

RESEARCH ARTICLE

COMMUNITY DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT IN THE DRYLANDS- EVIDENCE FROM KARNATAKA WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT AGENCY INTERVENTION

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ABSTRACT

In the examination of participatory development projects, existing contributions have demonstrated how aid resources are often captured by local elites. This paper examines the implementation of a Department for International Development funded Karnataka Watershed Development Agency project in Southern India. The project area had witnessed poor rainfall and crop failures before the commencement of the project and the farmers were pessimistic about the returns that they would get from farming. In such a scenario, farmers found that the short-term gains from undertaking the soil and water conservation treatment and colluding with the contractors and compromising on the quality of the work appeared to be more attractive to the heavily discounted long term gains from efficient soil and water conservation treatment. Despite the top management in the Karnataka Watershed Development Agency being aware of such malpractices occurring during the early stages of the intervention, no effective mechanisms were put in place to detect and penalise such actions. The evidence from our study suggests that provisioning by *small* groups could also lead to collective bad outcomes.

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INTRODUCTION

The 1990's was a period of increased donor involvement and Department for International Development (DFID)-funded projects like the Western India Rainfed Farming Project and the Eastern India Rainfed Farming Project were important examples. Based on the experience of these projects, DFID expanded their sphere of operations to southern India. In 1999, the Karnataka Watershed Development Agency (KAWAD) project was initiated in collaboration with the Government of Karnataka. The KAWAD project was a unique watershed intervention based on the concept of a demand driven approach, rather than the traditional ridge to valley approach¹, incorporating the principles of cost sharing and farmer driven Soil and Water Conservation (SWC) treatment in both planning and implementation of the intervention. The KAWAD project envisaged crafting Community Based Organisations (CBOs) with the formation of Self Help Groups (SHGs), Area Groups, User Groups and Micro Watershed Development Committees (MWSDCs). These processes were undertaken based on the understanding that the local people had a better knowledge of their conditions and constraints, and that their motivation to participate would be stronger when they were free to choose their objectives.

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¹ Ridge-to-valley approach of watershed development means that treatment begins from the upper reaches of the micro watershed and proceeds in a sequential manner to the lower reaches.

The intervention was to commence with a preparatory phase of building SHGs with the objective of creating the necessary capacity for participation. It was expected that the community would utilize the space provided by the CBOs which were crafted to exercise their voice and participate in concrete terms by contributing resources. A central premise of participatory development is an understanding on the importance of the power of the group, with the notion that the individuals are far more effective when they work together to achieve a common objective than working on their own (Mansuri and Rao, 2013, p.88). Participation through the exercise of "voice" has both intrinsic and instrumental value (Hirschman, 1970). Voice refers to various mechanisms through which through which people express their views, opinions and preferences. It includes participation in decision making, product delivery or policy implementation, complaint, organized protest or lobbying (Goetz and Gaventa 2001). Voice is important for four reasons. First, voice has an intrinsic value as it is good for people to express their thoughts and preferences. Second, voice is an essential building block for accountability. Third, the exercise of voice enables communities to arrive at the values and norms of justice and morality under which the action of power holders/project implementers would be judged (Goetz and Jenkins, 2002, 2005) and finally enhanced voice is also supposed to reduce capture and corruption. However, various studies (Platteau and Abraham 2002; Conning and Keavane 2002; Platteau and Gaspart 2003; Ravallion 2003; Bastiaensen, et al. 2005; Galasa and Ravallion, 2005; Iversen, et al, 2006, Fritzen, 2007, Pan & Christiaensen, 2012 Lund, et al. 2013) have demonstrated how aid resources are often captured by local elites. Elites are 'individuals who can exert

disproportionate influence over a collective action process' (Beard and Phakphian, 2009, p. 11) and elite capture occurs when those commanding economic and political power are able to influence the development priorities and decisions in such a manner which allows them to appropriate the resources and benefits of development for themselves (Wong, 2012, p.232). Due to poor institutional design of community driven projects, there are opportunities for local elites to siphon off a substantial part of the local resources (Iversen *et al.* 2006: 93) and local power groups collude beyond the control of higher level institutions (Bardhan 2002: 192-194; Leonard and Leonard 2004: 62; Johnson, *et al.* 2005). The motivation for the enquiry was driven by the need to examine the belief prevailing that the KAWAD project through the process of creating a dense set of community based organisations had ensured effective participation of farmers in the watershed development project.

