the formation of this WUA was inspired by a visit to Philippines in 1987 by the then chief Engineer of Agriculture Engineering Department. In the process of forming farmers organisation, the farmers were consulted many times by the specially appointed Irrigation Community Organisers (ICO) who were posted in villages to work with farmers. The problems posed by farmers were identified and the Agricultural Engineering Department took up on

farm development work for which estimates were prepared and rectifications were carried out. The ICOs were the moving force and their involvement motivated the farmers to form WUA.

- 9.1.5 The Maharashtra experiments throw light on two additional features of the interface between farmers participation and official machinery. Before handing over irrigation management to the WUA, I.D officials carried out joint management survey( walk through survey) along with farmers to locate defects in the water distributary system with a view to repairing the same. I.D. officials carried out bulk of the repairs.before handing over irrigation management while those not repaired at the time were mentioned in the MOU to be repaired subsequently by I.D. Another notable feature was the freedom given by I.D. to WUA to utilise the canal water saved in Rabi for growing crops in summer. Farmers were given complete freedom to grow crops of their choice. These proved to be a boon to farmers.
- 9.1.6 Experience of a different type was found during the process of formation of Paliganj WUA in Bihar. It may be recalled that this was an unique experiment in the sense that unlike Maharashtra experiments covering very small areas, this covered an entire distributary having a large area of 8800 hect.spreading over 55 villages : This experience, therefore, is quite relevant if a decision is taken to gradually handover the entire or most of the canal command to WUAs. As mentioned earlier, the lower irrigation bureaucracy in Paliganj was initially somewhat hostile or not enthused over the prospect of formation of WUA It apprehended a threat to its own interest. It felt that if the works traditionally handled by it such as those related to distribution of irrigation water, levy and collection of irrigation charges, repair and maintenance of irrigation structures were to be handled by WUA, then this would result in a gradual shrinkage of the Irrigation Department. As a result, their own promotion prospects would be affected in due course. This was obviously a genuine concern from their personal point of view. In addition, there was the immediate prospect of a reduction of their patronage and power at the local level. These fears were reportedly voiced by them during seminars, workshops and in-house consultations conducted by WALMI Patna while making preparations for introduction of PIM in Bihar. Their attitude changed somewhat after they were informed that formation of WUA did not imply downsizing of the Irrigation Department. What would change would simply be then nature of work. They would devote more time on really engineering works which used to neglected earlier because of considerable public dealings. In the course of time, after the formation WUA, the local engineers themselves found that their promotion prospects were not affected. Their patronage, no doubt, declined but so was their day to day botheration. As a result, even in Paliganj, a good deal of cooperation between WUA and local irrigation officials was found during the time our study team visited the area. Less problems were consequently encountered elsewhere in Bihar. As noted in chapter III, in Asarganj, the attitude of local officials was quite favourable.

- 9.1.7 Mohini provided a good example of functioning of the two agencies in close cooperation. This related to delivery of water. In the beginning of each season, the rotation for running and closing of canal system was prepared at Divisional level and published in the newspapers. In turn, the concerned Deputy Engineer and Section Officer of the society prepared the water schedule for each rotation in consultation with farmers and the same was communicated to all members of the society. The adequacy of water supply and its effectiveness were checked through Standing Water Flume (SWF) and day to day gauge and discharge register was maintained in society's office.
- 9.1.8 It can be seen from the above discussion that different types of interaction between WUA and official machinery related to operational aspects have already emerged. The attitude of local level irrigation officials towards WUA had exhibited a mixed pattern ranging from initial suspicious and hostility to very active cooperation. There have been the cases of indifference also. Other types of cases might come in future.
- 9.1.9 Success of any WUA requires friendly and cordial relation between ID and WUA. Hence it would be desirable if the ID staff are trained and motivated for promoting WUA. An appropriate training programme for this propose may be devised. At the same time ID should work out additional responsibilities for its local staff in place of the responsibilities taken over by WUA so as to avoid any apprehension regarding their future redundancy.

