



Environment

Water Community



Gender

Gender Community

Solution Exchange for the Water Community Solution Exchange for the Gender Community Consolidated Reply

Query: Rural Drinking Water Governance and the Role of Women - Experiences; Example

Compiled by [Nitya Jacob](#) and [Malika Basu](#), Resource Persons and [Sunetra Lala](#) and [Dhivya David](#), Research Associates

Issue Date: 26 June 2009

From [Seema Kulkarni](#), Society for Promoting Participative Eco-System Management (SOPPECOM), Pune

Posted 20 May 2009

I work with the Society for Promoting Participative Eco-System Management (SOPPECOM), Pune. My colleagues, Sara Ahmed currently with International Development Research Centre (IDRC), South Asia, Chhaya Datar from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) and I have completed a two-year study on decentralized rural water governance and women's empowerment in Maharashtra and Gujarat, supported by IDRC, Canada, as part of their global competition on understanding decentralisation and its impacts on women. This was a joint study conducted by SOPPECOM, UTTHAN and TISS, led by SOPPECOM. Please read more at http://www.indiawaterportal.org/tt/dwm/policies/Reforming_Water_Adding_Women_-_Nov_2008.pdf (PDF; Size: 256KB)

Women's role in providing for drinking water, collecting and utilising it for other domestic purposes has been fairly well-documented. Most policy and programmes are shaped by this limited understanding of what women do, rather than what they are capable of doing if provided democratic space within the family and the community.

Although women play a major role in the collection and use of domestic water, they have a small role to play in key decisions on community drinking water schemes. This is despite the fact that States have implemented the quota system in village water and sanitation committees under the Panchayati Raj system. For instance, in Maharashtra, the quota for women in these committees

is as high as 50% and up to 75% in the Women's Development Committees, which are a part of the drinking water programme; in Gujarat, the quota is prescribed at 33%.

We have analysed why, despite these quotas and the allocation of a small but dedicated fund, women remain marginal in the decision-making process. A range of factors, from economic status to caste and importantly patriarchy, play a role in determining women's participation in the public sphere. Our study also looked at a range of other constraining factors such as a lack of technical and managerial capacities that would help improve participation, from mere physical presence to making a difference, to both the sectoral performance as well as their own empowerment.

Against this background, I request members to share their experiences on the following:

1. How can the introduction of a quota system for women in the drinking water sector become a meaningful instrument to ensure their participation in drinking water governance?
2. How can women make the transition from their current role as merely providers of water in the households to decision makers in the public domain? Please share any examples of women's engagement in the operation and maintenance of drinking water schemes, particularly from Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Contributions from the community would be of immense importance as we are compiling recommendations for Maharashtra as part of our engagement with the State Government. We hope that your inputs will indicate what the state can do to introduce quotas, increase budgetary allocations, and capacity building efforts. While doing so we also hope for some pointers on bridging the divide between public participation and domestic work.

Responses were received, with thanks, from

1. [Surekha Sule](#), Independent Journalist/Researcher, Pune
2. Muhammad Mukhtar Alam, Centre for Ecological Audit, Social Inclusion and Governance, New Delhi ([Response 1](#)), ([Response 2](#))
3. [K. D. Bhatt](#), GSFC Science Foundation, Vadodara
4. [Atul Rawat](#), DMV Business and Market Research Pvt. Ltd., Hyderabad
5. [Seema Raghunathan](#), WaterHealth India Pvt. Ltd., Secunderabad
6. [Raghunath T.P.](#), Pondicherry Science Forum, Pondicherry
7. [Rupa Mukerji](#), Intercooperation, Hyderabad
8. [L. B. Prakash](#), Akshara, Hyderabad
9. [Debjani Ghosh](#), Catholic Relief Services, New Delhi
10. Arun Jindal, Society for Sustainable Development, Karauli, Rajasthan ([Response 1](#)), ([Response 2](#))
11. [Binukumar G.S.](#), Institute for Resource Analysis and Policy (IRAP), Hyderabad
12. [Ramakrishna Nallathiga](#), Centre for Good Governance, Hyderabad
13. [Seema Kulkarni](#), Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM), Pune
14. [Shalini Jain](#), SEEDS India, New Delhi
15. [Vishwanath Srikantaiah](#), BIOME, Bangalore
16. [Ruchi Kukreti](#), Development Alternatives, New Delhi
17. [Abha Mishra](#), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), New Delhi
18. [Poornima B. S.](#), Technical Support Unit to Karnataka, Scientific Advisory Committee, Bangalore
19. [Arunabha Majumder](#), Jadavpur University, Kolkata

20. [Ragini Sahay](#), Social Anthropologist, New Delhi
21. [Seema Tripathi](#), Water Resources Department Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh*
22. [Amitava Basu Sarkar](#), Rural Development Institute, Himalayan Institute Hospital Trust (HIHT), Dehradun*
23. [Krupa Dholakia](#), Sahjeevan, Bhuj, Gujarat*
24. [Maneel Grover](#), SDSG Foundation, Punjab*

**Offline Contributions*

Further contributions are welcome!

[Summary of Responses](#)
[Comparative Experiences](#)
[Related Resources](#)
[Responses in Full](#)

Summary of Responses

Women are proactive in drinking water governance in rural areas if they are part of existing power structures such as self-help groups. A powerful external agency, an NGO or a Community Based Organization can put women at the helm. However, merely legislating a quota for women in village water and sanitation committees fails to involve them in this critical area.

The local SHGs, mahila mandals or NGOs can catalyse the role of women in drinking water governance. For example, in [Pondicherry](#), the SHG members of Samam Federation regularly clean their overhead water tanks. This ensures the households get better quality water. Pondicherry had its first Panchayat elections just two years ago and therefore, their role in water supply is limited. In some areas of Gujarat, studies show women have a small role in drinking water governance though a third of Panchayat seats are reserved for them. In the same state however, [SEWA](#) used its grassroots network to strengthen the village water committees in Banaskantha district. This has helped women to play a central role in reviving traditional water sources and become efficient water managers.

In Kutch, [Gujarat](#) the Swa Shakti project (jointly implemented by the World Bank and Government of India) trained women to create community assets in villages. The project involved women from the planning stage, through implementation to maintenance of water schemes. Here again, the women from SHGs came forward to create and maintain the assets which helped the villages to overcome water scarcity.

Such examples show that women's empowerment is a necessary condition for them to play an effective role in drinking water governance. Putting women not exposed to life outside their homes, into water governance structures does not work. They do not come forward to participate in decision-making. Even in their domestic lives, the work that women do at home and in the fields is not valued; this further mutes their voice in external decision-making.

In [Karnataka](#), women said they wanted water storage tanks in their homes. The state government took it up as a project covering 1,000 villages under which 2,500 litre tanks, connected to a rainwater harvesting system, were built in 20 houses. These tanks are used for storing water from tankers when there is no rainfall. However, the men remained unconvinced.

In [West Bengal](#), UNICEF introduced Tara handpumps. It also trained and equipped women from SHGs to look after them. This worked well and is an example of community-based rural water supply with women's active leadership.