The unique nature of the KAWAD intervention strategy – with capacity building efforts preceding watershed development, makes it an interesting programme. In the KAWAD project the area to be treated by each MWSDC was less than 500 hectares, which meant that the number of targeted beneficiaries was less. The watershed area in each village was demarcated into smaller watersheds and therefore there could be multiple MWSDCs within the same village. The objective of focussing on a small micro-watershed area was to ensure visibility and more face to face interaction between the farmers and MWSDC members, and it was expected that this would lead to more efficient provisioning of the collective good (Olson 1965). Further, it was expected that the incorporation of SHG members in the MSWDCs would lead to greater involvement of the targeted beneficiaries in the planning and implementation of the SWC treatment. Therefore we characterise that the MWSDC formed under the project as a *small* group and expect that they would be apt for collective provisioning in terms of effective implementation of the project.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We have selected the state of Karnataka for our enquiry since it has a high proportion of dry land, 88 per cent, which is the third highest in the country (Shah *et al.* 1998: 121). Chitradurga district from Karnataka state was selected for the following reasons. This is a semi-arid² and backward district and the KAWAD project was implemented in the district under the leadership of MYRADA, an experienced NGO that has demonstrated its capabilities in initiating participatory approaches in the past. In all, 20 villages were covered by the KAWAD project in Molkalmuru taluk. All these villages come under the purview of Chinnahagari Watershed. Primary data was collected from five villages. In one of the villages (Devarahatti) MYRADA, one of the largest NGOs in the state with considerable experience in watershed development interventions, was implementing the project. In Marlahalli and Tumkurhalli, villages, GUARD (Group for Urban and Rural Development) and in Rayapura and Bommalinganahalli, RSC (Resource Support Centre) were the agencies implementing

the project. These two NGOs were relatively inexperienced in watershed development interventions. The profile of the study villages indicates that the area surveyed is predominantly dry land with irrigated area ranging from 3 per cent to 33 per cent of cultivated land. The average farm size ranges from 3.4 acres to 20.6 acres with an average land holding of 10.1 acres among the sample farmers. The basic information for the farm households was collected during the walk undertaken by the author from the upper to the lower reach of the micro watershed. This information was used to stratify the households and select the sample households. Two levels of stratification were followed. At the first level, the reach of the farmer (upper or lower) was identified based on the location of the plot in the micro watershed. The demarcation of the watershed into upper and lower reach was done during the transect walk with the help of cadastral maps and in discussion with key informants and officials. At the second level, farm households were classified into small, medium, and large, based on landholding size. From the list of farm households, on whose land the soil and water conservation treatment were undertaken, 25 per cent were selected from each stratum using the lottery method. A total of 175 households were interviewed from the above six strata using a pre-tested structured schedule. This was substantiated by interviews with key informants such as Micro watershed Development Committee (MWSDC) members, contractors, and NGO staff. In addition, secondary data was collected at the taluk (administrative unit below the district level), hobli (administrative unit below the taluk level), and village level. The indicators used to capture participation are membership in SHGs, compliance of contribution norms, and decision making on treatment. We examine the reasons for the processes of the project by examining the role played by the farmer, actors at the village level, and the NGO staff.

