Responsive to Whom? The State and Fast Track Participation in a South Indian District

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Abstract

This article responds to a proposition recently made, that development policy does not drive practice, but instead, practice produces policy, with key actors striving to maintain coherent representations of it. It examines the internal dynamics of a district level bureaucratic organisation — the Kurnool Watershed Office (KWO) in Andhra Pradesh — that is suddenly confronted with the task of implementing a complex national policy for participatory watershed development. The idiom of participation is unfamiliar to KWO's bureaucratic staff, and its Project Director responds by inventing a participatory protocol within which project targets can ostensibly be met in a 'participatory' manner. Through intensive field based evidence, both at the district and in a project village, this article demonstrates how and why the programme's critical implementers (junior project staff) in connivance with locally dominant interests, met the project's agenda on paper and fulfilled its representation to senior officials, but did not attempt to substantiate it on the ground or win popular support for it. The paper concludes that the use of participation by different layers of the multilayered state apparatus, in a self-consuming internal vortex of responsiveness, reporting and representation, considerably impairs the programme's limited potential for equity.

Keywords

Community, participation, state, watershed development, policy

Introduction

The perplexing disparity between the theory and policy of participatory development and its practice has evoked academic attention, albeit not with sufficient impact on policy makers and practitioners, who continue to emphasise the importance of better policy formulation. In this regard, David Mosse's key proposition, recently made, needs to be considered seriously. Mosse writes, "At best the relationship between policy and practice is understood in terms of an unintended 'gap' between theory and practice, to be reduced by better policy more effectively implemented. But what if development practice is not driven by policy? What if, instead of policy producing practice, practice produces policy, in the sense that actors in development devote their energies to maintaining coherent representations regardless of events?" (2004, p. 640). Mosse's proposition thus is pertinent to understanding the multi-layered web of relationships of actors as well as organisational cultures that drive practice.

Drawing from Mosse's critical observations, this paper examines the internal dynamics of a regional bureaucracy caught up with the task of implementing a participatory development policy in India. This is the case of watershed development (WSD), a state-led 'catch-all' rural development programme with pro-poor objectives, that has since 1994 been accorded an explicitly participatory thrust by the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD), Government of India. The programme policy was embodied within a nationally specified blueprint (the national guidelines) for participatory watershed development. While this policy reflected growing international as well as domestic endorsement of the significance of the 'community' and its 'participation' in natural resource use and conservation, such an idiom was largely unfamiliar to the bureaucracy, steeped in a postcolonial development culture of state directed, top down and hierarchical decision-making.

My paper investigates the response of the Kurnool district Watershed Office (KWO) in Andhra Pradesh, a state in south-east India, to the 1994 guidelines and their 'symbolic' imposition of a participatory culture. The paper tries to understand the factors, both of political environment as well as of institutional history, that shape the nature of KWO's 'fast-track' participation strategy. Further, through field-based evidence in a project village, the paper demonstrates how local project officers, in connivance with locally dominant interests, met the project's agenda on paper and fulfilled its representation to senior officials, but did not attempt to substantiate it on the ground or win popular support for it. KWO's overall strategy amounted both to accommodating semi-feudal power relations and reinforcing existing processes of socio-economic marginalisation in the project village.

The paper argues that for the majority of the project's critical implementers (junior project officials, fieldworkers with temporary jobs) participation remained a top-down imperative. It needed to be sustained 'upwards' to higher rungs of the state machinery that are bound, at least formally, to back the state's commitment to key political constituencies, instead of 'downwards' to local communities, that are the unwitting constituents of this statist agenda of participation. Indeed, what made KWO's discourse effective is the fact that it could be sustained through competent and coherent manipulations of the truth, and independent of actual practice. This evidence substantiates Mosse's central proposition: "that development actors work hardest of all to maintain representations of their actions as instances of authorised policy, since it is always in their interest to do so" (2004, p. 639), but reveals that it is neither equally nor similarly important for actors at different stages of policy formulation and implementation to project their commitment to participation, the authorised policy in question. Finally, the paper suggests that upward looking responses within the state machinery result from the excessive procedural thrust of participation that dominates WSD policy making at the national level and seriously reduce its potential for equity.

State policy for watershed development in India: Evolution, objectives and administrative implications

State policy for WSD in India today reflects a global transition from 'top-down' soil and water conservation (SWC) works to a comprehensive 'participatory' rural livelihoods programmes on a watershed basis.[1] In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, state authorities in the USA, Africa and India devised top-down strategies to tackle soil erosion, which they believed occurred due to 'bad' soil and water management by farmers (Hinchcliffe 1999, p. 2). India's first SWC efforts were massive treatment works in over silted and degraded lands.[2] These areas however were not regarded by state planners as lucrative from the viewpoint of agricultural productivity, a primary national imperative of the newly independent Indian state (Gupta 1998). The Green Revolution marked a definite 'productivist shift' in Indian agricultural planning, and the consequent emphasis on irrigated areas led to neglect of the country's dryland areas (Goodman and Redclift 1991).[3] By the 1980s however, the domination of neo-Malthusian paradigms in international development, persistent droughts in Africa, and fears of food shortage together made it implausible for the Indian state to ignore the country's drylands. It became amply clear that issues of agricultural productivity and degradation of biophysical resources could no longer be compartmentalised. In 1990, the central government's Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) launched the National Watershed Programme for Rainfed Areas (NWDPRA) aiming to develop integrated farming systems on a watershed basis.

