Promoting Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: a Framework for Managing Multi Institute Consortia

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Abstract

Watershed development approach has been followed for over three decades to address the complex and diverse development needs of rainfed areas. The challenges of development in these areas demand multi disciplinary and multi institutional approaches. The coming together of institutions having strengths in different areas of watershed development, community mobilization and institutional development as a consortium to implement what are called watershed plus or sustainable rural livelihoods projects is a recent phenomenon. It has become more of a necessity as a result of increasing complexity of development. This paper traces the evolution of the consortium concept over time, discusses project implementation and institutional frameworks and documents the first hand experiences emanating from out of one such multi disciplinary multi-institute consortium. Besides, it attempts to deduce the learnings accrued as a result of implementing a large project aimed at improving the livelihoods of the rural poor by a consortium of private, public, and non-government organizations.

Background

The post-Green Revolution era in India brought to the fore the growing disparities between well-endowed irrigated areas and the under developed rainfed areas of the country. Stagnating productivity levels in the Green Revolution belt and growing demand for food forced the country to look towards the unexploited potential of the large tracts of rainfed areas which constitutes over half of the total cultivated area of the country. Ever since, the country has been pursuing watershed development approach as a comprehensive strategy for the overall development of poorly endowed rain-fed regions. Watersheds offer a multitude of complex issues for scientists to resolve, as well as a myriad of challenges to development professionals to address. These range from technical issues such as determining run off potential of catchments to resolving conflicts related to resource use and

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entitlements. Thus, watersheds essentially demand multi disciplinary and multi institutional approaches in contrast to the demands of irrigated areas. The very complexity and diversity of rainfed areas have always compelled the development agencies to continuously evolve better instruments of implementation at the micro level.

Consortium Approach: the Evolution

By definition a consortium is an association of two or more individuals, companies, organizations or governments (or any combination of these entities) with the objective of participating in a common activity or pooling their resources for achieving a common goal. This has been in vogue in financial and industrial sectors for around two centuries and is of a more recent origin in the development sector.

The watershed development programmes were in experimentation phase from late Seventies to mid Nineties, during which many approaches were tried. Initially, the watershed programs were taken up by certain departments and emphasized construction of structures such as check dams, bunds, percolation ponds, etc., without much emphasis on people's participation. The structures, however, failed to generate lasting impact as they either disintegrated or failed to serve the purpose over time for want of follow-up, maintenance and repair. This was essentially due to lack of community ownership. Besides, the program was more biased in its approach towards landed communities leading to inequitable distribution of watershed development benefits across the sections of rural communities. Models that integrated peoples' participation in watershed development programmes (Ralegaon Sidhi and Adgaon in Maharashtra, Kabbalanala and Mittemari in Karnataka, Jhabua in Madhya Pradesh, Kothapally in Andhra Pradesh) sufficiently proved that equity issues could be better addressed by ensuring community involvement right from the beginning of the project. By the year 2000, people's participation in watershed development evolved as a more encompassing issue, addressing sustainable rural livelihoods. As a result, the following emerged as major issues to be dealt with in order to make watershed development programmes more inclusive.

- People's participation with stake for the poor and the landless
- Capacity building of stakeholders at different levels
- Equity in distribution of project benefits
- Convergence
- Post-project sustainability

Meanwhile the recommendations of the CH Hanumantha Rao Committee gave way for including a large number of NGOs as partners in the form of Project Implementation Agencies (PIAs). By late 1990s, Government of Andhra Pradesh had almost 60 per cent of PIAs from the NGO sector. The advent of Department for International Development (DFID) funded Andhra Pradesh Rural Livelihood Project (APRLP) gave a fillip for engagement of NGOs at higher levels as Resource Organizations. By this time reputed NGOs like Watershed Organization Trust (WTOR), BIRD, Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency (MYRADA) and OUTREACH had demonstrated the need for handling finer aspects such as capacity building, technical and institutional backstopping and micro enterprising in watershed development projects. The Commissionerate of Rural Developmment invited NGOs to demonstrate their strengths in watershed development programmes implemented in Andhra Pradesh. This may be regarded as a landmark step in the history of largely public funded watershed development programs, as it heralded a new arrangement of working in a partnership mode by formulating consortia of organizations having strength in different aspects of watershed management.

