FERAL is a non profit Trust whose mandate is to apply ecological research to solve issues in natural resource management, conservation and advocacy through building capacities of the different indi- viduals, communities and agencies involved.

Participatory Assessments : A tool for Community Based Organisations

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Acknowledgements

Preface

In today's context Community Based Organisations (CBOs) have a major role to play in the rural development scenario. They are recognised as the key stakeholders and as such need should be involved in all stages of developmental activities. This handbook addresses the issue of ensuring sustainable CBOs. It draws on the learnings of FERAL during the five year period of an ICEF funded project. The primary objective of this tank rehabilitation project was to set up practical and sustainable community based mechanisms to manage irrigation tanks, their catchment and related natural resources. Palmyra, the implementing agency, formed 31 Water Users' Associations (WUAs) and 78 women Self Help Groups (SHGs) in the Kalivelli watershed.

Women SHGs and WUAs are two CBOs which differ in terms of the purposes for which they are formed. To rehabilitate irrigation systems, to ensure equal share of water to all the farmers and to increase agricultural productivity are the primary objectives of Water Users' Associations. To increase social awareness among women, to encourage saving habits, to make use of credit at lower interest rates, thereby doing away with moneylenders and other middlemen, take up income generation activities are the objectives of the self-help groups. The common thread in both these organizations, however, is to work together to improve their livelihoods and the rural environment. This means that they need to be able to strengthen their capacities and continue to work in the long run, with or without support.

FERAL was involved in the project as the Planning and Monitoring agency. Through its sustained interactions with the members of the WUAs and SHGs, FERAL has trained them in participatory self-assessment, an important tool in ensuring their sustainability. This handbook summarises this experience, gathered over a period of five years. It also serves as a reference tool for Participatory Self Assessment.

Community Based Organisations and Sustainability

The initiation of a CBO takes place for several reasons. Many of these are formed through the initiative of non-governmental organizations, governmental agencies and other institutions such as banks. A few do emerge spontaneously, when compelling circumstances exist. Very often, CBOs formed through external initiative stop functioning with the withdrawal of the facilitating agency. This is due to the fact that the binding forces between members is the facilitating agency. Furthermore, the activities of these agencies are time bound in terms of projects to be completed and their intervention priorities also change over time. Thus the needs of the CBOs and those of the facilitating agencies may follow diverging tracks.

During the period of intervention, agencies invest considerable time and effort in providing a broad spectrum of training which they believe is helpful to the CBOs. The CBOs in turn are expected to make the most of these opportunities. This is expected to ensure that the organisations become independent of the facilitating agencies and enable them to take care of their functioning on their own. But to what extent do the CBOs internalise these inputs and how far are their capabilities developed? Facilitators often have monitoring and evaluation protocols built into the project to assess these questions. But these are driven by the agencies requirements and rarely is the process made a part of the CBOs' functioning.

For a CBO to continue functioning in the long term, these issues need to be addressed by the members themselves. Else, the danger always remains that the organization loses focus or disbands on the withdrawal of the facilitating agency.

What is sustainability? How can we achieve it?

To the Water User Associations and women Self-Help Groups formed during the course of this project sustainability would essentially mean

‣ How do these organizations continue to improve the socio-economic conditions (the over all objective) of its members.

‣ To what extent are the members equipped with skills to achieve their needs independent of the support of outside agencies.

These issues are also quite common to other CBOs. The answer to these lies in keeping track of several issues within the organization on a regular basis. In other words, it is important to monitor and constantly evaluate the functioning and progress of the organization. Though this normally occurs with external

input, the best strategy is for the organisation to internalise the process. A system of regular self-assessment or participatory monitoring by the members themselves then becomes an important tool. Such a process will help organizations adapt themselves to the changing needs of their members on a long-term basis.