MOA's initiative reflected not only the explicit thrust towards *integrated* conservation, management and development of land, water and forest resources, but also the normalisation of a micro-watershed as an appropriate unit for planning (Tideman 1998, p. 7). In 1995, a government review committee called the 'Dharia Committee' formalised these trends. It recommended first, that SWC efforts should not be confined to reclamation of over silted reservoirs alone, but instead to *all* lands, whether degraded or currently in good shape, in order to prevent further deterioration and depletion, and second, such reorientation in focus required an integrated approach to biophysical resource conservation on the basis of a micro watershed (Dharia Committee 1995).

This widening of scope took a further turn in the 1990s, when a number of studies challenged warnings of a neo-Malthusian disaster by showing large increases in rural population combined with environmental improvements and agricultural productivity (Woodhouse et al. 2000). Interest has since 'centred on the

[1] A watershed quite simply is all the land and water area, which contribute runoff to a common point. The term 'watershed' above any point on a defined drainage channel is used to denote all the land and water areas that drain through that point (Tideman 1998, p. 7). In India, a micro-watershed, which forms a typical project unit, is generally defined as falling in the range of 500-1000 hectares.

[2] RVP or Soil Conservation Works in the Catchments of River Valley Projects Scheme and FPR or Integrated Watershed Management in the Catchments of Flood Prone Rivers, introduced in 1962 and 1967 respectively, were largely treatment works in the catchments of river valley projects to reduce the siltation of reservoirs.

[3]'Drylands' are areas where agriculture is rainfed, depending mostly on the rains for soil moisture supply; they occupy nearly 52 per cent of the country's geographical area (Shah et al. 1998).

role of “indigenous”, “customary”, or “traditional” (hence “local”) institutions in regulating access to, and use of, natural resources’ (Woodhouse et al. 2000, p. 13). As a result, ‘community-based’ participatory natural resource management and decentralisation within state structures to facilitate such initiatives have become resonant themes within critical literature in the 1990s.

In India, support for community-based approaches in natural resource management has also come from what has been described as a ‘new traditionalist discourse’ in Indian environmental thinking[4]. This discourse ardently promotes the state-community dichotomy, and consequently, the demand for the ‘revival’ of community traditions or institutions in natural resource management has gripped the imagination of contemporary development practitioners, critical of the state’s centralised development practices (Mosse 2003). Since the 1980s, a number of individual initiatives in the non-governmental sector, such as Anna Hazare’s highly successful water-harvesting endeavour in Ralegaon in Maharashtra, as well as donor agencies (German KFW and the World Bank) espoused community based participatory approaches to WSD. Chipko, the environmental social movement in the Garhwal hills, demonstrated affinity with ‘people’s knowledges’ and ‘people power’ (Ghai and Vivian 1992; Rangan 2000).

The transfer of governmental mandate for WSD from the central Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) to the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) in the early 1990s reflected these many influences. Participation became a ‘mobilising metaphor’ earning political support and bureaucratic approval (Mosse 2004, p. 663). In 1993, the central government constituted a review committee headed by CH Hanumantha Rao, to reassess and integrate the Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP) and the Desert Development Programme (DDP), both through independent study and wider consultations with "NGOs, state governments, professionals and research institutions".[5] In a rare attempt at programmatic streamlining, the committee advocated that a number of other ongoing schemes with related objectives such as SWC, wastelands development and drought proofing be coalesced together with DPAP and DDP, and be implemented under a ‘common approach’, i.e. the watershed approach. A year later, in 1994, its recommendations were issued by MORD as the ‘Common Guidelines for Watershed Development’.

The 1994 guidelines, subsequently revised twice in 2001 and 2003, set out a vast array of programme objectives that centred on promoting equity both at macro (between irrigated and dryland regions) and micro (within communities to further the interests of the poor and disadvantaged) levels. This focus found expression in each of the three successive versions of MORD’s guidelines, albeit in declining degrees of explicitness and emphasis[6]. In any case, the equity objective was articulated alongside a number of other

[4] CSE (1985), Gadgil and Guha (1992), Sinha et al. (1998), all referred to in Mosse (2003), pp. 8-10
[5] Foreword, MORD 1994
[6] ‘More equitable distribution of the benefits of land and water resources development and greater access to income generating activities’ in the 1994 guidelines was the clearest program statement of equity thus

complex, even conflicting, objectives such as increasing agricultural productivity, improving conservation, community maintenance of assets created during the WSD project and now most recently, generation of regular income for Panchayats (constitutionally recognised elected local bodies at the district, block and village levels). Clearly then, WSD is a 'catch-all' development programme, and attractive both to elected political representatives and development bureaucrats as an impressive agenda of affirmative state action. Yet, while this bewildering multiplicity of objectives was apt for a programme that claims to address rural development comprehensively, equity could hardly have been pursued single-mindedly.

Quite in line with the recent history of participatory development, the Ministry for Rural Development or MORD adopted a procedural orientation to participation, and envisioned participation by local communities in its watershed programme through the invention of local institutions called watershed committees and devised detailed procedures to govern their formation and functioning[7]. What appears contradictory however is the implicit mention of socio-economic disparities in the guidelines, and yet, the near absence of any thinking on how these differences might influence participatory procedures in practice[8].

In addition to specifying a detailed blueprint for its programme of participatory watershed development, MORD also laid down a sophisticated administrative structure to implement it.

far; 'Promoting the overall economic development and improving the socio-economic condition of the resource poor and disadvantaged sections inhabiting programme areas' in the 2001 guidelines was explicit though less specific in comparison; 'Employment generation, poverty alleviation, community empowerment and development of human and other economic resources of the rural areas' in the latest 2003 guidelines was far less emphatic on equity.