Consortium Approach: a Case

CRIDA has a long experience of working in multi-disciplinary teams to implement on-farm research on sustainable natural resource management in collaboration with NGOs. Successful implementation of two DFID funded projects between 2000 and 2004 in partnership with several NGOs was well recognized. The Project Implementation Unit (PIU) of the World Bank assisted National Agricultural Innovation Project invited CRIDA to submit a proposal to Component 3 that deals with subprojects on sustainable rural livelihood systems. CRIDA developed a basic framework of the project after having consultations with several prospective partner organizations. Keeping in view the strengths required for attaining the project objectives, partners were carefully chosen to formulate a consortium of CGIAR and National Agricultural Research System (NARS) institutes, NGOs and private organizations to implement the subproject (Table 1).

The "Sustainable Rural Livelihoods through Enhanced Farming Systems Productivity and Efficient Support Systems in Rainfed Areas" project was refined after several rounds of consultations with the consortium partners and the stakeholder community. The PIU awarded the subproject for implementation in eight districts of Andhra Pradesh (see Fig. 1) on sponsorship mode. Following are the objectives of the project:

- To improve the livelihoods of the rural poor through better management of natural resources and increased productivity, profitability and diversity of the farming systems
- To facilitate agro processing, value addition and market linkages for enhanced on farm and off-farm employment and income generation.
- Capacity building of primary and secondary stakeholders through knowledge sharing, collective action and use of ICTs.
- To develop institutional mechanisms and support systems to internalize the project outputs by the community.

