CASE STUDY: Activating Governance Mechanisms

Context

Despite being a country with innumerable perennial rivers, natural and artificial lakes, and ponds, India ranks at the 133rd position out of 180 countries in terms of water availability, as per the Safe Water Network report in 2014[1]. Amidst the rapid consumption of water in this country, domestic use takes up to 10 % of this consumption, whereas industrial use is 20% of the total consumption. Agriculture, however, takes up to a massive 70% of the annual water consumption in India.

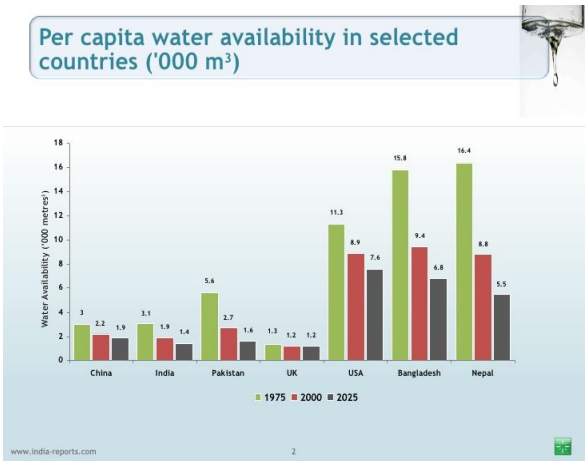

Image Source: https://www.slideshare.net/shalini.r75/water-in-india-management-resources-shortage

Uttar Pradesh makes up a considerable consumption of water for irrigation as a state sustaining largely on agricultural practices with its rural population, comprising of more than 77% of the total demography[2] with agross water withdrawals of 148 billion cubic meters per year. 86% of this withdrawal comes from ground water through tube wells and it is a perceived notion among consumers that withdrawal of water directly proportionate to the size of the land owned. It is therefore common farmers with bigger lands exercise indiscriminate withdrawal of ground water as the water table falls alarmingly every year. With the aim of endorsing and encouraging a democratic and judicious approach for water consumption (in agriculture, among other fields) the National Water Policy (revised last in 2012) recommends various forms of water governance i.e. multidisciplinary approach, participatory governance and institutional arrangement, at the grass root level. It is pertinent to mention here that the state of Uttar Pradesh has opposed the National Water Policy 2012 and has not adopted the same so far[3] making the presence of the policy felt at the grass root level almost negligible. Decisions are taken in top-down mode and directives are issued based on contemporary situation. Enforcement of regulations is also weak[4].

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[1]http://www.forbesindia.com/blog/economy-policy/ten-facts-about-drinking-water-in-india-that-may-make-you-sick/

[2]Provisional Population Totals". *Government of India (2011)*. Census of India. Retrieved 2011-07-23.

[3] The Hindu-New Delhi; 28 Dec'2012 (updated 15 June'2016),

[4]U.P. Development Report Volume 2 Planning Commission Government of India; 2007

Background Information

In 10 districts of Eastern Uttar Pradesh, HUF (Hindustan Unilever Foundation) has initiated a program on 'Water for Public good' in partnership with PANI (People's Action for National Integration) as Project Implementing Agency (PIA), which intern involves 10 grass root NGO sub-partners of PANI for ground implementation of project.

PANI and most of its grass root NGO partners have been working in the chosen project area from more than 10 years on different issues, including health, education, child development etc. and therefore enjoy a robust and trustworthy rapport with village community.

Initiation of agro-based livelihood program - FASAL (Supported by Tata Trusts) in2013 with outreach of 5178 household made PANI's
bond with community and partner NGOs further stronger and community highly mobilized with 297 functional SHGs. Adding to the strong social capital of PANI and its partners, a women empowerment program 'ERW' (Empowerment of Rural Women) started during year 2007 which mobilized over 150 thousand rural women and organized them to form 708 Gram Panchayat (GP) level entity called NARI SANGH.

The program commenced in November 2014 with the prime goals of improving water productivity and alleviating poverty of 26500 small and marginal farming household through sustainable agriculture practices and by improving water governance.
While FASAL focused on crop productivity and income enhancement of farmers through sustainable agriculture approach for poverty alleviation, ERW took job entitlement and right to work through MNREGA as its core strategy for women empowerment.
Geographical area of 'Water for Public Good' program has been layered with entire geography of FASAL while 5 locations of program overlap with NARI SANGH.