Participatory assessments - stepping stones to sustainability

Evaluation, assessment or monitoring answer the same questions "*Is the organization functioning as it has resolved to do? Are the needs of its members being addressed?*" Several techniques are followed in doing such evaluations. Evaluations are normally conducted by outside agencies to avoid any biases. However, since these evaluation reflect the needs of the agency rather than those of the CBOs, the results are either viewed suspiciously or ignored. Often the results do not reach the CBOs at all and thereby negates the very purpose of evaluations. This is where employing participatory techniques becomes useful.

Evaluation techniques are seen as giving quantitative results - how many, how much, etc. Participatory tools are seen to be more qualitative - relying more on perceptions and opinions. For organizations to understand the process of their growth, it is desirable to combine these two aspects. Adding a quantitative dimension to perceptions helps in comparing results over time and thereby assess changes within the organization. The techniques that facilitate community based organizations to assess themselves have the following characteristics :

‣ They are based on a series of participatory exercises wherein the members themselves identify indicators that are considered important to the effective functioning of their organization.

‣ They provide the members with the means to monitor their own activities and thereby ensure transparency and accountability of their repre sentatives.

‣ It provides a means of strengthening the capacities of the members to identify and implement activities with the facilitating agencies or funders.

‣ The results of these participatory monitoring or assessment exercises can also be easily integrated upwards with the monitoring that a facilitating agency or any other agencies may like to conduct.

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1. Selecting members from organizations which are a two to three years old helps in ensuring that the exercise is initiated correctly. These individuals have the experience of having worked together for a while as well as have attended several training programs. Thus they are in a better position to identify indicators to look at organizational functioning.

The Process

The process of self-assessment involves the members revisiting the purpose for which they have come together and taking a re-look at the activities that have taken place thus far. The degree of conformity or difference in the two helps the members assess their own functioning and also helps them identify their strengths and weaknesses. The indicators selected to run a self-assessment exercise cannot be provided as a single recipe for different organizations. This is because they have to be tailored to the goals of the organization and the activities they have undertaken. Thus, while the fundamental process is the same, the specifics are unique to each organization.

During initial stages, it helps to form a core team of members from mature[1] organizations to kick-start the process. These individuals are trained in the process and they help facilitate the assessment exercises with each individual organization. Thus two assessments take place, one by the core team and the other by the individual members of the organization being assessed. The comparison of results helps in identifying any biases or misunderstandings with the process of participatory assessments. The two step process is unavoidable until the process is internalised by the different organizations.

How the process is initiated

‣ Mature community based organizations are selected and asked to identify a few members who will form the core team. These members help identify the parameters to be used for the self-assessment exercise.

‣ The facilitating agency organizes a one or two day brainstorming session with these individuals to explain the process and how it can be used. A recap of goals and objectives of the organizations is done and activities achieved thus far are discussed. They are then requested to identify the indicators that they consider important for assessment of the organisations at this point in time.

‣ The card posting method[2] is employed to ensure that each individual member's views are expressed to the entire group.

2. Card posting involves providing each individual with a set of display cards. They are requested to write only a single point clearly on each of these. The cards are then pinned up on a board for display. This helps all members know what each one has said. Second, no opinion gets lost in the flurry of discussion. Further more, the cards can then be moved around during the grouping of indicators into categories.

- The parameters thus posted are then categorized to arrive at a "work able" set of indicators. This means the grouping of similar indicators or dropping of some if there are too many. One should avoid the danger of too many indicators as respondents get tired if the assessment process takes longer than a couple of hours.

- Each of the selected parameters are then scored in terms of their impor tance using a simple ballot box procedure. Ballot boxes are prepared with the numbers 1 to 3 or 1 to 5 depending on the scale of importance decided; 1 being lowest. Members are provided a set of cards with all the final parameters and requested to drop each card into the box marked with the importance score that they want to give that particular param- eter.

- The importance score for each parameter is now calculated. The differ ent scores received by a parameter are added and the sum is divided by the number of respondents. This importance rank is recorded for use in giving weightage to the scores during the assessment exercise (*See Annexure, Table 1*).

