



Environment

Water Community



## Solution Exchange for the Water Community Consolidated Reply

*Query: Discrimination and Exclusion in Accessing Water Resources – Experiences; Examples*

Compiled by Nitya Jacob, Resource Person and Ramya Gopalan, Research Associate  
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From [Sarbeswar Sahoo](#), Kalpataru, Orissa  
Posted 9 January 2008

I am associated with Kalpataru (a registered voluntary organization) working on water and forest management in the Kishorenagar Block of Angul District, Orissa. As part of our work, we have encountered difficulties in effective collective action in the management of traditional water bodies like tanks and ponds. This is due to the existing exclusion and discrimination prevailing in our villages.

In 1965, the United Nations formed the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). The CERD is the body of independent experts that monitors implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination by its State parties. However, despite prolonged efforts by UN, studies show that some form of discrimination and exclusion exists in most UN member countries.

On this front, India always has been worst in terms of caste-based discrimination, with certain castes being historically excluded, socially as well as physically, from society. Additionally, their access to land and water resources is limited, and hence food security is always under threat. Water is a common property but this never works in practice. Access to common property water resources, especially traditional wells, tanks and modern watershed, tube wells, and water harvesting structures is also restricted or unequal.

In this context, I would request members to provide their inputs on the following:

- Evidence and documentation of caste-based discrimination and exclusion in using the water resources at the national and regional level and the consequences/impact (if any)
- Experiences on the role NGOs have played in reducing caste-based discrimination and social exclusion
- Experiences with collective action in the management of Common Property Water Resources, and insights on the effectiveness of this approach, given the backdrop of caste based discrimination and exclusion
- Information on the legal measures available, as well as alternative measures to solve the water crisis for the socially excluded

These inputs will help us strive towards achieving inclusive growth and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and help Kalpataru devise measures to tackle the challenge posed by caste-based discrimination in the management of natural resources. We look forward to your contributions and will acknowledge them in our work.

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### Responses were received, with thanks, from

1. [Annie Namala](#), Programme for Inclusion and Equity (PIE), New Delhi
2. [Vinod Kumar P](#), Maithri, Palakkad, Kerala
3. [Sonali Patnaik](#), Arupa Mission Research Foundation, Bhubaneswar
4. [Kurian Baby](#), Tsunami Rehabilitation Programme, Government of Kerala, Thrissur, Kerala
5. [Rishu Garg](#), Association for Rural Advancement through Voluntary Action and Local Involvement (ARAVALI), Jaipur
6. [Terry Thomas](#), Bhopal
7. [George Thomas](#), Evangelical Social Action Forum (ESAF), Trichur, Kerala\*

*\*Offline Contribution*

*Further contributions are welcome!*

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### Summary of Responses

Access to drinking water is largely determined by caste in households and public places. This is because of the economics of the caste system under which certain castes and sub-castes are prevented from accessing anything, including natural resources, that can improve their quality of life. Several efforts have taken place around the country to reduce such discrimination and access to water. The discriminated castes and those working to eliminate the practice have recourse to several laws.

During the discussions, it became evident that the practice of caste discrimination ensures greater dependency on the dominant caste. By denying lower castes their customary water rights, landlords use drinking water as an economic instrument of oppression. This is particularly evident in water-stressed regions since scarcity also leads to further marginalisation. The present system of common property resource (CPR) management or water utilities totally ignores people's participation even if it is explicitly states. The protection of water rights falls under the jurisdiction of civil courts, which means protracted and expensive litigation, aggravating exclusion.

Members discussed policy-level discrimination as evident across the country, since most Acts for Water Users Associations (WUAs) are linked to property rights and land holding patterns are skewed. Few changes have been made at the policy level to include fisherfolk and women as in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, while Orissa is planning changes. The single largest reason for exclusion is the lack of clear, right and total information over a proposed activity (especially

among intended communities and immediate stakeholders). Other reasons for exclusion are micro-level community factors, technical inappropriateness, discrimination between urban, semi-urban and rural areas, inadequate infrastructure, improper and excess extraction of groundwater, and impact, incidence and implementation of supply and demand-driven public programmes to achieve quick results.