In [Madhya Pradesh](#), the government passed Sahbhagita Sinchai Prabandhan Me Krishkon Ki Bhagidari Adhiniam in 1999 to create water users associations (WUAs). The Act allowed the wives of landowners to vote in the WUA elections and created sub-committees comprising of 6 women to raise their issues. The system only worked when a SHG, mahila mandal or NGO was involved at the village level.

The ideal combination for women's involvement in the long term is an SHG or mahila mandal that works with the local self-government institution to create and manage drinking water systems. These organizations are local and not dependent on an external agency, such as an NGO. For example, in Nagaland, women comprise a quarter of the posts on the village development boards and are also the key decision makers. On the other hand, the presence of an NGO or other external agency, while excellent for the start-up phase, can sometimes make the people dependent on them, and that is bad in the long-term; this has happened in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra.

There are instances where a NGO has altered the social structures in a village, creating space for women to plan and implement. In Bhavnagar, a NGO taught women the technical aspects of water management, and helped them break out of the patriarchal system. In Adilabad, Andhra Pradesh, women were involved in planning, monitoring and maintaining water health centres. They are planning to buy rickshaws to supply potable water to households. Women from these households have more time to earn and improve their standard of living.

In Kerala, women are responsible for collecting water for domestic use under the Jananidhi programme. The law prescribes that a third of the Water Supply Beneficiary Group members be women. Women undergo training so that they can plan and execute drinking water schemes. They had led agitations against the local administration when the latter has failed to provide enough water. This model shows women are better in collecting and managing funds for the water schemes as well as in administrative matters. They are also good at holding the government accountable.

Women appear to play a larger role in external decision making when they become financially independent. This usually starts from a SHG or other similar group that helps them pool their resources for economic activities. Once the SHG matures, its members venture into areas such as drinking water to assume a larger role. These women need information on rain water harvesting and training to participate in drinking water governance. An enlightened locally elected leadership is another factor, though not as crucial, in drawing women into the public decision making sphere. Thus, it would seem involving women from a community based or self-help organization accelerates the involvement of women in drinking water governance.

Comparative Experiences

Gujarat

Technical Skill Building leads to Women's Participation in Water Governance *(from Shalini Jain, SEEDS India, New Delhi)*

The Gujarat Water supply and sanitation Board (GWSSB) invited SEWA to restore the failing water supply systems in Gujarat. As part of this, SEWA trained over 2500 women, to repair hand

pumps who were also provided a small fee and vehicle expenses, to travel to villages with their tools. Through this initiative, women engaged themselves in income-generation. This also contributed to women's decision-making and participation in local water management.

SHG Members take Charge of Water Storage in their Villages, Kutch District (from [Ragini Sahay](#), *Social Anthropologist, New Delhi*)

Residents of Jharu and Ahmedabad were suffering from drinking water shortages. To deal with the situation water storage tanks were created by the SHGs, which were maintained and supervised by women. Women were also trained to utilize the benefits available under various government drinking water schemes. As a result, a sense of ownership towards water supply management was seen among women who were also forthcoming in contributing their labour.

Haryana

Women Recycle Water to Deal with Water Shortages, Narnaul (from [Ramakrishna Nallathiga](#), *Centre for Good Governance, Hyderabad*)

Nai Basti in Narnaul has been struggling with water shortages. To deal with the problem, women here recycle water, putting it to multiple uses. The water from washing clothes, for instance, is reused to wash dishes. Water that cannot be used again is then used to flush the drains outside their homes. Nai Basti also has no sewerage. However, due to the initiative of these women, the area is surprisingly clean, and water is also being conserved as a result of their efforts.

Karnataka

Women's Involvement leads to Building Rainwater Harvesting Tanks to Deal with Domestic Water Supply (from [Vishwanath Srikantaiah](#), *BIOME, Bangalore*)

In 2004 over 90 talukas in Karnataka were affected by droughts, affecting water storage at the domestic level. Women here suggested that a storage tank of about 2500 litres, connected to a rooftop system, would be a solution. This would become a storage source when the rain came. This initiative was very successful and became a project in 1000 villages where 20 tanks were built with a capacity of 2000 to 2500 litres. Read [more](#)

Madhya Pradesh

Women's Participation Ensures Better Water Distribution and Maintenance, Raisen District (from [Seema Tripathi](#), *Water Resources Department Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh*)

In Kamapar village, Madhya Pradesh Water User Associations involving women were formed to deal with drinking water supply issues. These were linked to SHGs, NGOs and Mahila Mandals. The SHGs lent money to the Water User Associations for canal restoration work. As a result of these initiatives women's participation in water supply schemes was enhanced. Their consent also became an imperative in water distribution management.

Pondicherry

Samana Federation Led by Women Help in Tank Restoration and Water Supply (from [Raghunath T.P.](#), *Pondicherry Science Forum, Pondicherry*)

The Pondicherry coastal region has been excessively mined for groundwater and the groundwater quality here has been deteriorating progressively. The Samam Federation, led by women has ensured that the overhead tanks in their villages are cleaned on a regular basis. This has not only ensured the availability of drinking water, but also the quality of it. This effort has also resulted in financial savings as it has prevented water borne diseases.

West Bengal

Training Inputs enable Women's Participation in Management of Water Supply (from [Arunabha Majumder](#), Jadavpur University, Kolkata)

In order to deal with water shortages, and arsenic contamination, Tara handpumps were introduced by UNICEF across West Bengal. These were managed, and maintained by women. Women were also trained and provided with necessary tools and spares to repair the handpumps. A handpump attached Arsenic Removal Unit was also managed by women. It was observed that these worked extremely well with women's participation in maintenance efforts. Read [more](#)

Related Resources

Recommended Documentation

Why Gender Matters (from [Arun Jindal](#), Society for Sustainable Development, Karauli; [response 1](#))

Tutorial; UNDP, Capacity Building for Integrated Water Resource Management (Cap-Net); March 2006;

Available at

http://cap-net.org/sites/cap-net.org/files/training_material_s/why_gender_matters.pdf (PDF; Size: 1.57MB)

Demonstrates that addressing gender issues in water governance improves efficiency of water use, environmental sustainability, and improves social benefits and equity

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), 2005 (From [Muhammad Mukhtar Alam](#), Centre for Ecological Audit, Social Inclusion and Governance, New Delhi; [response 1](#))

Act; Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India; 2005;

Available at <http://nrega.nic.in/>

A Central Government Scheme which provides employment in rural areas and two thirds of its funding is spent on the water sector in rural India

Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) (from [Surekha Sule](#), Independent Journalist/Researcher, Pune)

Article; South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre; 2003;

Available at http://www.hrdc.net/sahrdc/resources/armed_forces.htm

An Act, which has witnessed several armed protests by the Meira Paibis women in the North East, who continue to be excluded from any decision making process

Lessons for New MPs, (from [Ramakrishna Nallathiga](#), Centre for Good Governance, Hyderabad and [Poornima B. S.](#), Technical Support Unit to Karnataka, SACS, Bangalore)

Article; by Kalpana Sharma; The Hindu; New Delhi; 31 May 2009;