[7] This step was crticised for undermining panchayats and provoked a trenchant debate between two rather fluid 'pro' and 'anti' panchayat camps. In 2003, MORD did away with watershed committees, and granted full powers of implementation to panchayats. The debate continues.

[8] I have fully developed this idea elsewhere. Please refer to Chhotray (2004).

Implementing Body	Advisory Body	Level
Department of Land Resources (Ministry of Rural Development)		Centre
Department of Rural Development	State Watershed Programme Implementation and Review Committee	State
District Rural Development Agency or Zilla Parishad	District Watershed Advisory Committee	District
Project Implement Agency (Government Officer/NGO/Cooperative, etc.)		Microwatershed[9]
Watershed Development Team (WDT)		Microwatershed
Watershed Committee	Gram Panchayat	Village

Source: Adapted from Guidelines for Watershed Development, MORD (1994)

MORD laid down a decentralised administrative structure for programme implementation, within which the district was the principal tier of implementation. The District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) or the Zilla (district) Panchayat, as the case may be, is responsible both for the selection of watershed areas and of Project Implementing Agencies (PIAs). A direct link has been established between the central government and the district executive, especially with respect to the funding pattern. Panchayat institutions have been accorded an advisory role in the programme. PIAs and their supporting staff in the multidisciplinary Watershed Development Team (WDT) are directly responsible for the implementation of a micro-watershed project. Finally, the local executive body is a watershed committee (WC) constituted at the village level. The committee elects a Chairman from among its members, and appoints a Watershed Secretary, who is a 'full time' paid employee of the association.

Within the programme's administrative structure then, the onus for making sense of MORD's participatory guidelines lay on district officers, PIAs and WDTs. Interestingly, while the policy for participatory watershed development evolved through a visible process of cross-national learning, discourse sharing and even consultations at the national level (described earlier), for those critically responsible for implementation, this policy surfaced suddenly, in the form of government circulars, and had to be

[9] Post the 2003 guidelines, intermediate panchayats are to be preferred to NGOs to act as Project Implementing Agencies, and the gram panchayat will perform all implementation functions at the village level. There will be no watershed committees.

implemented overnight.[10] This top-down method of communication of policy change and its ensuing implementation is typical of administrative functioning in India. As with MORD's 1994 watershed policy, most policies of the Indian state are implemented 'very low down in the bureaucracy', and therefore, the practices of interpretation and representation at that level become critical to understand (Kaviraj 1991; Mosse 2004). This paper attempts to unpack the procedures devised by the Kurnool district watershed office in Andhra Pradesh to implement the 1994 guidelines, and the practices that followed to sustain them.

The bureaucracy that makes sense of participation: District watershed office, Kurnool

The Kurnool Watershed Office (KWO) is an exclusive district level project office created by the state government of Andhra Pradesh for the WSD programme. It is headed by a Project Director (PD) who is typically a member of the IAS or other national allied services. The PD together with a multi-disciplinary team supervises the rest of the project hierarchy. PIAs, either government officers or NGOs, implement individual projects through a four member WDT. While senior officers in KWO have permanent jobs and are often from the elite civil services, junior level officers like PIAs and WDTs, are typically drawn from the open market and are engaged on temporary contracts.

KWO's mixed membership is a good example of the motley constituents of India's vast bureaucratic system. Although bureaucratic power is typically concentrated amongst IAS officers, the entire hierarchy of government, stretching from district headquarters to block offices and villages, eagerly claims its share of state power. In KWO's instance, NGO, as much as government officers acting as PIAs, are able to occupy 'official' positions and therefore claim the much coveted 'official' authority. As with any other typical bureaucratic organisation in India, there is an all-encompassing culture of obedience coloured by shades of flattery, compliance, resentment and insubordination.

KWO moreover, like other district bureaucracies in Andhra Pradesh, has been subject to an overwhelming technocratic thrust on governance by the last political regime in the state that stayed in power for eight years until 2004. Chandrababu Naidu of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), created a niche for himself in Indian politics by projecting himself as a dynamic and reformist Chief Minister. The cornerstone of his commitment to 'good governance' was bureaucratic reform, whereby he tried to create the conditions for strengthening the bureaucracy and allowing it to work 'free' from political interference. Naidu also emphasised delivery and performance, which led to innovative measures as monthly performance assessments, but yielded a distinctive target-driven approach and an obsessive orientation towards bureaucratic monitoring (Mooij 2003).

[10] The first 'batch' of watershed projects was implemented in 1995, the first year that the guidelines came into effect.

KWO's project strategy: A bureaucracy attempts participation

The 1994 guidelines, with their idiom of participation, were unfamiliar to a bureaucratic organisation like KWO. The onus of implementation moreover fell upon its senior-most officer, i.e. the Project Director, who said:

> "All of a sudden, there were these new guidelines. They have presumed that all persons here are very thorough in these participatory matters. We never knew what participation was, we were never excellent in this method of working" (Interview, March 2001, Kurnool).

However, while the programme's participatory thrust was new, its format, i.e. of implementation through fixed term development projects, with physical and financial targets, was both old and familiar. Quite logically therefore, the question of participation posed itself to KWO as something that needed to be accomplished within the rigid schedule of a time bound project.[11] Naidu's government moreover insisted on frequent monitoring of bureaucratic performance in relation to stated targets.[12] The strategy that evolved within KWO had two core parts: one, to distance watershed projects from any kind of unresolved conflict at the village level that may interfere with the project's objectives and pace of progress, and two, to divide the concept of participation into accountable segments which can be itemised and recorded on paper along with the project's financial and physical targets.

