

### 1. BACKGROUND

#### 1.1 UPSLRP I & II

Although UP produces 20 per cent of India's food grains, the major concern of the state is declining production of food grains. This is mainly due to water-induced land degradation with the sustained removal of nutrients associated with intensive cropping and inappropriate use of the heavily subsidized nitrogenous fertilizers. The resultant area affected by sodicity forms 10 per cent of the total cultivable area in the state. The state government, therefore, implemented an innovative pilot project called UP Sodic Lands Reclamation Project-I (UPSLRP-I) to address the problem and restore the productivity of the state's 1.2 million hectares of sodic waste lands, over a seven-year period (between 1993 & 2001). The project was funded by The World Bank and managed by the UP Bhumi Sudhar Nigam (UPBSN).

In order to consolidate the gains and replicate the experiences of the pilot project, a second phase of the project, UPSLRP-II, was commissioned in 1999 for a period of six years. The project targets 1,50,000 hectares of sodic land and 3,75,000 farming families who own them. These families are located in 1468 villages spread over 12 districts. Three-fourths of beneficiaries covered under the project are small and marginal farmers belonging to the socially and economically weaker sections owning sodic lands.

##### 1.1.1 Selection of Project Villages

The project villages were identified with the help of maps provided by the Remote Sensing Application Centre (RSAC). The following criteria were used in the selection: (a) the extent of sodic area is more than 30 per cent of the total area in the village and a minimum of over 10 hectares of 'C' category sodic land (with >8.5 PH where no crop is grown); (b) the main drain is close to the village; (c) ground water level is below two metres; and (d) village is not under consolidation.

##### 1.1.2 Selection of Beneficiaries

The criteria adopted for selection of beneficiaries are (a) the beneficiary is the owner of the sodic land; (b) the PH value of the land is >8.5; (c) the beneficiary is a resident of the project village; and (d) the beneficiary is willing to work for reclamation of his sodic land, through a group approach and as per the project norms

### 2. PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT PROCESSES IN UPSLRP-II

The UPSLRP-I had adopted a demand-responsive participatory approach in involving the beneficiaries as the prime actors in planning, implementing and sustaining the project impact at grassroots level.. The success of the Pilot Project in effecting participation was based on five basic principles: Transparency, Equity, Accountability, Decentralised Decision-making, and Human & Institutional Capacity Building. These principles continue to guide the UPSLRP-II also.

The participatory approach adopted for UPSLRP-II is built on the experiences of the Pilot Project, which established several grassroots-level institutions such as Water User Groups (WUGs), Site Implementation Committees (SICs), Core Teams (CTs) and Women's Self Help Groups (WSHG). Besides, there are the Community Resource Persons: progressive farmers and literate youth identified and selected as Mitra Kisan (MK) (Men), Mahila Mitra Kisan (Women) and Animators (Motivators). NGOs have been involved as supporting actors to facilitate and establish the beneficiary participation process. They are identified by the Participatory Management Cell (PMC), an apex body created at the UPBSN HQ specially for the purpose.

Various line departments of the government dealing with agriculture & animal husbandary, irrigation, public works and panchayat raj are also involved as partners in some important components of the project such as land reclamation & farming, engineering maintenance and farmers' rehabilitation. The UPBSN has also engaged certain professional institutions as contractual partners in adaptive research, training and independent project monitoring. Commercial and specialised banks have been involved in the project to facilitate access to bank credit for beneficiaries and SHGs constituted under the project.

A significant feature of UPSLRP-II is the mobilisation of beneficiary communities for participatory group action in order to help them absorb and sustain these technical, institutional and management practices that were sought to be instilled in them during the Pilot Phase.

### **3. INITIATIVES TO ENABLE PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES**

Three key areas have been identified for project interventions for enabling the beneficiary farmers to effectively participate in project activities. They are: (a) communication systems for community mobilisation & technology dissemination; (b) human resource development; and (c) credit accessibility support.