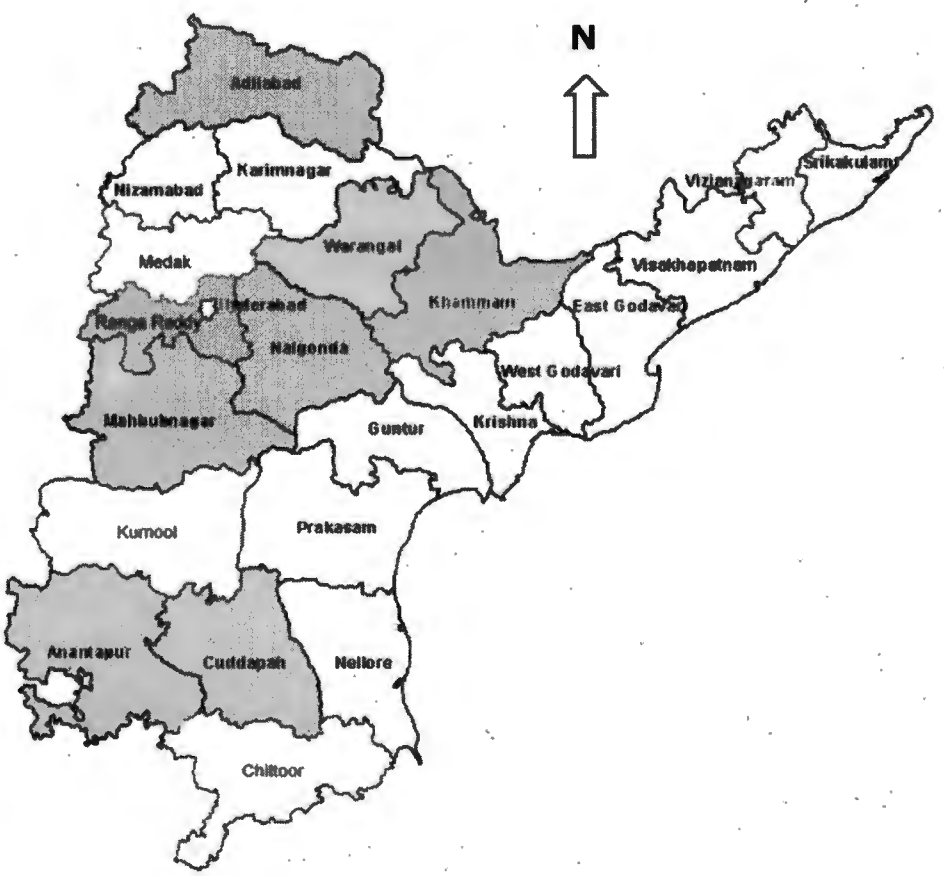

Fig 1: Location of Project Sites in Andhra Pradesh

Table 1: Consortium partners and their responsibilities

Partner	Responsibility
Central Research Institute for Dryland Agriculture (CRIDA), Hyderabad.	As a lead Center, responsible for coordination and monitoring of the project and technical support to project interventions.
Acharaya N.G.Ranga Agricultural University (ANGRAU), Hyderabad.	Cluster anchoring in Adilabad and technical support and capacity building in Ananthapur and Cuddapah clusters.
International Crops Research Institute for Semi Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Hyderabad.	Soil fertility enhancement related interventions and monitoring runoff in watersheds across the clusters including capacity building.
Watershed Support Services Network (WASSAN), Hyderabad, A.P.	Cluster anchoring in Rangareddy and supporting institutional innovations and support systems across the clusters.
Modern Architects for Rural India (MARI), Warangal, A.P.	Cluster anchoring in Warangal and capacity building on community led rehabilitation of traditional water harvesting structures across the clusters.
BAIF Institute of Rural Development (BIRD), Mahabubnagar, A.P.	Cluster anchoring in Mahabubnagar and Ananthapur and technical support to livestock related interventions across the clusters.
Sri Aurobindo Institute for Rural Development (SAIRD), Gaddipalli, A.P.	Cluster anchoring in Nalgonda and technical support to village level seed production across the clusters.
Center for World Solidarity (CWS), Secunderabad, A.P.	Cluster anchoring in Khammam and capacity building on social regulation of ground water use across the clusters.
Aakruthi Agricultural Associates (AAKRUTHI), Hyderabad,AP	Cluster anchoring in Cuddapah and supporting contract farming innovations across clusters.
Ikisan Limited (IKISAN), Hyderabad	ICT and market linkage activities across clusters.

Project management framework

Since the project is implemented in consortium mode, it demands a framework that enables the lead center to put the strengths of partners to good use. Keeping in view the complexity and demands of rigorous monitoring of the project, a large contingent of scientific manpower is committed by the lead center.

Each cluster of the district where the project is implemented is assigned to small multidisciplinary teams of scientists. These teams regularly monitor the progress of project implementation across the 8 districts. A host of new terminologies had to be evolved to define the relations and roles of partners and implementing organization. Some of the commonly used terminology is detailed below (see also Fig. 2).

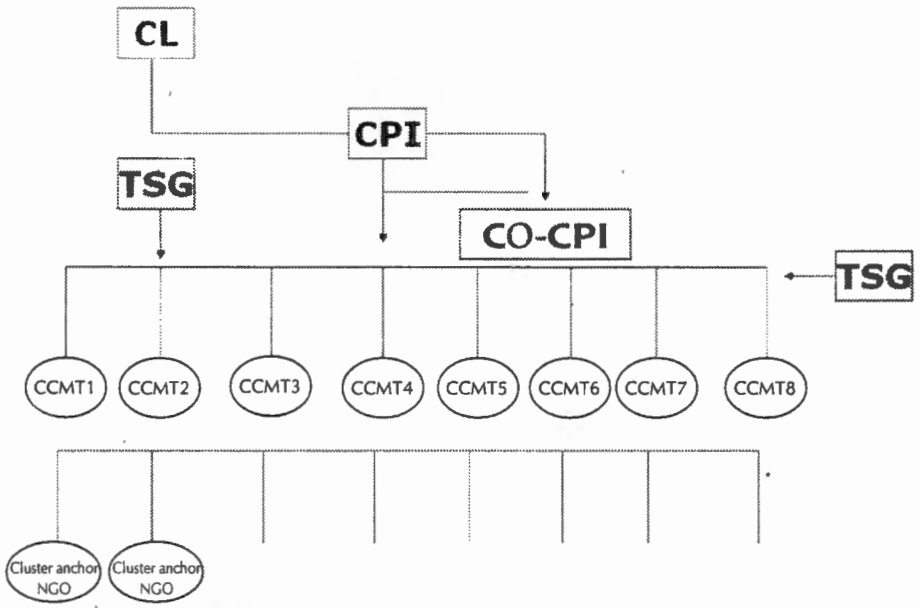

Fig 2: Project Management Framework

CL: Consortium Leader, CPI:Consortium Principal Investigator
TSG: Technical Support group, CCMT: Cluster Coordination and Monitoring Team