KWO saw its own role as technocratic and necessary for project efficiency. It adopted a strict posture of neutrality in core matters of project management, such as the selection of project areas and PIAs. The PD specifically maintained that elected political representatives and political leaders, who may have vested interests in influencing the selection of project areas, were not entertained.[13] This orientation is essential to the historically shaped bureaucratic *stance* on development, as a matter to be pursued through 'unbiased' technocratic planning and implementation as opposed to 'biased' political deliberation and influence (Mathur 2001; Chatterjee 1997). With politics, so defined being 'kept out' of the project, KWO viewed its participatory WSD projects as apolitical, and devised consent as an index of local participation.

In tune with the national guidelines, KWO required village watershed committees to be formed consensually and without contest. The proceedings for formation of such a committee were to be enacted

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[11] By KWO, I am specifically referring to its Project Director and other senior officials who advise him on matters of policy, procedure and implementation.

[12] For instance, KWO had to submit figures of how many watershed projects had been completed, how many watershed structures had been constructed etc. on a monthly basis. For more details, see Mooij (2003).

[13] The National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA), which is responsible for selected priority areas for WSD treatment on the basis of remote sensing, confirmed that Kurnool was one of the few districts in the state that adhered to its action plans (Interview with Project Director, NRSA, November 2000, Hyderabad).

publicly moreover. The presumption here was that the entire village community, regardless of its inequities and power relations, would gather publicly, agree on the composition of such a body and equally, express such agreement in public. KWO expected that the process would occur over a period of time, with user and self-help groups preceding the formation of the actual committee.

Project implementation was on the basis of an action plan. The guidelines required that the plan be formulated in a participatory manner by the watershed committee, through the assimilation of individual plans drawn up by user groups. This provision would ostensibly ensure that individual landholders (in user groups) would participate eagerly in the watershed project, by contributing in cash and labour, and maintain the structures when the project is complete. The final plan was then to be 'presented' to the Watershed Association comprising the entire community for its approval. WDT members were given merely an 'advisory' role in the process.

In an attempt to combine the project's target driven thrust with its recently acquired 'participatory' orientation, KWO's Project Director invented a four-part protocol. First, to guarantee that project works were conducted only with individual consent, the PD ordered that the project office would not approve any structure that the committee built on private lands without first securing a written letter of consent or *sammati patram* from the landholder. Second, to ensure collective decision making by the committee, the PD initiated the practice of an 'inland letter scheme', whereby committee secretaries had to send copies of resolutions, signed by all members, to the project office every month. The project office would issue payments only for works authorised by collective committee decisions. To make sure that individual landholders contribute to the post-project Watershed Development Fund (WDF), the PD prescribed that the amount of the contribution be automatically deducted by the bank at the time of reimbursing material and labour costs for construction undertaken by individual farmers. As the final measure in ensuring that participation would not 'escape' the project, the PD directed his MDT officers to monitor WDT members and committee secretaries regularly.[14] He introduced a 'Community Mobilisation Programme' or CMP, where senior officials publicly inspected project records in project villages. Such public demonstration sent out a very strong message to local project managers, both WDT members and those dominating watershed committees, that the senior project management greatly valued paperwork.

[14] An introductory circular to MDT members was worded in the following manner, 'I expect that you shall become the agent of change by making people aware, by *telling them what is good for them* and thus playing the role of an enabler and facilitator' (italics added).

Participation in practice: Project Lilapuram

KWO's Project Director seemed to have created a full-proof system to ensure participation in village watershed projects. In the following section, I will describe how this system unfolded in a remote village called Lilapuram, in Veldurthi *mandal* of Kurnool district.[15]

A profile

Lilapuram is a moderately sized village with approximately 2500 residents. Villages in the dry Kurnool uplands are predominantly mixed caste villages, and Lilapuram is typical. The Backward Castes (BCs), mostly Boyas, are in the majority, followed by the Other Castes (OCs), mainly Reddys and Vaishyas, a few Muslim families, and a handful of Scheduled Caste (SC) or Harijan families in the village.[16] Reddy domination, through a combination of 'high' caste status, concentrated ownership of large land holdings and capture of important positions in government and politics, is the principal caste feature of the entire Rayalseema region.[17] Lilapuram is no exception. A handful of Reddy farmers owns large landholdings. The Vaishyas are mostly prosperous petty businessmen and represent no threat to the Reddys here. Most BCs in the village own medium and small landholdings, and also work as wage labourers on the lands of the Reddys and other large landholders. The SCs, a majority of whom are landless, are treated as untouchables. They do not share drinking water facilities with other castes here, and their houses are constructed in a separate cluster.

The village has negligible common water resources and single crop agriculture in the rainfed *kharif* season is common practice. But a few Reddy farmers have individual wells for irrigated cultivation and are therefore able to control the agricultural economy of the village. They are also the largest employers of wage labour. Methods of payment range from fixed wage rates in cash to payment in kind. Prevailing wage rates in Lilapuram are less than the government minimum wage: the relative absence of accessible alternative employment options, both on- or off-farm, exposes small and medium farmers to wage related exploitation. Seasonal migration between the months of January and May, from the dryland villages of Rayalseema to the coastal areas of the state, is typical of the region. In Lilapuram however, migration is

[15] A *mandal* is a sub-district tier of administration particular to Andhra Pradesh. Names of the village and individuals have been changed to protect identity. Fieldwork methodology involved policy analysis at the district level, as well as village level fieldwork over three months. I used mainly qualitative forms of data gathering, particularly personal interviews, group discussions and triangulation within the village and referred to written project documents, and other relevant records such as village crime and agriculture records. In addition, I conducted a quantitative household level survey to understand trends of agricultural change following project intervention. My postdoctoral revisit in 2004 lasted a month, involving personal interviews with bureaucrats and programme officers, and group discussions in the case study village.