Available at <http://blogs.thehindu.com/delhi/?p=22634>

Highlights women's initiatives in saving water; emphasizes the need to include women in the planning and governance of water resources

From [Shalini Jain](#), SEEDS India, New Delhi

Women's Collective Action and Sustainable Water Management: Case of SEWA's Water Campaign in Gujarat, India

Report; by Smita Mishra Panda, Institute of Rural Management (IRMA), Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), Collective Action and Property Rights (CAPRI) and International Food Policy Research Institute; Washington; USA; May 2007;

Available at <http://www.capri.cgiar.org/pdf/capriwp61.pdf> (PDF; Size: 374KB)

Highlights women's role in Pani Samitis to manage water resources and its positive impact on their empowerment

Attaining the MDG in India, The Role of Public Policy and Service Delivery

Report; by Joep Verhagen and Rajesh Aggarwal, IESE and The World Bank; New Delhi; 2004;

Available at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTINDIA/Resources/swc.pdf> (PDF; Size: 554KB)

Case Study of SEWA's Water Campaign where women played a prominent role in water management; which led to improved water supply, increased income and saved time

Empowerment of Women for Sustainable Development, Reaching the Unreached: Challenges for the 21st Century (from [Arunabha Majumder](#), Jadavpur University, Kolkata)

Report; by Jayanta Ray; 22nd Water, Engineering and Development Centre (WEDC) Conference, Loughborough University; New Delhi; 1996;

Available at <http://wedc.lboro.ac.uk/conferences/pdfs/22/Ray.pdf> (PDF; Size: 34KB)

Describes women's role in the management and maintenance of TARA hand pumps and the complementary water and sanitation projects run by TARA

Madhya Pradesh Sinchai Prabandhan Me Krishakon Ki Bhagidari Adhiniyam (from [Seema Tripathi](#), Water Resources Department Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh)

Act; Madhya Pradesh Water Resources Department, Government of Madhya Pradesh; Bhopal; 1999;

Available at <http://www.indiawaterportal.org/data/policies/e9902.pdf> (PDF; Size: 53KB)

Specific provisions were made under this Act for women's participation in participatory irrigation management; Water Users Associations were also initiated in M.P under this Act

Bringing Home Rain (from [Vishwanath Srikantaiah](#), BIOME, Bangalore)

Short Film; by Sushma Veerappa;

Available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHnwD0VCnTc&feature=channel_page

Shows women's initiative in providing solutions to meet the demands of domestic water supply and the impact of provisions for household water storage tanks on women

From [Dhivya David](#), Research Associate, Gender Community

Mainstreaming Gender in Participatory Irrigation Management: The Case of AKRSP

Report; by Shilpa Vasavada; Gender and Water Alliance; Centre for Environment Education and Foundation Books; New Delhi; 2005;

Available at <http://www.genderandwater.org/page/5785>

Shows that involving women in water supply schemes empowers them, and leads to efficient, effective and equitable management of water resources

Flowing Upstream: Empowering Women through Water Management Initiatives in India

Book; by Sara Ahmed; Centre for Environment Education and Foundation Books; Cambridge University Press India; New Delhi; 2005; Permission Required: Yes, paid publication;

Available at <http://www.infibeam.com/Books/info/Sara-Ahmed/Flowing-Upstream-Empowering-Women-Through-Water-Management/8175962623.html>

Presents case studies of civil society interventions on issues of women's participation in community based water management systems

Water Supply: Impact on Gender and Income in Gujarat, India

Report; by Christine Sijbesmaa, Joep Verhagena, Reema Nanavatyab and A. J. James; IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre; The Netherlands; 2008; Permission Required: Yes, paid publication;

Available at <http://www.irc.nl/page/45885>

Investigates the impact of domestic water supply on economic development, and the gender dynamics in rural households in a drought-prone area of Gujarat

Mainstreaming Gender in Water Management: A Critical View

Article; by Smita Mishra Panda; Human Development Foundation; Sage Publications; Bhubaneswar; Orissa; 2007;

Available at <http://gtd.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/11/3/321> (PDF; Size: 118KB)

Critical analysis of SEWA's Women, Water and Work Campaign; highlights the negative impact of water sector reforms and the commodification of water

Women and Water, Stories from Dewas

Article; Catch Water Newsletter; Centre for Science and Environment; New Delhi; October-November 2002;

Available at http://www.rainwaterharvesting.org/catchwater/oct_nov2002/initiative.htm

Highlights cases where women SHG members have used the SWA Shakti scheme to create community assets for ensuring drinking water supply

Recommended Organizations and Programmes

Indira Awas Yojna (from Muhammad Mukhtar Alam, Centre for Ecological Audit, Social Inclusion and Governance, New Delhi; [response 1](#))

Government Scheme; Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India; New Delhi; 1996;

Available at <http://rural.nic.in/rh.htm>

Provides grant-in-aid for rural people below the poverty-line to construct dwelling units and to upgrade kutcha houses, with provisions for water supply

From [Rupa Mukerji](#), Intercooperation, Hyderabad

Water and Sanitation Management Organization (WASMO), Gujarat

3rd Floor, Jalsewa Bhavan, Sector 10-A, Gandhinagar 38200, Gujarat; Tel: 91-79-23247170, 23247171, 23237075; Fax: 91-79-23247485; wasmo@wasmo.org;

http://www.wasmo.org/cms.aspx?content_id=14

Empowers local communities, such as Gram Panchayats and Pani Samitis, to manage their own water supply schemes, particularly with women's involvement

Intercooperation, Andhra Pradesh

53/A/4, Sappers Lane, Balamrai, Secunderabad 500003, Andhra Pradesh; Tel: 91-40-27906991;

Fax: 91-40-23356275; info@intercooperation.org.in;

<http://www.intercooperation.org.in/projects.html>

Initiated a pilot project on decentralised natural resource management, including water, with a focus on empowering elected women representatives in rural areas

Samam SHG Women's Federation, Pondicherry Science Forum, Pondicherry (from [Raghunath T.P.](#))

No. 10, II Street, PR Gardens, Reddiarpalayam, Pondicherry 605010; Tel: 91-413-2292432;

rdpsf@gmail.com; <http://www.psfcerd.org/User/Samam/Samam.htm>

Members of the Federation have ensured availability and quality of drinking water, cleaned overhead tanks through their collective action

Jalanidhi, Kerala (from [Binukmar G.S.](#), Institute for Resource Analysis and Policy (IRAP), Hyderabad)

Kerala Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Agency, Ptc Towers, S. S. Kovil Road, Thampanoor, Thiruvananthapuram 695001, Kerala; Tel: 91-471-2337002, 2337003, 2337005; Fax: 91-471-2337004; pmu@jalanidhi.com; <http://www.jalanidhi.com/index.htm>;

Provides a minimum 33% reservation for women in Water Supply Beneficiary Groups (BGs), women play an important role in decision in water supply schemes

From [Ragini Sahay](#), Social Anthropologist, New Delhi

Gujarat Women's Economic Development Corporation Ltd., Gujarat

Udyog Bhavan, Block No. 8/8, Sector 11, Gandhinagar 382017, Gujarat; Tel: 91-712-23222644, 23227287, 23227119; Fax: 91-712-3227129

