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Poverty and Natural Resource Management

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Objectives

The following objectives are proposed for the Sida natural resource management programme: To strengthen the capacity of Panchayati Raj and related community institutions to conserve, manage, and use water and forest resources in an inclusive, pro-poor, and sustainable manner. – To improve the livelihoods and well-being of the poor through increased access, control and better management of water and forest resources. – To facilitate development of policy, programmes and practices consistent with the principles of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM). These objectives are further detailed in the various programme options outlined in Section 7.

Introduction

The present mission was aimed at contributing to Sida's ongoing preparation of a countrystrategy for India that will commence in 2003 and last for five years. The purpose of this assignment is toassist Sida in formulating.A proposal for development cooperation in the field of natural resource management (NRM), with a specific focus on water. The mission was undertaken during May and June 2002 and involved interactions with government representatives, donors, NGOs and sector experts at national and state levelVisits were undertaken to Chattisgarh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttaranchal.

In the past collaborated with India on bilateral and NGO interventions related to forestry, land husbandry, and, to a lesser extent, water. While these programmes and projects have resulted in the creation of extensive physical assets, it is recognised that their impact and sustainability are hampered by inadequate attention paid to poverty, institutional and policy related issues.It has expressed a particular interest in collaborating with India on activities that

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would support integrated water resources management (IWRM) and approaches that would strengthen Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The analysis in this document therefore pays specific attention to these. With regard to forestry, the scope of the study is to provide an overall policy and institutional analysis, and to explore the link between the forest sector and livelihoods in Orissa, rapid urbanisation and increased livelihood diversification, more than 6 percent of India's, population still depend on agriculture for livelihoods. The nexus between **poverty** and environmental, conservation remains strong. Land degradation is a key issue affecting resource productivity. It is estimated that about one third of the soil in India has been affected by erosion. This has a direct impact on agricultural productivity and hence food production, especially for resource poor, farmers living off marginal land-holdings. The area declining under forest cover has now been arrested, but the volume and density of forests have been reduced causing scarcity of valuable forest, produce, important for the livelihoods of poor in many regions.

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Overexploitation of surface and groundwater threatens the quantity, reliability and quality of water, availability. Water is rapidly becoming a scarce resource. Growing scarcity and competition for water poses a major threat to advances in poverty reduction by limiting productive as well as consumptive, aspects of livelihoods and well-being. If this trend is not reversed, it is believed that an increasing number of poor people may find more difficulty in securing access to water than securing, access to food, primary health care, or education Access to safe water

Forestry

Forests cover almost one fifth of the national land area of India. However, about 42 per cent of

these are degraded. Recent surveys indicate a slight increase in the forest area over the last two

years. However, this data is an insufficient indicator of the condition of India's forests, since levels, of aggregation reveal little about trends in quality. Degradation, not deforestation, is currently considered to be the major problem as deforestation has reduced due to massive afforestation programmes, and changes in government policies over the last 25 years. Shrinking common property, resource base, rapidly increasing human and livestock population, and poverty are some of the, factors contributing to the pressure on the existing forests. Though pressure from forest-dependent, local people is often cited as a major cause of forest degradation, it has also been the result of interventions, by multiple actors, including forest industry, involved in disturbing the same area of, forest at different points in time.

Water

India receives an average rainfall equivalent of 4,000 billion cubic meters but faces serious temporal and spatial water shortages. These shortages have exacerbated with rising demand for particularly, irrigation. Contributing to the scenario is inefficient water management and use. The efficiency of surface water irrigation is estimated as low as 40 percent and although overall groundwater exploitation is only about 50 percent, resource-threatening exploitation levels have been reached in several locations. Subsidies for canal irrigation and power have encouraged inefficient resource use. Water quality issues compound the problem. Deep borewells and handpumps, expected to address quality problems associated with traditional sources such as open wells, have become problematic themselves. Arsenic, fluoride, sodium and nitrate contamination have been evidenced with groundwater extraction from deep aquifers. Technologies for addressing these have been developed, but their applicability and cost in rural environments remain an issue. Analyses of current problems point to inadequacies in the overall policy, legal and institutional framework. In India, the entire approach to water resources in the post-Independence period was geared towards resource exploitation through capital investments rather than equitable and sustainable water management. It is within this questionable approach that many of today's concerns are rooted. The deterioration of traditional water harvesting structures has been one major impact of this flawed approach.

Water Resources Management

As mentioned earlier, India faces serious temporal and spatial water shortages that are worsened by rising demand, declining quality and poor water management and resource-use efficiency.

