

A Reflection on Policy Formulation Processes - A Case Study of Watershed Management Projects in Andhra Pradesh¹

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Dr NK Sanghi is a strong believer of state specific guidelines and always thought that Andhra Pradesh was a pioneer in this matter. He contributed to the conceptualization of Process Guidelines of APRLP, particularly on productivity enhancement and livelihoods components. He defined how these components could be integrated into existing guidelines. The first author had the fortune of working with him closely for almost 15 years and benefited from his “incorrigibly positive spirit” and “innocent thought process”.

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Though Government of India supported watershed development projects (financial support and program design) for a long period, the real paradigm shift in these projects took place with the advent of Guidelines for Watershed Development Programme in 1994. Through these path breaking guidelines Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India rationalized the on-going schemes related to drought relief and employment generation. These guidelines have introduced several innovative protocols with a strong belief on community participation. For the first time in India, development funds were directly transferred to the bank accounts of local committees. Otherwise, works were generally executed either through department or contractors. Similarly, there is a significant focus on participatory and comprehensive action plans; partnerships between voluntary organizations and state governments; special budgetary provisions for training and community organization and so on. It took some time for state governments, district level agencies, voluntary organizations, communities, local politicians and others to completely appreciate the implications of these changes on the discourse of policy and practice of watershed management in the country.

However, there are many questions and challenges in transferring these guidelines into reality. Are the provisions of guidelines adequate for promoting participatory watershed management? Are the District Project Management Team and Project Implementing Agencies ready for this initiative? Are the budget provisions (unit costs) sufficient? What is the meaning of training and community organization? How to select voluntary organizations and appoint them as Project Implementing Agencies? How to monitor the project at district level? What is the role of state government in this project? Did the agencies understand the spirit of guidelines? Such questions kept increasing with time. Very soon it became clear that these fears were not completely unfounded and some of them are “real” problems. Given this background, where a new policy with an egalitarian framework and passion for participatory development, is introduced by Central Government, to unprepared state and district level administrative machinery, the probability of failure seemed to be much higher.

In a federal system like India, the role of central government is largely limited to setting the vision and objectives; defining the strategy; provision of financial resources and guidance, while the state governments are expected to follow these guidelines, place effective implementation mechanisms and ensure that the expected end results are achieved. This is applicable to watershed development projects also. However, given the “newness” of the guidelines and

demands of participatory watershed management projects, there are several issues and concerns which need to be addressed. It is important to “contextualize” these national guidelines locally and “interpret” them in the interest of local communities. “Initiatives” have to be taken at the state level to ensure that the policies of national interest are truly relevant to the local conditions. However, there may be questions of role clarity between state and central governments. The dilemma of “who should do what?” may be a hurdle in taking any initiative. The key question is also, whether there is any “space and opportunity” for such initiatives. These questions may be little out of space now (2014-15) as the new phrase “cooperative federalism” is in currency. But, these are daunting questions for the state governments. It is not rare that even senior officers are desperate and make complaints that several “irrelevant” decisions (guidelines) are made at the top and there is not enough space to alter them to local conditions. The watershed development projects in Andhra Pradesh offer an experience (and a host of lessons from this experience), where dynamic senior government officers collaborated with like-minded partners, particularly with committed civil society organizations, politicians, peoples’ institutions, to see that national policy of watershed management was relevant to local conditions and aspirations of local communities.

This paper presents the reflections of two individuals, who have gone through the process of “contextualizing national policies for a local condition” and witnessed the “ups and downs” of this process, with a specific focus on watershed development projects in Andhra Pradesh. Section 1 of the paper explains “what” changes took place in the policy content (national provisions and local adaptations). Section 2 explains “why” these changes took place (reasons behind the change). In Section 2, the authors took the liberty⁴ of mentioning names of some key senior government officers and important civil society organizations, who made significant contribution in this process. Section 3 is largely on lessons learned followed by a concluding section.

Section 1 - What changes took place in the policy content?

