

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is about women's participation within the decentralised institutions (Village Water and Sanitation Committee, Women Development Committee and Social Audit Committee), established by Jalswarajya Project as part of the sector reform initiative. The Project is known as the world largest sector reform drinking water project implemented by the Government of Maharashtra (GoM) in 2003. The Jalswarajya Project with the objective to establish decentralised institutions for effective delivery of water services, promoted women and the marginalised caste groups' participation for efficiency and equitable distribution of water resources.

The move for inclusion of women as a key partner in development (rather as water managers) came with the postulation of Dublin Principles reiterated at the Earth Summit in 1992. This brought a paradigm shift amongst several governments from being a service provider to the role of a facilitator. Similarly women's role in drinking water was recognised predominately based on their reproductive roles that demanded water. At the same time, demand-driven approach as part of sector reform saw water being treated as an economic good where people had to pay for its usage provided by private players.

The Jalswarajya Project brought 50 per cent women's representation within the decentralised institutions, which was a move beyond one-third representation of women within the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs). The Projects were implemented based on villager's demand and their choice of technology. The end-users (villagers) were involved in designing, planning, implementing, contributing capital cost (in partial – 10 per cent) and handling 100 per cent operation and maintenance cost of the water supply infrastructures.

Above all, women participating in the Project were seen to move from private to public spheres challenging the patriarchal values. Promotion of Self Help Groups (SHGs) for economic gains was considered to create new avenues for women to renegotiate the traditional discriminative practices for their empowerment. This gender development strategy had been viewed as affirmative action of the State to justify the time-saved by women in collecting water (Cleaver, 1998).

Several researches relating to women and drinking water reported that when women were organised as groups it facilitated a process of empowerment, because economic opportunity provided a support for women to form alliance with the men within the decentralised institutions (Narayan, 1995). But recent studies from the field with regard to women and drinking water within the sector reform projects highlighted that, women's participation had largely been to justify the project norms; the collectivisation of women had actually not led to any substantive changes in their economic conditions (Kulkarni et al., 2008, Datar, 2008, Joshi, 2004). Most of these field studies were carried out while the projects were being implemented.

### **Research Process**

In this regard, to understand the roles and responsibilities of women within the decentralised institutions, its impact on women's decision-making process at

household and village level and the gender variations related to empowerment of women were examined amongst those villages where the Project was in an exit phase.

The guiding methodology in the study included a mix of quantitative and qualitative approach. The quantitative information were triangulated through qualitative tools such as Focus Groups Discussions and the 'Then and Now Analysis' of PRA Method.

Since the study considered reviewing the gender development strategy, women as members of the decentralised institutions were selected as respondents based on the completion of the Project as listed by the Reform Sector Project Management Unit - GoM. A total of 12 villages were surveyed and the sample size was determined based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970) technique and using 10 per cent sample as reserved category. The total sample in the villages was 248 respondents.

The analysis of the quantitative data was carried out through the application of descriptive and inferential statistics. Chi-square test and Fisher's Exact Test was applied to determine the association between the categorical variables and the  $p$  value. Tri-variate analysis was conducted to draw the causal inference. Factor analysis using principle component analysis was applied to understand the benefits of Jalswarajya Project. Since the research hypotheses were qualitative in nature, there were several specific working hypotheses developed to understand the association between the variables in relation to the Project outcomes. Over all the qualitative data was used to support the conclusions from the quantitative analysis.

### **Research Outputs**

Although the Jalswarajya Project rules/non-negotiable principles were addressed, women's participation within the decentralised institutions was largely seen to justify the project norms. The rural elites from the Village Water and Sanitation Committee had used women's participation as a measure for caste representation. Due to which, most women from the Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribe and Other Backward Class were seen as proxy representatives.

Women participating in the decentralised institutions were mostly through the recommendation of the Gram Sarpanch and the Gram Sevak. In reality, the rural elites motivated the women including their family members to participate so that the rural families could benefit from the Project activities.

Gender development strategy of the project aimed to bring changes in the lives of women from the marginalized caste groups. The SHG was a critical factor that had motivated women to participate in Jalswarajya Project.

In specific, leadership trainings provided to women as part of the SHG capacity building programme had an important role in women being vocal at the committee meetings and in their ability to travel alone outside the village. But the efforts did not sustain, as the process of women empowerment was viewed as project related activities.

Nonetheless, while SHG brought significant change within the rural women, it was not able to challenge the sub-ordination of women. Although, women participated in

the committee meetings as equal partners with the men and were vocal, they had limited influence within the decision-making process. Stronger control and power were exerted by the rural male elites to control decision-making and information regarding the Project budget. This was because the men largely held the key decision-making positions within the decentralised institutions.

At the household level, becoming a member of the SHG played a key role in their participation within the decision-making process, but the decision-making process itself was limited to addressing gender practical needs. The gender strategic needs were not addressed. Though majority of the men controlled economic decisions, but to some extent women were also seen having access to economic resources through the SHG loans. As a result, the women from the decentralised institutions considered economic benefits as the most beneficial aspect of the Project.

The gender development strategy did little to address the ascribed roles of women within the reproductive and productive spheres; in fact through the community-led project it extended the role of women to community work.

### **Discussions and way forward**

The incentive in drinking water project especially with the time-saved phenomena (Cleaver, 1998) had generated women's participation in the hope of bringing change in their conditions. But women's participation within the institutions was seldom realised as constructive change agents because much of these institutions were often embedded with social local power structures (Goetz, 1997).

The rural elites have had found opportunities to capture power and control over the Project funds and use women from the marginalised caste groups as another example of proxy representatives of the PRIs within water governance. Thus, over-emphasising of women's participation without addressing caste and class factor (which Jalswarajya Project does) in the gender development strategy actually masked the power differentials and political interest within the water institutes.

As a result, it was observed that often the local contractors for the construction of water supply infrastructures paid the five per cent people's contribution in kind by using the labour of poor women and the men in the village. This was a win-win situation for both the rural elites to exercise power and control and the local contractor to maximise profit.

On the other hand, when gender development strategy was implemented women from the lower caste groups saw it as an opportunity to escape from their sufferings. With that hope, they participated in the SHGs but most of gender practical needs were prioritised over the strategic needs. As a result, the gender strategy development constructed in an empowerment framework did little at household and at community level to challenge the patriarchal values and norms.

Although gender development strategy created a momentum for women to voice their practical needs, there is a need where the capacity building training programmes continues. This can be brought through convergence of development programmes that intend to address women's empowerment through quantifying latent variables as part

of the Project output indicators. This is what the researcher in the future intends to study.

Further, to prevent proxy representation of women within water institutes, it is essential that appropriate gender representation be in place even within the 1/3<sup>rd</sup> caste representation. This will provide the poor women and men equal opportunity to participate thereby minimising the scope of power capture by the rural elites.

Thus, sustenance of women's collective efforts, their spirits and their capability to influence decisions at village and household is equally important as sustenance of water resources.