***Lead centre*:** the organization that is responsible for overall implementation of the project; in this case CRIDA.

***Consortium Partner*:** the organization that has a defined role in the project implementation.

***Project Cluster*:** A group of contiguous villages within a *gram panchayat* where the project is implemented.

***Cluster Anchoring Partner*:** a partner who has a base in the cluster and is responsible to implement project interventions in that cluster. CAPs are members in the Consortium Implementation Committee, which is chaired by the Director

of the lead center. The Consortium Principal Investigator is the secretary of the CIC. CIC is a mandatory internal monitoring body that meets at least twice every year.

Cluster Coordination and Monitoring Team (CCMT): a multidisciplinary team of scientists (3-4 in number) representing lead center, which regularly monitors the progress of project implementation at cluster level. CCMTs are the contact point for cluster anchoring partners and in regular touch with the day-to-day project activities. The members of the CCMT are co-opted for the CIC meetings that are held at least twice every year.

Technical Support Group: A group of senior experts of the lead center that offers advice on different thematic areas (such as soil and water conservation, agroforestry etc). The group is often invited to review the progress of thematic interventions.

Besides the above, a high level Consortium Advisory Committee consisting of eminent experts in the field reviews the project. It is a mandatory body for periodical external review, prescribed by PIU.

While those described above provide a framework for project implementation at the consortium level, several innovative institutions have been evolved for effective ground level implementation as well. These are:

Salaha Samiti: A committee consisting of members drawn from each of the villages to monitor the implementation process at the cluster level. This committee acts as a link between the community and the Cluster anchoring partner. It helps generate awareness and build favourable opinion about the project among primary stakeholders besides acting as a conflict resolving mechanism. Other names for *Salaha Samiti* are Cluster action team, *Navakalpana* Society etc. Special emphasis is laid for ensuring women representation on these committees.

Commodity Interest Group: Special interest groups like Water users association for sharing groundwater (Ibrahimpur cluster, Rangareddy district), Mango growers association for collective marketing (Dupahad cluster, Nalgonda district) and sheep/ heifer growers' association have been formed to leverage community's bargaining power.

Custom hiring center: It is an enterprise managed by the community for promoting mechanization of small farms. A typical custom hiring center is stocked with useful agricultural implements that are hired out to needy farmers at a cost. The money thus collected is used to maintain and repair the implements.

Sustainability Fund/Revolving Fund: community's contribution towards availing project assistance is credited into a bank account that can be operated by joint signatories consisting of community and project representatives. This fund is loaned out to needy farmers at a nominal interest to spread successful project interventions.

Village Resource Center: Physical infrastructure housing a small meeting place; ICT equipment consisting of a touch-screen kiosk with Internet connectivity; printer, scanner and video screening facility. Each VRC has also been provided with a modest storage facility to enable storing of seeds and custom hiring equipment. This infrastructure is built on the land donated by the village *panchayat* or purchased by the village community. It acts as the nerve center of project activities besides representing the project as a physical entity.

The working mechanism

Besides the framework at the consortium level and field level institutions that support the project interventions in the form of a skeleton, there are certain processes that provide the much needed flesh and blood to the project which makes the entire system work. This may also be referred to as the software that runs the entire system.

***Community interface meetings*:** These are often employed to introduce a new intervention in the cluster. These meetings serve to inoculate the community with new ideas and incubate them to generate discussion about the intervention. Discussion thus generated helps gauge community response to the new ideas and aids the project implementation process.

