

CHAPTER SEVEN
CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

7.1. The Demand-Driven Approach

The provision of drinking water under the Constitution of India is a State's responsibility, yet the central government had been extending support for drinking water initiatives. After the 1990s a strategic structural reform in drinking water was seen and that was largely related to the shift in economic policies. The change in economic policies brought a shift in government's role from the state of welfare to a market or neo-liberal model. The reduce role of State in welfare services saw a changing concept of nation state in India. The new model recommended reduction in state subsidies, enhanced people's participation to manage their state of affairs and further increased market intervention to make developmental services accessible to people.

Nonetheless, the efforts at providing safe drinking water in international circles (New Delhi Declaration, 1990; Dublin Statement and the Earth Summit in 1992) drew criticisms as water was being provided at free of cost with huge government expenditure in building new structures and handling the O&M. The international players argued that the growing government cost and the water scarcity were due to lack of people's participation in planning, designing and monitoring the project activities. Hence these declarations strongly advocated for water to be treated as an economic good, reduced role of state in providing water services and increased participation of people and involvement of women as water managers.

The bringing of women within the water management in the international water declarations was the first formal step that provided women the space to articulate their needs. However the participation of women in water governance was perceived from women's natural role to provide water at household level and their role in protecting water resources for sustainability purposes (Cleaver, 1998a). To strategize the inclusion of women within the water governance, the World Bank provided a framework through its Gender toolkit in Water and Sanitation (Fong et al., 1996). On the other hand, for the inclusion of the marginalised the World Bank through several studies highlighted willingness of the poor to pay for the services as well as to handle the O&M of the water supply infrastructures (Joshi, 2005; Joshi, 2004; Narayan, 1995). These arguments clearly changed the perspective of participation (women and the marginalised) and the role of nation state within drinking water sector not only in India but also across several developing nations.

Consequently with the first sector reform drinking water project implemented as Swajal Project in the State of Uttar Pradesh in 1996, for the first time brought a shift in the role of State from service provider to the role of facilitator. Before the project was completed, it was declared a success and the SRP Project was implemented in 1999 across 67 districts in 26 States of India (Joshi, 2004).

The drinking sector reform saw the establishment of democratic decentralisation for water governance. Women, the poor and the marginalised were brought to participate within the water institutes. In terms of people's ownership of the project, the central government made people to contribute 10 per cent of the project capital cost and handle 100 per cent of the O&M of the water supply structures for sustainability purposes.

The implementation of SRP Project had been a landmark within water sector reform in India. It paved the framework towards democratic decentralisation within the water sector so that people could manage their own affairs by themselves as part of the water governance process. Further, it strongly advocated the neo-liberal agenda for reduced State role to stimulate economic growth for poverty reduction. This brought women, the poor and the marginalised to participate within the water institutes so that the project ownership rights were transferred to the community. Consequently people were made to contribute 10 per cent of the project capital cost and handle 100 per cent of the O&M of the water supply structures for sustainability purposes

The SRP Project was replicated as Swajaldhara Project and implemented as a full-fledged sector reform project across the country. The guidelines of the Swajaldhara Project clearly stated the State governments implementing SRP Project were to prepare their respective sector reform initiatives through adopting the principles of demand-driven approach. This saw the complete shift in government's role from the traditional supply-driven approach to demand-driven approach.

7.2. Inclusion of Gender Concerns in State's Drinking Water Programme

Before the implementation of the sector reform project in the State of Maharashtra, the Sukthankar Committee that reviewed the State water conditions highlighted supply-driven approach had no emphasis on the consumer's preferences and source sustainability and further indicated for a revamp within the approach of providing drinking water (Sangameswaran, 2010). The Sukthankar Committee's recommendation and the Central government's promotion of demand-driven approach clearly showed the necessity for a strategic reform to provide drinking water where the role of the welfare State was to change as a facilitator.

Nonetheless, soon after the National Water Policy 2002, the Maharashtra State government formulated its Water Policy in 2003, emphasising on people's participation and involvement of private sector in provisioning of drinking water needs. Thus, a total shift from the directives of the Central government and the State Water Policy clearly marked for a complete departure in the role of the welfare state in water sector.

Hence, with the financial support of the World Bank, the GoM implemented the first large sector reform project as Jalswarajya Project in 23 districts of the State. The implementation of Jalswarajya Project saw a completed change in government's role from welfare to facilitator. People were to contribute in cash and kind to meet the 10 per cent of the project capital cost and handle the 100 per cent O&M cost. Women were mobilised as members to form 50 per cent of the decentralised institutions established by the project. Thus, it aimed to focus on greater participatory processes, and the contribution of beneficiaries towards costs, as a viable alternative to the centralised supply-driven approach.

Further the Project optimistically also asserted that people's participation would empower community members, enabling them as primary stakeholders to make effective decisions regarding the formulation, implementation and management of project activities. In the process, women were considered an important stakeholder in the Project, right from villager's

mobilisation for capital contribution to designing, implementation and handling the O&M of the water supply infrastructures.

