



**8<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference  
Good Rural Governance and Citizen Participation**

(S M Sehgal Foundation and National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj)

**Village-Level Water Management: Community Participation and Convergence of Village Institutions**

India International Centre  
December 7, 2018



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# Background

The Eighth Annual Conference on Good Rural Governance and Citizen Participation, “Village-Level Water Management: Community Participation and Convergence of Village Institutions,” was organized jointly by S M Sehgal Foundation (Sehgal Foundation) in Gurugram and National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad, and presented on December 7, 2018, at India International Center, New Delhi.

NIRDPR is an internationally acclaimed United Nations ESCAP Center of Excellence in capacity building, action research, skill development, and behavioral change of rural development functionaries. Sehgal Foundation has worked since 2008 to streamline a model to secure good rural governance in communities through effective citizen participation and the involvement of various stakeholders including law schools and local government institutions. In collaboration with Jindal Global Law School and University of Baltimore School of Law, Sehgal Foundation organized its first annual conference on Good Governance and Citizen Participation in 2011. The conference series concept was to develop shared understandings, peer learning, and collaborative partnerships among stakeholders who are closely aligned with the theme of rural governance and access to justice. In the following five years, conference themes ranged from experience sharing to targeting specific government schemes and mobilizing stakeholder opinions and idea exchanges.

Furthering the concept of community participation in different sectors, “Village Level Water Management: Community Participation and Convergence of Village Institutions” in 2018 underlined the importance of community in planning, executing, and sustaining water projects in villages. In addition, conference participants discussed, probed, and reflected good practices of enabling community participation, nuances of relationships between water committees and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), ways to overcome the challenges of timelines in CSR funds, dominance of government departments in the development of water projects and their implications for community participation, and ideas for water-sustainable villages.

## Conference Theme

Water management has long been moving away from a top-down to a bottom-up community participation approach. Efforts are made to involve the community in the planning, execution, implementation, and sustainability of water projects at all levels—villages, cities, states, and nationally. But urgent community needs, such as extreme shortages of drinking water, have to be resolved immediately. Short timelines for completing projects push community participation to a backseat as project outcomes gain more importance. The lack of community finances is also a constraint as government departments and corporate stakeholders who make major financial contributions have determining influence in the projects. The

community again is forced to take a backseat. They want projects to come to their villages, and they cede space to donors to make all decisions in the project.

Government, both central and state, has no doubt included community participation in the policies and programs. Prime examples are the National Water Policy and the National Rural Drinking Water Programme. However, community participation in most policies and programs vary in social context and in the extent of devolution in urban and rural local bodies. Lack of participatory spaces for communities also affects the participation of women, the most important stakeholders in village-level water management.

In some states where water-user associations have legal status, an institutional structure is provided for community participation and maintenance of water bodies. However, water committees formed by NGOs and corporates for a particular project or structure in some states tend to supersede the gram panchayat. This often leads to conflict between water committees and gram panchayats over which body is the final decision-making authority. Thus the existence of multiple bodies creates overlapping responsibilities in the gram panchayat, and community participation loses direction and motivation. In such an atmosphere, priority is given to the completion of projects, not worrying about institutions and community participation, which affects the sustainability of projects.

Sustainability cannot be achieved without the community becoming engaged from the inception of the project. There is a need to scale up the collaborative model so that the community has the determining role. The determining question is how to put water policies and projects and engaged community participation into practice at the village level.

### **Conference objectives**

- 1) **Promote engagement** among policymakers, practitioners, community leaders, gram panchayats, and corporates on community participation in village-level water management, funding water projects for conserving and distributing water equitably, and sustaining the structures over time.
- 2) **Generate discussion** on a water sustainability plan in order to bring about behavioral changes in the consumption of water in households and on farms.
- 3) **Knowledge and experience-sharing** on water management innovations for replication and scaling up in various parts of India.

# Discussion Highlights

## Inaugural Plenary



The inaugural address, by Professor Ajay Pandey, chief executive officer of Sehgal Foundation, emphasized the importance of water in all lives, especially in the context of rural India where the water crises are felt more severely. He stressed engaging communities in decision-making processes as the only key to solve the multifarious crises concerning water management in rural India. He also approached the participants of the conference, especially representatives of the grassroots level organizations, to share good practices on community-led water management.