Ground Scenario of Water Governance in Project Area

The Panchayati Raj Act 1947, amended in 1992, provisioned that each GP(Gram Panchayat) will have a 'Water Management Committee'(WMC) to take care of water management related issues of GP. This is almost a regulatory and authorised body at GP level to deal with water. However, when in-depth interviews were conducted amidst the community members, these FGDs revealed that all the 120 GPs comprising of the project, there was no visible governance mechanism. It was found that the Water Management Committee is practically defunct across the project GPs and that these members are not even aware of their membership to this committee and

There is a 6 member Water Management Committee, formed through selection and nomination of GP members, representing one member each from scheduled cast, scheduled tribe, women and backward class with maximum of seven invited members from villagers.

their roles and responsibilities. Therefore, we can say that a functional institution/mechanism of water governance at GP level is non-existent.

The noticeable effect of non-existent/weak water governance at local level are clearly felt by various actors operating at ground including community. If one were to look at the categories within which current status can be evaluated, one would see easily be able to identify the gaps. For instance, no initiatives have been takes to upgrade the infrastructure of water usage. As far as the existing infrastructure is concerned, no attention has been granted towards the maintenance and upkeep of the natural or man-made water bodies. Indiscriminate water wastage in domestic and agricultural practices remain unmonitored with no evidence of steps taken to recycle water. Additionally, there is rampant water contamination in villages as sanitation stays ignored where water is concerned. If local needs, concerns or even knowledge on water consumption is to be assessed, negligence is apparent.

In lieu of the situation, the Program felt a need for intervention to improve water governance at GP level to address the key issues. The aim was:

- *To provide sustainable water conservation and management mechanism at village level.*
- *To inculcate participatory community behaviour in sharing responsibility and taking authority of collective action*
- *To provide a forum for last mile voice and encourage inclusivity.*

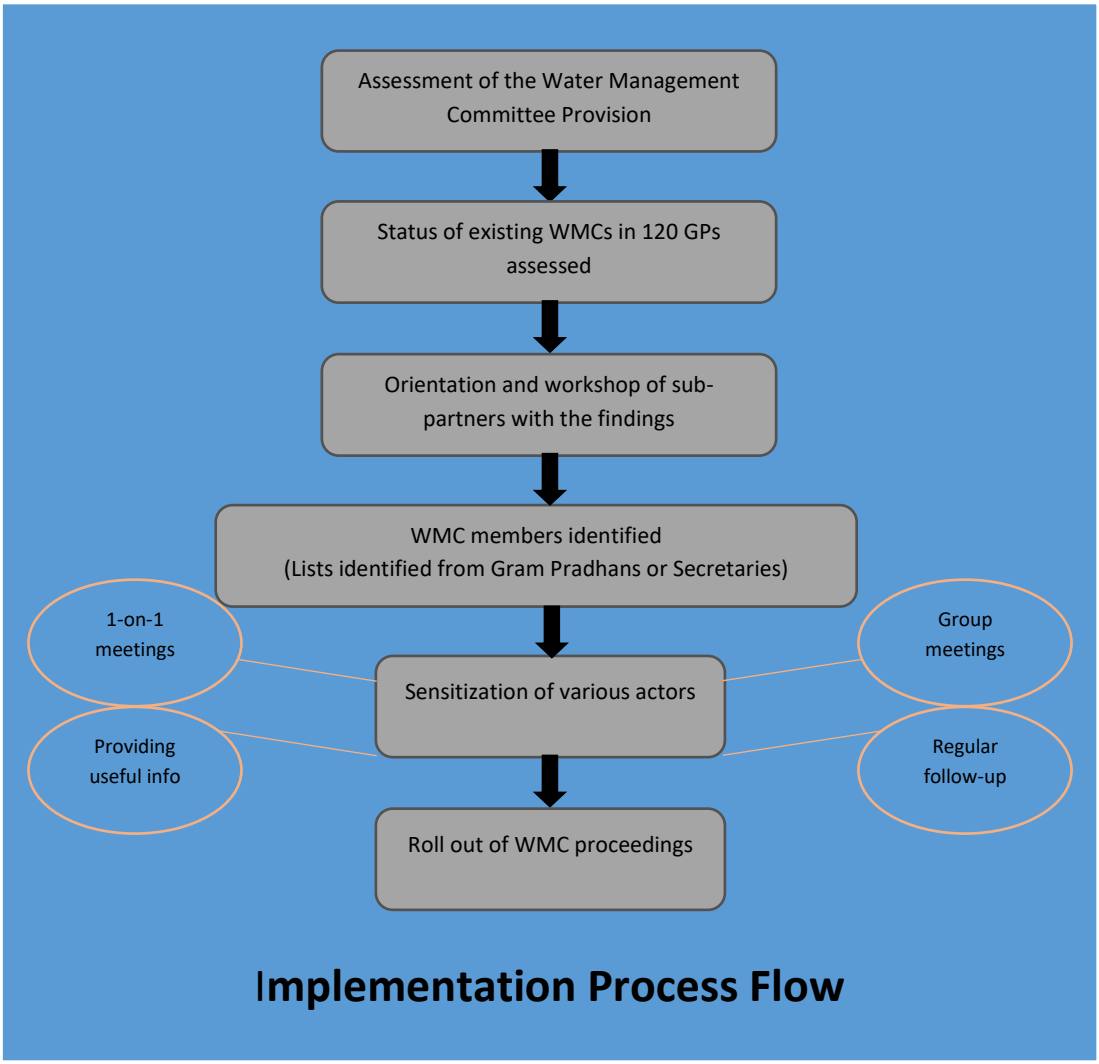
Accordingly, the program designed the intervention on the basis of above situation and objectives.

