

Community Participation in Watershed Management

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In the past, watershed management was synonymous with increase in crop productivity. Today, it is synonymous with poverty alleviation and sustainable development of watersheds for the welfare of the population or land users. Watershed management is seen in its entire complexity, where interrelated factors and their interactions are considered with the objective of poverty alleviation and food security of the populations. The past models of development, e.g., government or outside agency driven development programs (often top down) have not proved to be successful and have resulted in a waste of available resources (budgets).

With the new focus on poverty alleviation and food security through appropriate natural resources management, both people and natural resources become the focus of watershed management. Participation of local community in watershed development and management is essential to sustain the watersheds.



Community Interventions

There are many activities which are not effective, when attempted at an individual field or farm level, but call for simultaneous community action. For some areas/activities community interventions are essential. These activities are:

- Management of social forestry and pasture lands.
- Management of surface and groundwater resources.
- Maintenance of major structures.
- Management of gully control structures.
- Maintenance of drainage ways.
- Resolution of conflicts.
- Management of community funds.
- Management of other common property resources.



Key Elements in Participatory Processes

Some critical elements, which need to be integrated into watershed management programs have often been overlooked in the past. The following critical elements are the key elements in participatory processes for integrated watershed management:

- Participatory, multidisciplinary, and multi-sectoral approach.
- Envisioning of both farmers and professionals for integrated watershed management.
- Farmers' empowerment and ownership of watershed management processes and programs.
- Assured and quick benefit generation by watershed management programs.
- Land use titling/tenure for farmer ownership of watershed management programs.
- Mainstreaming gender concerns specially those of women and other disadvantaged groups.

Basic Principles for Effective Community Participation

Mutual respect

All people must be accepted as they are with their strengths and weaknesses.

Active involvement

Active involvement of the people is a pre-requisite for participation. Participation patterns must continue from planning through evaluation.

Agree to disagree

Participation requires an implicit and explicit understanding to agree and disagree and to accept the common interest above personal interest.

Building consensus

Collective responsibility for decisions made.

Commitment to action

Collective commitment to action on the basis of agreed upon decisions and plans.

Community Participation Activities

To improve community participation in watershed management the following activities are important:

- Establishing farmers' organizations.
- Capacity building of farmers in the following areas:
 - In planning and implementation of watershed project.
 - Conflict management.
 - Fund management.