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The present situation has been traced to a variety of reasons, of which the most crucial are: (a) traditional policy and institutional focus on resource utilisation rather than management, and (b) lack of regulation (including self-regulation) on inefficient water use. Government agencies, often uncoordinated, unsystematic and trapped in resource utilisation modes, have been largely unsuccessful in addressing the situation. The success of NGO and donor-driven watershed or water conservation interventions with community-centred processes offers some promise, but larger issues relating to sustainability and scale cast a shadow. While water conservation initiatives appeared to gain centrestage during the latter half of the nineties, the role of millions of farmers who actually manage groundwater resources has been limited even in these initiatives due to low levels of resource literacy on causes, consequences or choices. In this context, there emerges a case for building upon the momentum generated by watershed and water conservation interventions through locally developed and agreed mechanisms for sustainable and equitable water use.

Policies

An encouraging development in recent years has been the recognition and attempt to address the

fundamental issues impacting the water sector. This recognition is reflected in two key documentsthe National Water Policy 2002 and the Revised Watershed Guidelines 2001. The National Water Policy 2002 emphasises the need for sustainable water resource management, conjunctive use of surface and groundwater resources, groundwater regulation and people's participation in management of natural resources.

Rural Water Supply and Sanitation

Rural water supply is essentially a state subject. However, the central government has the dominant role in setting policy goals and standards which are aimed mainly at ensuring basic services and achieving health objectives.10 At the state level, most government programmes are aimed at providing safe potable drinking water to all. Financial resources for this are available through the national Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme In addition to this, the state governments have also accessed institutional finance for rural water supply.11 Following the emphasis on safe drinking water provision during the International Decade for Water Supply and Sanitation Development there have been increased financial

Panchayati Raj Institutions and Natural Resource Management

The process of devolution and decentralisation has been slowed by fiscal, administrative and political centralisation and centre-state conflicts since Independence. Progressive measures in states like Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka notwithstanding, the process of devolution and decentralization received genuine fillip in the early 1990s with the enactment of the 73rd (rural) and 74th (urban) Constitutional Amendments. Karnataka, for example, passed a much heralded law in 1983 with two important features: the president of the Zilla Parishad (District Panchayat) was given the rank of a Minister of State with control over the Chief Executive of the district16 and 25 percent of the seats were reserved for women. These amendments effectively created a third tier of governance that was hinted at but not given form in the Indian Constitution. Local institutions were devolved of planning powers, financial resources and implementation control

Proposed Strategy for Natural Resource Management

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Given that Sida' s overall goal is to 'raise the standard of living of poorer groups of people in the world', it is proposed that the goal of the Sida natural resource management programme in India should relate to this. Thus, it is suggested that the goal should be to: Improve livelihoods and well-being of the poor through sustainable and equitable management of forest and water resources. As described in Section 2, a sustainable management objective alone cannot ensure sustainable livelihood outcomes for the poorest. Therefore, it is important that equity is built into the goal itself. This will ensure that programmes and activities focus on pro-poor strategies and build in access and equity issues such as water rights, prioritisation and use at the outset. This is vital to programme success and addressing overarching poverty alleviation goals considering the nature of, and nexus between, social and power relations and resource claims in rural India. Both livelihoods and wellbeing need to be incorporated, given that livelihoods often have a productivity-based connotation whereas well-being is a broader term encompassing aspects of quality of life including, for instance, health benefits and time saved from access to clean water supplies.

Proposed Programme Options

The programme options identified are: (a) water conservation and management, (b) drinking watersupply and sanitation, and (c) capacity-building for IWRM. The first two may appear conventional at one level, but can be innovative if linked to an IWRM agenda. Further, much more needs to be done to find ways in which communities can assess, negotiate and manage water resources. It is in working towards this that interventions will distinguish themselves from conventional ones. The 'entry' will however have to be through the conventional route, which is recognised and accepted. The scale needs to be 'local' enough to effectively engage with Gram Panchayats and other community institutions and keep institutional complexities to a manageable level. Awareness and capacity-building, both among primary and secondary stakeholders, will be most crucial. The policy and institutional challenges are significant and impacts on these will occur through successful demonstration models and dialogue in various forms and fora. Sida's commitment to supporting the decentralisation process and working with PRIs adds another dimension to the institutional challenge. However, it is here that Sida can gain the most significant value added, if interventions were to show that Gram Panchayats can indeed manage water resources in an effective and pro-poor manner. a grant from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation

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