- Thus the core team identifies the parameters to be used and also gives each of them an importance rank. This finalised list is then used for the self-assessment exercises of the individual organisations. The core team now visits each of the organisations to help them conduct the self-assess ment.

- Depending on the numbers, the core team can be divided into groups looking at specific aspects. Typically, the facilitating agency contributes a few members to each team in the initial rounds.

- Based on the indicators and categories a score sheet is prepared for use by the members of the core team. The same sheet is also given to the members of the organisation being assessed (*See Annexure, Table 2*).

- The core team then visits each of the organizations and explains the process to the members. Score sheets are distributed to all. Assessment is done by both the core team members as well as individuals from the organization itself.

- Results are calculated and analysed separately. The scores given for each parameter by the different individuals are averaged (add all scores and divide by total number of persons). These are the results obtained while considering all parameters to be equally important (*See Annexure, Table 3*).

▸ Multiply the above scores by the importance rank of each parameter to get the weighted scores for each parameter. These results reflect the importance the members give to the different parameters (*See Annexure, Table 3*)

▸ Put up the results obtained on a board, both the scores given by the core team as well as that by the members themselves. Discuss these results - similarities and differences . These discussions are the *most crucial* part of the exercise. This is when the core team and individual members exchange their views on why parameters have received differing marks, identify issues requiring attention and provide suggestions. Discussions also ensure that the exercise is not seen as one of criticism but as a process for self improvement[3].

▸ Use the results of the self-assessment to plan the future course of action.

▸ Once the individual organisations have been through the self-assessment process a couple of time with the help of the core team, they should be encouraged to carry out the assessments on their own.

Basic steps of a self assessment exercise

1. Basic steps of a self assessment exercise
2. Revisit the goals and objectives of the organization.
3. Identify the objectives that should have been achieved at this point in time.
4. Select indicators that will help in assessing the levels of achievement on each objective.
5. Give an importance score to each of them
6. Ask individual members to independently rank the performance of the organization on these parameters.Total all marks and divide by number of members doing the assessment.
7. The results are multiplied by the importance rank.
8. Compare the two results; with and without the importance rank.
9. Discuss the results to identify the future course of action.

Case study: Self Assessment by the Water User Associations

FERAL facilitated two rounds of self-assessment exercises of about sixty WUAs and SHGs in the course of its activities in the project. These exercises helped evolve the protocol for such an assessment as well as demonstrated its usefulness to the organizations. The assessments were carried out separately with the WUAs and the SHGs, as the basic nature and activities of the two were different.

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3. Discussion can also center around the importance rank given to the parameters. The facilitating agency may feel that some priorities are not being fully appreciated by the members. A member may fell that past experience is not reflected in the importance given to a particular parameter.

However, an analysis of the indicators identified by the members showed several commonalities at the macro level. Dealings in financial matters, institutional record maintenance and developing links with other agencies were some of the common indicators identified by both. Specific issues dealt with water management for the WUAs and micro-credit disbursement for the SHGs. Differences were also seen on common issues with respect to perceptions of how activities needed to be taken up and which strategies would be beneficial to the organization. This further emphasized the need for indicator identification to be organization specific. Only then is the assessment beneficial to the functioning and development of the individual members and the growth of the organization as a whole.

In the following pages we present the self-assessment carried out by the WUAs. As the first step a meeting of all senior members of the WUAs was organised. They identified 25 parameters and these were grouped into the following basic categories.

- ‣ Financial
- ‣ Institutional
- ‣ Record Keeping
- ‣ Water Management
- ‣ Institutional Linkages
- ‣ Functional Aspects
- ‣ Gender Issues

Importance scores were given to each of the parameters through a process of voting. A core team of eight (including 3 project staff) was formed from this group. The team then visited each of the WUAs to help explain and conduct the self-assessment exercises. Each WUA used this set of indicators to assess their own performance. The core team assessed the WUAs as well. The results of these evaluations were then used to plan their future course of action. The importance ranks given to the parameters selected and the results of the self-assessment are given in Annexure A.