KAWAD Guidelines

To plan the Soil and Water Conservation (SWC) treatment, the MWSDC members along with the NGO staff and farmers – undertake a transect walk from the upper reach to the lower reaches of the micro watershed. During the transect walk, a decision on the SWC treatment to be undertaken is made. This plan is finalised in consultation with the farmer requesting for a particular SWC treatment, given the technical feasibility of the treatment. The farmer is also informed of the contribution norm for the specific treatment requested and that she is supposed to pay, and the contribution amount that is to be paid upfront by cash. The share of contribution varies from 10-50 percent of total cost, depending on the nature of the SWC treatment to be undertaken. The farmer has an option of getting a loan from the SHG to pay the contribution. The culmination of such individual treatment plans gets translated into an integrated action plan at the MWSDC level, which is submitted to the NGO overseeing the scheme in that village. The NGO sends this action plan to the KAWAD Secretariat in Bangalore through the Implementing Agency, MYRADA, whose office is in the *taluk* headquarters (administrative unit below the district level) of Molkalmur in Chitradurga district. Once the MWSDC action plan is sanctioned and authorised by the KAWAD secretariat, the NGO informs the farmer that the treatment plan is approved and he/she can go ahead and execute the SWC treatment. NGO officials, particularly the Engineer, are supposed to provide technical guidance in executing the treatment. Finally, the NGO team is supposed to

²The mean annual rainfall in the district was 565 mm during the 1901 to 1990 period. The rainfall in Molkalmur taluk has ranged from a high of 876.70 mm in 1999 in comparison to a low of 441.20 mm in 2002 (for the years 2000 and 2001, it was 591.80 mm and 562.70 mm, respectively).

assess the quality of the SWC treatment and then pay the farmer the sanctioned amount (project amount as per the norm) for the SWC treatment, by issuing a cheque in the farmer's name. The project aimed to be transparent and accountable by ensuring that the list of beneficiaries, financial assistance provided, and beneficiary contribution received by the farmers were displayed in a public place in the village. Another significant attempt to ensure devolution of power was the transfer of funds to the MWSDC account and one of the MWSDC Representatives was supposed to be a signatory of the cheque. This indicates the importance assigned to processes in the design of the project (KAWAD, 2002).

Processes in the KAWAD project

Participation

In the five study villages most of the families were represented in the SHGs formed under the project. While 77 per cent of the farmers had at least one of their household members in an SHG, about 26 per cent of the farm households had two representatives in SHGs. Despite the capacity building attempts, actual involvement of the farmers in decision-making was less than satisfactory. An important element of participation in the planning process was the transect walk. This was supposed to be undertaken by the MWSDC representatives and the NGO staff, along with the farmers, to plan the type and location of the treatment in the plots. In 18 per cent of the cases the farmers were not aware of the transect walk. Forty per cent of the farmers knew of the walk but choose not to participate. While 42 per cent farmers had participated, 7 per cent stated they were present when the walk was being held on plots belonging to other farmers but were not present when decisions were taken on their land.³ Therefore, there is the surprising result that participation in the transect walk, per se, did not mean that there was active decision and in 7 per cent of cases the farmers did not participate in the decision making process pertaining to the SWC treatment for his land. This was because the transect walks usually took place over a three to four day period and, in these cases, while the farmers had participated in the transect walk pertaining to decisions being made for the land of other farmers, they were not present during the decision-making for their own land⁴. The failure to ensure participation by the majority of farmers in the transect walks affected their involvement in the decision-making process. In about 22 per cent cases, farmers were neither involved in deciding on the appropriate SWC treatment to be undertaken on their own land, nor had their consent been sought. This proportion was particularly high in Marlahalli (62%) as the collusion between the women MWSDC representative and NGO staff lead them to take arbitrary decisions without consulting the concerned farmers. In 37 per cent of the cases, farmers passively gave their consent to the decision made by the MSWDC representatives, Book writer,⁵ and NGO staff. Only in 42 per

cent cases did farmers participate actively in the decision-making process.⁶ Clearly, the opportunity costs of participating in the transect walk was perceived to be high, particularly when farmers could get their land treated for free riding on the efforts of the NGO officials and MSWDC representatives.