The bringing of women within the water governance was assumed that it would reduce incidences to capture power and knowledge by the rural elites when women and the marginalised participated. The time-saved phenomenon was extensively illustrated to show that women when had piped drinking water supply at their doorsteps, it would save time for them to get involved in economic activities. Through the provision of economic activities and generation of income, women were supposed to challenge the traditional power relationship at the household level. Similarly as women's collective for having half the representation within the water committees, they were expected to negotiate for power and get involved in the decision-making process at the committee meetings and at the Gram Sabha ensuring accountability, transferability and sustainability of the water resources.

Consequently, from the stated gender goals of the Jalswarajya Project, it was important that the involvement of women within the decentralised institutions and handling the O&M of the water supply infrastructures did not burden women's work to carry out the community work. Further, women's involvement in the economic activity was assumed to translate into increased incidence of women taking decisions and control over economic resources at household level. Nonetheless, the Project intention of having women in the decentralised institutions also challenged the normative concerns with regard to women and water and further brought about a sense of empowerment amongst the members of the committee.

Henceforth, the study adopting a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methodology to understand the gender development strategy in Jalswarajya Project presented the women's perception from the decentralised institutions that were selected as part of the Phase I Batch I villages in Maharashtra.

7.3. Gender Concern Findings from Jalswarajya Project

1. Profile of the Decentralised Committee Members

- i) The representation of women with the decentralised institutions had been fulfilled as per the project rules.
- ii) A majority (about 55 per cent) of the women from the decentralised institutions reported that they were members of the Jalswarajya committees for about 4 years. But still a large number of respondents about 45 per cent were not aware of their tenure in the decentralised committees.
- iii) The mean age of the women members in the water institutions was 39.67 years and about almost half of them (49 per cent) was at the age group of 31 to 46 years. A large section of the members from the decentralised institutions belonged to the middle age group.
- iv) An overwhelming majority (about 94 per cent) of the women were married.

- v) With regard to women's age, about 95 per cent of the married women were within the age category of 31 to 46 years. It was found that age had a significant association with the marital status of women from the decentralised institutions. The middle-aged women who were considered to be more stable and mature were more likely to be the members of the decentralised institutions in the drinking water project.
- vi) Regarding to women's representation within the decentralised institutions (VWSC, WDC and SAC) a large majority (about 75 per cent) belonged to SCs, STs, OBCs and the VJNTs, while only about 1/4th were members of the general caste groups.
- vii) At VWSC women belonging to SCs, STs and OBCs were merged as women representatives to fulfil both, the 50 per cent reservation of women and 30 per cent reservation of marginalised caste groups (SCs, STs, OBCs and VJNTs).

Since there was no government resolution to quantify women's representations from the reserved caste groups other than the general 30 per cent reservation, women from SCs, STs and the OBCs, were brought to participate as proxies for the marginalised men. In doing so, the 50 per cent reservation of women was used by the rural elites to represent women as caste groups. This reduced the overall women's representation, as 30 per cent of SCs, STs and OBC also belonged from the women's representation. The decentralised water governance, which aimed at efficiency through people's participation, was likely to be using reservation policy as taxonomy to capture resources and the benefits meant for the upliftment of the poor by the upper/dominant caste and class groups in Jalswarajya villages.

- viii) A large number of women respondents (about 36 per cent) had studied up to secondary level of formal schooling.
- ix) The mean family income of the women was INR 26468 per annum. A large number of women members and their family member's income (above 30 per cent) fell between INR 1500 to 13000 per annum category. But as per the World Bank's calculation of PPP, taking the US\$ 1.25 earning per person per day, it was found that a majority of the women and their family members were living below the poverty line index.
- x) However most (about 52 per cent) of the women members from the decentralised institutions had their ration card which were saffron in colour indicating they were above the poverty line as per the GoI rules.
- xi) Of the women members, a large number (about 46 per cent) were involved in their own field growing cash crops as their main livelihood. In spite of World Bank funding for poverty alleviation and improving women's income generation capabilities, most of the family participating under the gender development strategy, had no increase in their family income.

2. Process of Becoming the Decentralised Committee Member

- i) About 73 per cent of the women from the decentralised institutions felt that they were selected on the basis of the recommendations by the Village Sarpanch and the Gram Sevak to become member of the decentralised water committees. Women's participation in Jalswarajya Project had largely been through other's recommendations especially by the Village Sarpanch and the rural elites rather than their self-motivation to bring change in their lives.

3. Nature and type of Women's Participation in Jalswarajya Project

- i) A large number of respondents (about 49 per cent) participated in the committee meetings within the category of 50 to 74 per cent of attendance rate. Overall, a large number of women from decentralised institutions participated in the committee meetings with greater than 50 per cent of attendance rate.
- ii) Of the members who have participated in the decentralised committee meetings, it was observed that a large majority (about 80 per cent) had participated for about one to two hours while the Project was being implemented. Unfortunately after the project was in 'exit' phase, a reduction in women's participation was observed due to restrictions imposed by family members and those participating did not voice as most feared to speak in public.
- iii) While the project was implemented, a majority (about 53 per cent) of the women from the decentralised institutes reported that the Mahila Gram Sabhas were organised before the main Gram Sabha.
- iv) A majority (about 51 per cent) of the women respondents highlighted that they did not participate in the Gram Sabhas as per the norm of more than six Gram Sabhas to be held in a year. Women members participating in the decentralised institutions meetings or even the Mahila Gram Sabhas were less likely to participate in the main Gram Sabhas due to patriarchal values that imposed restrictions on being vocal at the Gram Sabha.
- v) 64 per cent of the women reported that more women participated in the decentralised committee meeting as compared to the men. Women attending the committee meetings were mainly the members of the SHGs.
- vi) In comparison to the association of variables between becoming a SHG member and gender attending committee meetings, 69 per cent women from the SHG member category reported that more women than men participated in the decentralised committee meetings. The significant association between the variables indicated that the higher value of becoming a SHG member increased the likelihood for the women to participate more within the decentralised institutions as compared to the non-SHG members.
- vii) The perception of women to collectivise and participate in the committee meetings was to bring about change in their conditions (about 29 per cent) followed by those women who