Each of the parameters identified has a bearing on the development and functioning of the Association. The sections that follow look at these categories in detail, the discussions that were held during the exercise and see how the self-assessment process has benefited individual Associations.

Financial
Access to adequate financial resources was identified as a key component to all organizations as a lack of resources hamper their functioning. In particular, it was crucial for the water users' associations whose main objectives are the physical

rehabilitation of tanks and its future maintenance. These tasks require substantial funds especially in the initial phases. Members of the organizations should meet periodically to discuss ways to generate the required financial resources. Several strategies were discussed ranging from membership fees, annual levies, water charges and maintenance funds. All Associations have now started discussing these issues - how much is to be charged, at what intervals, etc.

Individual contribution

The Water Users' Associations have contributed a 30% of the costs involved in the rehabilitation of tanks. A large portion of this has come from the village common fund. However, it was felt that farmers should also contribute a fair amount personally to this fund. The farmers identified this as an important factor that would help strengthen their commitment to the rehabilitation process. It would also encourage interest in post-rehabilitation maintenance. Otherwise, there is a possibility that the programme becomes irrelevant to them, especially after major works have been completed. Hence, it is important that every farmer contributes his individual share to the organization and thereby establish his rights within the same.

> Once the members of the Water Users' Association have paid their own money as individual contribution, there is a change in the consciousness of the people: the tank is ours and it belongs to the entire population of the village. Why is somebody cutting a tree? Why is somebody wasting water? Why is somebody mining sand from the tank? Why is somebody breaking the tank-bund? These are some of the questions that farmers have started to raise.
>
> *- Kovadi Tank Water Users' Association*

Institutional

As a group of people, each with his own ideas, hopes and needs, the importance of communicating with each other and being able to forge a common vision was discussed. The basic parameters identified to help assess the efficiency of functioning and co-ordination amongst members were:

> ‣ Attendance and Participation
> ‣ Convening Regular meetings

Attendance and Participation

Regular attendance at meetings was recognised as crucial for all members to be fully aware of its activities and provide necessary direction. In general it is recommended that CBOs have maintain at least 80 percent regular attendance as an essential criterion. Attendance was seen as not mere physical presence but the active participation in the deliberations of the organization. Only then can each

individual be sure and ensure that the organization also represents him. Attendance and participation in meetings was also seen as strengthening the sense of belonging within the organization.

Convening regular meetings

The prime importance of the office-bearers in an organization as role models to the members was identified. They should convene the meetings at regular intervals without fail. Their responsibility should also extend to the implementation of the decisions taken at these meetings. It is therefore important that all the office-bearers of the organization act in unison and in accordance with the decisions taken by the members. In case of any difference of opinion amongst themselves, it is necessary that these are resolved amicably. The importance of office bearers resolving conflicts during the initial phases rather than letting opposing ideas get strengthened was stressed.

Record Keeping

Maintenance of registers was recognised as an important function. One, it ensures clarity among the members, with particular reference to discussion, resolutions adopted and accounts. Registers are like mirrors which reflect the functioning of the organization. Proper maintenance of registers also helps avoid misinformation and confusion among the members. It ensures credibility and satisfaction with respect to the functioning of the organization. Confusion related to accounts was identified as common issue among majority of the organizations. Sometimes, it is serious enough to result in the collapse of the organization. Proper and transparent maintenance of registers is therefore a very important task for the office-bearers and members of the organization. The practice of writing the accounts on the village notice board periodically by some of the Associations was commended by all.

Secondly, registers were recognised as the primary source of information for officials, other farmers and visitors who would like to learn about the organization. However efficiently an organization functions, if the registers do not reflect it, there is always the possibility that the visitors arrive at conclusions contrary to reality.