Provided support to women SHG groups to manage and maintain drinking water storage systems; and has demonstrated success stories of water resources managed by women

Swa Shakti Scheme

Government Scheme; Department of Women and Child Welfare, Government of India; New Delhi; 1988;

Available at <http://wcd.nic.in/ar0304/chapter2.pdf> (PDF; Size: 639KB)

Provides financial support to build community assets, and several women SHGs have used it to build infrastructure for drinking water

People's Learning Center for Water and Sanitation (PLC), Gujarat (from [Surekha Sule](#), Independent Journalist, Pune)

C-1157, 1st Floor, Manu Raja Chamardiwala, Opposite SBS, Kaliyabhid, Bhavnagar 364002, Gujarat; Tel: 91-278-2573061; plc_watsan@rediffmail.com;

<http://www.plcwatsanutthan.org/index.html>;

Builds capacities of communities by enabling them to realize their rights to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, particularly that of women

From [Seema Raghunathan](#), WaterHealth India Pvt. Ltd., Secunderabad

WaterHealth India Pvt. Ltd., Andhra Pradesh

No. 206, Ashoka My Home Chambers, 1-8-301, S. P. Road, Secunderabad 500003, Andhra Pradesh; Tel: 91-40-27890307, 27890308; Fax: 91-40-27890309; infoindia@waterhealth.com;

<http://www.waterhealth.com>

Helped set up Water Health Centres for providing safe drinking water, which were managed, monitored and maintained by women

Indira Kranthi Patham, Andhra Pradesh

Department of Rural Development, Government of Andhra Pradesh, Huda Hermitage Building, Hill Fort Road, Opposite Public Gardens, Hyderabad 500004, Andhra Pradesh ; Tel: 91-40-23296790; Fax: 91-40-23243518 comm_rd@ap.gov.in;

<http://www.aponline.gov.in/apportal/HomePageLinks/IndiraKantiPadham.htm>

In collaboration with other stakeholders, involved women in the management and maintenance of Water Health Centre to provide safe drinking water

Terre des hommes, Karnataka (from Muhammad Mukhtar Alam, Centre for Ecological Audit, Social Inclusion and Governance, New Delhi; [response 1](#))

No. 5. Stephens Road, F Town Frazer Town Bangalore 560005, Karnataka; Tel: 91-80-25484937; Fax: 91-41-58611067; info@tdh.ch;

<http://www.terredeshommes.org/index.php?page=act.eme&lang=en>

Provides water access points to marginalised tribes; installed Water Health Centres managed by women, in collaboration with its partners

Self Employed Women's Association, Gujarat (from [Shalini Jain](#), SEEDS India, New Delhi)
Opposite Victoria Garden, Bhadra, Ahmedabad 380001, Gujarat; Tel: 91-79-25506444, 25506477, 25506441; Fax: 91-79-25506446; mail@sewa.org;

<http://www.sewa.org/campaigns/water.asp#The%20Water%20Campaign>

Part of SEWA's water campaign, which trained women in rural areas to maintain and repair hand pumps, and encouraged their overall participation in water management

United Nations Children's Education Fund (UNICEF), New Delhi (from [Arunabha Majumdar](#), Jadavpur University, Kolkata)

73 Lodhi Estate, New Delhi 110003; Tel: 91-11-24690401; Fax: 91-11-24627521;

newdelhi@unicef.org; http://www.unicef.org/india/children_2357.htm

UN agency which works on sanitation and hygiene education, it introduced the Tara handpumps in West Bengal, involving women's participation in their maintenance

Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (India), Gujarat (from [Dhivya David](#), Research Associate)

9th-10th Floor, Corporate House, Opposite Dinesh Hall, Off Ashram Road, Ahmedabad 380009, Gujarat; Tel: 91-79-66312451; Fax: 91-79-66312471; kishore@akrspi.org;

http://www.akdn.org/india_rural.asp

Supports women's role in water governance and also helps SHG members to access microfinance schemes for minor irrigation and watershed development

Recommended Portals and Information Bases

From [Dhivya David](#), Research Associate

Gender Water Network, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies (RSPAS), The Australian National University, Australia

<http://rspas.anu.edu.au/gwn/index.php>; Contact Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt; Gender Water Network Coordinator; Tel: 61-61254343; kuntala.lahiri-dutt@anu.edu.au

Provides information for students, professionals and researchers interested in gender issues pertaining to water resource management

Gender and Water Alliance, Netherlands

P.O. Box 114, 6950 AC Dieren, The Netherlands; Tel: 31-313-427230; Fax: 31-313-427230;

secretariat@gwalliance.org; <http://www.genderandwater.org>

Global network to promote equitable access to and management of safe and adequate water involving women's participation

Responses in Full

[Surekha Sule](#), Independent Journalist/Researcher, Pune

Utthan has already addressed these issues in some way through its People's Learning Centre (PLC). I happened to visit PLC in Bhavnagar and some villages around it. It has left its mark in some villages especially where women are inspired because of Nafisa (Utthan's leading figure). Some women have learnt technical aspects of managing drinking water resources. Otherwise, it is quite an uphill task to break through the patriarchal traditions where women just sit silently in veils in the meetings.

Another observation was at Ahmednagar where a leading NGO works among the village community, although the projects here have been labeled 'with people's participation', it is very limited, and villagers tend to depend on the organization for every little thing. For the NGO, it is not always possible to undertake post-project follow up at all times.

Even in Manipur, women from Meira Paibis (Women Torch Bearers) are taking lead in protesting against the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) and protecting their men folk who are targeted by security forces and insurgent groups as well. But even these women do not have a say in the village affairs.

In Nagaland, village autonomy is strong and is further helped through the Village Development Board where 25 per cent of the funds are reserved for women. Women here seem to be taking lead in the decision-making process too.

While the ground is prepared through policy and programmes for women to take active part in village affairs, organizations such as PLC should be strengthened with resources - both in terms of funds and in terms of upgrading training personnel who create a motivated cadre at least at the block level. Such models of PLC need to be replicated with emphasis on self-dependency.

Muhammad Mukhtar Alam, Centre for Ecological Audit, Social Inclusion and Governance, New Delhi (*response 1*)

I recall my work with Terre des Hommes (Germany) India Programme where while supporting the work of Society for Rural Development Action, we helped in the formation of federation of self help groups at district levels. It would be useful if women and their consent are made critical for the governance of drinking water in the rural and urban areas. I guess this would be an effective tool for ensuring ecologically safe and sustainable access to water resources both in the rural and urban areas. The quota system appears to be a good instrument for ensuring inclusion of all groups. Proportional representation of women belonging to the various social groups would be useful and it would be a stepping stone for ensuring inclusive justice in the governance of drinking water in rural areas.

K. D. Bhatt, GSFC Science Foundation, Vadodara

I would like to respond to [Muhammad Mukhtar Alam's](#) suggestion of forming women's SHGs both in rural and urban areas. I believe that for urban areas, it is a distant possibility since most of the households in urban areas get assured water supply either through municipal corporations and/or through private tube wells/bore wells. So, unless there is pressing demand for the resource, there will be no common pool of thought leading to the formation of SHGs.