Experiences of Andhra Pradesh indicate that content of policy is dynamic. Part of the policy changes, while certain part gets entrenched without any change. It is also observed that certain policy provisions are never/ rarely operationalized. In this section, changes in the contents of the policy and other arrangements

4. *These are the perceptions of the authors and others could have different opinions/ points of view on this matter.*

are chronicled. This section also presents the variations between the policy provisions at national level and local level.

First Phase (1994 to 2000) - Early Glory

In this phase, watershed development projects enjoyed high priority and glory. In Andhra Pradesh these were considered as an important agenda of the state government during 1994 - 2000. With the objective of addressing the major concerns of the drought prone areas, the state government was able to mobilize large number of watershed development projects from the Centre. During the same period, Andhra Pradesh also promoted other important community based development initiatives such as – self-help groups of women (micro finance and institutionalising women’s collectives); joint forest management; participatory irrigation management and so on. As state government was keen on addressing the critical concerns of rural areas/ communities, these initiatives were considered to be necessary conditions for “accelerated growth”. Given the massive scale of these initiatives, the state government had to “prepare” itself to support them and deliver the promise. This triggered a new way of functioning and policy framework for these initiatives. Implementing participatory development projects on a large scale was a challenging exercise for the senior officers of the Government. The following interesting policies were promoted during this phase, for watershed development projects in the state.

- As watershed development projects have high potential (for changing the rural economy and ecology), Government of Andhra Pradesh developed a State Perspective Plan for Watershed Development projects. This document⁵ provided a clear direction to the state – indicating the commitments of the state government; expected funding support from different sources; phasing of the projects, area/ targets to be covered, institutional arrangements and so on. Within the broad framework of this document, the state government shaped its implementation strategies.
- The national policy suggested DRDA as the nodal agency at district level for watershed development projects. As GoAP realized that DRDA would be over loaded with a massive project like this, it established separate Drought Prone Areas Project Offices in the 13 DPAP/ DDP districts. This

5. *This process of preparing State Level Strategic Plan was subsequently integrated into the Guidelines of Integrated Watershed Management Project (2008) of Government of India.*

dedicated⁶ institutional arrangement helped to provide focus on the watershed projects. These DPAP Offices had a Project Director with requisite Multi-Disciplinary Teams.

- As watershed development projects demand high level of efforts towards community mobilization, GoAP decided to appoint local NGOs as Project Implementing Agencies. NGOs were expected to provide necessary inputs and support the peoples' institutions on watershed related issues. During this period, in some districts of the state (e.g. Nalgonda District) majority of the projects were implemented by local NGOs. Though this provision is part of national guidelines, several state governments have neglected this provision, while GoAP tried to make maximum use it.

Second Phase (2001–2005) – Harmonising Innovations with Mainstream

This period witnessed series of changes in policies of watershed development project in the country and state. This was strongly linked to the changes in leadership at government and administrative set up of watershed development projects. During this period, Government of India changed watershed guidelines twice (Revised Guidelines in 2001 and Hariyali Guidelines in 2003) and GoAP issued Process Guidelines twice (2002 and 2005). Government of India also constituted a committee for reorienting watershed development policy and programs (Parthasarathy Committee, 2005-06). The policy formulation processes and the content of the same have significant impact on the quality of the program at grass root level.

The state administration realized the gaps in watershed development project during the initial phase (1994-2000). There was an excessive focus on “physical and engineering works” in the project, while the participation, equity and gender issues got neglected. GoAP wanted to improve the quality of watershed development projects and bring in livelihoods focus. With the support of Department for International Development, India (DFID I), Government of Andhra Pradesh executed AP Rural Livelihoods Projects (APRLP) in five districts of the state from 2000-2007. The last two years (2005-2007) of APRLP were used for consolidating the initial experiences.