Therefore, the maintenance of registers was emphasised as an important task

The association began to implement the decisions taken by the executive committee. During the implementation phases, one member from the association and one from the non-governmental organization assumed responsibilities. Strengthening of bunds, planting trees to strengthen the tank-bund, repair of distribution channels are some of the works undertaken during this period. The accounts of this work were periodically presented to the meetings of the members and transparency was ensured at all levels. We still have monthly meetings and discuss issues.

- Vada Agaram Tank Water Users' Association

that helps in projecting the correct picture about the functioning of the organization to its own members and to others.

Water Management
The work of a Water User Association does not stop on completion of the physical rehabilitation of tanks. The main work starts after this. It was recognised that the WUA should take up the responsibility of better management of water. The farmers reflected that the primary objectives of their Water Users' Association also take this into account. The points to take care of were identified as:

‣ Efficient use of water
‣ Ensuring availability of water to the tail end farmers
‣ Increasing productivity

Efficient use of water
Though it is a set objective, it was seen as a difficult one to follow. A firm commitment is required from each farmer to put it into practice. The farmers spoke of past experience wherein one often expected others to act first and ended with water being wasted overall. Several examples were cited including wastage of water due to improper maintenance of distribution channels and cross-field irrigation. Therefore, a change in attitude was recognised as being necessary along with timely action. They felt that it would not be easy in the beginning, but over time, difficulties are bound to go away. Belief in change was considered the first step. The changes themselves would follow suit.

> We elected two members in-charge of opening and closing the sluices for irrigation. A decision was taken that opening of the tank for irrigation by anybody other than these two would invite a fine of Rs. 100/-. We decided that only the required quantity of water is to be supplied and all random supply of water needs to be stopped. No water is to be provided on the basis of individual requests. The land of all the members should be inspected regularly to check equal supply of water to everybody. Sluices should be opened only during the day and only by the two persons appointed for the job. These two persons would be given a salary of four measures of paddy per acre.
>
> *- Kayalmedu Tank Water Users' Association*

Ensuring availability of water to tail end farmers
An important objective of the Water Users' Association is not only the efficient use of available water but to also ensure its availability to all its members. The tail end farmers are the first to be affected during times of insufficient water availability. Often, they are the ones who are most hesitant in participating in the organization. In this regard it was recognised that more attention had to be paid to distribution systems than had been done so far. Concrete steps had to be taken to improve the distribution systems and also put in place a water sharing agree-

ment amongst farmers. Only then would the organization gain the confidence and support of these farmers. The farmers concluded that it was this confidence of all members that would ensure the sustainability of the organization.