#### **3.1 Communication Systems**

In the planning stages of the project the focus of communication was on familiarising the beneficiaries with the participatory implementation activities. The focus will gradually shift to technology dissemination, in the implementation stage. For this, a farmer-led extension system by way of Farmers' Field Schools and Farmers' Clubs, has been conceived along with a decentralised training model. This approach has been adopted for the twin purpose of ensuring widespread reach of training as well as capacity building of beneficiary communities for sustainability. Information is delivered at regular intervals using different methods of communication ranging from 'wall writings' to 'electronic media'.

#### **3.2 Human Resources Development (HRD)**

Training modules have been developed, based on the experiences during the pilot phase. All the modules, except for a few basic ones, are kept flexible and dynamic, in view of the prevalent superstitions, persistent illiteracy (especially of women) and different needs of the stakeholders. The UPBSN has also tied-up with some professional institutions in the region in imparting the training, which is administered at village, district & headquarters levels.

#### **3.3 Credit Accessibility Support**

Majority of beneficiaries under the project are either small and marginal farmers or landless labourers. Support for credit-accessibility, therefore, came to be perceived as a crucial intervention for enabling the beneficiaries and instilling in them a sense of confidence in project objectives. Activities initiated include: sensitisation of bank personnel, and simplification/ modification of existing agri-related loan procedures and facilitation of more beneficial arrangements.

### **4. ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES IN UPSLRP II**

The consultancy assignment undertaken by STEM involved periodical review of the above participatory management activities in UPSLRP-II and suggestion of corrective measures to be adopted.

#### **4.1 Objectives of the Assessment**

The objectives of the assessment are as follows:

- Evaluate the content, appropriateness, adequacy and effectiveness of the participatory approaches developed under the project in accomplishing the project objectives
- Identify the areas requiring further improvement and attention to facilitate the development of future plans based on the assessment

## **4.2 Sample Size**

A total of 12 villages, one each from the project districts, were selected using stratified random sampling method. The stratification included pre-reclamation, reclamation and post-reclamation villages covered under the project during the years 1999 (4 villages), 2000 (6 villages) and 2001 (2 villages).

## **4.3 Methodology & Approach**

A participatory methodology, based on the Social Audit Approach as suggested in the TOR, was adopted for the assessment.

The qualitative parameters that were looked into were: (a) Contents of participatory processes adopted in the project, its appropriateness and adequacy; (b) Expectations of the key primary stakeholders, before the project; (c) Outcome of project intervention and its effectiveness; (d) Gaps, if any, between expectations and outcome and the reasons thereof; (e) Adequacy and appropriateness of strategies planned for withdrawal and sustainability of project impacts; and (f) issues and concerns related to participatory implementation.

The quantitative parameters covered include: data related to physical progress of selected villages, sub-units and project units and, for the state level, from the UPBSN HQ, gathered through desk review of various project documents and interactive discussions and workshops with personnel concerned at various levels.

## **4.4 Techniques and Tools**

Multiple techniques and tools used to generate the required information and data for the assessment include: desk review, focus group discussions, resource mapping, preference ranking, stakeholder assessment matrix, case studies, and interactive information workshop.

## **4.5 Limitations of the Assessment**

The participatory management process under UPSLR-II is being implemented in as many as 1468 villages. The very extensive scope of the assessment, the extremely small sample size of 12 representative villages, and the restricted time frame of two months envisaged by the TOR has limited the intensity of the study.

# **5. FINDINGS**

## **5.1 Impact of Technology Transfer**

Transfer of knowledge regarding technologies to be adopted for reclamation and crop production as well as the dissemination methods adopted have been very effective as confirmed by the experiences of respondents, especially from the villages of the first two years of project implementation. The technology, particularly of gypsum mixing and leaching, draining of salt water through link drains, soil testing, timely application of fertilizers, etc., have tremendously influenced the perception of farmers vis-à-vis land and its productive use. Improvements were noticed in soil quality, flora & fauna, area of productive lands, employment opportunities in the villages, wage rates and attitudes towards collaborative & co-operative practices. There was also a change in the socio-economic conditions of the beneficiaries. There was a reduction in out-migration as well as a positive shift in the spending habits among new small farmers – from food and alcohol to children's education, agriculture, animal husbandry, and so on.