During this phase, GoAP attempted to mainstream some of the good practices and innovations into watershed development projects as part of APRLP. For

6. Later, this arrangement was also up-scaled to the entire country in the Guidelines of Integrated Watershed Management Projects (2008).

enabling this, GoAP issued “Process Guidelines for Watershed Development Projects” in Dec 2002. These Process Guidelines gave significant emphasis on participatory processes; institution development; capacity building support; productivity enhancement and livelihoods; focus on equity, gender considerations. Experiences from Civil Society Organizations contributed significantly towards policy improvements of watershed development project in the state. However, these Guidelines could not be implemented properly as they were inconsistent with the new Hariyali Guidelines, issued by MoRD in Apr 2003. Hariyali Guidelines did not give space for several newer provisions and innovations that GoAP wanted to promote as part of Process Guidelines (2002). This stalemate was resolved during 2005, when the government changed in 2004. GoAP issued second version of Process Guidelines in 2005, which could harmonise the proposed innovations within Hariyali Guidelines. The main features of the Process Guidelines of Watershed Development Projects in Andhra Pradesh, during this phase are as follows:

- District level dedicated offices (District Water Management Agency) were established in all districts of the state to provide leadership to watershed development projects
- Policy was highly forward looking and sensitive to the concerns such as gender, equity and participation
- Dedicated budgets for capacity building; livelihoods and productivity enhancement
- Livelihoods Resource Centres were established for strengthening delivery of capacity building services at community level
- Consortium of Resource Organizations was established to forge partnerships between GoAP and resource organizations for strengthening the project
- Partnerships were forged between Grama Panchayati and Village Organization; responsibility of project implementation was divided between these two institutions
- NGOs were given the role of resource organization and anchored few livelihoods resource centres

However, in harmonising the national level Hariyali guidelines and the state process guidelines, there were few “compromises” that had serious implications on the quality of watershed projects:

- Constant re-organization of the watershed teams (state/ district/ project level administrative arrangements) destabilized the project management.

- NGOs were no longer selected as Project Implementing Agencies. As a result, the facilitation support for institutional development was weakened.
- Grama Panchayati received very little direct support. Orientation to them as responsible institutions for implementing watershed development project was fairly weak. There was very limited supervision and monitoring of the performance of Grama Panchayati.
- There were several partnership related issues between NGOs and DWMA in anchoring Livelihoods Resource Centres.

Third Phase (2006 – 2009) – State of Confusion and Low Priority

During this period, watershed development projects faced considerable neglect from the policy makers at central and state governments. The APRLP project was formally closed by Dec 2007. The Parthasarathy Committee submitted its report to MoRD, GoI. It was strongly recommended that community based institutions such as watershed committees should be part of watershed development project and Grama Panchayati should be engaged with governance of projects, rather than implementation of projects. Based on this report, MoRD initiated another process of revising Guidelines for Watershed Development under the guidance of Planning Commission, GoI. As a result of this, Common Guidelines for Watershed Development Projects (2008) were issued by MoRD. These Common Guidelines are applicable to all watershed development projects funded by MoRD and MoAgri in the country. Some elements of Process Guidelines of GoAP (2002 and 2005) were integrated⁷ into Common Guidelines for Watershed Development Projects (2008). Some of the key elements are:

- Establishing dedicated institutional arrangements at national/ state/ district/ project level for watershed projects.
- Each state to develop a State Strategic Plan and State Specific Process Guidelines to contextualize watershed projects in their local setting.
- Budgetary support for livelihoods and productivity enhancement was included in the financial allocations of watershed projects.

Unit cost was increased from 6000 to 12000 Rs/ hect and the provision for NGOs as Project Implementing Agencies was re-introduced. The contribution from Civil Society Organizations in the process of drafting the Common Guidelines was well recognized by Planning Commission, GoI and MoRD.

7. *This could be considered as one of the important achievements of Government of Andhra Pradesh, where key elements of a locally defined policy of the state government were integrated into national policy*

GoAP revisited State Perspective Plan for watershed development projects as per the directions of Common Guidelines. Commissionerate of Rural Development adopted Human Resource Policy which helped in attracting and retaining the staff.