considered provision of water to the family member as their ascribed role (about 25 per cent).

- viii) In this process, caste of an individual that determined access to resources and to those reasons of participation to bring change in women's condition was statistically significant. A large majority from the OBC caste group (about 78 per cent) reported that their participation in Jalswarajya Project was to bring changes in women's conditions.

The association between caste and participation in the Project was visible. Given the subordinate position of women, the SHGs' efforts mobilised women from the lower caste groups to be part of the decentralised committees of Jalswarajya Project.

- ix) The third intervening variable women becoming member of the SHG was statistically examined with the established association of variables (caste and participation in the project to bring change in women's condition). The statistical results were conditional.

It showed that in case the women who are not the members of the SHGs their opinion about women's participation in the Project varied due to their caste identity. But if they are members of the SHGs, irrespective of their caste identity, women's reasons for participation to bring change in women's conditions did not change. SHG had an important role to determine women's participation in the Project.

- x) Of the reasons for participation in the drinking water project, about 67 per cent of the women from the OBC category reported their reasons for participation was to provide drinking water to the family members. Similarly caste of an individual also had a significant association with women's ascribed roles to provide water to the family members. Lower the caste identity, greater the likelihood for women to participate more in Jalswarajya Project given their socially ascribed role of water managers at the household level.

4. Women's Participation at Decision-Making levels in Jalswarajya Project

- i) At community level, a majority of 51 per cent of the respondents stated that all women and men of the village were vocal at Gram Sabhas. A bi-variate analysis was carried out to understand if there was any association between 'belonging to VWSC/WDC/SAC' and 'the most vocal at the Gram Sabha' to understand whether being in specific decentralised committee had an important role to be vocal. The statistical test showed no significant result. Most women were found to be vocal at the Gram Sabha regardless of their association with the water committees.
- ii) 'Being member of the SHG' was statistically significant with 'most vocal at the Gram Sabha'. This association indicated that SHGs had an important role for women to voice their opinion in the Gram Sabha. But there were also other factors which played a vital role, such as exposure visits of women, the dominant caste groups to address just the practical needs of women and more importantly the meeting with government officials had contributed to women being vocal at the Gram Sabha.

- iii) The socio-economic factors ranging from income, education, occupation and colour of the ration card had no significant association with 'most vocal at the Gram Sabha' and 'women take help of someone to speak at the Gram Sabha'. It was SHG that had a key role for women to be vocal at the Gram Sabha. The education or income status of the women did not influence beyond a point in making women vocal at the Gram Sabha.
- iv) Of the household decision-making process for the construction of water pipeline/toilet facilities, a majority (about 64 per cent) of the women stated that it was jointly taken with the family members. 19 per cent of the villagers had no access to pipeline drinking water sources.
- v) Women as SHG members played a key role in the household decision-making processes. The association between the variables were significant. 73 per cent of the SHG members stated that the family members jointly took decisions for the construction of water pipeline/toilet facility at the household level. Women's participation in family decision-making process was related more to their basic needs like drinking water, sanitation, health needs, while men took decisions related to economic aspects.
- vi) Although family income did not have a significant association with women being vocal at Gram Sabha, but it played a major role at the household level decision-making process. About 80 per cent from the higher income groups (INR 30,000 to 1,50,000 per annum) reported that all family members collective decided for the construction of water pipeline/latrline facility at the house, but within the lower income groups (INRs 1,500 to 13,000 per annum), women were found to be the key family decision makers.

5. Accountability in Jalswarajya Project

- i) 37 per cent of the women respondent stated that the Women Development Plan was carried out by the Mahila Gram Sabha.
- ii) A majority of over 62 per cent of the women from the decentralised institutions had limited knowledge about the Jalswarajya Project budget. 40 per cent of them, were not interested to know about the budget. They displayed a lack of the interest in the Project budget as the women considered men have better skills in financial management.
- iii) A large majority (about 83 per cent) of the women groups were not trained for collection of water tariffs.
- iv) Over 70 per cent of the women from the VWSC and SAC were fully aware of their respective roles and responsibilities within the decentralised institutions. Further, a majority of above 57 per cent of the women from the WDC were also fully aware about their roles and responsibilities.
- v) Participation as a prerequisite for community development projects was assumed to enhance access to information and generating better accountability. In this regard, the

research hypothesis of, 'participation of women in the decentralised institutions is likely to achieve greater accountability of the project' was developed. Due to qualitative nature of the study, several independent working hypotheses were developed. These were: 'Higher the women's participation in committee meetings, better is the awareness about the project budget', 'women's participation in decentralised committee meetings is likely to transfer right to collect the water tariffs' and 'women's participation in decentralised committee meetings is likely to increase awareness about the VWSC, WDC and SAC roles and responsibilities respectively'. The association of variables to all of these working hypotheses were not statistically significant.