Corruption in SWC Treatment

After the SWC plans were approved, the farmers were given the go ahead to undertake the planned treatment. A letter from the Executive Director of KAWAD dated 4th May, 2001, addressed to the Project Directors, stated the following: "innovative approach of the implementation of project guidelines through MWSDCs is bound to give scope for misuse of funds" (emphasis mine). In a letter, dated 5th November, 2001 the Executive Director of KAWAD wrote to the Project Directors/Coordinators of the Implementing agencies and NGOs: "Raising the cash receipts without the actual collection of cash from the hope that the farmers would give cash in the future dates.... this is serious irregularity, for the reason that no cash receipts are expected to be issued without collection of cash" (KAWAD, 2002, p.34). Despite, the early warning signals, our study documents that malpractices occurred. Under the KAWAD mode it was initially envisaged that the work would be carried out with local labourers, so that it would benefit people who are dependent on wage labour. However, this guideline was later relaxed, on the grounds that local labourers were not readily available. There is indication that in many cases contractors were employed and, in some cases, machinery was used, violating the KAWAD Guidelines. Although the use of machinery for some activities was occasionally justified, particularly in activities relating to boulder removal and land levelling, it also enabled contractors to overstate the quantum of work done and inflate stated costs above actual level. Realising an opportunity to appropriate funds some MSWDC members became contractors. While the KAWAD guidelines permitted treatment to be done by the farmer, it was these contractors who generally did the work. In Tumkurhalli, it was decided in a MSWDC meeting that farmers should get the treatment done by the contractors. In some cases the contractors paid the own contribution to be made by the farmers (or paid him Rs.2000-3,000) to book the treatment contract. The contractors also used to bribe the engineer Rs.2000 to ensure that they would be allotted the responsibility of undertaking the treatment. This pertains to the GUARD NGO villages of Tumkurahalli and Marlahalli. Once the contract for the treatment was booked, the contractors compromised on the quality of the SWC treatment. The prevalence of such practices was well recognized by even the KAWAD officials. In order to verify whether the contribution was in proportion to the work undertaken on the farm plot, data on contributions from the farmers was compared with figures available from the work registers maintained by the MWSDC. The data on the farmer's contribution was collected from the work register maintained by the Book writer of the MWSDC at the village. The amount stated to have been paid was noted from the work register and compared to what the

³Interestingly, 82 per cent of the farm households without any representatives in the SHGs did not participate in these transect walks.

⁴ Further analysis found that farm households who were a member of an SHG and those who had participated in the transect walk and were aware of the existence of the MWSDC had better forms of decision making. These results confirm the inference that there were better forms of decision-making in the MYRADA village of Devarahatti as compared to the GUARD and RSC project villages.

⁵The book writer is a member of the MWSDC who maintains the accounts in the MWSDC and receives a monthly payment for this work

⁶Interestingly, among the farmers who had actively participated in decision-making, 26 per cent were not aware of the existence of the Field Officer. This implies that the request for land treatment was made to some other official, possibly MWSDC representatives in the transect team.

farmer stated to us during the household interview. Further the farmers were also asked to show the receipts they received for the payments made. The difference in terms of the farmer's statement vis-à-vis the work register data was calculated to arrive at an estimate of 'adjustment'. On an average an adjustment of Rs.2, 012 were made per transaction. It was found that such adjustments were made in all villages. They were highest in Marlahalli (Rs.11,127), followed by Tumkurlahalli (Rs.3,374). The high levels of 'adjustment' in Marlahalli was due to the proactive role by the women MWSDC representative, who colluded with the GUARD NGO staff, in profiting from various malpractices. The dominant strategy of the farmers was to collude (74%) with such a behaviour highest in the villages of Marlahalli (90%) followed by Tumkurlahalli (87%). While in only 8% of the cases, the contribution norm was followed in letter and spirit, there have also been cases wherein the contributions made by the farmers were pocketed by the Book writers in the MWDCs who were responsible for maintenance of the accounts. This was particularly high in Rayapura (39%) and Bommalinganahali villages (35%). In the MSWDC meeting in Tumkurlahalli it was suggested that farmers should get the treatment done by the contractors. In other villages, the contractors paid the own contribution to be made by the farmers (and in some cases paid him Rs 2000-3,000)⁷ to book the treatment contract. The contractors also used to bribe the engineer Rs 2000 to ensure that they would be allotted the responsibility of undertaking the treatment.⁸ Once the contract for the treatment was booked, the new contractors⁹ compromised on the quality of the SWC treatment. Under the KAWAD model, it was initially envisaged that the work would be carried out with local labourers so that it would benefit people who are dependent on wage labour. However, this guideline was later relaxed on the grounds that local labourers were not readily available. There is indication that in many cases contractors were employed and, in some cases, machinery was used, violating the KAWAD Guidelines. Although the use of machinery for some activities was occasionally justified, particularly in activities relating to boulder removal and land levelling, it also enabled contractors to overstate the quantum of work done and inflate stated costs above actual level.