Atul Rawat, DMV Business and Market Research Pvt. Ltd., Hyderabad

Women are worst affected when there is a scarcity of water. There is no crop; men have to move out to earn their living while women are left to fend themselves and their families. They have to travel long distance in search of water. This whole process affects their health and reduces the time available to them which could be utilized for other income generating activities. It also restricts their participation in socio-economic activities.

Low water levels mean that women have to put in more effort to draw water from wells. They may also have to wait longer for their turn. Therefore, there is a need for increased awareness regarding water harvesting, particularly among women. They also ought to be given a fair

chance by considering their views. It is also important to make them part of the decision-making process related to water governance.

Seema Raghunathan, WaterHealth India Pvt. Ltd., Secunderabad

The role of women in providing safe water for the household is a difficult task, yet women have for long been successful in providing safe water to not only at household levels but also for the community.

In partnership with IKP and ITDA, WaterHealth India in Jainoor, Adilabad district, Andhra Pradesh installed Water Health Centre for providing safe drinking water for the community. The project ensured that women were involved in managing, monitoring and maintaining the Water Health Centre. This has been a sustainable model and now women from the area are planning to buy an auto rickshaw for distribution of safe water to the households. Although the Adilabad model is new, in other districts of Andhra Pradesh another 260 Water Health Centres have also been successfully providing safe water to the community. This has helped them to devote more time towards generating livelihood options.

Raghunath T.P., Pondicherry Science Forum, Pondicherry

I have been following the discussions and thought I could provide some information which others may find useful. I work with the Pondicherry Science Forum (PSF), which has been active in science communication, literacy, with federation of women's SHGs, etc. I am giving here the specific experience of Samam - a women's federation of SHGs that PSF has been instrumental in the formation of, following the total literacy programme in Pondicherry.

Pondicherry is a Union Territory with no dearth of funds for rural infrastructure. Regarding the rural drinking water scenario, Pondicherry may be one place where supply of drinking water has been ensured to almost every village. The problem has not been that of drinking water availability, but the quality of it. Being very close to the coastal area and due to bad planning, the Pondicherry coastal region has been excessively mined for groundwater and the groundwater quality has been deteriorating progressively from the 1960s. Existence of chemical factories have added fuel to the fire, with many of the industries directly pumping their effluents into the shallow aquifers, completely polluting the aquifers in areas like the Kirumambakkam industrial area. After agitations, complaints and studies, the government came up with the banning of new borewells within the 6 km range about 20 years ago, but the old borewells still remain and no control on the withdrawal of groundwater exists by the industries even today.

The role of women's SHGs, specifically the Samam Federation has been that, for the last 4 or 5 years, Samam SHG women have taken the lead to see that the overhead tanks in their villages are cleaned on a regular basis. In many villages, women climb to the top of the overhead tanks, get them opened, and get them cleaned too. In many villages, the overhead tanks were never cleaned for years altogether! This happened both in rural and urban areas. Now, in many places, the Samam women demand for regular cleaning of the tanks and a system has been put in place. Since Pondicherry did not have elected panchayats for more than 30 years, Samam's intervention was all the more meaningful and appreciated. (Pondicherry had its panchayati elections only about 2 years ago)

Another specific case where the Samam SHG women actively participated was in the stopping of a major paint company setting up their production plant in a prime agricultural area in Pondicherry. The Pondicherry Science Forum also helped them in studying the environment impact assessment and found that many of the claims made in the EIA were actually wrong.

Along with other civil society organisations, the Samam SHG Federation took the lead in the agitation and brought to notice the flaws in the EIA and finally the Pollution Control Board cancelled the license to the company.

Today, Samam is involved in local issues related to not only the availability of rural drinking water, but also on the quality of it which is all the more important since water borne diseases puts strain on the women's savings and with more than 7 medical colleges in this UT, the health of the people is getting more and more compromised. For Samam, the main focus is empowering the women and providing financial credit is only one of their activities. Samam's intervention in the issue of drinking water proved that women, if properly informed and given the necessary inputs, can effectively intervene in drinking water governance issues as well.

Rupa Mukerji, Intercooperation, Hyderabad

I am familiar with the Maharashtra model and it poses interesting challenges for local management of a system that is large and centralized. It is like the Panchayati Raj System itself where decentralization is promoted from the top, the flow of resources is largely top down, and the local entity seeks to define its role and position in the given power structure. While the presence of women through a quota system is a very important first step, there are several challenging next steps – women's role and position in such bodies should be acknowledged; they should have the confidence and information base to voice their opinions; their opinions should be heard; and finally appropriate actions need to be initiated based on these.

Quotas are an important right and a first step. Large scale systematic grassroots efforts are needed for capacity building of women members and for making institutions responsive to women. The WASMO experience is valuable in this context. Intercooperation has initiated a pilot programme on decentralised natural resource management with GPs in Bidar which is now being upscaled and its focus is to work with elected women members. Funds are made available to women GP members to help them gain experience in planning and monitoring small interventions that meet the practical needs of women. The support NGO and elected members will be sensitized on gender budgeting for better analysis of panchayat plans and improve future negotiations.

Muhammad Mukhtar Alam, Centre for Ecological Audit, Social Inclusion and Governance, New Delhi (response 2)

I would like to share another experience of my work with Terre des Hommes (Germany) India, New Delhi where with the support of BMZ and in partnership with ECAT, Bodhgram, Nagaur, Rajasthan, we provisioned the creation of water access points for Bagarias, a tribe that did not get the ST status while Meenas got post independence and Gujjars have been asking for the same. Many Bagarias have been victims of caste based discrimination and untouchability. ECAT Bodhgram faced threats and insinuations from people who believed that that they were working for missionary organizations as they were interacting with the Bagarias, who are a total outcaste in the area. The issue of women's participation did not come up through we had supported them in running shelter homes for single women, primarily widows. Ensuring participation of Bagaria women in the local governance structures in education, water and sanitation, health would be the most critical step for the state to ensure inclusive growth. I am sure this would be the case for other tribes and social groups in Gujarat and Maharashtra and indeed is the case for denotified tribes for whom liberation from colonial laws continues to be a dream.

Thus a combination of civil society actors, religious actors, and state actors need to work together to get rid of the general caste-based attitudes responsible for denial of equitable space

in society. We need convergence of actions through implementation of schemes for covering such social groups. We could call for interest free loans for setting up ecologically sustainable enterprises while providing complete coverage under SSA, Indira Awas Yojana, NREGS, etc. Some of the nomadic tribes seeking permanent settlement need to also be provided with housing and livelihoods support.

L. B. Prakash, Akshara, Hyderabad

In Andhra Pradesh and I guess in some other states as well, drinking water processing units have come up through the PPP process and through private entrepreneurs. The community has to pay about Rs. 1 per litre or less for drinking water, and this seems to have become popular. It may be good to understand their impact on women as well.