It was found that although women participated equally with men in the decentralised committee meetings, they still lacked the knowledge about the project budget; they were not involved in collection of water tariffs and had no better understanding about their respective committee roles and responsibilities. Thus, regardless of their participation in the Jalswarajya Project, women were found to be less accountable and men (especially the rural elites) shouldered the responsibilities to implement the Project.

- vi) One being vocal at Gram Sabha can generate knowledge about the project budget. In this regard the tested working hypothesis had a positive significant association between the variables. A large number of women who were vocal (about 48 per cent) were also aware of the Jalswarajya budget. Thus, active participation in decentralised committee meetings fosters a sense of accountability if women are aware about the project budget.
- vii) Further to probe this understanding of participation and accountability, a trivariate analysis was carried out with the gender development strategy, 'becoming member of the SHG'. It indicated that being member of the SHG had a significant bearing, which eventually affected their accountability in drinking water projects. Thus, being member of the SHG was an important factor for women to be vocal and have the knowledge about the project budget.
- viii) Furthermore when the research hypothesis of 'participation of women in the decentralised institutions is likely to achieve greater accountability of the project' was examined through establishing other working hypotheses, 'women being vocal at Gram Sabha are likely to be involved in the collection of village water tariffs' and 'women being vocal at the Gram Sabha are likely to have better understanding about their respective roles and responsibilities of the decentralised committees (VWSC, WDC and SAC)', the results of these associations did not show any statistically significant effect in any of the accountability indicators. Although women were vocal at the Gram Sabha it did not influence the levels of accountability. Participation of women in spite of being interactive within public arenas did not alone suffice to generate accountability in the Project; there were patriarchal values and the caste-based discrimination that in effect determined participation and accountability.

6. Gender Development Strategy in Jalswarajya Project

- i) A large majority of about 75 per cent of the women from the decentralised institution stated that both women and men were the signatories of the VWSC bank account. Followed by 60 per cent reporting that woman was the signatory of the WDC bank account.
- ii) With regard to the women's leadership positions in the decentralised institutions of Jalswarajya Project, 55 per cent of the women respondents stated that the men usually held the president post in the VWSC. Similarly, from the SAC, 48 per cent reported that men were usually the president of the decentralised institutions. Thus, women's participation within the leadership position such as the treasurer/signatory of the bank account was mainly to justify the project norms. . Much of the decision-making powers were concentrated in the hands of men being President of VWSC and SAC.
- iii) One-third of the women participating in the decentralised institutions were part of the SHG movement at the village level.
- iv) Through the caste classification of the women and their membership in SHGs, it was observed that a large majority of about 89 per cent of the OBC women were part of the gender development strategy. Like to a large number of women from the OBC category felt their reason for participation in the Jalswarajya Project was to bring change in women's conditions. Women from the OBC groups similarly also consider SHGs as a gateway to mediate with their deprived conditions.
- v) A majority of the respondents (about 63 per cent) stated that SHG meetings were held regularly on monthly basis.
- vi) A large majority (about 75 per cent) of the SHGs were linked with the commercial banks. The linking of SHGs with the commercial banks had been for saving purposes.
- vii) Although SHGs were promoted for economic growth, 42 per cent from the SHGs had not undertaken any income generation activities due to lack of marketing plan.
- viii) Nonetheless, the amount provided from the WEF was used for skill and capacity building of women's groups. They were provided trainings on several issues. A large number of women respondents (about 40 per cent) stated the WEF was utilised for building skills to initiate IGAs. Through this training programme a large number of the SHG members (about 31 per cent) had learnt leadership skills.
- ix) The second research hypothesis derived from the World Bank gender strategy framework assumed that 'the gender strategy of the World Bank is more likely to enhance the empowerment of women at the village level'. In this process several working hypotheses was established based on the gender development strategy in the project. The working hypotheses stated that, 'leadership roles as part of the SHG training was likely to make women participate more at the decentralised committee meetings'. The bivariate analysis

between the variables leadership skills learned and the proportion of women and men attending the committee meetings had no significant association due to which the working hypothesis was rejected for the decentralised committee meetings.