## **5.2 Impact of Training Interventions**

Access to support services in technical areas such as bore and pump set mechanisms and maintenance and social welfare services such as literacy promotion and health care, especially mother

& child care, were found to have made a long lasting impact on the farmer communities. These have enhanced the confidence among the farmers and also the animators that they can find the remedy within their own village.

### **5.3 Impact of Participatory Management**

Involvement of beneficiary farmers in the decision-making at different stages of the project such as identification of needs and problems, planning and implementation has inculcated a sense of ownership among the beneficiaries. In realising the objective of participatory management processes, the UPBSN has demonstrated a strong commitment to empowering the stakeholders. The agency has been able to evolve and develop a replicable model.

### **5.4 Impact of Credit Management**

Because of their poor economic background, banks generally tend to consider the local community as not credit worthy. The project has, therefore, been making serious efforts to sensitize bank officials -- through regular meetings, training programmes & exposure visits -- on the credit needs of the farmers, policy issues involved and problems encountered in credit administration, the need to find solutions for facilitation of credit accessibility and active involvement of bankers at field level. Credit awareness camps were also organised for the benefit of the project communities. Following project interventions, procedures for crop loans have been simplified and a Cash Credit Limit (CCL) facility for crop loans via SHGs has been introduced. Besides, at the instance of the project, the stamp duty on agricultural and SHG lending is being reduced by the government from time to time. Such measures have resulted in smooth release of institutional credit to the beneficiaries.

### **5.5 Effectiveness of Beneficiary Institutions**

The grass-roots level beneficiary institutions are: WUGs, SICs, Core Teams, MSHGs & WSHGs. An assessment of their functioning in terms of beneficiary participation, decentralised decision-making, transparency and capacity building was carried out. It was in the form of a participatory appraisal. These institutions belonged to 8 out of the 12 project districts.

Respondents indicated that the frequency of WUG meetings had been declining over time. An important observation made by some group leaders was that the attendance was not good when the meetings were held frequently. Attendance was reported to be good only for the meetings connected with the distribution of inputs and money. The farmers' preoccupation with their work, people having become fully aware of the project, and some group leaders failing to give advance notification to members were among the reasons cited for irregular meetings and low attendance. However, respondents were of the opinion that when the meetings were held, the atmosphere was informal and transparent and devoid of any class/ caste prejudices. Conflicts, if any, are resolved to the satisfaction of all or at least the majority of group members. All financial transactions are kept transparent by the groups and any member or project functionary can access the documents any time. The WUGs have instilled a sense of ownership among the beneficiaries and enhanced their confidence of managing reclamation activities by themselves with guidance from the project functionaries.

There have been incidents of misuse of inputs such as seeds and fertilizers supplied by the project. The process of distribution is not monitored in a systematic way. Although many beneficiaries are aware of land classification, many are ignorant of the input eligibility criteria. Besides, some group leaders fail to notify the members in advance of the day of distribution. This leads to confusion.

Respondents reported that many group leaders of the core teams do not share the knowledge and experience gained either in the group meetings or in the SIC meetings. This has further alienated the core teams from many beneficiaries and created the impression that the CTs are not living up to their objectives.

The proportion of WUGs which have formed MSHGs varies across the project units assessed. However, the average proportion is less than 30 per cent.

The members of the savings group formed by the WUGs save regularly in the initial period of formation of the groups. But, gradually, one by one the members stop saving and finally the group ceases to exist.

The quantum of internal lending as against their savings is very low among many MSHGs, in most of the project districts. Cases of evasion of repayment of credit by members and, consequently, the groups concerned becoming defunct, are also not rare. Generally, the linkage of MSHGs with the banks has been found to be poor in all the project districts assessed. One reason identified was that many MSHGs do not meet the criteria since they do not have regular savings. Another reason cited is procedural delays on the part of the banks.