Debjani Ghosh, Catholic Relief Services, New Delhi

I do not have much experience of working in this issue, but because I work on gender issues I can say that water supply in urban areas for women is equally a concern. In urban slums the situation is dismal. If you observe any urban slum, the civic services are poor and access for women is a challenge. Women are engaged both in household works as well as livelihood. They are always pressed with time and have the responsibility of running families. The urban slums do not have the concept of water ration, are faced with erratic timings, and shortage of supply often leads to fight and quarrel among the women. Men also often fail to cooperate with women and do not help them in collecting water if they are away for work. I do not know whether the formation of SHGs will help this issue or not. But equal rationing of water among women and making it available when the women are back home and can use them effectively and with no conflict needs to be ensured. There are issues of conflict among women over the use of water.

Secondly, even in the urban areas, women have to access water from the common taps and sometime far off from their houses. It involves time, the burden of carrying things and also carrying water back home. Often young girls are responsible for collecting drinking water and for other household purposes. We need to look into these both in the rural and urban areas.

Arun Jindal , Society for Sustainable Development, Karauli, Rajasthan (response 1)

There are significant gender differences in use, access, and management of water. In many cases, gender discrimination can limit women's and men's chances to access vital water resources, by placing restriction in their autonomy. The tutorial, http://cap-net.org/sites/cap-net.org/files/training_material_s/why_gender_matters.pdf, is primarily aimed at those interested in or responsible for managing water resources. The authors show how addressing gender will improve efficiency of water use and environmental sustainability. A gender approach will also improve social benefits and equity from use of our water resources.

The tutorial covers the basic concepts of water management including how to achieve environmental sustainability and the gender barriers. It considers how to gain environmental benefits and economic efficiency for women. The document covers a number of key areas. For each area the problems are outlined and the benefits of a gendered approach are examined. The authors then outline how to achieve benefits and retain them. Key areas covered in this document are:

- the water supply sector
- sanitation
- agriculture
- environment

A comprehensive list of resources is also provided at the end of the tutorial including selected references, manuals, and general tools.

Binukumar G.S., Institute for Resource Analysis and Policy (IRAP), Hyderabad

I worked for several years in the rural water supply sector under the SRP and Janani projects in Kerala. The responsibility of collecting water for household purposes is earmarked for women. However, in some areas men carry water from distant places by using bicycles and other vehicles. As per the Bylaw of Water Supply Beneficiary Groups (BGs), a minimum 33% reservation is allowed for women and one key post i.e. president, secretary or treasurer is allotted to them (most of the BGs elected women as treasurers). Most of the BGs feel that women handle financial matters better; interestingly majority of the men made this remarks.

The integrity of women's involvement in project implementation is very appreciable. The training programmes on management and skill development helped them to overcome their apprehensions. There are several incidents of agitations in front of electricity offices and GP offices by BG women for seeking approvals and sanctions in the right time for the proper implementation of schemes they are involved in.

In the decision making process, their involvement is very important and their commitment has helped in achieving the target. Once they are engaged in key positions they ensure that the first priority is water supply. Their willingness to spend time to complete the work is also remarkable. The schemes which have women as pump operators, the supply timing and revenue collection is far better. In Kerala the role of women in water supply schemes is very crucial.

Ramakrishna Nallathiga, Centre for Good Governance, Hyderabad

An article written by Kalpana Sharma in the Sunday Special supplement of The Hindu on 31 May 2009 (<http://blogs.thehindu.com/delhi/?p=22634>), mentions the experience of Nai Basti in Haryana, maintained by women under whose leadership the supply of basic services such as water, sanitation and other civic amenities are maintained. And, it fares much better than those not managed by women. I am pasting the text of the article below.

Lessons for new MPs by Kalpana Sharma

Will our MPs listen to the people and understand what they want?

One of the 59 women MPs elected to the 15th Lok Sabha, that incidentally has more women than in previous parliaments, is Shruti Choudhury from Bhivani-Mahendragarh in Haryana. She should visit the small town of Narnaul in her constituency and go to Nai Basti, a slum-like locality. Talk to the women of Nai Basti. They will speak without a moment's hesitation if she asks them what should be her priority. Water, they will shout, followed by sanitation.

Even as the new government jostles over portfolios and the media engages in endless speculation about political equations, millions of people around India are going through another year without adequate water. Bhopal has already seen water riots. There are towns in Gujarat where water is provided for an hour every week. Millions of residents in urban India depend entirely on water supplied by tankers though the summer. And in villages, wells are drying up as the water is diverted, either to supply thirsty towns and cities, or industries.

Governance and development were the two mantras that the Congress Party believes brought it back to power so convincingly in these elections. But in its second term, will it continue to push these two crucial factors, where one cannot work without the other? The best of schemes falls flat because there are no systems of governance. And even where there are systems of governance in place, nothing changes if there is no investment in basic services like water supply and sanitation.

Narnaul is a good illustration of this. The town, with a population of over 60,000, is located just off the highway between Delhi and Jaipur and is typical of non-descript North Indians towns. Over 18 per cent of its population lives in slums.

I spent a morning with the women of Nai Basti, one of these slum colonies, well before the prospect of a general election had dawned. Women of all ages, their heads covered in brightly coloured dupattas, sat in the verandah of one of the houses and vociferously expressed their views about governance and development.

Their biggest problem was water. They showed me pipes peeping out from the ground that were proof that there had once been a plan to supply piped water. But the plan remained, literally, a pipe dream. The water never came, the pipes remained dry and there was no point attaching a tap to a pipe without water. Thus, the women lived with the proof of a dream, one that has yet to come true. Yet, on paper, they get piped water and thus have to pay a flat rate of Rs. 50 a month for water that is never supplied. So much for paper statistics.

"We did a lot of dharnas for water two years ago. We jammed the road, went to the District Collector's office, sat there for three hours. Everyone came. The water came for two days and then stopped. It is the first time I heard the voices of women drown out those of men!" says one of the women. Despite this, there was little improvement.

How do they get water? The municipality supplies water by filling up tanks some distance from Nai Basti. On paper, this is supposed to happen thrice a week. In fact, the water comes only once a week. Women must wait their turn and fill up as much as they can carry. A couple of hand pumps make up the difference. But the amount they gather and fill is nowhere near their need.

"Gents can go to work. All problems have to be borne by women. We have to collect the water. Women are powerful because they have to bear everything," says Birna Devi, once a municipal councilor.

You can see this at work as you watch how the women of Nai Basti use and save water. They recycle every drop of water, putting it to multiple uses. The soapy water from washing clothes, for instance, is reused to wash dishes. And water that cannot be used again is then used to flush the drains outside their homes. For, in addition to the absence of running water, Nai Basti has no sewerage. But because of the initiative of these women, the area is surprisingly clean.

So the primary lesson in governance that these women can teach our newly elected MPs is: talk to the women, listen to them, ask them about basic problems and learn from the solutions they have devised.

Not everyone heeds such advice and as a rule, even if women's voices are heard, they are not heeded. In Dharavi, the vast cluster of contiguous slum settlements that is constantly in the news for a variety of reasons, women's suggestions should be seriously considered. But they are not.