***Periodical field monitoring visits*:** The success of any complex multidisciplinary and multi institute project depends on how closely and regularly the project is monitored. Regular visits help the project maintain continuity with the community.

***Cross learning workshops*:** These are generally held at the beginning of a cropping season inviting all the partners and CCMT members. During these workshops the partners are encouraged to share the experience gained during the previous cropping season and present the plan of work for the next season. These are also known as planning and sharing workshops.

***Thematic workshops*:** Thematic workshops are conducted to address a common issue such as market linkage or gender and equity issue that is concerned with all the clusters. Experts are invited to share their ideas with the partners.

On-site capacity building sessions: These are meant for improving the skills of project staff to carry out specialized tasks such as recording runoff and soil loss data, rainfall data or operating a digital GPS for recoding global coordinates. Generally these sessions are organized in any of the clusters.

Convergence with on going programmes: Several programmes of the Central and state governments are implemented simultaneously with little or no convergence among them. Efforts are necessary to exploit the synergy among such programmes. This is possible if convergence is promoted between the implementing agencies. The project is making conscious efforts to sensitize the implementing agencies and promote convergence of programmes at the community level. It offers a win-win for all those involved in implementation of development programmes. For instance, over Rs.70,00,000/- worth of assistance provided under ongoing projects was tapped by converging with different development agencies during the initial phase of NAIP component 3 subproject (Table 2).

One-to-one financial reviews: Besides progress on implementing technical intervention, progress in fund utilization is an integral part of the success of any project, and is monitored very closely by the reviewers particularly if the project is donor funded. In order to assist the partners to comply with the donor requirements, periodical internal reviews are conducted with each partner to thoroughly review the progress of fund utilization. Partners are assisted to prepare monthly expenditure statements and quarterly statements of expenditure in prescribed formats. It needs a special mention here that CRIDA-led consortium has had few issues related to release and expenditure, as acknowledged by the PIU.

Lessons learned

The Lead Consortium has a great responsibility to hold the entire flock together. It should exhibit maturity and tact while handling the relations among partners and between partners and the lead consortium. Persuasion and patience are the virtues of the lead consortium. Being accommodative of divergent views and assertive in matters related to implementing work plan helps the lead consortium to steer the team steadily towards achieving project goals. The following are a few important thumb rules to remember while leading a consortium of diverse institutions.

***Develop a common vision*:** It takes considerable time and effort to develop a common vision for the project. However, there are neither short cuts nor are there any alternatives to the visioning exercise. It is the most basic building block of any consortium formation endeavour. Partners' opinions need to be accommodated and consensus found, to achieve a common visioning.

***Respect diversity*:** Convergence of institutes/organizations with diverse backgrounds and strength in different areas adds value to the project team. Constituent institutes carry with them their own work and organization cultures. These institutes, however large or small, need to be respected for the value they bring to the consortium.

***Respect limitations*:** Organizations differ in their perceived capability and the actual capability to deliver at the field level; capability to understand and execute project interventions, respond to stakeholder needs and commitment to develop and nurture grassroots democratic institutions and processes and absorb funds for implementing interventions.

***Respect differences*:** The Lead Consortium must be sensitive to the ideological leanings of its partners. Areas of differences must be addressed and resolved as quickly as possible. Partner institutes must be allowed independence as far as internal matters such as recruitment, retention and termination of the project staff are concerned. Hierarchical/bureaucratic approach must be avoided in dealing with partners.

Keep communication channels open: Consortium needs a mechanism to address the concerns/issues of the partner institutes. Multiple channels of communication need to be kept open for information and communication among consortium partners. Maintaining a regular contact with the consortium partners addresses several issues.

***Share credit generously*:** The Consortium must put partner institutes ahead while acknowledging their role in the project and in matters related to publicity, publication and public relations and follow an agreed convention for sharing credit.

Conclusion

There is an increasing realization that the complexity of development cannot be addressed by a single institute/department and several institutes having strengths

in different aspects of addressing development must come together for a concerted effort. Donors are also realizing this and asking different institutes to come together for bidding development projects. Coming together of institutes/departments as a consortium to address development issues is a stage in the evolution of a comprehensive strategy for tackling rural poverty. For now, the consortium approach is here to stay and bring about improvements in the way projects are delivered.