- x) The working hypothesis 'leadership roles as part of the SHG training was likely to make women vocal at the Gram Sabha' when statistically tested had a significant association between the variable. Women as part of the SHG who participated in building leadership skills were the ones who were more vocal at the Gram Sabhas than those who had not participated in the SHG leadership skill building training programmes. The higher value of leadership skill learned increased the likelihood for women to be vocal at public fora.
- xi) Following, the working hypothesis 'leadership skills learned by women are likely to become aware about the project budget' was again established to understand the impact of gender strategy for empowerment of women. The result of the statistical analysis did not support the working hypothesis. It indicates that in spite of women learning leadership skills as part of the SHG training programmes it did not bring awareness in knowing the project budget.
- xii) The working hypothesis of the impact of gender development strategy on women's empowerment was established as, 'women after becoming member of the SHG it is more likely that they travel alone outside the village'. Statistically the association between the variables did not support the level of significance. Thus, women regardless of their affiliation with SHGs, they were still restricted from travelling alone outside the village.
- xiii) Even if women could not travel alone outside the village, some degree of restrictions on women's mobility could have been negotiated through the implementation of gender development strategy. In this process, the working hypothesis established was, 'women after becoming member of the SHG, they do not seek permission from the husbands or in-laws to attend the SHG meetings'. The statistical analysis amongst the variables indicated a significant positive association. Of the members of the SHGs (about 60 per cent) of them stated that they did not seek permission to attend SHG meetings held within the village level. Although women's mobility through the gender development strategy had increased but it was only within the villages. . Under the Jalswarajya Project there were little avenues for women to renegotiate power and control at the family level.
- xiv) Through leadership skill enhancement in the SHGs, it was possible that women were able to negotiate to travel alone outside the village. It was observed that there was a significant association between these two variables while statistically testing this working hypothesis. About 73 per cent of the women who had learned the leadership skills reported that they travelled alone outside the village. Thus, just by becoming member of the SHG it did not challenge women's position rather capacity building training in particular the leadership skills had a greater impact on women to renegotiate their ways to challenge the subordination of women.
- xv) Similarly the other gender development strategy was examined through the establishment of a working hypothesis, 'after becoming member of the SHG woman is likely to be

aware about the project costs'. There were no significant association between the variables due to which the working hypothesis had to be rejected.

- xvi) Like awareness of the Project budget, the association between the variables of being member of the SHG and awareness of committee roles and responsibilities was examined through the working hypothesis, 'after becoming member of the SHG it is more likely that women are aware about their committee (VWSC, WDC and SAC) roles and responsibilities'. The preference variables did not show statistically a significant association in each of the committee's roles and responsibilities. Thus the working hypothesis had to be rejected. Gender development strategy of the World Bank implemented through Jalswarajya Project has brought women to participate in the project activities but it did little to address the structural causes that inhibited the process of women's empowerment. So women were minimally interested to challenge the traditional pattern of decision-making process, which were usually held by the men.
- xvii) On the construction of public stand post/community toilets, a majority of the women respondents (about 73 per cent) stated the infrastructures were constructed as per their convenience.
- xviii) The gender disaggregated labour indicated that although a majority of about 55 per cent of the men were involved in agricultural activities, a large number of women about 45 per cent supported the men in the production sphere. Women participated through the labour intensive activities including weeding (about 74 per cent), harvesting (about 64 per cent) and threshing (about 66 per cent). They also participated with the men (about 47 per cent) in collecting the fodder.
- xix) On the household activities, an overwhelming majority about 96 per cent of the women were involved in cooking, collecting firewood, fetching water, washing utensils and clothes, cleaning the house, caring for the elders and childcare. In terms of household economic resources, about 63 per cent of the men had the control and decision making power.

Through the implementation of Jalswarajya Project there was no change in gender roles, in fact women's role had further been extended from the reproduction to production and to community work. The project did not address the ascribed gender roles of women and men; in fact it further strengthened the gender division of labour by bringing women to perform the community works as part of the cleanliness drive and community contribution of labour for the village development. This extended the women's labour from double to triple burden.

7. Benefits of Jalswarajya Project

- i) The benefits of Jalswarajya Project as perceived by women from the decentralised institutions after the factor analysis, revealed three factors: Personal Benefits, Economic Benefits and Overall Benefits.

- ii) Composite scores based on the mean of the items, which had their primary loading on each factor states, that Economic Benefit had the highest score. Thus, most of the women participating in the project considered economic benefit as their most beneficial aspect of the Jalswarajya. Much of women's participation and mobilisation were related with the movement of SHGs at the village, followed by overall benefit and finally the personal benefit.

7.4. Discussion

The shift from the traditional supply-driven approach to demand-driven approach brought about a drastic change in government policies. The end-users were made to pay for the services received from the government. Nevertheless, in the Jalswarajya Project, use of the obscure terms of supply-driven and demand-driven was to disguise the realignment of the state's economic role more often known as neo-liberalism - the shift away from redistributive taxation/expenditure policies towards reduced government intervention in the economy.

Under the 'supply-driven' system the finance for construction and planning came from tax collection - water charges (though partial) structured so as to allow (at least in theory) money collected from the wealthy to subsidise those without the ability to pay. The neo-liberal policy as implemented by the Jalswarajya project was to transfer the responsibility for 10 per cent of capital expenditure and 100 per cent of O&M costs onto all individuals, regardless of their ability to pay.

This was not the only aspect of the Project's neo-liberal design that would worsen inequalities by shifting more of the burden of payment onto the poor and the women. In the preface to the Jalswarajya Project's PIP document it was claimed that the project would succeed, because it will empower the Gram Sabhas and Village Panchayats and prepare them to be more responsive to the needs of the poor and the women (GoM, 2003a). This was a recipe which expressly allowed the socio-economic and political elites to shrink their responsibilities to the so-called weaker sections, and to continue to exclude those they had already 'socially marginalised'.