Acknowledging the inherent dynamics and significance of the issue, members shared evidences of caste based discrimination. An isolated event in Palakkad District, [Kerala](#), depicts how wage labourers from the SC/ST population opted for work under the NREGS but the landlords had prevented them from taking water. Similarly, in [Muthalamada, Kerala](#), in most tribal settlements, the traditional water sources were usurped by the wealthy landlords. Caste based evidence of discrimination are also enumerated in the case of Pani Panchayats in [Orissa](#). Water distribution to marginal farmers is often ignored by the rich farmers.

Exclusion has gender aspects because women are automatically excluded from Pani Panchayats since agricultural land is normally owned by men. Members also shared key experiential learnings such as the Jalnidhi effort in [Kerala](#) that functions on the principle of willingness to pay (WTP). WTP is used as an instrument for ownership, accountability and voice, aiming towards equity in ownership ensuring equity in voice. With regarding to experiences of NGOs that have worked on ensuring equity and inclusion, respondents recommended the strategy of [Deccan Development Society](#) which has helped Dalits access common property resources in **Andhra Pradesh**. Members referred to other organisations working on these issues including IAEET, OPDSC and ASHA, CCD and SWWS, SACAL, UAA and PREM, Pallishree, Unnayan and Agramee.

Discrimination and exclusion from water resources have always been a serious development challenge and are a blatant violation of human rights and the principle of equity. Participants suggested several alternative measures to legal remedies that can be possible recommendations to address this critical issue. Even though there is no easy answer, social engineering could trigger client power, generate awareness regarding subsidies and opportunities to enable informed decision making. Members further advocated improving community's capacity in a political manner, ensuring their participation in designing schemes; emphasising the need for community mobilisation and sensitization towards developing more inclusive policies. The participation of key stakeholders is the mainstay of development in India and therefore collective action and cost-sharing is essential to ensure minimum access to drinking water.

The discussion helped expand their understanding of communities and caste based discrimination for access to water resources, opined members. Given that access to drinking water is prone to discrimination and communities are excluded on the basis of caste, there is definitely a need to garner a better understanding of the complexity of this critical issue and include the above aspects in future planning of schemes, felt members.

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## Comparative Experiences

From [Vinod Kumar P, Maithri, Palakkad, Kerala](#)

### Kerala

#### **Dilemma faced with the onset of the NREGS, Chitur Thaluk, Palakkad District**

Here, almost 25% of SC/ST population are wage labourers, many of whom opted for work within the NREGS, since payment is almost double of 60 rupees that a woman labour usually gets. However, the area is the driest and most of the poor is dependant on the landlord's water source

for drinking water. Now the landlords are barring the SC/ST population from taking water since they are going for the NREGS works. This issue has gained attention from the media.

### **Water Schemes Managed by Tribal Communities, Muthalamada, Chitur Taluk**

In 2000, WB funded a tribal development programme which took five years for 19 community water supply schemes to cater to 1000 tribal families in the GP. The wealthy and influential usurped the traditional water sources, refusing to give consent for laying pipelines or drawing electric lines. The scheme collected 10% capital costs, unaffordable by 98% tribal families. The communities themselves organised work and trainings, successfully running 16 schemes today.

### **Participatory Stakeholder Analysis/Social Assessment** ([Kurian Baby](#), *Tsunami Rehabilitation Programme, Government of Kerala, Thrissur, Kerala*)

Carried out to identify potential exclusions in the IDA supported Jalnidhi watsan programme and targeted intervention package designed for the tribal communities of the project area. Key elements include providing mandatory dominant role for tribal households/women in decision making, relaxed scheme cycle to suit their absorption capacity, appropriate technical choice having minim O&M costs, specifically designed capacity building and social marketing tools, etc.

## **Orissa**

### **Caste Based Discrimination and Exclusion in Pani Panchayats** (from [Sonali Patnaik](#), *Arupa Mission Research Foundation, Bhubaneswar*)

Access to and control over water is varied. Caste based evidences are visible when WUAs called [Pani Panchayats](#) are formed. People from lower castes, having low land holding take up share cropping, agriculture labour or migrate to meet daily needs. Resource rich farmers often ignore water distribution to marginal farmers and tail enders of a tank system. Further hierarchically, men own most agricultural land, thus automatically excluding women from Pani Panchayats.