Why did the farmers choose to collude?

The question then arises as to why the beneficiaries sacrificed the potential long term gains from land improvement that would follow if the SWC treatment was undertaken efficiently. Under normal circumstances, they should have provided (or at least attempted to provide) a feedback of the poor quality of SWC treatment being undertaken. Instead, we found that glowing statements were being made about the nature of SWC treatment to hide the inadequacies in treatment. The reason for this apparently puzzling behaviour was that part of the 'adjustments' was paid by the contractors to the farmers to 'buy' their silence.¹⁰ While it was not possible for us to obtain

estimates of their share, we have anecdotal evidence from the farmers. In Tumkurahalli, for instance, the contractors used to give Rs 2,000-3,000 to the farmer to book the contract. However, this raises the question why the farmers should sacrifice the perpetual income flow resulting from land improvement in favour of the one-time bribe. The rationality of this choice made by farmers is explained below. The farmer can gain from the KAWAD project through a lifetime increase in productivity and augmentation of the livestock. If a feedback mechanism is introduced, whereby the farmer can threaten to report poor SWC treatment to the NGO, then the contractor would tend to improve his work. The other option before the farmer is to compromise by accepting the poor quality of the treatment and get a share of the excess profits made by the contractor. The optimal strategy of the farmer depends upon the respective pay-offs from colluding and reporting. Now, given the poor rainfall and crop production scenario before the KAWAD project was initiated, farmers were pessimistic about the possibilities and incremental gains that would accrue to them from SWC interventions. This implied that perceived increased in income due to soil and waters conservation treatment was low. Further, farmers felt that the incremental gains from reporting was low because the NGO staff were perceived to be corrupt and were receiving pay-offs from the contractor so that no corrective action would be taken. The corruption of the local NGO staff was particularly apparent in Marlahalli and Tumkurlahalli. There is some evidence on the extent to which the strategy of colluding appeared attractive to farmers.

The same farmers who appeared satisfied with the quality of treatment paradoxically claimed that the SWC treatment was inadequate and demanded more treatments to be carried out in their plots.¹¹ Such a perception of the farmers was not based on the quantum or quality of SWC treatment undertaken on their land. Rather, they were motivated by the prospect of maximizing the gains that could be garnered from further SWC treatment by colluding with others. The village-wise evidence shows that such perception was present among more than 80 per cent of the farmers in Devarahatti, Rayapura, and Bommalinganahalli villages despite relatively better NGO staff effort to ensure the quality of the SWC treatment. In Tumkurlahalli village, since the NGO office was located in the village itself, the farmers were able to lobby and put more pressure on the NGO staff¹². It may also be seen that if farmers themselves undertake the SWC treatment, compromising on the quality and quantum of work, they will tend to have a higher profit. The best option for the farmer was to undertake the SWC treatment and appropriate the entire surplus himself. We observed that this proportion was highest in the case of tank silt application treatment (79 per cent), followed by boulder removal (73 per cent), rubble filled checks (63 per cent), and land levelling (53 per cent). However, this trend was limited by the inability of some farmers to pay the initial

⁷ The conversion of 1 US Dollar is equivalent to Rs 45 Indian Rupees (Rs).

⁸ This pertains to the GUARD NGO villages of Tumkurahalli and Marlahalli.

⁹ We characterise them as 'New Contractors' as these people were essentially farmers and in some cases MWSDC members who emerged as contractors sensing the opportunities to generate income from the possibilities that the project provided of undertaking SWC treatment on behalf of the farmers.

¹⁰ However, there have been cases in Marlahalli village wherein despite farmers honestly paying the contribution amount as mandated due to the malpractices of the lady representative of the MWSDC who colluded with the

GUARD NGO staff, many farmers stated that they suffered due to the very poor quality of the SWC treatment undertaken in their land.

¹¹ About 85 per cent of farmers made this claim.