During this period, there were some other path breaking policies/ schemes that emerged in the country. National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is one such important initiative by Government of India. As this initiative was also steered by MoRD, GoI, majority of the staff and efforts were engaged with this new initiative. The watershed projects were neglected in all aspects - deployment of staff; monitoring; fund flows; capacity building support and supervision. This step motherly treatment to watershed development projects was questioned by several Civil Society Organizations and their networks. However, the situation on the ground did not change much. Both central government and state governments were busy in streamlining the administrative set up of watershed development projects. During this phase very few projects were sanctioned by MoRD, GoI.

Fourth Phase (2010 onwards) - Learning Lessons from Deliberate Deviations

GoAP should have been in a comfortable position as most of its policies (contents of Process Guidelines) were incorporated into the framework of Common Guidelines for Watershed Development Projects (2008). However, the priority at the state level was largely on Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and the watershed projects got low priority. Initially, Commissionerate of Rural Development, GoAP started to follow certain practices, which seemed to be in line with watershed guidelines/ policy, but they had potential for damaging the core principles of watershed management. The Commissionerate, quickly realized the gaps and started taking steps for improvement. Subsequently, State Level Nodal Agency embarked on a path that opened up several new opportunities and strategies for improving the watershed management projects (mainly implementation systems). Some of these instruments/ strategies were like double edge swords with both positive and negative aspects.

- Initially, GoAP decided to implement IWMP through Mandal Praja Parishad Development Officers (MPDOs) as they are already part of MGNREGS. As these functionaries could not perform many tasks of the PIA (with desired quality), GoAP took a decision to appoint its own staff and NGOs as PIAs.

- Software⁸ was developed for IWMP to help in planning, implementing and monitoring watershed projects. This on-line package also helped in stabilizing the project protocols, including fund flows/ payments/ records.
- A clear policy and protocol for forging convergence between IWMP and MGNREGS is a break-through in the country. This policy facilitates convergence between two major schemes at village level, through comprehensive planning, clear division of activities between two projects, uniform wage rates, etc.
- IWMP played a major role of convergence with other line departments like Department of Agriculture; Horticulture; Rural Water Supply and Sanitation; Animal Husbandry; Forests. Several innovative schemes/ approaches were demonstrated in a collaborative manner with these departments.
- SLNA, AP partnered with Society for Social Audit, Accountability and Transparency (SSAAT) for improving transparency and accountability. Protocols for social audit of IWMP were also developed by SSAAT.
- Intensive review meetings (on monthly basis) are conducted for better planning, coordination and implementation of the watershed projects at the state/ district level.

Fifth Phase - Need for Reinventing Watershed Approaches

Since 2014, there is a huge change in the country. New governments at central and state level and bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh into Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have defined a new context. There are several new initiatives as the newly formed governments at state and central levels have a new vision for the states and the country. They want to re-define the policy, program and directions of development. Planning Commission is abolished and NITI Ayog is established. 14th Finance Commission has recommended a new set of relationships between state and central governments. Several centrally sponsored schemes and flagship programs are being pushed out, as the central support is reduced from 90% to 50%. Watershed development projects (IWMP) fall in this category. Central government is willing to share higher share of tax revenue, and reduced its share from 90% to 50%. This financial condition is slowly settling down on the states and senior government officers of several states are unsure about the willingness of their political bosses (Chief Ministers/ Ministers for Rural

8. *The software and other systems (E.g.: Social Audits) developed for MGNREGS were found to be very relevant to IWMP also. Similar software was developed for IWMP also. This convergence between the two schemes brought a significant change in the course of direction of these programs.*

Development and Agriculture) to allocate remaining 50% for watershed projects, from state budgets. There are debates on the prudence of such financial policy. There are new schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayi Yojana (from GoI); Mission Kakatiya; Harita Haaram; Grama Jyothi (Government of Telangana); Neeru - Chettu; Smart Villages; (Government of Andhra Pradesh). Watershed projects and approaches are finding little support from Central/ State governments. There are new and more glamorous programs, for them. It appears that there is slow death of watershed approaches. It is the time for civil society organizations, concerned senior officers, committed donors, sensitive politicians to network and put together some good ideas and re-invent watershed projects and its approaches. This agenda is setting new challenges to all.