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## **Related Resources**

### ***Recommended Documentation***

#### **The Orissa Pani Panchayat Act, 2002** (from [Sonali Patnaik](#), *Arupa Mission Research Foundation, Bhubaneswar*)

Act; Law Department, Orissa Act 10 Of 2002; Department of Water Resources; Government of Orissa

Available at <http://www.dowrorissa.gov.in/PaniPanchayat/paniact.htm>

*Provides for farmers' participation in management of irrigation systems and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto critical to defining social exclusion mechanisms*

From [Ramya Gopalan](#), *Research Associate*

#### **Caste, Social Exclusion and Poverty Linkages – Concept, Measurement and Empirical Evidence**

Paper; by Sukhadeo Thorat

Available at <http://www.empowerpoor.org/downloads/castepovertypaper.pdf> (PDF Size: 130 KB)

*Attempts to address and provide evidence on exclusion linked deprivation leading to lack of income earning assets like agricultural land, employment and social needs like water*

#### **Gender, Caste and Ethnic Exclusion in Nepal: Following the Policy Process from Analysis to Action**

Paper; by Lynn Bennett; The World Bank; Arusha Conference, "New Frontiers of Social Policy"; 12 - 15 December 2005

Available at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTRANETSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/Resources/Bennett.rev.pdf> (PDF Size: 5 MB)

*Presents the exclusion background in Nepal which includes limiting the so-called lower castes to socially-sanctioned roles, refusing to share water sources with them etc*

### **Water, Hindu Mythology and an Unequal Social Order in India)**

Paper; by Deepa Joshi (India) and Ben Fawcett (UK); Second Conference of the International Water History Association; Bergen; August 2001

Available at [http://www.wateraid.org/documents/plugin\\_documents/hindumythindia.pdf](http://www.wateraid.org/documents/plugin_documents/hindumythindia.pdf) (PDF Size: 150 KB)

*Based on field research on water use in a rural Hindu society reveals how caste based notions are used to determine and reinforce inequitable access and control of water*

### **Social Exclusion in Peru: An Invisible Wall**

Paper; by Jaime Saavedra *et al.*; Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo; Lima, Peru; August 2002

Available at [http://www.gdnet.org/pdf/2002AwardsMedalsWinners/OutstandingResearchDevelopment/jaime\\_saavedra\\_paper.pdf](http://www.gdnet.org/pdf/2002AwardsMedalsWinners/OutstandingResearchDevelopment/jaime_saavedra_paper.pdf) (PDF Size: 381 KB)

*Describes social exclusion related to ethnic and racial differences that limit access to assets, for e.g., less than 45% of indigenous people have access to public water supply*

### **Shifts in International Development Policy and Social Exclusion: Experience from the Water Sector in Uganda**

Paper; by Peter Balimunsi; National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC) Planning and Development Department; Kampala, Uganda; 4 March 2003

Available at <http://www.chronicpoverty.org/pdfs/2003conferencepapers/Balimunsi.pdf> (PDF Size: 80 KB)

*Discussed WSS as a requirement for a sustainable livelihood, and conceptualises the linkages between WSS and chronic poverty focusing on gender and social exclusion*

### **Reducing Poverty by Tackling Social Exclusion**

Policy Paper; Department for International Development (DFID); September 2005

Available at <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/social-exclusion.pdf> (PDF 154 KB)

*About the challenges posed by social exclusion in accessing water, education, health and other services, and the ways governments, civil society and donors can tackle them*

## ***Recommended Organizations and Programmes***

From [Annie Namala](#), Programme for Inclusion and Equity (PIE), New Delhi

**National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), New Delhi** (from Name, Organization, Location)

8/1, 2nd Floor, South Patel Nagar, New Delhi – 110008; Tel: +91-11-25842249; Fax: +91-11-25842250 [ncdhr@vsnl.net](mailto:ncdhr@vsnl.net); <http://www.ncdhr.org.in/>; Contact Arun; [arun@ncdhr.org](mailto:arun@ncdhr.org)

