CHAPTER 7

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND WATER GOVERNANCE

Quantitative data was collected at the village level to assess the degree of women's empowerment as a result of SEWA's intervention for community water management initiatives, which is being presented in this final chapter of the field study. To assess women's empowerment at village level, focus was on to assessing the following aspects:

1. Women and Water Governance
2. Women's Control over their Time and Income
3. Interview with men to get men's opinion on the changing gender relations as well as the reasons for this change
4. Women's Position in the society and in the household to assess the role women take.

This Chapter provides the analysis of gender in water resource development and management at the village level by looking into the main issues on how work, control and benefits are divided between women and men. It is considered very important to assess the changes in gender relations caused by the increased women's awareness, leadership and responsibilities taken up by women through water management activities and to assess the nature of women's empowerment and how the gender relations in villages where SEWA is active compare with the gender relations in the control villages. This is helpful in establishing the empowerment of the community, especially the women in them. The empowerment of women and the sustainability of water resources based on efficient use and management of water, as discussed in the last two chapters, indicate good governance and thereby a change in the politics of water and water management systems at the village level.

The issue of women's empowerment and water governance through Panchayati Raj institutions could be looked at either in a way that it will automatically enhance women's participation in crucial issues affecting them, such as, water management. Simultaneously, it is also possible that enhanced participation of women in village development programmes, such as those related to water management, will bring about their empowerment and lead to the better governance of resources through Panchayati Raj Institutions. Whatever the case may
be, it is worth considering whether this, in turn, will usher in more effective policies and programmes in the water sector, as women will then be able to decide upon issues affecting their lives and derive equal share in the benefits in the sector. To look into these questions based on the arguments stated above, the study conducted at the village level has sought to assess the empowerment of women. Through the data thus collected an effort is made to understand the level of changes that have come about in the lives of women through their participation in the water programmes and to assess the relationship between women’s empowerment and their participation in water programmes.

1. Women and Water Governance

It is considered that effective participation of women in community water issues is one of the ways of assessing women’s empowerment, therefore, the study conducted through focus groups in SEWA and non SEWA villages looks into the following aspects related to water governance:

i) Women’s participation in Water Management Programmes and Water Committees

ii) Women’s interaction with Panchayat and Water Board officials

iii) Women’s participation In Training programmes

iv) Changes in gender roles in water management have been assessed in following terms:
   a. Regarding decision making for investment in traditional water sources
   b. Regarding use of water
   c. Follow-up after breakdown
   d. Decisions about Construction operation and maintenance
   e. Upgrading-Operation and Maintenance

i) Women’s participation in Water management activities and water committee

As stated in the last chapter, in SEWA villages of Banaskantha, watershed management structures, plastic lined ponds and roof rainwater harvesting structures have been constructed. In Sabarkantha women have taken up technical tasks of handpump repairs and maintenance and also watershed activities. In Surendranagar technical task of Operation and Management of Pipeline Water supply and also construction of Roof rainwater harvesting tanks has been done in SEWA villages. All this has become possible through large-scale village mobilization.
and formation of water committees for each of the above-specified activities. The water committees that are formed have the participation ratio of men to women at 50 to 80 percent and include the panchayat representatives. In non SEWA villages, water sources developed by the water board include watershed in all the three districts and handpumps in Sabarkantha, and pipeline water supply in Banaskantha and Surendranagar. The village communities have not been actively involved in the tasks of installation operation and management of the sources and watershed structures exist only in papers.

Table: 7.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women's</th>
<th>% of Women in SEWA Villages</th>
<th>% of Women in Non SEWA Villages (Control Villages)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i) Participation in Water Management Programmes and Water Committees</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) Interaction with Panchayat and Water Board officials</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii) Participation In Training programmes</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table is related i) ii) & iii) on Women and Water Governance in SEWA and non SEWA villages*

The table also shows a very high percentage of women's participation, 95 % in SEWA villages and comparatively in non SEWA villages, about 40% of women participate in water management activities and water committees (but they have almost negligible decision making or actual powers so their participation is mostly in name). Therefore, in some cases the fund for watershed activities has been granted and used up, however no actual structure exists in the villages. Similarly, water committees are non-functional although they do exist in name in some villages since this is one of the government guideline for funding.

