

Improving Access of CPR's to Poor

Lessons from Tank Bed Cultivation in Zamistapoor

Despite the disappearance of most of the CPR lands in villages due to illegal occupation and distribution to the poor by the Government, village tanks are one type of Common Property Resources (CPR) which are still in use in most of the villages particularly in the deccan plateau. These tanks collect water from village catchment during rainy season. The water is used mainly for irrigation and for drinking water for cattle, washing clothes and religious purposes. However, due to continuous siltation and reduced flows from the catchment areas, these tanks now remain dry most part of the year except for a few months in rainy season. In Semi-arid areas, more than half the tank bed becomes empty as the water recedes due to evaporation or used up for cultivation. These tanks can vary in size from very small covering an area of 2 acres to a large size of 20 acres. Due to silt deposition, these tank beds are fertile and retain adequate moisture in the profile for cultivation of short season crops. It is in this context that the project staff of DFID-NRSP Project R8192 “Enabling Rural Poor for Better Livelihoods through Improved Natural Resource Management in SAT India” came up with an idea of institutional arrangements for putting these tank beds to use by making them accessible to poor for crop and fodder cultivation.

Zamistapoor is one of the four villages selected for implementation of the DFID-NRSP Project R8192 in Mahabubnagar District of Andhra Pradesh. The project staff observed that the village tank, known as “Varadaiah Cheruvu” has a total area of 20 acres of bed of which only 30% area is filled with water. From village records it was also known that the tank has not filled completely and not over flown in the last twenty five years. As a result most of the tank bed is covered by thorny bushes like Prosopis and weeds.

It was thought that if this un used tank bed can be brought under cultivation and given to landless poor people, they can ekeout a living. The idea was discussed with the village panchayat under whose jurisdiction the tank bed comes, who responded positively for the proposal and were willing to permit the use of tank bed by landless.

Four landless men came forward initially to cultivate 4 acres land, but they were reluctant to start cultivation as they were not sure of returns. At this stage, two landless women Smt. Venkatamma and Saraswathamma from the same village came forward. These women had high confidence of taking risk, because of their success in raising a nursery and running it viabilly, earlier in the project.

The project made contribution for cleaning the land and ploughing it and helped in procuring quality seeds of crops to be grown. The women contributed their labour for raising the crops. In two and half acres of land, crops like fodder jowar, maize, vegetables and Chick pea crop were grown during rabi 2004.

The women could successfully grow short season vegetables, but the moisture was not adequate to get grain yield from Jowar and Maize.



Developed tank bed ready for cultivation



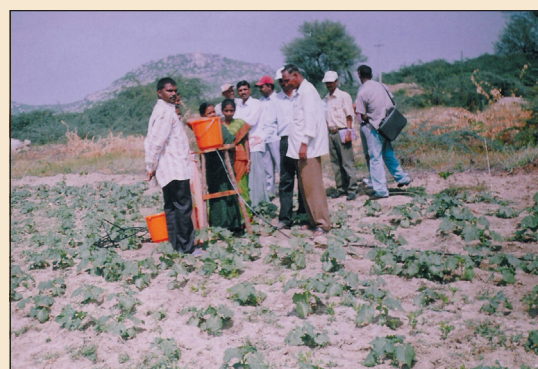
Women farmers with fodder maize in cultivated tank bed



Leafy vegetables grown in tank bed

Even for vegetables, they provided supplementary irrigation by using water from the tank through an improvised drip irrigation using plastic buckets. But in case of other crops like Jowar and maize they could get reasonable income by marketing it as green fodder within the village. Considering one season experience, the women believe that a open well dug in the tank bed which would be recharged with seepage can be a good source of supplemental irrigation and significantly enhance the chances of realizing more assured income from all crops and reduce the risk.

Policy implications: From the experience of the landless women in accessing CPRs in this case study, it was found that,



Drip irrigation to vegetables with plastic bucket set

- Proper identification of CPRs fit for cultivation is necessary in consultation with the village people
- The village institutions need to be persuaded to help the landless people by allowing their access to the CPRs
- The Government or other development institutions should help in initial development of the tank beds to make them fit for cultivation through capital assistance and in some cases soft loans.
- Besides development of land, technical support for identifying suitable crops, enterprises and provision of inputs plays an important role in success
- Landless women demonstrated greater initiative to take up cultivation of the CPR's and take risk. Therefore women/women groups should get preference in such allotments/leasing agreements
- Arrangements for supplementary irrigation enhance the chances of success of this approach many folds

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