*A campaigning organisation on Dalit Human Rights, focussing on caste based exclusion in various sectors including access to water resources*

**Deccan Development Society, Andhra Pradesh**

101, Kishan Residency, 1-11-242/1, Street No. 5, Shyamlal Buildings Area, Begumpet, Hyderabad  
- 500 016; Tel: +91-40-27764577/27764744; Fax: +91-40-27764722;  
[ddshyderabad@gmail.com](mailto:ddshyderabad@gmail.com); <http://www.ddsindia.com/www/default.asp>

*Recommended for its strategy which has helped Dalits access common property resources such as water in Andhra Pradesh*

### ***Related Consolidated Replies***

#### **Exclusion in Drinking Water Supply Networks, from Jyotsna Bapat, Independent Consultant, New Delhi (Experiences). Water Community.**

Issued 18 November 2005. Available at <http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/environment/cr/cr-se-wes-18110501.htm>

*Highlights various aspects of social exclusion in drinking water supply networks based on (context-specific) experiences*

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### **Responses in Full**

#### **Annie Namala, Programme for Inclusion and Equity (PIE), New Delhi**

I work with the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies at New Delhi, which is a research organisation with a focus on Dalits and other marginalised communities. I am also associated with the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), a campaigning organisation on Dalit Human Rights. NCDHR had raised the Dalit Human Rights issues with CERD at the Durban conference in 1992 and has been taking forward the issues of caste-based discrimination with the UNHRC as well as CERD.

I am part of the Dalit collectives and have been working with Dalit communities for over two decades. Drinking water continues to be a site for caste based discrimination on the religious-cultural reasons like purity and pollution across the country from the south to the north. This is visible not just in private homes but in public places like schools, hotels and so on.

The practice of caste discrimination at the common property and irrigation sources is stems from another basis. This is not so much based on the purity-pollution, rather on the economy of caste. Caste system provides an economic model where you can exclude sections of the population from expanding their economic base and improve their livelihood.

The economic limitations placed by the caste ensures that the dominant castes will always have cheap labour, obedient servants and slaves that are always dependent on them. In addition to this benefit, it will also ensure that the Dalits will not rise up to be an economic competition to the dominant castes. This threat of competition is what provoked the reservation conflict in AIIMS. I am shocked to know from the recent conflict in Kandhmal in Orissa which has been portrayed as a religious conflict, the actual point of attack has been the 'Ambedkar Vanija Sangh' which is a body of Dalit youth who have initiated independent enterprises in the town. In the attack more than 20 Dalit enterprises have been selectively blasted. The selective destruction of Muslim property in Gujarat is now well documented. Caste and religious domination is threatened by economic empowerment of lower castes and minorities. The prohibitions on the use of common property resources is also part of this frame.

Regarding experiences of NGOs that have worked on ensuring equity and inclusion of Dalits on equal terms, there are not many. I think the reason for this is that NGOs that do not work on a human rights perspective with principles of justice and equity do not recognise caste discrimination as an issue. Hence, programmes get implemented with partial unequal engagement of Dalits or their silence and exclusion. Dalit organisations on the other hand are

more engaged with human rights issues and those that are small and local do not often have the support to confront the dominant caste dictats. Despite this Dalits have over and over confronted dominant caste prohibitions on water bodies. I think Arun from NCDHR (whom I have copied this mail and sends out a daily 'Dalit in News') will be able to share such cases with you.

An organisation that has helped Dalits access common property resources to some extent is Deccan Development Society in Andhra Pradesh. Here again their strategy was to strengthen Dalit women's organisations with credit, skills and solidarity to negotiate land and water as natural resources in their villages and cultivate them.

My own experience is that once an organisation begins to negotiate against the caste norms, there is very little negotiation space that is allowed by the dominant castes. One soon has to advocate for a just sharing of resources from those that are excluded and this is taking a stand on the issue. My experience is also that given the day-to-day vulnerable position of Dalit communities they also may not go along with an organisation that they are not confident of will stand in their favour. Hence taking a position in support of and strengthening the Dalit community to stake their claim has been my experience of promoting equity and justice in the caste context.