Repair of distribution channels

In many villages, a lot of water is wasted by not repairing the distribution channels on time. It was accepted that all the members should change this practice and commit themselves to ensuring timely repair and maintenance of channels. This would help ensure an adequate supply of water to all plots of land and thereby ensure higher productivity.
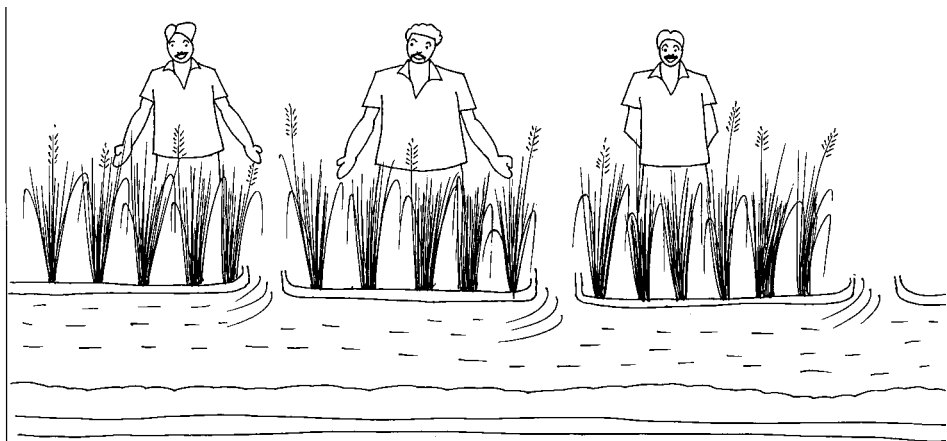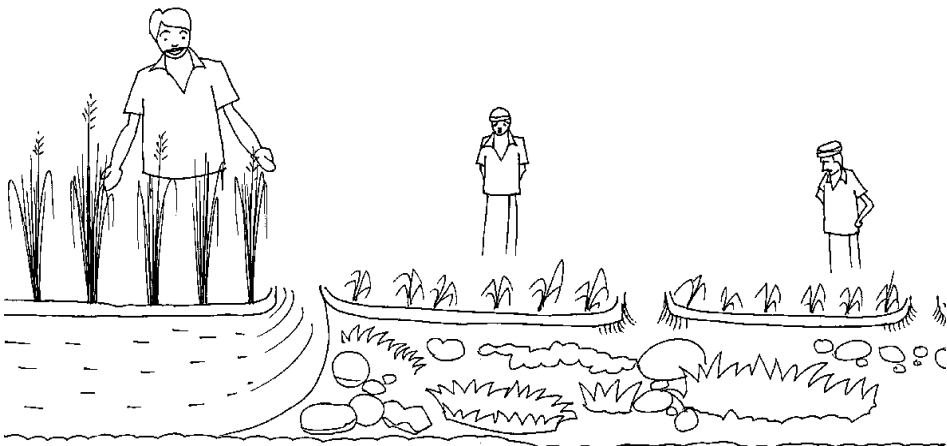
The distribution channels suffered several leakages due to soil erosion and holes made by crabs. The representatives of our Association took active interest in addressing these issues. We have since tried to use water efficiently and stop wastage of water.

*- Adavallikuthan Tank Water Users' Association*

Institutional Linkages

Cultivating active linkages with other agencies such as Government departments, banks, village Panchayats and Non-governmental organizations was seen as an important parameter in building the capacities of the members. Furthermore, these linkages were also recognised as essential for carrying on the work of the organisation. The WUAs needed to maintain a healthy relationship with the village panchayat and develop strategies for equal and efficient use of the natural resources that are available from the tank. Linkages with government agencies were seen as useful in facilitating faster implementation of government work and ensure better benefits from its programmes. Linkages with non-government agencies were seen to be helpful in being aware of new opportunities and the work of other organizations. It was also seen that these linkages would help the WUAs avail of the expertise with these groups.

The executive members of our association visited the Tindivanam PWD office for the first time after our association was started, to get permission for undertaking work on our tank. The SDO met us and asked us to take our seats and served us tea. He enquired about the planned work. He also asked us to maintain regular contact with the PWD. He said that the PWD is willing to work with us and wondered why we did not call upon them earlier. Our frank response was that several expenses were involved in the arrangements for the visit and as farmers we are unable to bear such costs. But in the case of the ICEF project, the staff are always willing to help us and we have no expenses. They are also aware of who we need to meet. To this, the SDO responded by promising that such issues would not arise in future and asked to us to be in touch with the department. Only then we realized the significance of working together as an association and not as individuals. If we had gone as individuals, we would not have been able to talk to the SDO at all, let alone have the response we received to our requests.

We were all reminded of a remark made by members of the Lower Bhavani Farmers Federation, when we visited them. "You will provide them tea if you go as individuals, but they will provide you tea if all go as representatives of an organization."