ii) Women's interaction with panchayat and Water Board officials
Women were asked questions about their interaction with water related government officials at different levels i.e. village district and state levels. In SEWA villages 80% of all women have learnt to participate and conduct gram sabhas and have interacted with water board officials at
the district and state level. They have also learnt that it is their legal right to do so and ask for their water rights in a constructive and effective manner. In Control villages, women do not actively participate in gram sabhas and interaction with the water board authorities such as GWSSB. This is shown in the table above.

iii) Women's participation in Technical Training
Access to training is considered a very essential part of the empowerment process of village communities. Women’s access to training is very crucial in this regard since women are often neglected. In SEWA villages, earlier only men had been receiving technical training but now women are well trained in all water-related activities. Efforts have been made in getting women training in watershed, handpump repair, roof rain water harvesting, pipeline operation and management, which have either directly or indirectly affected their time and income. Thus this has drastically changed the way women perceive their status and role and the way society treats them. In control villages, women still depend upon men to handle the technical management related aspects of water sources although they are not satisfied with the quality of services provided and commitment and sensitivity in solving their water related problems.

iv) Changes in gender roles
Changes in gender roles were assessed in water management due to women’s leadership and increased women’s participation in the following terms:

Table: 7.2
Changing gender roles in community water management in SEWA and non SEWA villages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision regarding</th>
<th>SEWA (%)</th>
<th>Non SEWA (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment in traditional water sources</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Water</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up after breakdown</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upgrading-Operation and Maintenance</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction of new water sources</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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As seen in the table above, the women in the SEWA villages appear to be more involved in the community water resources than women in the control villages, with an exception of the use of water, which is women's issue only in both types of villages.

2. Women's Control over their Time and Income

Apart from assessing the role of women in water governance and changing gender role in water management, the study also looked into the aspect of empowerment in terms of women's control on their own lives. As shown in earlier chapters that women gain and save time and income when water conditions are improved and therefore they take keen interest in participating and sustainably managing water resources locally. When women initiate action to improve water supply and find success, they also take care to keep it in good condition and thereby get enough time to spend on their other income generating activities. Secondly, when they directly take charge of operation and management of local water management systems, then that usually becomes a means of income generation. However to understand if the women are truly empowered in this process it is important that they themselves decide on what they want to do with the time and income saved. One of the criteria to assess the level of women's empowerment is to know who takes the decisions in the household regarding the women's time and income, i.e. whether they alone decide or they take decisions in consultation with others in the household, or someone else, like the husband or in-laws, decide about women's time and income saved due to improved water condition.

It is considered that the water management tasks and responsibilities have helped in terms of women having more time and income for themselves when water is easily available to them. One of the first indicators on whether women now have sufficient control over the way they want to use their time and money is by considering

a) if women are making the decisions alone or
b) with someone in the household or
c) if someone else is still deciding for her
In all three districts, in SEWA villages and control village’s women feel that they do have a great degree of control over their time although more women in SEWA villages felt so. Among women who do not have a say on how they spend their time saved were mostly recently married women, who still have according to local customs to obtain a position in their households.

**Control over Income by Women**

However, on control over income, the women in SEWA village felt that they had most control over their income from activities that they have taken up after SEWA’s intervention but they have least control of the entire household income. Some women in SEWA village who also have least control over the income are probably the same group that does not have control over their time. In control villages, women have not started any independent activities related to water and they still have to spend a lot of time in water collection and have very little free time.
3. Interview with men to get men’s opinion on the changing gender relations as well as the reasons for this change

As gender concerns the relationship between women and men, the women’s husbands were interviewed about the changes in gender relations they have observed over the last 10 years, as well as about their opinion about these changes.
Men's opinions on changes in gender relations

The assessment is indicated in the following terms:

a) The men’s opinion on the **changes that are taking place**: In both SEWA villages and non-SEWA/Control villages, the men feel that the gender relations have changed and that the position of the women in the household and the village society has changed. Changes in the SEWA villages, however, are stronger than in the control villages. With some exceptions, the men in both types of villages are positive about the changes that are taking place.

b) Men’s opinion on the **type of changes that are taking pace**: These were stated to be a combination of the aforementioned issues like women having savings and assets and participation in water management and other household and community decisions etc. in both SEWA and Control villages.

c) Finally, men’s opinion on the **reasons for these changes taking place**: In SEWA villages, the men identified SEWA’s activities and an increased exposure to the outside world as the main reasons for the change and in control villages, changes in society as a whole was identified as the main reason for change in gender roles.
4. Women's Position in the society and the household

Women's Position in the society and household has also been studied to assess the role women take. Regarding what type of changes in leadership role of women in society in SEWA and non-SEWA villages, the following stages or levels of participation were taken into consideration:

- Leader of other villages
- Leader of women in other villages
- Leader of women in the village
- Speaking in the village meetings
- Going to meetings in the other villages
- Going to village meetings
- Never going in meetings

Graph 7.4 Changing role of women at Society level in SEWA and non SEWA villages

Leadership Role of Women in SEWA and Non-SEWA Villages
Women in SEWA village participate more in the village meetings and some of them are even active as leaders in other villages. Women in non-SEWA village mostly do attend the village meetings but their role and participation declines in terms of the other roles.