This also means that exclusion and discrimination cannot be addressed as a project. This is so much a process that once we take hold of the tail, we are onto a long journey of seeing discrimination and exclusion in various other spheres and the need to address them. The community that you are currently engaged with may or may not prioritise the issue of common property and water bodies at this point in time and they may have other priority issues. (I am only suggesting a possibility). In that case, one has to begin with the issue that the community may consider its priority. In addition, it would be important to identify local Dalit youth leadership that would feel that the issue is important and they want to address it.

I know the above are not solutions to the issue you have raised or best practices that can be adopted. I feel you have hit upon a very critical issue that is very complex and hope you would further engage with this issue.

Prof. Thorat has done critical work on caste-based exclusion in the economic sphere including modern labour market that was reported in EPW in October 07. In addition, you might like to refer to Paul and Arun from NCDHR.

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**[Vinod Kumar P](#), Maithri, Palakkad, Kerala**

This is a very important topic in the current context. In Palakkad District of Kerala, an issue is finally catching attention of media and officials. In Chitour Thaluk there are a large percentage (almost 25) of SC/ST population who are wage labourers. With the onset of NREGS, many of them opted for it since the payment is almost double of 60 rupees a woman labour usually gets. However, the area is the driest and most of the poor is depending on the landlord's water source for drinking water. Now the landlords are barring the SC/ST population from taking water since they are going for the NREGS works. Presently the media is celebrating the event until it gets another. This is not an isolated event and prevalent in the area despite the famed all round social improvement in the state of Kerala.

The State water utility or other institutions are not able or going to solve the issue considering past experiences. The present system of CPR management or water utilities totally ignore people's participation even if it is stipulated. Neither will it give dignity to the participating people. The caste/colonial system of looking down is die-hard. They believe in giving alms or setting up non functional public stand posts and declaring the area covered under 'safe water supply'.

As a rule, the marginalized stay in marginal lands, away from the road on barren hillocks in small clusters. The utilities are happily covering the sides of the roads. Supplying the distant isolated poor families is not a concern at all. The poor have to get water in the morning or evening to complete the chores by 7 AM and reach the work site by 8 AM. But who is bothered about it? Poor people are being dehumanised by end less waiting at the stand posts or for tanker lorries and the ensuing squabbles. None is bothered about the losing dignity of the poor.

If only the planners are willing to design schemes with people's participation in a dignified manner the problem can be addressed. In 2000, the WB funded a Tribal development programme in Muthalamada of the said Chitru thaluk. It took almost five years (four to plan and one to implement) to build 19 community water supply schemes to cater to almost all of the 1000 tribal families in the Grama Panchayath. In most tribal settlements, the traditional water sources were usurped by the wealthy land lords. The influential people refused to give consents for laying pipelines or drawing electric lines. The scheme has to collect 10 % of the capital cost, which was against the grain of state schemes. Even the local MLA was against it (the present political set up as well). 98% tribal families are having less than five cents and none are having graduates or some regular employment.

The crux of the intervention was to build the capacity of the local community to tackle the issues. It took lot of time and processes for them to understand the issues and to gear up for the intervention. For example, all of the committee members were tribal and absolutely no other community members were allowed to get involved. The funds, at a time amounting to lakhs were directly transferred to the community accounts. The community themselves organized work teams and learned new trades like well digging, lining, pipe laying, ferro cement construction etc and contractor, real or binami was totally absent. All of the purchases were done by themselves. For each of these activities informal trainings were organized in enabling conditions. The whole course was tough with innumerable obstacles. However, the goal was clear.

The community thus contributed 9.2 lakhs and executed works worth almost 1 crore. Out of the 19 commissioned schemes in 2004, 16 are smoothly running until today with the community meeting full operation and maintenance cost.

When another funding opportunity for reviving agriculture came last year, the federation of the tribal communities decided to set up education centres where all of the school-going children will get intensive attention instead of spending the resources on subsidies.

The point is that unless the community's capacity is improved in a political manner there is no way out for the problem.