[16] OCs commonly comprise the higher castes in the traditional Hindu caste hierarchy. SCs are the lowest in the caste rung, and have suffered centuries of discrimination. BCs, including various castes and sub-castes that lie in between OCs and SCs, have gained in importance with post Mandal reservation policies of the 1990s that allowed for 'affirmative action' in their favour.

[17] Rayalseema constitutes the western and south-western strip of the state and is distinctive on account of its rugged, dry upland terrain.

confined to the SC community, which on account of its ‘low’ caste status receives little or no employment within the village.

Viraj Mohan Reddy, the largest landowner of the village and also the head or *sarpanch* of the village panchayat, dominated local politics in Lilapuram until 1985. In this year, two of his cousins, Harekrishna Reddy and Gangadhar Reddy contested him in panchayat elections, but lost. In 2001 (when I first did fieldwork), Viraj Mohan Reddy’s nephew, Satya Reddy, managed panchayat affairs, as his mother was the sarpanch.[18] Although there are two Reddy camps in Lilapuram, there was no indication of any clear-cut division within the village. In public, the Reddys maintain a cordial relationship. Reddy brothers on either side of the divide profess distinct political identities (supporting Congress and TDP respectively),[19] projecting their mutual distancing to be an outcome of principled political differences as opposed to petty personal bickering. Party based identities in the village become charged during elections only. Contest to panchayat seats (11 excluding the sarpanch’s post) has increased in the last 15 years. Both Reddy families nominate their respective candidates to each position.

It is common for villages in Rayalseema to have two or more ‘factions’, though such divisions may not necessarily always be as peaceful as in Lilapuram (and here too, the public veneer of dignified interaction has been known to give way during high points of electoral tension).[20] Rayalseema has a high crime rate of faction based feuding. The term ‘faction’ is used to broadly describe groupism and conflict, and is rather different from its popular use in the study of Indian politics.[21] Factions refer to groups typically loyal to a single leader, but there is usually no instance of vertical organisation cutting across caste networks. Faction based contests are often anchored in caste rivalries, although caste factors can be compounded by others, such as family disputes over property, or access to controlling the local village panchayat.

My recent revisit to these villages in 2004 revealed some important continuities in local politics. Satya Reddy is vice-sarpanch and continues to be at the helm of panchayat affairs. The sarpanch’s seat was reserved for a BC and Satya Reddy’s nominee defeated Gangadhar Reddy’s candidate to occupy the post. The two Reddy groups remain adversarial, although Satya Reddy’s camp is clearly more powerful by virtue of its hold over the panchayat. Intensification in panchayat politics in both villages does not indicate any real expansion of claim to local power beyond the two dominant groups.

[18] The sarpanch’s seat was reserved for a woman.
[19] TDP displaced the Congress at the state in the early 1980s, and has been in power for most periods since. It was routed by the Congress in the recent assembly elections of 2004.
[20] Lilapuram Police Records, Veldurthi mandal.
[21] The term ‘faction’ has been used to denote a ‘vertical’ organisation that typically comprises members from different castes, who are held by ‘transactional’ ties to a leader (Hardiman 1982, p. 199).

The interface between KWO and Lilapuram

In 1997, a team of officers from KWO, comprising the head of an NGO appointed as the PIA for this project and his team of four WDT officers, arrived in Lilapuram to announce the watershed project and initiate the formation of the committee.[22] The NGO in question is a small organisation of six members, and was formed by a retired government functionary in 1995, shortly after KWO started project operations in the district. It had not conducted any work in Lilapuram prior to this visit. A typical project starts with 'entry point meetings', ostensibly large public gatherings in the village, where officers explain the purpose of the WSD project, and solicit interest in the formation of user and self-help groups, and ultimately the watershed committee. Unsurprisingly, the first points of contact for the project team were the two Reddy leaders: Satya Reddy, proxy-sarpanch and his rival and uncle, Gangadhar Reddy, who was also the Village Agricultural Officer. A meeting was convened under their auspices. In the same meeting, it was decided that there would be two committees given the size of the watershed area. The two Reddy leaders acquired control of one watershed committee each. Each leader selected a handful of BC members who were usually engaged as labourers on their lands. The mandatory reserved quota of two SC members per committee was also fulfilled. Right at the outset then, the project fell in tune with the village power structure. Luckily for the visiting project team, the watershed committee was formed without any contest.

No user or self-help groups were formed at the time. Although project officers later formed these groups on paper, they did not attempt to galvanise their functioning in practice.[23] Far from being aggregated through individual plans formulated by user groups, the action plan was prepared by the multidisciplinary WDT. This was only to be expected as the action plan is a 'modern' document, complete with sector wise targets and financial estimates; its formulation requires skills that immediately put project officials at an advantage over the 'locals' they seek to empower. Besides, the plan had to be drafted in the very first year of the project, and even if there had been intent, there was no time to devolve technical capability to local committee members.

Project works had to be initiated soon after the formation of the committee in order to meet the targets laid out for the first year. WDT staff actively interacted with the committee secretaries to this end, but neither they nor the secretaries attempted to initiate a broader process of popular mobilisation. The idea that decisions regarding watershed works (location, timing, sequence, costs, securing of contributions and engagement of wage labour for example) would be taken by anyone other than themselves was alien to the Reddys. Both the other public operations in the village, agricultural works and panchayats works,

[22] This account is based on oral accounts acquired during personal interactions with a range of villagers in Lilapuram. These were corroborated both by the Reddy leaders in the village as well as KWO project staff.