Dr. MVRL Murthy, water consultant, Tanager, focused on addressing the issue of water conservation and community-driven initiative, along with quantification of water saved and its utilization. He noted that the majority of India's population experiences water scarcity due to inequitable availability and distribution of water. He reiterated the importance of water conservation in agriculture, as in India, 80 percent of the total water is being utilized in the agriculture sector. Hence efficient management of water in agriculture is required to save a huge quantity of water as well as promote its optimum utilization. He drew attention on the community-driven initiatives and technologies in agriculture that can help farmers save water in irrigation. These practices include agriculture rainwater harvesting with fertigation, drip irrigation, irrigation scheduling, and mulching. Further, quantification of water can be adopted, as was illustrated in the case of mint farming. Through equipment like tensiometer, and information on the water requirement of the crop, farmers irrigate the crop with the right amount of water, which not only saves water but also results in increased production.

Mr. Manas Satpathy, integrator, PRADAN, talked about methods of engaging the community in integrated natural resource management with a focus on water management. He specifically highlighted involvement and capacity building of the community from the planning and implementation to utilization and maintenance process in order to promote community ownership. He also stressed mobilization of the local community needs to precede the preparation of community-level natural resource management plan.

## Panel 1. Innovation leading to water security



Panel 1 discussed innovations leading to water security. The panelists came from various grassroots level organizations across India and discussed in detail the social innovations that have succeeded in providing water security to some of the most marginalized sections of the society. The focus of the discussion was on the scalability of these innovations from a very small local context to national-level policy-making and its replicability. The major problems and possible solutions identified by the panelists included the following:

- The discussion underscored institutionalization of the water sector and water pricing. The requirement of an integrated approach was identified to ensure water security. A river basin approach is one such example that needs governance mechanism and requires a multidisciplinary approach.
- Technologies for Climate Resilience in the water sector, such as GIS, resource, and village mapping, are useful tools in accessing different aspects of water use. In addition to this, check dams, which represent a traditional technology like Bhungroo and RWH (rainwater harvesting) systems, are proven and effective sustainable water security technologies. Promotion of portable drinking water quality monitoring kits, for example, Jal-Tara developed by organizations such as Development Alternatives, can assure clean drinking water, as is the kits are cost-effective, portable, compact, and easy to operate. Low-cost water filters can provide the solution to the problems of high levels of arsenic, fluoride, and multi-parameter purification (bacteria, iron, and arsenic) solutions, depending on the water conditions of the area.
- Rooftop rainwater harvesting methods are quite effective in fluoride resistance. Providing river water or water through RWH for drinking purposes, as rainwater is considered to be one of the purest forms of water, is one of the best ways to prevent fluorosis. Rooftop rainwater harvesting can address the highly pressing issue of scarcity of safe drinking water both qualitatively and quantitatively. It also helps address climate change, rainfall irregularity, and off-time rainfall issues. Being demand-driven, this methodology has potential for long-term sustainability.

- Inter-country adoption of ideas was discussed. Inter-AguaClara is a multi-disciplinary program at Cornell University that designs sustainable water treatment systems to achieve long-term environmental, social, and economic sustainability. Primarily AguaClara was in Honduras but, in 2013, its implementation extended beyond Honduras. The experience of community water filters was discussed in the Indian context.

## **Panel 2. Convergence of water committees, gram panchayats, and district administration**



Discussions in Panel 2 centered mostly around the convergence of water committees, gram panchayats, and district administration. The convergence method follows a bottom-up approach instead of a traditional top-down approach in the management of water resources, making the community crucial stakeholders. Panelists highlighted the need for sustainability and convergence to go hand-in-hand.

The discussion emphasized that the adoption of a needs-driven and adaptable approach based on participation of villagers is required to ensure their full participation in the projects. This can be achieved by giving them a decision-making role in project design, using their traditional knowledge. Since most of the projects are time-bound and objective driven, community participation takes a back seat. This makes villagers completely dependent on the intervention agency for the long-term maintenance and operation of the resources provided. It was observed in several projects that, once the duration of the project was over, the resources become non-operational because of the non-participation of the community.