Section 2 ~ Why these changes took place

There are series of changes in the contents of the policy of watershed projects since 1994. Obviously these policies have significant impact on the quality of practices on the ground. This dynamic process of policy formulation and practice is nurtured and shaped by several individuals, organizations and other strategic partnerships. In this section four “reasons” behind the changes are presented. There may be several other contributing factors/ reasons.

Vision of Individuals

Bureaucracy in Andhra Pradesh is always regarded as very proactive and committed. They are known for taking risks and interpreting the policy for the benefit of the community. Several members have shown out of the box thinking for achieving the intended results of the government policies. In the context of watershed management projects in Andhra Pradesh, some of the senior government officers who played significant role in changing the direction of policy discourse are Shri BN Yugandhar; Shri Smarjit Ray; Shri SP Tucker; Shri K Raju; Shri Reddy Subramanyam; Shri K Tirupataiah; Shri Sanjay Gupta; Smt C Suvarna. Though each one is a unique personality, with distinct approach and priorities, all of them have a strong commitment and vision for a community centric watershed management. This vision and commitment pushed them to take several new initiatives and go beyond defined roles. All of them collaborated with civil society organizations, extensively interacted with them and understood their experiences and suggestions. These members also devised administrative instruments such as forming a working group, establishing a committee, commissioning a study and so on, where new ideas were generated

and integrated into new policies/ programs systematically. They were able to steer the agenda from higher level to project level, by motivating their team. They closely observed similar projects supported by NABARD. The results of such efforts have accumulated over a period of time and created a new culture in the state. This character of bureaucracy in Andhra Pradesh is a unique contributing factor for this policy change process and a continued effort on this agenda.

Civil Society Organizations and Networks

Added to the visionary bureaucracy, active and committed civil society organizations in the state benefited this process. A partnership between these two ensured “necessary and sufficient” conditions for creating an enabling policy across the time lines. A vibrant civil society group in the state was instrumental in conceptualizing the new ideas/ agenda for policy change. These agencies promoted several innovative programmes on a variety of issues and crystalized/ synthesised the lessons. These experiences were readily available for “up-scaling and mainstreaming” into the watershed projects. These agencies were willing to collaborate with the state to improve the government policy (in content) and make it relevant to the local conditions. Centre for World Solidarity; Deccan Development Society; AccionFreterna; WASSAN; APMAS; Centre for Peoples Forestry; Centre for Environmental Concerns; MARI; Dhan Foundation – are some of the voluntary organizations which contributed to the changes in “thought and action” of watershed programme in the state. Some of them promoted networks of organizations and demonstrated innovative and challenging agenda on the ground. Rayalaseema Watershed Development Program was one such initiative, which was promoted by Centre for World Solidarity. Dalit Watersheds was another experiment by Deccan Development Society. WASSAN offered a platform for all actors associated with watershed mandate to come together and exchange thoughts, good practices, issues & concerns. Since 1998 WASSAN is organizing Annual Network Meetings in which latest developments; issues and problems are discussed by a range of stakeholders. Representatives of NGOs, Government, Communities and others participate in these deliberations to improve the quality of watershed management in the state. These meetings offer an immense scope for reflection, correction and appreciation. Over a period of time, several new thoughts were integrated into watershed program (policy and practice) from these deliberations. Such effort is a unique feature in the country. As this process is

carefully nurtured by state bureaucracy and NGOs, one can easily perceive the relationship between the dynamic nature of policy formulations in the state and vibrant civil society action.