[23] When I asked some members who were listed as group members in project records, they had no idea of what I was referring to.

bear a stark expression of Reddy domination, and absolutely no attempt is made to soften this by recourse to participatory or pro-equity talk or gestures as a matter of everyday practice.

As for agriculture, big Reddy landholders engage wage labour predominantly from among BC families alone. SC families are treated as untouchables and routinely deprived of wage employment in the village. The panchayat, meant to be democratic and representative in theory, is not so in practice. It has been a coveted source of local authority however, and both Reddy groups compete regularly to gain control over it. Representative membership of BCs, SCs and women in the panchayat is entirely notional, since Satya Reddy does not work in consultation with anyone. No public meetings are ever called by the panchayat, not even the mandatory monthly *gram sabhas* (village assembly). Besides, the panchayat, supposed to be the repository of wide ranging duties and functions, both regulatory and developmental in nature, restricts its functions to a few construction related tasks. These too are executed through local contractors, selected on the basis of tenders, instead of engaging villagers. The contractor system allows sarpanches to acquire profits or 'cuts' through panchayats works and is rampant in the region.

At the same time, the Reddys were fully aware that their roles as committee secretaries required them to adhere to the protocol of participation devised by the project office. WDT members took pains to explain these procedures to secretaries; this was essential to secure the release of project funds. Besides, documentation and record keeping had to be up to mark if humiliation at the Community Mobilisation Programme rounds was to be avoided.[24] Equally, approval from senior officers at KWO was a powerful incentive for the Reddys, who may have enjoyed a powerful basis of domination, but thrived on its validation by official authority.[25] Consequently, each one of KWO's formal requirements regarding participatory decision-making and implementation, i.e., collective decision-making by the committee, expression of consent by private landholders and the receipt of contributions to the Watershed Development Fund, was fastidiously met. There are however reasons to believe that such compliance was more formalistic than substantive in nature.[26]

[24] I was present at one such CMP and observed MDT officers publicly criticising WDT officers and watershed committee sercretaries for inefficient record keeping. WDT officers, with their temporary jobs and lower status in the administrative hierarchy, were visibly embarrassed.

[25] Gangadhar Reddy in particular was obsessed about earning a 'good name' with government authorities. Since I was researching the project, he thought it was necessary to impress me, so that I said 'good things' about him to project authorities. He regularly writes letters reporting his work, not just to the project office, but also to the Chief Minister! The opening lines of one such letter are, 'Respected Sir, I want to submit the following lines for your kind notice and information. I have been advising all my watershed presidents, chairmen and secretaries, to do their works sincerely with good quality in a justified manner to get a good name'.

[26] Much of the following account draws on descriptions by WDT officers who requested anonymity. I was able to corroborate their accounts through general conversations with a large number of farmers, from different castes, as well as the landless in the village.

To begin with, committee resolutions signed by all the members did not count for much in Lilapuram. The Reddys took decisions unilaterally, and simply obtained signatures from other members, who were wage labourers on their lands. Similarly, the practice of securing *sammati-patrams* was observed, but not quite in the way KWO's PD may have intended it to. Sameer Reddy and Gangadhar Reddy, both committee secretaries, normally started work on people's lands much before obtaining any written consent. This emerged when I spoke to a large number of farmers, on whose lands watershed structures had been constructed.[27] Of the 20 or more farmers I contacted, each one confirmed that none of them had been contacted before commencement of work, though they had been made to sign or record thumb impressions afterwards. Besides, even if a landholder were contacted, the margin for dissent was negligible, given the undeniable context of unequal caste and wage based relationships that governed the interaction between the Reddys and the majority farmers here. In any case, as a project official informed me in confidence, there were no such cases of consent ever having been denied, which makes the matter suspect.

Also, while having structures constructed on their lands puts farmers in the category of 'project beneficiaries', farmers do not regard all project activities as beneficial. For example, they tend to be suspicious of project arguments in favour of field bunds to check the downward velocity of water. These are perceived as unnecessary structures that result in water stagnation at the corners, causing crops to rot. In comparison, big structures like farm ponds are normally perceived as highly beneficial. Their willingness for project works is also dampened by the requirement for cash/labour contributions to the Watershed Development Fund (WDF).

In Lilapuram however, as in a large number of other project villages, a string of malpractices ensured that the contribution to the post project WDF was neither explicitly sought, and oftentimes not made, except on paper. KWO required that all works could be executed only after a watershed committee collectively prepared estimates for these, which would then be approved by a project officer, either the WDT or MDT, depending on the amount in question. In Lilapuram, the Reddys appropriated the power of estimate preparation. While preparing financial estimates for individual structures in accordance with government rates, they regularly provided for costs higher than those actually incurred in the village (since typically, the government rates for materials and labour were much higher than those prevalent locally). They then used this gap not only to show the WDF contribution on paper, but also to pocket a part of the difference. Such practices may or may not have been in connivance with WDT and MDT members, but certainly in their knowledge. Interestingly enough, it was the Project Director who described this malpractice to me in detail, confirming that as long as the gap between estimated and actual rates continued, it would be difficult to verify individual contributions. KWO's system then, of anticipatory contributions deducted at

[27] The WDT maintains a list of people on whose lands structures are constructed, under the category of 'project beneficiaries'. This list was very easy to obtain.

source while reimbursing farmers, was hardly effective. It was especially unjust when the project constructed works on common lands, as poor labourers who were employed had to pay the mandatory contribution from their wages.[28]

The committee secretaries also openly executed project works using just a handful of backward caste labourers, drawn from amongst their regular farm hands. The SC community, regarded as untouchable and normally deprived of regular employment on the lands of the Reddy farmers, received no employment on the project either. Since there were no active user groups, the guideline that user groups, comprising landholders, be encouraged to take up works on their lands was disregarded. Few, if any public meetings, were convened for the entire village, after the initial days of the project.