Nevertheless, much of women's participation within these decentralised institutions had been negotiated by caste and class factors. Overall, although it may seem that women's participation in the water project was fulfilled, women's inclusion were brought in the Project as representatives from the marginalised caste groups. As there was no specification as to what constituted 30 per cent of the marginalised - whether it was women or men. The women in the village from the SCs, STs, OBCs and the VJNTs were also mobilised as women groups for the establishment of the decentralised institutions. This reduced the opportunity for the marginalised men to be represented as members of the water committee. Hence from a gender perspective, there is overwhelming representation of women, and reduced proportion of men from the caste groups. Thus, in the future, the researcher intends to explore how the politics of representation within water institutions negotiate caste and gender factors to address participation and gender empowerment.

However, as also found by Kulkarni, Johnson and Prokopy, such situation not only added to the example of PRIs male proxy but also added up to the space where the rural elites found

opportunity to capture power and resources at the village level (Kulkarni et al., 2008; Johnson, 2003, Prokopy, 2004). Over emphasising the involvement of women at the community level without addressing the factors of caste and class (especially without segregating the proportion of gender participation) can mask the power differential and political interest within water institutes. As a result, very little information could be generated on the manner how water institutions operated. In fact these emerging trends observed within water governance could perpetuate the traditional discriminative practices against caste and gender. Nonetheless, women who were members of the decentralised institutions and part of the SHGs participated in the Project to bring change in their conditions. Through the SHGs training in particular the leadership training (being able to articulate with men) provided them the confidence in the public meeting and voice their needs, which resulted in them knowing about the project budget.

Further when it was stipulated that 10 per cent of the project cost was to be met through people's contribution, the answer from the field and also from the findings of Kulkarni et al., (2008) confirmed that the private contractors were reportedly offering to pay the beneficiaries 10 or 5 per cent contribution themselves. But how did it work? Local contractors paid people's contribution (in kind) to those poor women and men who contributed labour in receiving the water supply services at their doorstep. But which corners will the contractors then cut to make their profit? Even if the contractors built the water supply infrastructures with their profits, what will be the quality of the water supply structures and how well would it function in the long run were some of the critical issues. This was one of the important concerns, which this study in the future proposes to examine for understanding sustainability of these water supply resources especially in the context of climate change as it has already been found there are reduced incidences of water availability.¹

Additionally in some villages Kulkarni et al., (2008) found that the rural elites who held the president's position within the VWSC were obstructing the functioning of the Support Organisations (SOs) – local NGOs - by non-timely release of funds for capacity building programmes in the Project. With devolution of financial powers vested with the VWSC, the local rural elites found opportunities to exert control over the functioning of the NGOs and to circumvent the community contribution through the local contractors. This provided the rural elites in the VWSC, an ultimate ground to not only mask the power differentials in the village but also reinforced the traditional practices that subordinated woman by controlling information so that women could not raise questions against patriarchy. Consequently in the project an overwhelming majority of the women were unaware of the project budget.

Although there was higher proportion of women's participation in the committee meetings it was only to justify the project norms. Those women who participated in the Project were in the middle age groups. Similar findings observed by Ahmed (2008) in the Gujarat's drinking water project states, irrespective of women's participation in the committee meetings, women's knowledge about project budget and even handling the O&M of the water infrastructures was very little. Such practices of having women as nominal participants (as marked by Agarwal, 2010) in the Project is to justify the project norms which reduces the opportunity for the women to seek answers from the men in the village.

However, some women SHG members were actively vocal at the decentralised committee meetings, but much of the issues discussed in these water committee meetings were related to their practical gender needs. As rightly commented by Moser (1993), addressing of practical gender needs were much easier as it was less threatening. So overall women were vocal while addressing their water needs, but when it pertained to questioning men or seeking budget clarifications, they remained silent as it challenged the patriarchal order.

The Jalswarajya Project claimed that when women participated in the drinking water project they were considered to deliver efficiency and better water governance. But RSPMU Mid-Term Review classifies participation of women on headcounts rather than involvement in decision-making process, issues raised and women's needs being addressed, among others. Thus, while women were often seen as the key player but experiences from the field indicated that they had a minimal role in decision-making and handling the O&M of the water infrastructures. Most of the O&M were mostly handled by the rural elites (PrimMove, 2005b).

Besides, if participation led to empowerment of women, which the project claimed, then field findings contradicted the project goals. This was because women were mobilised to attend meetings, but the quality of their attendance differed. As rightly marked by Goetz (1997), it was found that these water institutions were often embedded in local social and power structures due to which the prevailing patriarchal values and norms imposed restrictions on women making it difficult to articulate their concerns and aspirations. Therefore participation in the Project became externally driven without any genuine processes to empower women.

However, when Jalswarajya Project provided the space for women to articulate their needs, women generally did not take up initiatives to address those inhibiting factors to empowerment as it implied challenging the household dynamics, power relations between wife and husband, and the relationships with in-law, among others. For example, young women who were members of the SHGs, and the decentralised institutions often had to seek permission from their husbands, and their in-laws. They were denied permission to travel alone outside the village and at times even to attend the SHG meetings.