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**[Sonali Patnaik](#), Arupa Mission Research Foundation, Bhubaneswar**

Access to and control over water in Orissa is varied:

1. Caste based, the evidences of this are visible when Water Users Associations, commonly called Pani Panchayats are formed. In Orissa's context, people from the lower castes, normally having low land holding either take up share cropping, agriculture labour or migrate to meet their daily needs.
2. Water distribution, where the marginal farmers and tail enders of a tank system are often ignored by the resource rich farmers
3. Gender based, wherein farm land that is owned by a woman headed household and the participation of such a woman in the water users association is limited. Moreover, since land is normally passed on from parent to son instead of parent to daughter, it is found that most

of the agricultural land is owned by men and women are automatically excluded out of Pani Panchayats.

4. Policy level discrimination is evident because most of the acts across the country for water Users Associations do not include other water users apart from those who own agricultural land. It was only after World bank began funding such projects , that some policy level changes were made for such acts to include fisherfolk and women as in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, with Orissa in the pipe line.

There are a number of NGOs that are working on these issues directly or indirectly. These include: IAEET (koraput), OPDSC and ASHA from Rayagada, CCD and SWWS from Gajapati, SACAL, UAA and PREM from Ganjam, Pallishree from Jaipur, Unnayan and Agranee from Mayurbhanj.

Change would be possible only if policies are made more inclusive. This would require advocacy. The NGOs mentioned above are on a community mobilisation and sensitisation drive to ensure that tail enders, women are at least included in Water User Associations.

At the same time a proposal for amendment of the Pani Panchayat Act of 2002, to make it more inclusive has been put up by the DoWR to the Cabinet.

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#### **Kurian Baby, Tsunami Rehabilitation Programme, Government of Kerala, Thrissur, Kerala**

Discrimination and exclusion in access to water resources have always been a serious development challenge – blatant violation of human rights and the principle of equity. Evidences of caste based exclusion and discrimination is found across the country, the latest being the news report from the high HDI state of Kerala (The Hindu January 17, 08, cited by Vinodkumar). In real analysis, rather than a caste based discrimination, the causative forces are economic-exclusion of marginalized farmhands in denying their customary water rights. The landlords were using drinking water as an economic instrument of oppression and to penalize the households who have taken up better paid employment away from the landlord's farms. I have seen the practice across India, notably in the water stressed regions. Scarcity leads to exclusion of the marginalized.

Interestingly, we have many traditional systems of water conservation and sharing like the 'anga' system in Rajasthan in olden days, where the community, based on participatory water budgets, adopt a normative sharing process, based on based on family needs including that of cattle(questionable in terms of equity and water rights, but better than exclusion and deprivation. Legally water rights are linked to property rights and land holding pattern is highly skewed ). Many such best practices are available in India and abroad, one such example I have seen is in the catchments of Volta lake in Ghana, where a combination of customary laws being reinforced with economic rights through willingness to pay. Unfortunately, modern interventions and socio-cultural changes, while undermining the social capital, have not substituted feasible alternatives – an obvious question of regulation and water governance.

Instead, public programmes, both supply driven and demand driven are being increasingly used to usurp water from the marginalized. In many occasions dominant caste using the guise of public cause using public funds develop and use traditional water sources leading to deprivation and exclusion. Under supply driven programmes, public service provisions and subsidies have gone to the rich and the powerful, poor areas are not effectively served at all. This is also true for watershed programmes as well; marginal land owners and riparian rights generally suffer. Protection of water rights are under jurisdiction of civil courts and protracted litigation and cost of

legal provision leads to double exclusion. In many occasions, despite the widened stakeholder base including NGO intermediation in programme implementation, on account of 'targetism' and expectation of quick results (where fundamental shifts are necessary) poor/lower casts are excluded.

We have tried various options for inclusion and access in designing and implementing watsan programmes. On such success story is the participatory stakeholder analysis/ social assessment carried out to identify potential exclusions in the IDA supported Jalnidhi watsan programme and targeted intervention package designed for the tribal communities of the project area, in Kerala. The key elements of Tribal development Plan (TDP) include providing mandatory dominant role for tribal households/women in decision making, relaxed scheme cycle to suit their absorption capacity, appropriate technical choice having minim O&M costs (gravity fed, rainwater harvesting etc.), specifically designed capacity building and social marketing tools, innovative options for community contribution in cash and labour, supported by intensive community intermediation. ***Willingness to pay is used again as an instrument for ownership, accountability and voice. Equity in ownership ensures equity in voice.*** Even in the primitive tribal Kurumba colonies, community driven projects have been set up and are being managed sustainably. We have also designed a special programme 'Giridhara' for the Wynad hill tracks of Kerala, exclusively for tribal communities with the support from GoI, which has been implemented with mixed success.