Although a good number of WSHGs have been formed under the project with sufficient savings, their performance varies across the project districts, in terms of amount of savings mobilized and the amount utilized for internal lending. The total internal lending of WSHGs account for nearly 92 per cent of the total savings of the groups. This is an indicator of good performance by the groups. However, the proportion of internal lending for purposes other than agricultural-related accounts for 50-60 per cent. There have been a few cases of internal lending being availed for starting micro-enterprises, which call for better attention. The repayment of credit in many of the groups is generally good, even though some cases of members absconding after availing credit do exist. Other than savings, the WSHGs rarely discuss any issues related to women or land reclamation. The women members and their leaders do not participate in WUG or SIC meetings. The MMKs and Female Motivators have not been adequately trained to nurture the WSHGs and direct their efforts towards self-reliance and empowerment. By and large, the formation of WSHGs were found to have a very positive impact on the socio-economic status of beneficiary women.

## **5.6 Performance in terms of Reclamation**

The performance of the selected project in terms of sodic area reclaimed in the last two years, the area proposed for reclaiming during the current year and the number of villages covered during the last three years varies from one district to the other. In five out of ten districts sampled (relevant data was not available for two districts), the achievement of area reclaimed was found to be less than the target fixed. Although the target of most of the project units is uniform at 1200 hectares per annum, the actual area reclaimed was 90-95 per cent of the targeted area. The reason given by the project managers for low achievement are many. The common reasons attributed by most of the managers are:

- Non-completion of OFD works such as bunding, leveling and field drains in time, after issuing few notices as per the decision of SIC.
- Conflicts among beneficiary farmers in taking possession of allotted lands.

## **5.7 Beneficiaries' Capacity for sustaining Project Impact**

In the case of UPSLRP-I, the withdrawal strategy was not planned at the initial stage of the project. This had affected the sustainability of the project impact to some extent. Based on the Phase-I experience, the withdrawal strategy has been built into the project implementation methodology for UPSLRP-II. A quantitative assessment was carried out in a group of 12 sample villages, representing the three reclamation years, to understand the extent of preparedness of beneficiaries for post-reclamation activities. Two of them belonged to pre-reclamation stage, six to the reclamation stage and four to the post-reclamation stage. The assessment was based on five broad parameters: (i) Land Reclamation; (ii) Crop Production; (iii) Technology Dissemination; (iv) Institutional Linkages; & (v) Socio-economic Factors.

As for Phase-II, the required management structures and capacities are developed right from the planning stage of the project. Community level resource persons are identified and trained in order to make the required capacities available at the village level. Participatory mechanisms are developed and infused into the process for maintenance of common property resources. Emphasis is being given to establishment of functional linkages between beneficiaries and government departments, financial and training institutions to strengthen the co-ordination.

The Farmers' School (a group of Farmers' Clubs) formed at the block level is the most important component in the Exit Policy of the project. This entity would be developed as the apex participatory body of the extension system led by farmers after the exit of the project. This was found to be an innovative approach. The fact that the concept has been well accepted by beneficiaries has resulted in the inception of nine farmers' schools in the Phase-I areas. One such school, set up at Darauly in Fathepur district, has been functioning quite effectively beyond Phase-I. The meetings are held regularly. The master farmers now serve as resource persons to the new villages selected under Phase-II.

The SICs, on the other hand, have not attempted at serious thinking towards post-project responsibilities or activities. However, some SICs in certain villages, like Balu Khed in Aligarh which is in the third year of implementation, are reported to be already preparing for post-project activities. Some SICs, like the ones in Sultanpur and Hatras, felt that SICs are not capable of continuing after completion of the project and have expressed a wish to be associated with the agriculture department once the present staff withdraws.