The socio-cultural factors that were generally prevailed in South Asia and particularly in Maharashtra were often discriminatory towards women. Although degree of women's subordination may differ, overall the conditions that led to women's subordination were generally the same in South Asia (Krishan, 2007). But when caste intersects, it not only defines access (in terms of water) but also determine participation in public places such as community meetings in rural areas. Due to which, women from the lower caste groups (OBCs and the STs) took up active roles to participate in the Project in order to bring change in their conditions. But women from the upper caste groups did not participate in its fullest sense (referring to the typology of participation) as much of their work in terms of fetching water was usually done through paid labour. It is not to state the position of women in the upper caste are better off than others, but the concern is when projects like Jalswarajya is implemented, women from lower caste groups see such opportunity as a gate-way to reduce their suffering and bring change in their lives.

Such expectation in Jalswarajya Project led women from lower caste groups to participate in the project by becoming members of the decentralised institutions and SHGs. In fact these were spaces particularly SHGs, where these women utilised to re-negotiate the power relations at the village level.

As stated, the saved time in collecting water by the women was assumed to be used in constructive manner for income generation activities. This whole gamut of ideas promoted for appropriate justification to the saved time in collecting water was rationalised in the Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA). This tool of project appraisal involved the monetisation of gains and losses, and the subtraction of aggregate project costs from aggregate project benefits to arrive at an estimated net financial benefit – used by many neo-classical economists eventually predicting an economic growth rate. But all costs and benefits were not readily identifiable and monetised. So in Jalswarajya Project it was relied on counting the benefits of the time saved by women in using the improved water facilities and instigating IGAs.

However agreeing with Cleaver (1998b), provision of water had been the main incentive for participation of villagers in the drinking water projects, where she extends further by specifying that the time-saved phenomenon had been applied to women as an incentive so that women could participate in IGAs. Similarly in Jalswarajya Project this incentive was found with women becoming member of the SHGs and undertaking IGAs through revolving fund. Although this incentive had worked for women, but it concerned mainly the women from the lower caste groups who wanted to bring changes in their conditions so that they could provide water to meet the household work. Hence, it can be observed that see this incentive operated at different levels that cut-across class and caste and gender.

So having the incentive to justify women's improved conditions through the provision of drinking water and initiating IGAs did not suffice alone. Because through such an approach practical gender needs were prioritised over strategic needs.

The other primary reason for involvement of women beside the incentive to generate income was to increase their attendance in the committee meetings and handling the O&M of the water infrastructures for sustainability purpose. But in almost all villages, the O&M of the water supply were entrusted to the Village Panchayat. Women as SHGs were not involved at all in the collection of water tariffs; instead it was entrusted to the Panchayat peon. This showed that after the water needs were addressed at the village, the incentive that drew villager's participation gradually reduced with the realisation of their water need and the responsibility of O&M was transferred to the Panchayat. Thus, after the exit of Jalswarajya Project there was no decentralised committee meetings, in fact in some villages, the water supply infrastructure had broken down and no maintenance work was carried out within the period of 18 months of the exit phase.

Nevertheless, the involvement of women within drinking water projects has today become a standard practise to justify women's empowerment because SHGs were promoted as targeted approach to mobilise women to form SHGs. Therefore, they preferred getting those women who were already members of the decentralised institutions. Besides, it was easier to mobilise them for committee meetings than mobilising the non-SHG members in the village. Consequently we

find a difference in opinion amongst women who were members of the decentralised institutions but not members of SHGs with regard to their knowledge about Project budget and their respective committee roles and responsibilities.

However, the SHGs with the hope of bringing change in women's economic conditions were provided revolving funds (as loan) to instigate IGA, but with growing SHGs population, the quantum of revolving fund in the Project was not adequate to support the entrepreneurship development. Due to which, there were several fights amongst the SHGs members and between SHGs itself. Consequently it brought caste preferences to receive the SHG loans. Having lack of access to loan facilities and marketing plans, SHGs carried out similar activities and are not in the capacity to sustain the collective spirit.

Referring here to the CBA which the Project intends to justify the benefits of the project in terms of time-saved, becoming SHG members, instigating IGAs are in reality driven by other factors such as the reduced caste, class discrimination, improved women's land rights, reduced gender-based discrimination at household and community level, among others. Although some were latent variables, within gender studies it is important to develop quantitative indicators that could significantly contribute towards the normative concerns over women and water and be incorporated with other drinking projects that intended to implement activities from a gender perspective. So that gender inequalities in water sector could be countered when women and men are brought as equal partners within democratic institutions that get established as part of demand-driven approach. The implication of such an approach would effectively handle gender differences right from the inception/community mobilisation phase to conceal the traditional practises that sub-ordinate woman.

Nonetheless, the community participation in drinking water project ignored the social divisions, and the gender imbalances and further resulted in making women work harder as they were the least powerful. Women irrespective of performing the productive and reproductive roles due to community participation and contribution, their roles further got extended as unpaid labour with least recognition especially during the cleanliness drive at the village. Such findings were also observed by Joshi (2004), thus the poor women besides having their reproductive and productive roles they were mobilised to carry out the community work. Hence, agreeing with Kabeer (1994), Moser (1993), villages implementing community development projects for water and sanitation services extends the work of a woman from reproductive to productive and eventually to community work as a triple burden. Since drinking water and involvement of women are seen from a time-saved perspective, it actually increases women's work to perform the community roles as part of the collective (Cleaver, 1998b).