Intervention Strategy, Design and Implementation

Regulatory provision in PRI Act 1947 (73rd Amendment, 1992), for formation of Water Management Committee at each GP and *Rules and Regulation, 1989*or its functioning was taken as reference by PIA and a strategy was designed to use this regulatory provision to activate the WMC and make it functional through sensitization of participants and community at large.

Implementation

The implementation required three phases of actions. The first comprised of forming a clear understanding of the provision of the governance mechanisms and entities at the community level. The second required an assessment of the existing status of the these entities. The final phase involved enabling and supporting the functionality of an efficient and effective governance. A well-designed and meticulously followed inclusive process was followed with an inclusive approach.



In order to roll out the proceedings of the the WMC members, meetings were conducted with noted minutes of the meetings. Alongside, regular follow-up, orientation and meetings were conducted with the committee members to create pressure and generate actions; a big role was played by PIA and field team of sub-partners in executing the same. For the determination of actionable progress, a joint consensus helped to create action plan for the WMC based on requirement and suggestions from WMC members and community, incorporating voice of marginalized community. For handholding support, the PIA prompted and facilitated by PIA for creation of water management structures through MNREGS by raising the proposal to GP in Open meeting.

For a holistic and inclusive approach, WUGs (Water User Groups) were formed wherever possible to demonstrate collective ownership and shared use of water resources.

Activating Governance at Community Level- **Water User Groups**
At the 120 GPs of the project, such water sources were identified that are used by the community as a public source- like ponds, lakes or wells. Community members around the water source were collectively addressed and formed into user groups. The groups were oriented on water conservation and were instigated to exercise thoughtful and responsible consumption from their their water source. The objective of forming these Water User Groups (WUG) were to to create a motivation for collective responsibility, judicious usage and for close monitoring of water use and wastage. These WUGs are also an effective means to create pressure, execute monitoring and support in action plans for the WMCs

Goals and Outcomes Expected

With the strategic interventions determined, definitive outcomes and goals were set at the offset as a result of the various activities that would also be determinants of the success of this intervention.
The aims are:

- ***To get WMCs activated in all 120 GPs of project areas***
- ***All WMCs to develop the action plan of their respective GPs***
- ***WMCs to start having regular meeting***
- ***WMCs intervene in management of common water resources in GP***
- ***Demonstration of community managed Water User Groups (WUG) and its functioning method at select locations.***

Challenges and Concerns

It is a given that the status at selected areas for program intervention is poor in terms of awareness and sensitivity towards water conservation. Thus, to initiate an intervention from ground zero has posed its share of challenges.
Reluctance of Gram Panchayat leaders to share list of WMC members made it difficult to identify members. This was also relatable with the lack of awareness amidst the community about the provision and existence of WMC, so much so, that even WMCs were noticed to be unaware of their membership or responsibilities related to the committee. Another major point of obstacle was experienced in the situation, capacity or knowledge of the WMC members who were found to be ill-equipped to act as per their responsibility. Since WMC's tenure is for five years, as in case of GP, PIA is concerned that the entire effort of re-activation and capacity building of WMC will go waste after the tenure is over and all effort has to be started again and afresh with new WMC.

Outcomes

With an active pursuit of identifying and revitalizing governance for water management at the community level, several changes have been noticeably established and are showing signs of continuous development.

Community Mobilization

Along with collective sensitization of the community, measurable achievements can be seen in the formation of Water User groups (a total of 26 groups formed). Out of the total 120 WMCs in each Gram Panchayat, the intervention managed to activate about 33.3% of these, sensitizing 189 members about their roles and responsibilities. With this activation, the WMCs, roll of action plans is also anticipated with the help of the WUGs.