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Table 2: Convergence with development departments/organizations (2007-09)

Department / Organization	Nature of work	Units / Quantity	Amount (Rs.)
Seethagondi, Adilabad			
DWMA	Farm ponds	5	80000
ZP	Sanction of additional funds to CLRC Building	1	175000
ITC	Supply of Eucalyptus saplings	7000	49000
Department of Forestry	Supply of saplings Pongamia, Seethaphal	2000	6000
JK Trust	Artificial Insemination	5	250
		Total	**310250**
Pampanur, Ananthapur			
Department of Animal Husbandry	Fodder production (endowment land)	5 Acres	5000
	Animal Health Camps	2	20000
NREGS	NRM activities		
	CCT	2000 rmt	25000
	TCB	1300 rmt	100000
	Farm pond	1	12000
RDT	Livestock rearing for milch animals (calf rearing)	30 cows	450000
ANGRAU	Kisan Mela		10000
		Total	**622000**
B Yerragudi, Kadapa			
DWMA	Laying field bunds Jungle Clearance	27 acres	87000
ADAH	Fodder seed distribution	50 kg	250
	Poultry Units	74 units (each 10 chicks)	9250
	Vaccination	628 animals	3000
	Poultry Vaccination	950 birds	1000
ADH	Tomato Seed (PKHS-9005)	30 farmers (each 50/-)	1500
Dept. of Agri.	Vermi Hatchery	1	500
	Knap Sack Sprayer	1	800
	Pheromone traps	100 units (each 30/-)	3000
	Pheromone Lure	100 units (each 9.50/-)	950
		Total	**107250**

Thummalacheruvu, Khammam			
Primary Health Centre	Health Camp	100 members	15000
Chaitanya Seva Samithi	Dryland Paddy training	25 members	2000
Kovel Foundation	Non-timber Forest Management (NTFM): Data collection about gum production& trainings	5 batches (60 members)	40000
Northern Power Distribution Co. Ltd. (NPDCL) & ITDA	Power Connection 3-Phase		4400000
NEDCAP	Biogas plants	87 completed	652500
		Total	**5109500**
Jamisthapur, Mahabubnagar			
APMIP	Micro Irrigation for vegetable & Horticulture (Drip)	2	28000
Department of Animal Husbandry	Animal Health Camp	3 camps 830 animals	20000
	Vaccination	200 animals	1400
	Deworming	200 animals	1400
	Fodder (PC-23) Production	80 kg (4 farmers)	320
Sri Venkateswara University	Animal Health Camp	288 animals	10000
Livestock Research Station	Training on Sheep & Goat rearing	35	3500
NRC on Meat	Feed supplement for small ruminants	200	10000
		Total	**74620**
Duphad, Nalgonda			
Department of Horticulture	Vegetable seed production (Tomato,	3 kg	22000
	Vegetables, Bhendi, Palak)	3695 cum	21,4000
NREGS	Deepening and desilting of Jalamalakunta percolation tank		214000
		Total	**236000**

Ibrahimpur, Ranga Reddy			
Department of Horticulture	Mini kits for kitchen garden	50	500
Jaffergudem, Warangal			
ATMA & NFSM	Groundnut seed production	6 acres	18000
Board of SPICES	Silpaulin Sheets (for clean threshing)	12	13296
Department of Animal Husbandry	Fodder Jowar Seed Distribution	150 kg	10500
NEDCAP	Biogas plants	6	72000
NABARD-WDF	NRM Activities		
Watershed Program	Field bund strengthening	1934.59 m^3	96484
	Water Absorption Trenches	23512 m^3	161559
	Continuous Contour Trenches	33.92 m^3	2476
	Stone Gully Plugs	10	51128
	Mini Percolation Tanks	1	69773
	Repairs to Mini percolation tanks	1	97109
	Sunken Pits	27	34533
	DOP Dugout Pond	1	7791
		Total	**634649**
		Grand Total	**7094769**

Source: CRIDA, 2009