- Kovadi Tank Water Users' Association
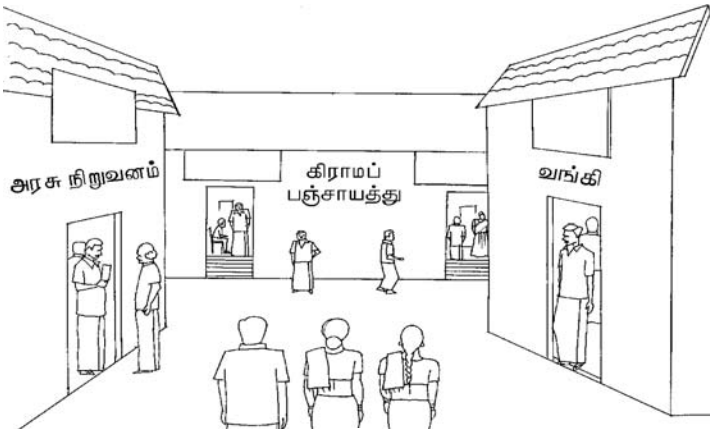
Functional

The members identified the level of activity in an organisation as an important parameter. Only then would the members have a continued interest in being a part of it. Several activities were identified as possible :

‣ Supervision of work
‣ Post-rehabilitation maintenance
‣ Removal of Encroachments
‣ Put training into practice
‣ Resolution of conflicts between members

Supervision of Work

Members of the Water Users' Association should should supervise all physical activities undertaken. This will ensure quality control and see that work is completed on time. Moreover, the organization is then in a position to take up activities on their own in future.

Post-rehabilitation Maintenance

Sustaining interest in the organisation after the completion of major works was recognised as a difficult task. But it was important to ensure a continued interest in the management and maintenance of the system. These works are smaller and not as dramatic as desilting but were recognised as the key to stability in the long run. Action plans for regular maintenance needed to be drawn up. The whole purpose of an effort that costs several lakhs of rupees would be lost if the organization ceased functioning. Hence, maintenance and continuous activities was important for the sustainability and would also ensure that initial investments were recovered.

Removal of Encroachments

After the tank rehabilitation our association, along with the self-help groups in our village, has taken steps to plant trees in our village. We have also installed two oil engine pumps in the tank to ward off any problems due to water scarcity at the end of the season. All members participated in the repair work on the tank bund when small damages occurred due to rain. We have also laid out a specific route for the bullock carts to safeguard the bund. Pisciculture has been undertaken to bring in revenue to the Association.

- Kayalmedu Tank Water Users' Association

Maintenance after rehabilitation is very important. We have proposed to collect membership fees from all the members of the association to create a maintenance fund. We are also hoping to supplement this with aid from the government.

- Alankuppam Tank Water Users' Association

Encroachments were recognised as actions that affect all the farmers in the WUA. The tank which is common property, is taken over for individual gain. Particularly, encroachment of the inlet channel hinders the flow of rainwater into the tank, while those on the foreshore areas reduce total capacity of the tank. Addressing these issues as an organization rather than as individuals was considered to be advisable. The affected organizations could inform the federation of WUAs about the encroachment, which could then inform the relevant Government officials and see to it that necessary action is taken. It was felt that individual conflicts would be avoided through this strategy.

> Before our association was started, none of us were bothered about the encroachments in the tank. Farmers as individuals hesitated to raise questions. Also there was a general apathy towards such issues. The Tank Water Users' Association was started and the tank was surveyed to mark the correct boundaries. During the rehabilitation stage, soil dug out was deposited in the encroached area. These individuals came and raised objections. But the representatives of the association convinced them of the need for such an action and removed the encroachments without any confrontation.
>
> *- Karasanur Tank Water Users' Association*

> Before the tank water users' association was started some portions of the tank was encroached by a few individuals. Since everybody acted as individuals, nothing was done about it. Once the association was started, all the members in the ayacut gained the strenght to confront these encroachers, which made them reconsider their actions.
>
> *- Endiyur Tank Water Users' Association*

> Encroachment is a stumbling block to the progress of agriculture. If the association takes the right initiative, there is no doubt that these stumbling blocks will become the stepping-stones to success.
>
> *- Kunimedu Tank Water Users' Association*

Utilisation of training

During the course of the project several training programs and exposure visits were organised. The members discussed how this has been useful to them in learning to work together as a group. The need for several kinds of training programs was discussed. Leadership training, training in accounts, in water management, enterprise training and exposure visits were some of those identified. As it is impossible to provide this training to all the members of an organization, it was recognised that those who attend should ensure that the knowledge gained is shared with other members. Members who do not attend training should also take the initiative in seeking this knowledge. Only then would the objectives of training be entirely fulfilled. The degree to which the Association ensures this was identified as an important parameter for assessing the communication and interest of the members in its activities.