Winners and losers

The watershed project came to an end in 2001. It had a reasonably good record of execution of works, and both physical and financial targets had been met, although with different degrees of sectoral success. Project works were carried out in four sectors: minor irrigation, agriculture, horticulture and afforestation. The following table illustrates the project's financial performance in these.

Financial performance 1997–2001

(All figures in lakhs of rupees)

Sector	Target	Expenditure	Balance
Agriculture	3.78	3.627	0.153
Minor Irrigation	4.84	4.69	0.15
Afforestation	3.03	0.889	2.141
Horticulture	1.352	0.934	0.418

Source: Kurnool Watershed Office

These figures reveal that expenditure targets were met most effectively in the minor irrigation sector while major under spending was in the afforestation sector. MI financial targets are easier to meet than others because they involve expensive works like percolation tanks, and almost all works involve material costs in addition to labour. Agriculture sector targets are fulfilled because of the extensive nature of the works, such as fieldbunding for example, which encircles individual landholdings. Dryland horticulture, which involves direct disbursement of seeds or money for seeds from the project to individual beneficiaries, was extremely popular and many farmers flooded the project with requests for disbursements. The project did badly in the afforestation sector, which involved regeneration activities in the village common lands. These lands are insignificant to rich farmers as they meet their fuel and fodder needs from private lands.

[28] In principle, while landowners are required to contribute 10% of the total cost if a structure is raised on their lands, for structures raised on lands that are commonly owned, the contribution ought to be obtained on a shared basis from landholders who are most likely to benefit.

Common lands in the village have deteriorated significantly over the years, and poor people have taken to grazing livestock and gathering firewood from the adjoining hills and reserved forests. In this respect, the watershed project did nothing to address this inequitable situation; and indeed, Lilapuram's common lands found no mention in the project's action plan.

The project concentrated on activities that could be carried out on private lands. This created conditions for large landholders with good access to water to benefit more than others. In Lilapuram, agriculture is typically restricted to groundnut, the principal crop in the rainfed season. Besides the depletion of soil moisture and nutrients on account of monoculture, factors like bad rains, crash in groundnut prices and pest attacks regularly put small farmers to risk, depriving them of their major source of income. Farmers also grow small amounts of red gram and *korra* (inferior rice like cereal) for domestic consumption. Only large farmers owning wells have the option of growing a major second crop in the rainfed season (like castor and sunflower) and cultivating their lands at all (with winter groundnut, cotton and sorghum) in the irrigated season. The agricultural specialist in the WDT actively advised farmers to diversify cultivation to new water intensive crops like drumstick, in addition to cultivating sunflower, castor and cotton. However, each of these crops involves high input costs for seeds and pesticides that only rich, large farmers could afford. Besides, a few small farmers who worked for large landlords were able to procure seeds, pesticides, and in some cases water, free of cost from their employers, and thus introduced drumstick and sunflower on their lands. The option of diversification however eluded the large majority of small and medium farmers in Lilapuram. Horticulture with its lure of direct disbursements created popular demand. But soon enough, small farmers discovered that shifting to horticulture was a risk they could ill afford. Fruit trees do not start bearing fruit for at least four years; till then, the farmer continues to make huge investments and suffer negative returns.

Even with an increase in on-site water availability as a result of the project intervention, a number of other factors influenced the extent to which different categories of farmers could benefit. While medium and small farmers reported an increase in groundnut crop yields, they could not really benefit through crop diversification, for reasons mentioned above. The landless who were also from the 'untouchable' scheduled castes were the worst off. They were systematically deprived of project work, and thus continued to migrate to the wetter eastern parts of the state during the long and dry summer. The project moreover was confined to the execution of works on farmland and did not initiate any non-farmland based activities (like thrift and credit activities for women, known to be popular in other project areas).

The chart of winners and losers was a predictable one. Larger landholders with better initial access to water were in a better position to benefit, and were in this sense, better allies of the project staff in their

pursuit to achieve targets and show signs of progress.[29] The poor, small and marginal farmers, either had little, no or poor quality land, and few other assets that they could tap in order to avail of other project options as diversification or even entitlements, as employment on project works. One disadvantage bred another (the poor landless from the scheduled castes who had to migrate to eke a living through the summer, were accused by the Reddys of being 'absent' in the village when project works were being carried out), and the project staff did little to pursue their cause, as it would be 'unrewardingly hard work'.[30]

Conclusion

The key conclusions that arise largely substantiate Mosse's propositions regarding policy and practice, although not in entirety.

To begin with, the case of the state policy for participatory watershed development clearly shows that policy is not unimportant — on the contrary, it is essential 'state-speak' and necessary for the higher echelons of the state to respond to diverse influences — but its capacity to actively dictate practice is limited. To this extent, Mosse's first proposition that "policy primarily functions to mobilise and maintain political support that is to legitimise rather than to orientate practice" is compelling' (2003, p. 648). The disjuncture between policy making and policy implementation is a central theme of this article. This is prompted by two factors. One, the actors involved in the making of the watershed policy and its implementation are rather different. And two, different actors involved in policy formulation and at the various stages of implementation were likely to have different attitudes to all that the policy stood for. I will say more about this soon. As a result of this disjuncture however, interpretation of the policy became central to its implementation.