## **9.2 WUA and Panchayati Raj Institutions**

- 9.2.1 Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) established at the village, block taluka or district levels since the fifties were in the process of decay when a decision was taken to revitalize them. For that purpose, constitution of India was amended through 73rd amendment in April 1983 according to which a three tier Panchayati Raj system (at the village, district and intermediary levels) was made an integral part of the Indian administrative system having elected government at those levels and making elections mandatory. Since then PRI in most states had been constituted after election and started functioning. In view of this, it was useful to explore the relationship between WUAs and PRIs since both were democratic institutions working in the same area and since a number of farmers in a concerned village having a WUA might also be member of the village Panchayat. WUAs at sluice or distributary levels might have a similar relation with Panchayats at block or district levels depending upon the convergence of their respective areas. An attempt was, therefore, made in this study to get an idea of the emerging relationship between the two types of institutions.
- 9.2.2 The investigation was, however, not very rewarding because of the very few cases in which some interaction between the two had taken place. Panchayats had been moribund in Bihar where elections were not since 1978. There was, therefore, not much scope for any specific relationship in three cases of Paliganj, Asarganj and Vaishali in Bihar. Tamilnadu too was not

very strong in PRI. Even then in Anaikuppam, a close and cordial relationship between the two institutions was observed. The President of Panchayat took interest in welfare of WUA. The Panchayati Raj Department of the state government also provided a small fund to WUA for desiltation and minor repairs of canals. Both Maharashtra and Gujarat had a strong base of Panchayats. A close of relationship between Panchayats and WUA was, however, observed in Palkhed project area only. Here members of WUA were also members of Panchayat. Attitude of Panchayat towards WUA was quite cordial, Both Panchayats and WUA played complementary roles for the betterment of the village. There was no interference by Panchayats in the affairs of WUAs.

9.2.3 The relationship between Panchayats and WUAs at different hierarchical levels would need to be watched with interest specially in case Panchayats become self-governing institutions in the real sense of the term as they are expected to be as a result of the 73rd constitutional amendment. At the moment, both the institutions are in their infancies. Hence only future can tell how the relationship between them would evolve. Even then, a few questions are likely arise. These may be examined and possible outcomes indicated. This is done below.

9.2.4 Agriculture is the predominant economic activity in rural areas and irrigation is most crucial for development of agriculture. Majority of rural households have agriculture as their principal means of livelihood. It is, therefore, expected that a significant proportion of rural population would be interested in issues related to farmers participation in irrigation management. Many of them are also expected to be associated with Panchayats. There is, however, no formal link between Panchayats and Water Users Associations. It is true that Panchayats in due course are expected to take over the governmental responsibilities at local level. However, the subject of irrigation has so far been kept out of the purview of the Panchayats. Such an arrangement might be considered appropriate from the point of view of management of main canals which traverse across different Panchayats and districts and even states. Distribution of a given quantity of water as available through an irrigation system among farmers in a village or in a cluster of villages within the jurisdiction of a Panchayat can, however, be regarded as a local issue which may be included within the purview of the Panchayats at all the three prescribed levels namely village, district and intermediary without removing it from the state list. This means that the functioning of the Panchayats in this respect would be under the guidance of the state government. This would require an amendment of Panchayat Act of states wherein the role of WUA should also be mentioned. This would ensure that Panchayats do not unnecessarily interfere with the functioning of WUAs.

9.2.5 Panchayats and WUA have complementary roles helping each other so that the villagers benefit. Panchayats can help Water Users Associations by giving supplementary grants for maintenance in case their resources permit. They can also provide assistance to WUA in any outstanding disputes between them and governmental agencies because of their commanding position in the

village society and administrative system. Panchayats help can also be sought by a WUA for resolving any outstanding dispute among its members. WUAs can also draw upon the services of Panchayat's physical and administrative infrastructure for managing their affairs till such time as they are in a position to have their own infrastructure.

- 9.2.6 In order to facilitate interaction between the two institutions it would be useful if a representative of Panchayat is made a permanent invitee to the meetings of the Management Committee of Water Users Association. Similarly a representative of Water Users Association should be made a permanent invitee to the meetings of Panchayats. The arrangements can be reviewed later on in the light of the experience gained in this respects. A similar arrangement can be thought of with respect to relations between Zila Parishad (district level panchayat) and distributory level WUA or a federation of Water Users Associations at district level in case they exist.