¹² The farmers also successfully lobbied with the NGO that they should also pay the Standard Schedule of Rates (SSR). The SSR are the prescribed rates for various SWC treatments fixed by the Government of Karnataka, which are generally higher than the local costs and defacto, the payment of such rates means that the recipient receives more money than the actual cost spent. The lobbying took place after the farmers came to know that such rates had already been paid. In the neighbouring village of Devarahatti (MYRADA micro watershed village)

contribution, or by their ability to enter in a bargain with NGO staff to have a collusive contract. It is interesting to note that in the case of land levelling, where the farmers benefit perceptibly and immediately from the treatment, the rational choice would be honest behaviour and ensure that treatment is undertaken efficiently. This is actually what we observed for land levelling activities, where most of the farmers generally undertook the work themselves.

Role of MWSDC Representatives

Each Micro Watershed Development Committee had two representatives. The proportion of farmers who were able to identify at least one of the representatives was 61 per cent. The perception of 61 per cent of the farmers in Tumkurlahalli was that the first representative was good, although 26 per cent of farmers did express that they had no contact with him. His role in convincing the farmers to undertake the SWC treatment in their land was well recognised by the farmers. The first representative also played a positive role in ensuring collective action among land owners whose lands were located next to each other, so that work could be done in a sequential manner leading to the construction of a diversion drain. This representative, however, could not prevent wealth-seeking behaviour that took place. In Tumkurlahalli, the MWSDC, in one of its meetings, had asked the farmers to get their land treated through the contractors, which was a clear violation of the KAWAD guidelines.

The majority of the farmers in Marlahalli (52%) stated that the representative was good¹³ and only 10 per cent expressed the opinion that the lady was corrupt. However, this perception does not stand the test of the empirical data on contribution as we have documented the 'adjustments' that the lady fixer undertook by co-opting the GUARD NGO staff. The representative in Devarahatti¹⁴ is the least visible with 47 per cent of the farmers having no contact with the representative, while the corrupt nature of the representative which we have documented was expressed by only 10 per cent of the farmers. The perception among 64 per cent of the farmers in the RSC-operated villages was that the representative played a positive role. The evidence from the data on contributions has revealed that although the representatives themselves were not corrupt in Bommalinganahalli and Rayapura villages, they could not prevent the 'adjustments' taking place. The evidence below shows the level of interest and the contestation process that took place after completion of the term of the representatives (one year). The normal processes in the KAWAD villages are that there is less contestation when the representative selection takes place for the first time. However, by the second year when discussion begins to take place on the need to change the representatives (as per the project guidelines), active lobbying and contestation takes place. This is based on the following rationale. The mode of implementation and the wealth seeking opportunities that exist in the project become public knowledge by the time the project reaches the second year of the implementation. Therefore, there was an interest generated to garner the spoils through the capture of the influential position of the representative. The evidence from the following two villages illustrates this. In Tumkurlahalli the selection of

the representatives in the first round was based on consensus, but the second round witnessed some hectic lobbying by a particular farmer. The farmer belonging to the Nayaka caste, owned 31 acres of dry land and 4 acres of irrigated land (lower large reach). He was also operating the Public Distribution System (PDS) shop in the village. This farmer made an active attempt to capture the representative's post and his efforts involved door-to-door lobbying to influence the farmers. However, he was unsuccessful¹⁵ in his attempts as another Nayaka farmer (owning 26 acres of dry land and 6 acres of irrigated land) was selected as the first representative. The change of representative was not a smooth process as the earlier first representative did not like the idea of him being changed, repeated meetings were held and this particular farmer was forced to attend the meeting wherein he was replaced in his post by another person.

The incentive of this particular farmer to cling on to his post was based on the aura and respect that he had as a representative¹⁶, which he did not want to lose. In Devarahatti, the change of representative took place due to the following initiative. A farmer (who was largely dependent on wage labour for his livelihood) gave a letter to the MWSDC stating that as per the KAWAD rules, the representative change was over-due and had to take place. Based on this letter, a meeting was held and the change took place. The instigation for giving the letter was based on the consideration that these representatives were involved in wealth-seeking activities. We have some evidence to suggest that the letter was not given by the farmer based on his own individual initiative, but by the instigation of other farmers (with larger landholding) who wanted the wealth-seeking activities of the representative to be stopped. The new representative of the MWSDC was a lady who stated that she wanted to avoid the mistakes committed by the earlier representative, ensure participatory processes of decision making and further ensure that no 'adjustments' took place in the contribution. In the KAWAD mode, the MWSDCs crafted were supposed to play an active role in supporting participatory processes of planning and implementation with the active support and facilitation of the NGO staff.