Figure 1: Water source monitoring by community

Infrastructural Development

Since initial assessment had indicated that there was hardly any maintenance of the existing water bodies, a considerable attention was directed towards sensitizing the community on the same. As a result, many water bodies, under the supervision of the WUGs have been brought under maintenance. More than 1500 soak pits have been developed by the community members to collect any excessive water flow to recharge ground water. One such Gram Panchayat has also managed to establish its own functional drainage system, which, given the pre-intervention scenario, speaks positively about the rising awareness in the community.

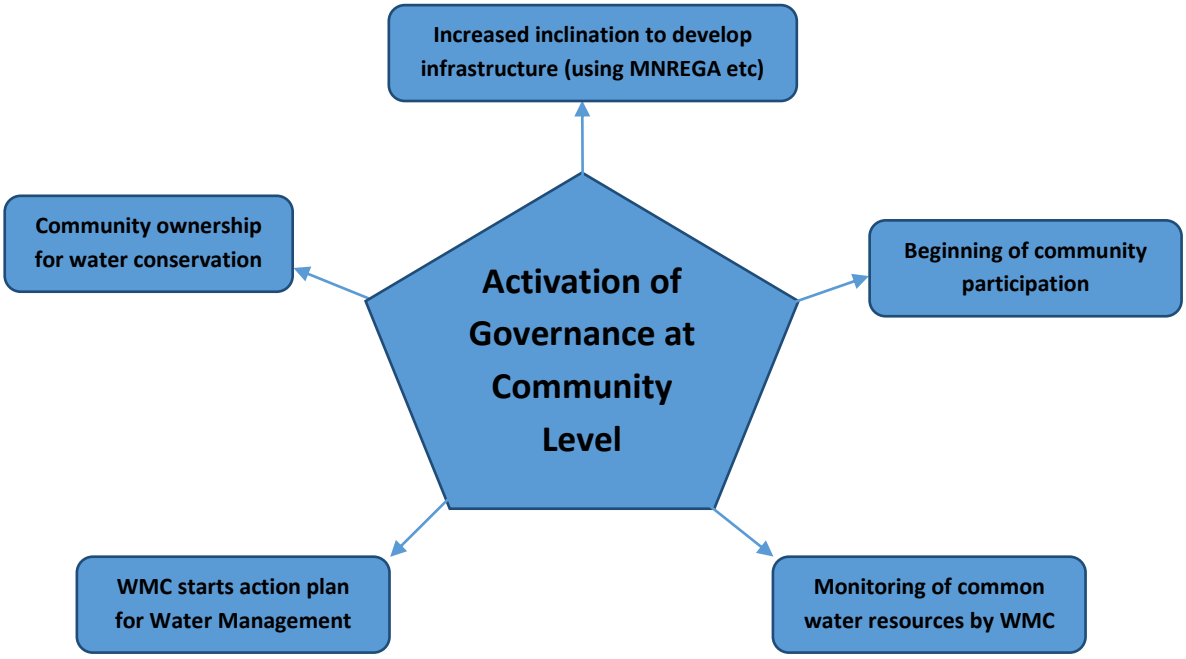
Figure 2: Soakpit build by community members

Governance Activities

With the pressured monitoring of WUGs, the community has found a capacity and organized platform to raise water related concerns. As per the status and needs of the water sources in the Gram Panchayats, the community has managed to submit a collectively prepared memorandum to the WMC. In turn, it the WMCs have also been found to rolling into action in certain places. Within the project area, two proposals have been raised by the WMC for water conservation structures through MNREGA.

A Post Intervention Analysis

The intervention has begun to exhibit evident changes as emerging during the post-intervention analysis that reflect on the positive effect of activation and strengthening the governance mechanism.



Lessons learned and Way Forward

During the period of intervention, the following key lessons have been derived through observation and analysis:

- Water management committee is effective institution at GP level to input in water governance. WMC is also a most appropriate for incorporating local voices.
- Sensitized and mobilized community can provide active participation influence decisions of PRIs/public systems for mass benefits.
- Rules, Regulations acts and provisions related to WMC have been understood by PIAs and sub-partners.
- It is possible to pursue and get the institution activated as per provisions.

It is evident from the first steps of intervention that not only is governance mechanism at the community level extremely critical for water conservation, but also that activating and empowering the community based bodies is an effective tool to achieving the goal of effective water management to address the rising water crisis. A strong community participation and ownership towards water bodies, especially through models like Water User Groups can be used effectively and sustainably to keep such governance productive.