Dharavi is slowly changing, and could become unrecognisable in the next decade if the government's plan to redevelop it takes off. At present, it is a strange mixture of the old, haphazard low-rise slum tenements and around 80 seven-storey buildings that are part of the current slum redevelopment programme. The majority of these buildings were designed and constructed by builders interested only in extracting the maximum value out of the land and not in the opinions of slum residents. But some of the buildings were designed after extensive consultations with the community that was to be resettled.

Yet even in the latter, women's views are sometimes overlooked or over-ruled. For instance, in one such building where the community to be resettled was consulted the women suggested that the terrace of the building constituted a great common space. They said they could use it to dry their spices and do some of their home-based work. It would be a safe space for small children to play around and for the elderly to walk. Sensible suggestion, you would have thought. Typically, though, the women were over-ruled by a male dominated committee that decided that it was too much of a "risk" to allow people to use the terrace. So today, this community space with its China mosaic floor is kept "safely" locked.

Crucial to good governance is the ability of our legislators to listen and understand what people want. Better still if they heard and understood what women want.

Seema Kulkarni, Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM), Pune

Thanks for the interesting and useful responses from all of you. Examples from Kerala, Gujarat and Pondicherry are particularly inspiring. The wide range of responses more or less seem to converge on 2 critical issues 1) need for quotas for women 2) need for building capacities of women .

These emerge as very useful recommendations for the State governments who need to be told that a) strategy paper for rural drinking water and gender outlining a concrete action programme with a financial allocation be made through a participatory process involving CBOs, NGOs government officials and academician needs to be brought out b) firm budgetary commitment and allocations for the priorities laid out in the strategy paper be made.

Although all these positive responses talk of how women are participating in water governance and in some cases leading some of these initiatives, they also need to discuss how women have been able to overcome the constraints of time and work burden to be able to participate so actively in the public sphere. For example in our study the most cited constraint for women has been that work load is not shared at home or outside and this is a constraint in participation in the public sphere. The other reason of course being the social acceptability of women's participation especially in leadership roles. Many eager women have of course said very firmly that the only way that they can earn the "respectability" to participate is by doing all their assigned tasks at home and outside. None of them have questioned the undemocratic family and domestic spaces which in fact are the main constraining factors for continued and sustained participation of women.

It would be useful if we could discuss some of these aspects that directly affect women's participation and how we could overcome them. Granted that these are issues that call for a broader change process, but can we also think of action programmes that can be the starting points for that broader change process to take place. Many of the answers for these can be found in the positive examples that have already been quoted by you, but by going into the

depth of how women have negotiated and overcome those barriers? Are there any leanings from there? Hope we can continue this dialogue.

Shalini Jain, SEEDS India, New Delhi

There are several instances in India and across the world illustrating the inherent potential of woman to contribute to protection and management of natural resources. The effort of the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) to mobilize women for its work and water campaign in Gujarat in Western India is one such commendable initiative. In 1986, the Gujarat Water supply and sanitation Board (GWSSB) invited SEWA to use its grassroots base to strengthen village-level water committees (*pani samitis*) so that the local people could take over the failing water supply systems. Through regular meetings with women and men in the villages, SEWA was able to identify– the need to find non – water based economic work and the need to conserve water, revive traditional sources like surface wells and ponds, and create alternative water sources like rainwater harvesting.

Under this campaign, with the help of the *pani samitis*, SEWA organized the execution of actual repair/up-gradation work of the traditional water sources such as (wells and ponds) ensuring that women play a leading role in the entire process of revival of the traditional water sources, and undertake tailor-made training and on-the-spot capacity building to become efficient water managers. Rainwater harvesting was also realized as a viable alternative to transporting water over long distances by pipelines and/or tankers. Women were trained to maintain the roof structures, including cleaning the tank with lime to store water and flushing out the first rainwater collected.

In many villages, where hand pumps were the sole source of drinking water, SEWA trained more than 2500 women technically supporting the trained women technicians with a small fee and vehicle expenses to travel to villages with their tools and spare parts for repairing hand pumps. Initially, women faced problems as technical knowledge is considered a male domain and their work was not taken seriously by the villagers. Only after women proved themselves as able technicians were they accepted by the community.

Through this initiative, women could engage themselves in income-generating activities. Such a change also had an impact on gender/power relations both at the household and community levels and has also contributed towards greater gender equity in terms of women's decision making and participation in local water management.

References:-

1. Women's Collective Action and Sustainable Water Management: Case of SEWA's Water Campaign in Gujarat in India
2. Attaining the MDG In India, The Role of Public Policy and Service Delivery, Conference Delhi 17/18 June 2004

Vishwanath Srikantaiah, BIOME, Bangalore

I would like to share a small example on the role of women and the perception towards water. Please visit http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHnwD0VCnTc&feature=chann el_page When we were looking at rooftop rainwater harvesting as a domestic water solution, at the behest of the Government of Karnataka during the drought year 2004 we visited close to 90 taluks in Karnataka and spoke to the worst drought affected villages where water was being brought by tankers. In discussion with women it became quickly clear that the key issue was

storage of water at the domestic level. Without storage there was no access to the standard of 55 lpcd that the GOK had. This was because:

- the pumps of the borewell did not work for lack of electricity for more than 4 hours.
- when the water tankers came there was a scramble and people got about a couple of pots at the most.
- the waiting time for water was uncertain and indeterminate and in the case of both genders of the family needing to work impossible unless one gave up and spent time waiting for water.

We believed in discussion exclusively with women that a storage tank of about 2500 litres connected to a rooftop system would be a solution because it would collect rainwater when it rained and become a storage source when the water came. The idea was that if a private water tanker came it could be asked to fill up the tank at every household. The women liked the idea, the men were not impressed.

This became a project in a 1000 villages where 20 tanks were built of 2000 to 2500 litres capacity mainly because the government put a ceiling of Rs. 5000 per household. As the youtube video shows - incidentally made by Sushma Veerappa- and not deliberately covering only women in it- that is was a blessing to have a storage tank for most women at household level.

How does it transfer to decision making at Gram Panchayat level? Beats me! In many places women have been demanding a bathroom, but we only have a toilet construction programme under the TSC. How do we tackle that?

I hope to be more knowledgeable after the summary of the discussion and the good experiences of many in such an important sphere.

[Ruchi Kukreti](#), Development Alternatives, New Delhi

Despite the fact that that quota system has been introduced for women in the Water and Sanitation Committees, which sounds very logical, but all of us should be aware of the fact that these samities are usually defunct and the women members are mute participants and are just used as rubber stamps.

It is important to work on building the capacities of these women to create a women collective action group for addressing and controlling the decision making processes. It is very important to work with women to make them a demand driven, rights based group. The women members of these Samities should work closely with the women SHGs, Mahilla mandals so that these women collectives are able to support the women members of the samities as pressure groups.

[Abha Mishra](#), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), New Delhi

I totally agree with [Ruchi Kukreti](#) on this issue. It is easy to nominate a women member in the committee but very difficult to ensure that she can perform effectively. Another issue which is important is the multiplicity committees in the villages. I feel that if there is a Women SHG or a Mahila mandal in the village we may like to involve them as members in the Water and Sanitation Committees rather than look for new nomination. As drinking water is mostly women's business we may like to train women members regarding the maintenance and repair as is being done in many of the WATSAN programme under UNICEF which in many places of Orissa is a success.

