



# Watershed development: the current status in India

Mr. S. P. Tucker

**With the watershed development approach nearing 30 years the Government of India have introduced the Revised Guidelines. Using the specific case study of Andhra Pradesh, the impact of the Guidelines is examined.**

In India, strategies for implementing watershed development are more than three decades old. A macro-policy called the 'Revised Guidelines for Watershed Development', a path-breaking document propagating a participatory and integrated approach, were formulated in 1994-1995 by the Rural Development Department, Government of India. The Agriculture Department and Forest Department too have also been taking up similar activities for increased agricultural productivity and Joint Forest Management. Perhaps this is a good time to reflect as more than 14 million hectares of waste and degraded lands have been taken up for treatment under the Revised Guidelines.

The evolution of such an action plan has the following clear-cut landmarks:

- In 1989, the Department of Space suggested a low rainfall, sedimentation rate and evapotranspiration rates as the criteria to prioritize watersheds for the purpose of treatment. An Integrated Mission for sustainable Development (IMSD) was initiated during the same period. The Department of Space and Planning Commission joined the Rural Development Department, Government of India to facilitate such an approach (1989 - 1993).
- The Revised Guidelines provided extra inputs for prioritization of watersheds

on the basis of regional backwardness and low attainment of socio-economic parameters. Mobilization of the community was proposed at the

beginning of the activities at watershed level and the average cost of area treatment proposed was approximately Rs.4000 (\$ 94 US) per hectare.

- Almost a decade ago, it was decided that the government-supported wage employment programmes should also be utilized for taking up integrated watershed development and, as a consequence, from 2 October 1993, there was a many fold increase of the wage employment component of watershed development.
- Around the same time, the Dr. Hanumantha Rao Committee<sup>1</sup> was trying to understand the processes that enable watershed development activities to become people centred as a tool of poverty alleviation. The result was the upscaling of the watershed movement in the country, which was supported by the Revised Guidelines as well as institutional arrangements facilitating such a strategy.

Different user groups like farmers, landless labourers and women play an important role in the management of watersheds. A ten-member committee coordinates the work and a secretary (local youth) takes responsibility to take up day-to-day management.

While the activity of watershed development has been scaled up, it has been realized that in a large number of cases the programme has become a 'soil and moisture conservation' programme. The contemporary idea, to include the issues relating the equity, gender, usufruct rights out of common pool of resources have yet to be addressed. The issue of sustainable development and a withdrawal strategy still are of paramount importance and need to be re-emphasized, since one cycle of watersheds is about to be completed.

<sup>1</sup> The committee had practitioners, Planning Commission members, Macro Policy Advisors and the concerned officials on board.

Much fallow and degraded land has been transformed through the 'Guidelines'



Charles Batchelor

## Status of Watersheds in the State of Andhra Pradesh: A case study

Under the revised guidelines, in the State of Andhra Pradesh, 2090 watersheds with an area comprising one million hectares were taken up. In December 1999, a ten-year action plan to treat an additional 10 million hectares of wastelands and fallow lands (40% of the area) was launched.

Currently, 2.7 million hectares of land is under treatment through 5200 micro-watersheds at a cost of Rs.1080 crores (\$ 240 million). Recently the Department of Space has released the Wasteland Atlas of the Country highlighting the status of Wastelands, which make up 20% of the land (64 million hectares). This is in addition to a large extent of Fallow lands which also need treatment.

Experience of the upscaled scenario in the State of Andhra Pradesh has thrown up the typical issues when a 'programme-based top down' approach is taken up.

- Sustainability of the project becomes the biggest casualty and watershed programme at the village level becomes an end in itself.
- The issue regarding the role of the watershed as a facilitator for the process of empowerment of the village or watershed community towards a self-managed entity is still relevant.

These are some issues, which have emerged. The role and relationship of different partners such as Watershed Community, non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the Governmental Agencies implementing the programme need to be defined very clearly.

- Proper delegations of power and preparation of micro plans and implementation have to be facilitated in real terms.

A community willing to come together will look to the future for a successful watershed development programme

### about the author

Mr. S. P. Tucker is the Commissioner Rural Development for the Department of Rural Development in Andhra Pradesh. Mr. Tucker can be contacted via the Editor.

## Andhra Pradesh Rural Livelihoods Project (APRLP):

Since huge resources are being spent in the watershed programme, it has been felt that any bilateral or multilateral agency which wants to joint the efforts of the state, should join the ongoing programme to strengthen it from within. A pure project-based approach may not have such a potential. Hence with DFID support, consolidation of the efforts in five of the districts covering 40% of the wastelands in the state of Andhra Pradesh have been initiated. This is meant to strengthen capacity building efforts as well as participatory implementation and monitoring efforts of the watershed community. The issue of contemporary ideas to use watersheds as a means of livelihoods of the landless, women and the poor as well as a focus on gender, equity and common pool of resources is being addressed.

## Introduction of pre-watershed stage

While learning from the experience of the last decade, it is realized that the process of community mobilization must precede the sanction of watersheds. Hence an innovation was proposed in the watershed guidelines to divide the watershed activity in two phases

1. A pre-watershed phase to initiate the process of community mobilization, participation and testing the willingness of communities to come together to initiate certain pre-agreed activities. These include an offer to all the very high priority villages to come forward and initiate pre-watershed activities including protection of the hillocks, promoting natural regeneration, prevention of fires on the hillocks, banning the felling trees, controlled grazing maintenance of water bodies and cost sharing.
2. Once the community is able to prepare itself and prove its willingness to launch the regular watershed activity through a formal sanction.

It is hoped this initiative may improve the quality of inputs, especially when large-scale activities are taken up, to cope with the level of soil degradation and stressful living conditions in these resource-poor areas.



Charles Batchelor