The evidence from our study villages indicates that there have been compromises in the programme implementation with collusive behaviour of the farmer-MWSDC member (either the representative or book writer or both)-NGO staff in facilitating 'adjustments' which lead to the poor quality and quantum of the SWC treatment. In the GUARD villages, while in Tumkurlahalli, the first and second representatives were not corrupt, quite a bit of 'adjustments' took place with the MWSDC stating in one of its meetings that the farmers could give the work to contractors to get their work done (so that they could avoid paying the upfront contribution as mandated by the project). Quite a few new contractors emerged in this village. In the other GUARD village of Marlahalli, the first representative (a lady) emerged as the fixer who facilitated the collusive behaviour leading to no consent treatments and 'adjustments'. In the RSC village, of Bommalinganahalli, the Book writer of the MWSDC was corrupt and undertook 'adjustments' and the farmers were cheated as they were asked to pay more money than it was required as per the norm. This

¹³ This perception is despite the fact that 55 per cent of the treatment occurred without consent.

¹⁴ This is the village where the implementation agency, MYRADA, is involved in implementation.

¹⁵ Although there were a section of farmers, who were supporting his candidature, one of the reasons as to why he was not selected was that he was told to "concentrate on running the PDS shop".

¹⁶ He was not involved in any wealth seeking activity.

is excluding the normal process of 'adjustments' that occurred similarly in other study villages. Similarly, in Rayapura, the book writer was involved in facilitating 'adjustments'. In Devarahatti, the first representative himself was the 'new' contractor and facilitated the various 'adjustments' that took place. Although the strategy of KAWAD in having smaller MWSDCs was to some extent successful in ensuring visibility and more face-to-face interaction between the farmers and MWSDC members, this did not lead to the provisioning of the collective good. There was a collective 'bad' outcome with wealth-seeking activities being undertaken by a variety of actors (farmers, NGO staff) with the cooption of the MWSDC representative's/book writer. This led to poor quality of soil and water conservation treatment.

Role of NGO staff

Our survey found that the behaviour of the street level bureaucrats (Lipsky 1983) – the Field Officer and other staff – was inefficient in the case of the GUARD NGO staff. The reason for the tacit collusion of the NGO staff – in the form of either being a passive party to 'adjustments' or, in some cases, even engineering them – was due to their low salary. They became ready partners in the collusive behaviour. This proved to be a win-win strategy for both the farmer and the NGO staff, as both of them could garner money, in the villages of Tumkurlahalli and Marlahalli. The positive work done by the Field Officer at Devarahatti in initiating SHGs despite huge resistance from the villagers was recognized by many respondents as a worthy contribution. In this village, area groups formed by the Field Officer played a positive facilitating role, leading to the formation of the MWSDC. However, he could not prevent the corrupt behaviour of one of the members of the MWSDC who had emerged as a contractor. The RSC NGO staff were equally committed and attempted to initiate participatory process of planning, particularly in Bommalinganahalli village. In Rayapura, on the other hand, in quite a few cases, decisions were imposed upon the farmers from the top, particularly with respect to farm bund treatment as there was pressure to spend the approved money within a given time period.¹⁷ In this village, while the Field Officers were not corrupt, they could not prevent the corrupt activities of the book writer of the MWSDC. In these three villages, the NGO staff can be said to be selectively efficient as they were able to put in place certain appropriate processes without being able to stop the corrupt behaviour of some of the other actors.