Nonetheless, the drinking water projects that justify the time-saved perspective for women's participation were typically implemented within the economic empowerment framework. The empowerment process did not percolate down to address the household dynamics. In fact agreeing with Krishna, (2008) development programmes irrespective of an effort to bring about gender empowerment of women they continue to be implemented on sexual division of labour and responsibilities. Consequently it is very rare these programs challenge the strategic gender needs. If it was an effort to, the traditional institutional structures that inhibited the empowerment process were to be focused. Though the leadership positions were provided to women in the

Project, men occupied those positions as presidents of VWSC and SAC. Due to which most women were unaware about the project budget, they seldom raised their voice to meet the strategic gender needs, as a result; women were mostly seen as water users in the Project rather than change agents.

However, the 'demand-driven' language adopted was women's empowerment but its implementation was gender neutral and ignored inequality in decision-making process and resource allocation. As a result the gender connotation in the project was often related to women and their homogeneity was assumed. The Jalswarajya Project although rhetorically tended to fall within the framework of gender and development but it was gender neutral and it failed to address equitable allocation of resources.

This was because with the implementing the women empowerment framework in the Project, women from the SHGs began to realise their roles and their interest to participate in the drinking water project, but it could not be sustained as much of the decision-making positions were held by the men, where they had created several mechanisms to control and exert power within the decentralised institutions. These structures eventually inhibited the process for the women in the SHGs to sustain the collective spirits as it was further intersected with caste difference. The extension of Jalswarajya Project as Phase II if continues to be addressed from a gender and development framework, there is a strong need for convergence of development programmes.

Convergence of development programmes could act as a fall back mechanism for women to continue the spirit of collectivisation. More importantly, the gender latent variables should have quantitative measures as project outcomes within the convergence strategy. This can be the first step to address Jalswarajya Project, which is likely to be reintroduced in 2012. Indeed participation of women in Jalswarajya Project through membership in SHG had enabled women to reap economic benefits to some extent, however, it was not able to change the gender roles and relations due to strong patriarchal values and the vested interest of the rural elites to control and exert power in allocation of resources. Thus, these influencing factors to women empowerment could be addressed if the gender latent variables were integrated as an expected outcome of drinking water projects.

7.5. Way forward

Further, when convergence of development programmes takes place, it is essential that gender interests (practical and strategic) be integrated into planning, designing, implementation and monitoring of the development schemes/projects. This is because, in the present context, very often cross-cutting issues (such as climate change, gender, health) are assumed to be addressed through convergence, but unfortunately there is no clear cut policy which directs how convergence of development services should take place.

In specific, projects that intend to bring people's participation through establishment of decentralised institutions should have measures for representation of the marginalised community members through a gender perspective. Such as within the 1/3rd representation of the SCs, STs in the PRIs or even within the water institutions there could be women representatives, for better gender representation. For example within the decentralised institutions of Jalswarajya

Project 50 per cent representation of women is on the total number of members, but if the 50 per cent representation is also incorporated within the SCs and STs category besides their 1/3rd representation it presents a comprehensive gender representation. This could also prevent proxy representation of women and the capture of power and control over the resources by the rural elites. If not, women representation is again homogenised.

There are several studies and policies that direct recognising women's multiple roles, which should be integrated within water resource management, but unless efforts are made from the male members of the community, no such policy change or effective planning can bring about improvements within women's conditions. Just as women are trained to challenge the traditional practises that subordinate them, likewise, men from rural communities can also be trained on gender sensitivity issues.

Such a strategy needs policy address and effective planning. This will not only open up avenues for women to be part of the power re-negotiation at village level (pre and post training programmes), but at the same time they would be putting across issues which patriarchal mind-set does not address. . This re-negotiation process may continue even after the project gets over usually with its stipulated time frame (like the 18 months project cycle in Jalswarajya) to challenge the power structures.

As stated, convergence of development programmes is important for sustainability of project activities, it is also a mechanism for women to regain the momentum to voice their needs even after the accomplishment of projects. This will not only secure women's needs but also reinforce the willingness to challenge the historical inequalities over a period unlike projects, which are time-bound.

The convergences of drinking water projects can take place in several manners: similar to the functioning of PRIs on tenure basis, water committees can also function on similar manner; and like to the rotational representation within the PRIs, the decentralised water committees can also have rotational representation. This will ensure a not only a fall back mechanism for women empowerment process after the implementation of the project but also secure the differing needs of the community in villages and sustain the water supply infrastructures.

Henceforth, though women's empowerment is a slow process, development projects need to sustain and plan collectivisation of women to influence decision-making at household and community level even after projects are completed.

Notes:

1

Availability of Drinking Water Sources from 2005-06 to 2007-08		
Districts in Maharashtra	Collecting drinking Water from Improved Sources	
	(2005-2006)	(2007-2008)
Chandrapur	94.6	74.1
Latur	98.1	74.9
Nandurbar	93.7	91.9
Source: SRI (2008, p.24)		