WASSAN and its partners were invited to be on the committees/ working groups/ pilots that focused on policy formulation agenda. In this process, WASSAN and its partners could significantly contribute to policy formulation processes in the state – Process Guidelines of Watershed Development Projects; Capacity Building Strategies; Establishing Livelihoods Resource Centres in the state; Creating roles for Village Organizations in Watershed Development Projects; Comprehensive Land Development Project; MGNREGS and CPRs; Integrating Forest Lands into IWMP; Integrating Groundwater Concerns within IWMP; evolving policy for groundwater regulation; partnership policy between NGO and GOs - are some of the unique contributions of WASSAN and its partners in the state.

Strategic Partnerships

Government of Andhra Pradesh developed strategic partnership with reputed agencies such as ICRISAT, MANAGE and other academic institutions. These partnerships also extended to bilateral projects such as AP Rural Livelihoods Projects, AP Drought Adaptation Initiatives, so on. These partnerships triggered a new thought process and action within the mainstream projects. Such co-existence offered invaluable confidence to the mainstream systems to uptake any new idea, without much doubt. As a result of such partnerships the entire administration is open to adaptation to new processes, protocols and policies. These partnerships offered a unique position to the state government and was far ahead of other states, in several issues. The initiatives under these partnerships could offer considerable flexibility and boldness in the project norms and protocols. There is an opportunity to experiment and learn from the same and these experiments were of different scales. There was a space to forge partnerships. Given this culture of partnerships, GoAP was in a position to propel itself into new frontiers.

Political Will

“Political will” is an important pre-condition for change. The governments in the state/ country changed several times in the last 20 years which had implications on the policy and practice of watershed management. For e.g., watershed development projects received high attention during the initial phase

(mid 90s to early 2000), as the state government considered them as an important intervention for rural development. This priority changed over a period (mid 2000) to MGNREGS and watershed projects received (relatively) low priority. While the broad 'setting' was defined by political processes/ mandates of the elected government of that particular period, the contents of these policies are largely defined by the senior government officers, in collaboration with civil society organizations.

However, issues like partnerships with NGOs in watershed projects remained contentious. This issue witnessed ups and downs over the period. There were glorious and dark periods. The application of IT in MGNREGS and IWMP could demonstrate high level of transparency in the financial aspects of the projects. These issues required considerable political will and support from the ministers and concerned political parties/ cadre, including people's representatives. One could see that senior bureaucrats were able to garner support these path breaking initiatives in the state. They were able to "educate and motivate" the senior members of the political parties on the implications of these changes and boldly encouraged them to be supportive to these matters. They could also "shape" the new thought/ initiative in such a way that this idea provides a fillip to the image of the government. These efforts helped to create enabling support systems and political will for change in the state.

Section 3 - Lessons Learned on Policy Formulation Processes

Some key statements from State Strategic Plan of Andhra Pradesh clearly indicate that the agenda of watershed management projects is long term and is not over: *"Out of 9301 watershed projects taken up so far under various schemes of DoLR, 4741 were completed and 4560 projects are under implementation. A total area of 46.50 lakh ha area is taken up for treatment and an amount of Rs.1722 crores was spent so far"...* The State Strategic Plan also indicates that 22141 micro watershed projects are yet to be completed and an area of 110 Lakh hect is yet to be covered under watershed projects in the state. This is about 40% of geographical area of the state. During IWMP period (since 2009), about 27 Lakh hect area was covered. This is about 5 Lakh hect/ year. If this pace is continued, it might take about 22 years to complete the above area. There are districts in which not even 30% of watershed area is treated so far. Apart from this, several villages where watershed projects are already completed may require another round of investments.

However, future watershed development projects in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have to find themselves in the midst of changing global equations; changing technology; climate change related issues; deteriorating soil fertility; diminishing forest covers; depleting groundwater; increasing urbanization; decreasing productivity of several crops (irrigated/ rainfed crops); newer aspirations of younger generations in rural areas; increasing disparity between rich and poor in the society; conflicting agriculture and land use policies (corporatization of agriculture; special economic zones; increasing monocropping; others); breaking institutional arrangements for rural/ agriculture finances; increasing landlessness and further fragmentation of land; low level of political support for agriculture/ rainfed crops. Some of these issues are age-old, while several other issues are increasingly becoming important and more visible in recent past.