There is no easy answer except social engineering to trigger client power and generate awareness and informed choice to access subsidies and opportunities.

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**[Rishu Garg](#), Association for Rural Advancement through Voluntary Action and Local Involvement (ARAVALI), Jaipur**

I think it's a very important and critical issue that Sarbeswar has raised. I would like to share my thoughts with the community though some of these do not entirely relate to Sarbeswar's query.

Before I had read the query, I must admit that my earlier understanding of exclusion of communities and caste based discrimination for access to water resources was limited to western Rajasthan but the responses to the query suggest that even in states like Kerala, access of the poor to water resources is a big issue. I think this aspect has policy implications too. Because communities residing in such habitations might get categorized as safe (habitations) whereas they (poorest) remain vulnerable and in fact might have to pay much higher cost in terms of working on less wages etc as has been shared by Vinod Kumar P from experiences in Kerala. To assess the situation of rural drinking water supply coverage status a rural habitation survey was conducted in 1991 and again in 2003 by the ministry. As access to drinking water is so much prone to discrimination and communities are excluded on basis of caste therefore there is definitely a need to include all these aspects in future planning of schemes of drinking water supply to rural areas and especially while assessing drinking water status of rural areas of the country. Western Rajasthan is rife with cases of such discrimination and there have been numerous incidences as highlighted by Vinod Kumar P.

Besides this there is another form of discrimination that goes un-noticed most of the times. And this is the discrimination between Urban and semi-urban and rural areas while efforts and resources are allotted or prioritized. With rapid growth in urbanization (in Rajasthan the urban population increased by 31% from 1991 to 2001; Source: Census, 2001), the demand for water in urban areas has also increased sharply and is expected to increase even further. Because of which there has been loss of catchment area of water harvesting structures with concretization of pasture and common lands in areas adjoining rural areas. Water resources are channeled to provide drinking water (in urban areas) in profuse quantities to meet the needs domestic needs

for drinking, washing and bathing etc. On the other hand, drinking water still remains a big problem in rural habitations. Inadequate infrastructure and improper and excess (more than that should have been) extraction of ground water for irrigation have often been sited as reasons for the destructive future and special emphasis has now being put on reducing the same. The problem becomes more draconian where the ground water is salty and is with high contents of fluorides. Status of the rural habitation is ascertain fully covered if there is 35-42 liters of water per person per day (Ministry of Rural Development, Department of Drinking Water Supply) but how much of such quota is fixed for urban areas is anybody' guess.

Another important issue that would want to broach at this point (though it may not be as much relevant to the present query but I think is important to ensure drinking water to all our rural areas) of time is the issue of type of water resources and the question around participation (participation of people in terms of contributing to the cost). Can the village community living in remote rural areas of the state be blamed for neglect of traditional water harvesting structures or micro-irrigation structures and for demanding assured drinking water supply through pipes and by canals for irrigation?. If yes then, by the same logic, upcoming and urban settlements shall also share the blame for not undertaking activities that replenish ground water such as through roof water harvesting and also maintaining their own reservoirs. If no, then in given circumstances even when there is piped drinking water supply and canal water supply for irrigation, the need of small water harvesting structures cannot be gainsaid because of vagaries of monsoons on which the supply depends (to a great extent) and therefore it is important to understand as to what can be effective mechanisms that could ensure their maintenance and put them to useful purposes as they were earlier?. This is also to point to the need for regular desilting of water harvesting structures and their management is taken up through NREGS so that it becomes a recurring activity and not a one time activity.