Following issues were taken into consideration to see the changes in gender relation at the household level:

- Going out alone
- Children going to school
- Women have savings
- Women participate in agricultural decisions
- Woman participate in decisions on purchase of cattle
- Women have own assets in their name

In the case of SEWA villages the changes in the above aspects were assessed in terms of before and after SEWA's intervention while in the case of control villages the gender relations changes were assessed with a comparison of now and what it was 10 years back.

Table: 7.3 Changing gender relations in SEWA and non-SEWA villages at household level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SEWA</th>
<th>Non SEWA/Control Villages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>After</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going out alone</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children going to school</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women have savings</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women participate in agricultural decisions</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman participate in decisions on purchase of cattle</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women have own assets in their name</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that in both SEWA and non SEWA villages, gender relations have changed over the last 10 years for example more women have started going out of their
houses alone and more children are going to school, and so on. These changes seem to be an outcome of the ongoing changes in society as a whole that are taking place. On a number of key issues such as participation in agricultural decision making, savings, ownership of assets, gender relations in SEWA villages have improved more in favour of the women, as compared to control villages.

Gender role and responsibility at the Household level was also assessed by looking into who is providing the help to women for completing their tasks: the husband, girls or boys especially during normal water situation and during the time of water shortage.

Table: 7.4 Help from household members in SEWA and non SEWA villages to complete women's tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Water Situation</th>
<th>Average no. of hrs in SEWA villages</th>
<th>Average no. of hrs in non SEWA villages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normal Time</td>
<td>Husband 1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls 3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys 1</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Breakdown time</td>
<td>Husband 2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls 4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys 1</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In both SEWA villages and control villages most of the help is given by girls, and in this respect little change in gender roles are found except in the case of water breakdown when SEWA women receive more help than women in control village. This is either because of the income-generating work that she has taken up and the leadership role that women have taken up in SEWA village to help improve the water situation in the village.

From the above data it can be said that the case study of SEWA indicates that empowerment cannot be said to have been achieved through participation merely in terms of numbers. Qualitative aspects are equally essential in the process, which has been shown through
women's greater control over their time, income and help from household and leadership in society as discussed above. At the household level, positive changes have come about due to women's increased role and the data shows that women have gained confidence in going out alone and have taken the initiative of sending children to school. They have more savings with more control over water availability in the village and they therefore make more agricultural decisions since they decide that excess water is not used up affecting availability of drinking water in the village. Interestingly, women now also participate in decisions on purchase of cattle and having assets in their own name, which was not happening earlier.

In all these fronts there have been changes in women's life in general and in lives of SEWA members in particular. Perhaps more crucial is to see that women from socially backward and poorer classes who are members of SEWA are the ones taking lead and hence have been empowered in this collective effort on the issue that so closely affects them. Significantly, the data clearly brings out that women have shown great ingenuity in terms of participating and making a positive impact on water governance, which is seen through their increased participation in water management programmes and water committees, increased interaction with panchayat and water board officials and participation in training programmes. Positive changes in gender roles in water management have been observed with increased capacity of women regarding decision making for investment in traditional water sources, regarding use of water, follow up after breakdown, decisions about construction operation and maintenance and also for upgrading maintenance. Interestingly, women have shown leadership in a small way even in villages other than their own and are recognized as leaders in their own village. They have now taken courage in speaking in the village meetings, in going to these meetings in the villages and sometimes even in conducting meetings in other villages.

The collective strength of women has demonstrated sustainable models on water management in several villages across Gujarat as seen in earlier chapter. It is true that empowerment automatically does not lead to greater effectiveness in all water governing activities since there are political and cultural constraints, but presently it can be safely concluded that there are greater chances of better governance of drinking water management systems through women's empowerment and participation in panchayats than were prevalent in the villages before such efforts were initiated in these districts.