Conclusion

The KAWAD mode of intervention was based on a model of SWC treatment wherein the farmer was given the right of treating their plot. Such an approach is based on an implicit assumption that the farmer would ensure good quality of the SWC treatment for their own benefit. The exercise of voice as conceived by the KAWAD project was based on the concept of effective demand wherein the farmer would express the desired treatment that was wanted in his/her land and was

¹⁷It was reported by certain farmers in Rayapura village that despite them stating that they do not want farm bunds to be constructed in their plot, farm bunds were constructed. This was due to the pressure on the 'street' level bureaucrats to ensure that their targets for expenditure of the funds were met. The KAWAD secretariat was also under pressure that the money received from DFID was spent with the time period for which it was earmarked.

given the right to undertake the treatment in his land on his own (provided he agreed to pay the contribution amount as per the norm). However, the design relating to contributions, we argue, was inappropriate. First, the project could have fixed the contribution norms only after discussing with the farmers. Second, in the context of poor rainfall in the years preceding the intervention, the emphasis should have been more on generation of wage employment. Third, there were no mechanisms to ensure compliance to contribution norm. In an agro-system characterized by poor rainfall/crop failures, the traditional pessimism of the farmer created high discount rates. Since the farmers were pessimistic about the returns that they would get under such poor rainfall scenario, the project should have taken steps in undertaking exposure visits for farmers to successful rainfed development projects in the state, or elsewhere in the country which had demonstrated that dryland development projects could deliver even under a poor rainfall scenario. Under such a scenario, farmers found that the short-term gains from undertaking the SWC treatment and compromising on the quality of the work or colluding with the contractors appeared to be more attractive to the heavily discounted long term gains from efficient treatment. This led to a high incidence of 'adjustments', with large scale collusion between the farmers and the newly emerging contractors. The collusive nature of corruption and malpractices with the involvement of the beneficiaries meant that the feedback mechanism was getting subverted, nullifying embedded systems and assumptions of participatory development projects to check corruption. Ironically, the Executive Director of KAWAD had predicted the possibility of malpractices occurring during the early stages of the intervention. However, no effective monitoring mechanisms were put in place to detect such forms of collusive corruption¹⁸.

The evidence shows that these functionaries themselves became party to the corrupt activities. The monitoring by the implementing agency, MYRADA, was not very effective, as there were no penalties on NGOs in whose micro watersheds the quality of the work was found to be poor. With the project management being aware of the corrupt practices, efforts should have been taken to devise to detect such collusive behaviour and penalties imposed on the offenders. It is surprising that despite detection of poor quality work, no penalties were imposed. Further, there was no effort to address the crucial issue of malpractices relating to the violation of the contribution norm. The Mid-Term Evaluation Report of KAWAD (KAWAD 2003) surprisingly did not report the irregularities that were being committed.¹⁹ This is a serious lacuna, especially in the context of KAWAD Secretariat being transparent²⁰ and open to constructive

¹⁸The mere detection of occurrence of malpractices and the communication regarding this from the KAWAD secretariat to the heads of the Partner NGOs (PNGOs) did not lead to any corrective action. There was no initiative/sensitivity shown to alter the project design parameters (in terms of planning and execution of the SWC treatment, contribution norms) with respect to the constraints the farmers faced.

¹⁹ When it was informally queried that as to why this was not reported one of the members of the Evaluation team stated that although this problem was known, there was no consensus (among the team members) that it should be stated in the report.

²⁰ The KAWAD Secretariat have been forthcoming in sharing their guidelines document which contain critical correspondence that they had with the project officials, including on malpractices while collecting the upfront cash contribution from farmers for the SWC treatment.

criticism to such observations, and could have moved to ensure mid-course corrections of the project. Timely inputs provided by the Evaluators could have probably ensured mid-course corrective action based on the concept of 'embracing error' and 'learning by doing' (Korten 1980).

We had hypothesised that the KAWAD MWSDCs would be apt for collective provisioning. We however found that collusive behaviour took place leading to the provisioning of a collective 'bad' ('adjustments' in contribution leading to the compromise in the quantum and quality of SWC treatment). The attempt of KAWAD based on a demand-driven approach essentially meant that the ridge-to-valley approach of treatment was compromised, based on the implicitly held notion that cost-sharing to ensure participation was more important. Our evidence tempts us to conclude that provisioning by *small* groups could also lead to collective 'bad' outcomes.

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