Participation of key stakeholders has been the mainstay of development in India and across the globe. Similarly collective action and sharing of cost are other important dimensions that are sought from stakeholders expecting rural community to participate and share the cost of maintaining traditional water harvesting structures. By the same logic, urban population and industry shall also share the cost of maintenance and construction of large dams and replenishment of ground water. Any use of water in scarcity conditions for non- priority shall be on premium, if at all it has to. Also, the supply of water should be restricted and limited to that could be assured per capita to the rural population (through traditional water harvesting structures or from other sources). Experiences from Swajaldhara and looking into reasons of low acceptance suggest that even a contribution amount of 10 percent is difficult for some rural communities. In my opinion, cost of participation should not be a deterrent to ensuring access to drinking water and shall (if it has to) only be after ensuring minimum amount access to all.

Water policies place the priority to drinking water, irrigation and industry for use of water. But the spatial dimensions to which these priorities apply is as much important an issue as the issue of scarcity of the resource itself. Also when different users vie for limited resources, the deterrent mechanism for miss-utilization shall not be effective irrespective of whether it is rationing or priced based mechanism. Effective mechanisms for restoring the traditional rain water harvesting structures has been underpinned through policy instruments and in guidelines of rural development programs but reasons of low acceptance by people is also an important issue. One of the issues might be the sharing of cost of collective action for bearing the burden. The point that I have already argued upon earlier.

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**Terry Thomas, Bhopal**

Having involved through action researches and process monitoring of community water systems linked tasks in Kerala, my observations and learning's may add some value to the concern raised.

Primarily, inclusion and exclusion phenomenon is observed mandatory in any activities with rigid conditions e.g. time limit, cost levels, technology options, prescribed community size etc.

Single broad reason for exclusion include lack of clear, right and total information over proposed activity (especially among intended communities and immediate stakeholders), followed by micro level community factors and technical inappropriateness resulting in exclusion.

In many cases, it is observed community is initially provided with filtered information over project processes especially at the time of planning. Much thrust is often attached for practices and approaches that require minimal efforts from the side of the implementing organizations. Hence, by default this indirectly targets the weaker sections.

Examining micro level societal processes in a demand driven water supply context underwent where project inventions occurred (resulting inclusion) and where not occurred (resulting exclusion), revealed the following finding-

When people seek improved water services, most projects begin with institutional structures in place as a mandatory rule. For such an institutional set up to emerge, those communities with substantial previous exposure and with some leadership traits avail/ seek more benefits than the others (weaker folks). Here ability, influence and capacity to create (easier to form) an institutional setup (irrespective of the water need) receive much thrust than addressing the core issue (extension to real water scarce locations/ sections). Hence, the scenario emerges where the project largely benefits where the "community/leadership preparedness" is comparatively higher, than catering those communities with extreme water scarcity. By default, again targets the weaker communities..

The second face is the technical inappropriateness. In most cases, stress is given for options/ structures that can be easily replicated from the technical viewpoint than considering the local water resource features and its dynamics. This leads to a situation, whereby those areas with relatively easier water source options gets through and exclude those communities where water resources are limited and erratic.

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**George Thomas, Evangelical Social Action Forum (ESAF), Trichur, Kerala\***

I am working with a development organization called ESAF mainly involved in Micro Finance, Natural Resource Management including Water and Sanitation Projects, Disaster Management, etc. I had an opportunity to implement 4 major water projects supported by World Bank and Govt. OF Kerala. One specialty of this project was there was a community participation in every stage of its implementation. One learning I had from this project was Water is such a natural resource, for making this commodity available, we can organize people irrespective of caste, creed and sex. Some highlights

1. We organized more than 150 users groups consists of 30 to 40 families each irrespective of caste and status
2. Ensured their participation in identifying the water resource, implementing the project and sustain it even after completion.
3. Social and Technical capacity building of users group
4. Well defined guidelines, which has to ensure any class or caste people.
5. Ensuring the support of local self governments

We found it very effective

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*Many thanks to all who contributed to this query!*

*If you have further information to share on this topic, please send it to Solution Exchange for the Water Community in India at [se-wes@solutionexchange-un.net.in](mailto:se-wes@solutionexchange-un.net.in) with the subject heading "Re: [se-watr] Query: Discrimination and Exclusion in Accessing Water Resources - Experiences; Examples. Additional Reply."*

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