Mosse's second proposition clarifies this point further, that "development interventions are drawn not by policy, but by the exigencies of organisations and the need to maintain relationships" (2003, p. 651). The case study of KWO illustrates the regional, organisational and personality factors that gave rise to a specific 'managerial regime', which vitally influenced the construction of particular procedures to give shape to the 1994 watershed policy. Throughout Andhra Pradesh, KWO's participatory protocol was unique, and could be attributed to the innovative ideas of one Project Director, whose personal convictions arising from his bureaucratic training and orientation, combined with the real need to address targets, shaped his response. Even at KWO, subsequent Project Directors have hardly paid sufficient importance to the protocol described here.

[29] One large farmer, who took up drumstick cultivation and was able to procure massive yields, was enthusiastically referred to by project staff as the 'drumstick hero'.
[30] I borrow here a phrase used by Mosse (2004) to describe similar outcomes in another project.

The hallmark of KWO's participatory protocol was its centralised control over project operations. As a result of this, a vertical upward-oriented system of representation of participatory procedures ensued. This example substantiates Mosse's third proposition that "development projects work to maintain themselves as coherent policy ideas, as systems of representation" and that "participatory models and ideals of self-reliance are often more part of the way projects work as systems as representations, oriented upwards and outwards to wider policy goals and institutions that secure reputation and funding" (2003, p. 657). In this respect however, the stakes and interests of actors at different levels of policy making and implementation were strikingly different.

It may have been imperative for policy makers at Delhi to present a veneer of enthusiasm and conviction in the participatory aspects of the new watershed policy, poised as they were at an important juncture in the interface between international donor engagement, mobilisation of national resources and also, importantly, explicit commitment to key political constituencies within the Indian democracy. For KWO's Project Director, also a civil servant like those at Delhi, the compulsions were slightly different, as he was far more concerned with the pragmatic aspects of reconciling the participatory policy with the regular tedium of development project management, none of which had been done away with. For the Project Director's advisory staff, senior line department officials who were based in Kurnool, the need to express formal commitment to participation was not pressing; they could continue their familiar monitoring functions within the new arrangement. Local project officers, while not being constrained to conform to participation as a laudable political objective either, were able to have far more localised and immediate concerns regarding their roles. The narrative of Lilapuram showed how junior project staff along with dominant local interests entered into an expedient pact of silent incredulity in the participatory discourse, created by the senior project management, to see the project through. They were well aware that the project could not have continued without the support of the Reddys, and therefore accepted the terms on which such cooperation was offered.

At the village, different segments of the population remained incredulous of the project's participatory discourse too, and for very different reasons. Dominant interests recognised that formal compliance with KWO's protocol was possible without jeopardising their interests, while guaranteeing the additional benefit of basking in the project's official authority. Subordinate members were equally disbelieving, for practical if not expedient reasons; their lack of open protest only facilitated the Reddy's usual exercise of domination. In any case, the participatory discourse or the lack of it did not really matter to the poorest groups. Scheduled caste women in Lilapuram were much angrier about the denial of wage labour on project works; they hardly contemplated the issue in terms of deepening patron-client relationships.

It is here that the article points to a slightly different, albeit significant conclusion, from Mosse's key propositions. Key actors within KWO were not really concerned about the credibility of the participatory

project on offer, and by extension, not worried about the loss of ‘legitimacy’ that the project might suffer on account of obviously ‘unparticipatory’ practices on the ground. The article in effect shows how participation works as a rhetorical state strategy even in the face of widespread incredulity. Those who state their conviction most explicitly (policy makers) either do not need to confront popular incredulity directly or are familiar with cynicism given the repeated failure of the Indian state to deliver on promises. And those who are most responsible for implementation are unconcerned about the project’s lack of success in propagating its participatory discourse. This disjuncture implies that not all development actors are equally concerned about reputation and legitimacy, or even in the same way, perhaps contrary to Mosse who writes passionately about development actors working hard to build ‘interpretive communities’.

Conversely, the state is not experienced by ‘ordinary people’ as a Weberian aggregate, and therefore there was no grand crisis in its legitimacy when local staff acted in ways that clearly breached the larger claims of the development project. In deed, "the political order is acknowledged not because it is regarded worthy, but because of the adoption of an instrumental attitude towards it" (Held 1984, p. 89). The persistence of everyday cases of content and discontent, negotiation of easily deliverable benefits from the project and frustration at failure in doing so, reaffirms this point. In fact, the creation of concrete, visible project structures — regular icons of development work — provided the local staff with ammunition of alibi to offer both to villagers, who may have been dissatisfied due to the perceived lack of gain, and indeed, senior officials from KWO who occasionally visited project villages.

Finally, the paper concludes that the state’s watershed policy contained a limited mandate for equity, but one that was substantially diluted by the accompanying emphasis on the procedures for participation and the ostensible belief that seriously structural problems could be resolved through community level action alone. This paper demonstrates how the overly procedural emphasis on participation kept the project staff busy, creating the necessary diversions for them to further disregard the pursuit of equity. Mosse’s final proposition that "success and failure are policy oriented judgements that obscure project effects" urges for recognition of the fact that projects may have genuinely "positive livelihoods effects while not being fully participatory" (2004, p. 662). In this case however, ‘participation’ served as the very instrument through which the watershed project secured the interests of the economically advantaged, reconstituting rather than challenging relations of power and patronage.

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