Discussions of examples across India revealed that participation of the community can be ensured by:

- Involving the villagers in the decision-making process before the implementation of the intervention.
- Empowering end-users for sustainable management of drinking water assets. Form water committees in the village to mobilize and empower the villagers.

- Partial capital cost-sharing, either in cash, or kind, or both, and responsibility of operation and maintenance by the villagers.

Various successful community-led water interventions were discussed to understand the convergence between community, intervention agencies, and government agencies.

- **Chitte River rejuvenation:** The project rejuvenated 16.5 km of Chite River, which directly affects 15,000 people. The villagers were initially involved in the project through entry-level activities like multi-purpose hall, the building of roads, providing solar lamps and kitchen gardens. Further SHGs were formed in the village and on-ground planning of the project was done with consultation of the community. This has ensured people's participation and resulted in the collection of Rs. 2 crores 59 lacs (approximately) from the community.
- **Check dam in Sato Village:** SATO, a small tribal village of Bishunpur Block of Gumla district, Jharkhand, is situated at a high altitude and surrounded by hills and mountains. The dam was built with the help of community participation. Contributions toward the building of the dam in cash or kind was collected, and the community was made responsible for its maintenance. Further, the convergence was also seen when villagers and the Forest Department collaborated in building the dam.
- **Spring corning:** Konkan district has a lot of rainfall, but due to a lack of infrastructure related to water harvesting, hardly any water is saved and stored. After September every year, the district faces water scarcity resulting in large-scale migration from villages. The traditional springs were identified by the community and a small reservoir was constructed to collect the water with a minimum cost involved as labor cost was provided by the community. The community took ownership of the traditional water bodies and has maintained them so that water is available in the village at least 3–5 more months, which has resulted in reduced migration.
- **Har Ghar Jal ka Nal:** Efforts of the Bihar government to provide clean drinking water to every citizen of the state, without any discrimination, resulted in the formulation of the program *Har Ghar Jal ka Jal*, under which clean drinking water is to be provided in approximately two crore households in the state through concerted cooperation of the people of every village and locality. As a part of this, schemes have been modulated to provide a piped water supply to every household with a view to end their dependence on hand pumps (*chapakal*) and other sources of drinking water. However, implementation of the program is facing some critical challenges like upper caste families with influence getting the access quickly and families of scheduled caste and extremely "backward" classes still struggling for water supply. Organizations like Landesa are advocating for equitable access to water under this program.

### Panel 3. Community Participation in village-level water management



In India, the government provides financial support, policy guidance, and technical support for building and management of water resources. Over time, it was realized that people's perception is that water is an item of social good to be provided free of cost by the government, rather than a scarce resource that should be managed by the community. The reasons for this, as identified in the discussion, are as follows:

- The water supply programs have so far been driven by a top-down approach, entirely managed by the Government.
- The water solutions are based on modern engineering-based knowledge and are beyond the capacities of the rural community to understand.
- There is a complete lack of involvement of the communities in the planning, selection, construction, or management of water resources.

Experiences of various community-led water interventions show that communities are willing and able to manage and co-manage the water resources they need. What they require is the capacity to pursue their basic right, which is often denied to them. This was also seen in various interventions discussed by the panelists.

- Social preparedness case of Dhundhar: Dhundhar covers an area of Ajmer, Jaipur, Dausa, Tonk, and Sawai Madhopur districts. The main problems faced by the people of the area are soil erosion, illegal mining, land encroachment, and very low forest cover. The master plan for the village is formed with the community, and they are made responsible for the water resources of the villages. Meetings with specific stakeholders, such as shepherds, are conducted regarding conservation of greenery. This sense of ownership over the resources of the village has motivated the villagers to take the responsibility for the upkeep and maintenance of them.
- The case of the Village Water and Sanitation Committee in Karnataka: This committee was mandated by the government, and such committees are set up on paper in 90 percent of the villages across Karnataka. The committee is responsible for overall planning and implementation of watershed activities in the village and comes under Panchayati Raj Institution. But just 10 percent

of the committee members are aware of their roles and responsibilities. This highlights the importance of effective community participation within the village governance system, the lack of which might endanger the overall purpose of forming such committees.