Apart from the above issues, in the advent of recommendations of 14th Finance Commission, where IWMP is integrated into Prime Minister Krishi Sinchayi Yojana, there is a need for the states and the Centre to look at the emerging situation where funding support from Central Government for IWMP is being reduced from 90% to 50%.

A strong vision and policy framework has to be articulated at this juncture, where the relationships between central government and state governments are changing. Based on the achievements so far, the future course of action needs to be defined. In this context, the lessons learned from past on “policy formulation processes” itself is not out of place.

Lesson No I - Cultivating Partnerships

It is obvious that previous achievements are a result of effective partnerships between several actors in the agenda – senior government officers; strong networks of civil society organizations; representatives of political parties/ people; academic institutions; community based organizations and other actors. It is important that the elected governments in democracy cultivate and nurture such partnerships effectively and learn from each other. The essence of democracy is visible when plurality of institutions exists and multiplicity of thoughts is encouraged. Such vibrant society would throw up relevant policy solutions for a given situation. There should be harmonious relationships between people’s representatives, bureaucracy, civil society groups and communities. This partnerships, networking and associations would help to

create an ambience in the society that eventually addresses the critical issues of development. This “space” needs to be consciously identified and nurtured by governments and should not suffocate it.

Lesson No 2 - Strong Support for Innovations, Experimentation and Action Research

Change is not possible without knowledge. It is important to create new knowledge and existing knowledge should always be upgraded. This requires considerable efforts by the governments and policy makers. These efforts should broadly focus on ways and means of promoting innovation, experimentation and learning. Governments should have clear funding support to autonomous institutions that are engaged in creating innovative knowledge products; action research and experimentation. There should be partnership between these knowledge stream and action stream. The combination of these two streams should be generating new policy framework. This would lead to an informed process of change, rather than an ad-hoc way of creating policies and pushing them down. These efforts could create an opportunity to integrate innovations/ lessons from experiments into mainstream programs and minimize learning time/ efforts.

Lesson No 3 - Independent and External Feedback

It is important to realize that any policy and program are not written on stone. There could always be change and improvement on any aspect of the policy/ program. For this dynamism, there is a need for effective and independent feedback to the system. Though several programs have feedback loops, these are generally marred with vested interests. It is important to cultivate “openness and open mind” for improving the existing systems – policy, practice and protocol. Project management teams should have support for independent and external feedback systems so that they could engage in midcourse corrections also.

Lesson No 4 - Orientation to Cadres

Policy formulation processes could be driven and shaped by internal teams themselves, while external inputs provide necessary guidance and direction. For this to happen, capacities of project cadres have to be improved. A reflecting and capable team could define its course of action, if there is “space and

opportunity” for them. For this purpose, there is a need for improving sensitivity, competency and commitment of project cadres, particularly project leadership at state/ district level. Developing sense of direction and common vision could be an important input in this process. Significant capacity building inputs have to be organized to the project cadres to understand the purpose, expected end results and necessary protocols. Organizational processes/ protocols should have adequate space and flexibility to innovate at local level, without compromising on the vision/ values of the initiative. Improving and cultivating belief on partnerships is an important aspect of this process.

Conclusions

The policy formulation processes in Andhra Pradesh in the context of watershed development projects are largely guided by principles of partnership and collaboration among several like-minded partners including government officers, civil society organizations, people’s representatives/ governments and other agencies/ individuals. The processes that contributed to this are “owned and nurtured” by several actors and these efforts need to be continued, in the interest of “greater good” of the society. Though all these initiatives are not systematically institutionalized, there is a loose cohesion in this process. These efforts could produce meaningful results – “new and relevant policy and practices” in the context of watershed management projects. This paper tried to re-construct the processes and to decipher the hidden lessons from this long standing experience in the state. It is important to facilitate such processes in other parts of the country also.

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