[Poornima B. S.](#), Technical Support Unit to Karnataka, Scientific Advisory Committee, Bangalore

I remember an article by Kalpana Sharma which appeared in The Hindu on 29-5-09 which mentions how women of Nai Nai Basti save water. The headline just attracted my attention: *The primary lesson in governance for our newly elected MPs is: talk to the women...*

Below is the link to the article which may be of some help:

<http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mag/2009/05/31/stories/2009053150100300.htm>

[Arunabha Majumder](#), Jadavpur University, Kolkata

The Tara hand-pump was introduced by UNICEF in West Bengal in the mid-nineties in rural areas for drawing drinking water from tube-wells. Women groups from beneficiaries were selected for maintenance of the Tara Pump tube-wells. Women groups were also trained under the programme. It worked extremely well with women participation for maintenance. Necessary tools, spares were supplied to them. It was an example of community-based management of rural water supply with women's participation. We have also seen that a hand-pump attached Arsenic Removal Unit functioned well with community participation, especially when women groups took major responsibility of management.

[Arun Jindal](#), Society for Sustainable Development, Karauli, Rajasthan (response1)

Women's empowerment through rural drinking water governance is a relevant topic. We have the case of a woman elected representative who became the chairperson of the village water and health committee, which implements drinking water project in Chainpur village, Karauli district, Rajasthan. One can explore how after the 73rd amendment women are taking a lead role in decision making.

[Ragini Sahay](#), Social Anthropologist, New Delhi

My own experience of working in a self help women group project in Gujarat is as follows:

Under the rural women development and empowerment project (commonly known as Swa Shakti Project World Bank and GOI, implemented in 9 States) lot of women across various districts of Gujarat were involved in various activities of women empowerment. One of which was creating community assets in the villages under which various issues related to drinking water were solved. Need assessment through PRA and FGDs were done to understand their priorities and identification of assets. Women were found to be putting forth their demand and justifying its uses. The women were not only the providers for the family for water, they were fully involved in planning, implementing in preparing such assets which helped the whole village in storing water and maintaining it for longer use.

In Kutch (village Jharu, Block Anjar), I observed that a water storage tank was created by the SHGs which had the storage capacity of 10000 litres. Prior to this the village people had no facility for drinking water. Similar examples in Ahmedabad (Block Viramgam at Moti Kishol a pucca well was created, HAWDA at Block Tankara was created by village people for water storage which helped them in feeding their animals, prior to that they had to walk for 4 kms. There are numerous success stories similar to this. In all these cases though the project had provided a partial financial support, the women and other village persons were forthcoming in contributing their labour as well as from SHG corpus. All these assets were maintained and supervised by SHGs of women. A strong sense of ownership among women was seen. Also under

the convergence programmes women were trained to utilize the benefits already operating under schemes including drinking water schemes. The project in Gujarat was implemented by Gujarat Women Economic Development Corporation Ltd.

I feel women when given a chance in such activities as a part of participatory process of planning and executing, they are instrumental in bringing change and success. The inherent capacities of women can be brought out by the right impetus and opportunities. Training of women is a critical issue in the entire process.

[Seema Tripathi](#), Water Resources Department Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

I would like to thank [Ruchi Kukreti](#) for raising this crucial issue. This is a reality that only reservation to women candidates is not the solution of women empowerment. I also work in a similar field. Madhya Pradesh Water Resources Department initiated the formation of Water User Associations in the whole state, by passing an act in the year 1999, which is known as Sahbhagita Sinchai Prabandhan Me Krishikon Ki Bhagidari Adhiniam. To increase the women participation in Participatory Irrigation Management, so many provisions were made through this act namely-

- All the wives of landholding farmers will be eligible for voting (though they are not having land in their own name) in the WUAs elections.
- Formation of a women subcommittee comprising of all 6 women members.
- Also there is a provision that if there is no women member elected in the territorial constituency (T.C.) then at least one woman should be nominated.

It seemed difficult task in preliminary stage to increase women participation in PIM because women work at field but their work is always neglected as a farmer so they put them in backseat in decision-making issues. Consent of women members is generally not taken during water distribution management

But here I want to put few success stories of these WUAs by linking them with SHGs, NGOs and Mahila Mandal. In the village Kamapar of (Jal Upbhokta Santha Ucher) of Raisen district of Madhya Pradesh women WUAs formed their own Self Help Groups.

One of the Self Help Group lent the money to the Water User Association for the canal restoration work. In this way women came forward in this water distribution work and canal maintenance. They also worked in health and education sector.

Madhya Pradesh Water Sector Restructuring Project is a World Bank aided project of water resources department. In this project social issues have also been focused. One consultancy has been appointed for the capacity building of Water User Association in the 5 river basins of Madhya Pradesh. This consultancy is also working for women empowerment.

[Amitava Basu Sarkar](#), Rural Development Institute, Himalayan Institute Hospital Trust (HIHT), Dehradun

I agree with both [Ruchi Kukreti](#) and [Arunabha Majumdar](#). Calculating women participation in terms of mere numbers does not serve any purpose. Imposition of quota is also of very little use. I agree with Ruchi in this.

If women are given due respect, treated as human beings, empowered, involved in all the (planning) activities they can do it, and have done it before. Here I agree with Arunabha.

I personally feel that quota system (in any walk of life) should be abolished, as it has been proven beyond doubt to have been a failure. You can not make horse drink, even if you drag it to the river!

Krupa Dholakia, Sahjeevan, Bhuj

We have a lot of experience on the issue. To make the quota system efficient, we need to create effective strategic plan and provide capacity building for women. It is not sufficient to have a percentage of women involved in water committees. We need to build their confidence, skill and provide information on this issue. Water governance requires technical skills, however women are not traditionally expected to be involved in it or be aware of it. As a result these issues are not discussed with them. There is a need to break these stereotypes, though it is difficult.

In my personal experience if we create an enabling atmosphere and strategy for women; then they are very competitive. Both men and women need gender sensitization. We work with women for water governance from the technical and social point of view. We have many of examples of women's role in drinking water governance in Kutch.

Maneel Grover, SDSG Foundation, Punjab

The condition of women in rural Punjab is not very good. They contribute the most towards proving safe drinking water to the family as well the community, but have the least role in policy, decision making, etc.

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 and Solution Exchange for the Gender Community in India at se-gen@solutionexchange-un.net.in with the subject heading "Re: [se-watr][se-gen] Query: Rural Drinking Water Governance and the Role of Women - Experiences; Example. Additional Reply."

Disclaimer: *In posting messages or incorporating these messages into synthesized responses, the UN accepts no responsibility for their veracity or authenticity. Members intending to use or transmit the information contained in these messages should be aware that they are relying on their own judgment.*



Copyrighted under Creative Commons License "[Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.5](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/)". Re-users of this material must cite as their source Solution Exchange as well as the item's recommender, if relevant, and must share any derivative work with the Solution Exchange Community.



Solution Exchange is a UN initiative for development practitioners in India. For more information please visit www.solutionexchange-un.net.in