- Collaboration of NGO and CSR: Collaborative projects of rejuvenation of ancient water tanks and construction of check dams by Coca-Cola Foundation and Sehgal Foundation in Kolar district in Karnataka and Anantpur district in Andhra Pradesh are also aimed at building capacities of local communities so that they can take ownership and charge of the operation and maintenance of the assets created as part of project activities.
- Building capacities of women communities: Building capacities and confidence and creating livelihood opportunities for women is extremely crucial, so that women can feel empowered and take ownership of community-owned natural resources including water. The case of Bharatiya Harit Khadi Gramodaya Sansthan was mentioned in this context in that, after community's skills were developed, the women naturally became capable of becoming employed in manufacturing garments. The initiative also promotes forward-backward linkages and endeavors to link the products prepared by village women with brands like W. This model further depicts that success of community-based projects depend on convergence of several agencies such as KVICs, NGOs, SHGs, District Administration, and private companies.

### **Key Takeaways**

- Scalability of successful local projects needs to be focused on to become part of national-level policy-making.
- Efficient management and the subsequent utilization of water in the agriculture sector are required to save water.
- Water supply programs have so far been driven by a top-down approach, which needs to change. Community participation and community-led water interventions ensure the sustainability of the resources.
- Partial capital cost-sharing, either in cash or kind, creates a sense of ownership of the resource and ensures sustainability.
- Local context-based solutions are available within the knowledge of the community and need to be explored.

## Annex 1: Conference Agenda

### **Village-Level Water Management: Community Participation and Convergence of Village Institutions**

Registration: 09.30 A.M.

10.00– 11.15	<p><b>Inaugural plenary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome, Ajay Pandey, CEO, Sehgal Foundation</li> <li>• Manas Satpathy, program director, Pradan</li> <li>• Amit Kumar Singh, country representative, Tanager</li> </ul> <p><b>Special address</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India; Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India, M. D. Asthana, I.A.S. (retired)</li> </ul>
	Coffee/Tea break
11.30– 1.00	<p><b>Panel 1: Innovations leading to water security</b></p> <p>Chair: Lalit Mohan Sharma, director, Adaptive Technologies, Sehgal Foundation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Suresh Kumar Rohilla, senior director, Centre for Science and Environment</li> <li>• Dr. Vijayalakshmi, Development Alternatives</li> <li>• Dr. Fawzia Tarannum, assistant professor, TERI Institute of Advanced Studies</li> <li>• Dr. Shivrudrappa, programme director and regional director, South, BAIF Foundation</li> </ul> <p>Open Session</p>
	Lunch
1.45– 3.15	<p><b>Panel 2: Convergence of water committees, gram panchayats, and district administration</b></p> <p>Chair: Chandni Bedi, director, Navjyoti India Foundation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pankaj Singh, Vikas Bharti</li> <li>• Narhari Shivpure, Gram Vikas Sansthan</li> <li>• Arty Kumari, program manager, Landesa</li> <li>• Rahul Kumar, program leader, Sehgal Foundation</li> <li>• Vilas Kamble, Yuva Parivartan</li> </ul> <p>Open Session</p>
	Coffee/Tea break
3.30– 4.55	<p><b>Panel 3: Community Participation in village-level water management</b></p> <p>Chair: Dr. Harish Vashistha, executive director, Credibility Alliance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laxman Singh, Gram Vikas Navyuvak Mandal Laporiya</li> <li>• Dr. K. Prabhakar, assistant professor, National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati raj</li> <li>• Debika Goswami, program leader, Sehgal Foundation</li> <li>• Tulika Jha, COO, Bharatiya Harit Khadi Gramodaya Sansthan</li> </ul> <p>Open Session</p>
4.55– 5.00	<p><b>Concluding Remarks and Vote of Thanks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Vikas Jha, Sehgal Foundation</li> </ul>