Once individual farmers start having their own water sources, the WUGs will become irrelevant and disappear. As for MSHGs, their linkage with the banks have helped the farmers avail credit for agriculture expansion purpose. A small number of MSHGs, like the ones in Mainpuri, Etah and Etawah, are functioning well. They have taken up micro-enterprise activities, and their linkage with other departments is well established.

The project has propagated the concept of amalgamation of WSHGs into Women's Clubs (WCs) and Women's Union, on the lines of farmers' clubs and farmers' schools, among the WSHGs. The WSHGs are convinced and willing to form such federations. However, they expect to receive proper guidance, training and exposure to prepare them for this.

### **5.8 Beneficiaries' Own Assessment**

An assessment of the impact of project intervention by beneficiaries themselves was facilitated by the evaluation team in some of the study villages. This was attempted specifically in the villages where the project was into the second and third year of implementation. A participatory self-assessment methodology was used whereby the beneficiaries themselves identified the project impact in terms of the change in several social, economic and capacity aspects. Scores were assigned on a scale of 0-10. The exercise showed that the project interventions have had a positive impact not only on the social, economic and capacity aspects, but also on the attitudes and participatory levels of the beneficiaries.

### **5.9 Perceptions of Non-beneficiaries**

Further, the study team interacted with some non-beneficiaries in the sample villages assessed to elicit their impressions and perceptions on participatory management aspects of the project. Their experiences show that the project has brought several spill-over benefits to them too.

## 6. SUGGESTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- The project staff should take immense care during the selection of the sodic lands. The sodic lands selected should not be near the drainage area. This will affect the sodicity of the lands even after land reclamation, since they are near the drainage.
- The project should frame specific rules to ensure that the WUGs meet regularly during the project period and discuss various aspects of project implementation. The field staff should ensure the attendance and participation of the beneficiaries.
- Internal monitoring should be more effective – as much process-oriented as target-oriented. The project units should be assessed both in terms of target and process achievements. A balance between these two assures the sustainability of the project impacts.
- SIC has come to be perceived as a UPSLRP-specific forum, not expected to outlive the project. Special efforts are, therefore, needed to identify future roles for the SIC and to ensure a stake for the community in sustaining this institution even after the withdrawal of the project. Towards this, it is imperative that the SICs go through more training and capacity building exercise.
- The core teams' roles and responsibilities, not known to many beneficiaries, should, in fact, be clearly explained in the SIC meetings, in the initial stage of the project itself.
- The inter linkages between the SIC and WSHGs are not clearly known to the beneficiaries. There is a lot of confusion regarding this among the field workers also. The inter-linkages between these two institutions should be clarified, especially to the field staff, to ensure their continuance.
- The WSHGs should be motivated to take up micro-enterprise activities based on the locally available raw materials, knowhow and markets.
- Women's participation in the project is very low at all levels, right from the HQ level down to the community level. More time and maturity will be necessary for these institutions to actually increase the participation and involve all.
- The WSHGs should be linked to the other government departments and programmes. The project also needs to concretize its policies with regard to the mechanisms for such tie-ups.
- The number of field staff allotted to a sub-unit should be commensurate with the target area assigned to it.
- The inputs (seeds, gypsum, fertilizer, etc) have to be distributed on time to the beneficiaries. Once the inputs are distributed, a very close monitoring should be carried out by the project staff to ensure their proper use.
- The Mahila Mitra Kisan should be motivated and trained to play an effective role in project implementation
- The female motivators need to be oriented and trained on their roles and responsibilities, specifically to enhance women's participation in the project. The Training Cell should lay more emphasis on the gender-training component in its training curricula, with a view to increasing women's participation in the project activities.

- The PMC executives should be assigned a definite role. They should be oriented on the participatory techniques and on playing an active role in initiating participatory processes in the project. The PMC process documentation leaves much to be desired. It should be enhanced with a view to assessing the trend in participation at a later stage.
- Assessment of the different levels of participation is very essential for the effective implementation of the PMC process. This calls for an extensive monitoring in the field. The villages where the participatory processes are weak should be identified in each district and the project authorities should concentrate specifically on these villages.