> Due to several training and exchange programmes, we have become aware of issues related to bio-fertilizers, crop rotation, water management and the importance of the unity of an association.
>
> *- Therkunam Tank Water Users' Association*

> The project staff members frequently visited our village, participated in our meetings and shared ideas. They have trained us well to manage our own affairs, to maintain accounts and to speak in public as well. We have thus acquired the capacity to mange our tank and association all by ourselves.
>
> *- Karasanur Tank Water Users' Association*

Resolution of conflicts

All agreed that it is natural that problems arise between members of an organization. But, it is important to address such problems immediately with the concerned members. Otherwise, these problems flare up and could even destroy the organization. Therefore, when conflicts arise, the concerned parties should be brought to the discussion table and the issue resolved. All the members should abide by such decisions. Finding solutions is a delicate process and lack of seriousness would only multiply the problems faced by the organization.

Gender Issues

The need to involved women actively in the Association was discussed. Our society is male dominated and women do not get the rights that they are entitled to. Even though women participate in several agricultural activities, they are often not involved in the functioning of the organizations. An important parameter was thus identified as the extent to which women were allowed to play an active role in the functioning of the organization, and providing them with adequate space to express their views and ideas. Other than strengthening the organization, this would help women become self confident and the organization as a whole could function more efficiently.

Horticulture, fish culture and field trials were identified as activities that could be carried out by women. The role of women was recognised as important in the development of the family, the village and the society.

Conclusion

These were the discussions of members of the WUAs formed during the project. In this process several lacunae were identified, associations helped each other in dealing with certain problems and strategies for the future were formulated. The WUAs discussed the changes that had taken place in their individual perspectives and how they were learning to function as a group.

They realised that an organization is not a static body; it grows and changes with time. Furthermore, only an active body dealing with the needs of its members can sustain their interest in the long run. The important issues for a stock taking were listed as

> *Is our organization on the right path?*
> *Are we addressing the needs of all the members?*
> *Where do we need additional help?*

The self-assessment exercise is an important tool in addressing these concerns. Not only does it help create better organizations, but also enables the development of skills among members. It ensures active participation of the members in the day to day functioning of the organization. However, the objectives of self-assessment will only be fulfilled by acting upon the decisions taken subsequently. Identification of indicators will have to be done afresh with the changing role of the organization. Some indicators will tend to change or some could become redundant. It is very important that the members doing the assessment evaluate their organization in an objective manner and do not yield to biases or the temptation to see themselves in the limelight. There is no doubt that an honest self assessment exercise will further improve the strengths of an organization and help focus on areas that need attention.

Finally, self assessment exercises are as much a mobilization tool as they are a tool for monitoring and building healthy and capable community based organizations.

> ▸ Participation of members of the local community is seen as a key to better management of local resources and improved livelihoods.
> ▸ Community based organizations should therefore be equipped to be sustainable and not project bound.
> ▸ Participatory monitoring and assessment is a tool that can be used effectively in strengthening the CBOs.
> ▸ The process has to be dynamic and address the changing needs of the members.

ANNEXURE

Key Points

‣ Self-assessment is an exercise carried out by the members of a community-based organization to evaluate their own activities once or twice a year.
‣ Assessment by the members themselves ensures that the yardsticks selected are useful to them.
‣ Participation of as many members as possible is healthy, as then all are aware of the activities within the organization.
‣ Members should commit themselves to an honest assessment.
‣ The decisions taken after the assessment exercise should be acted upon.

Steps to be followed

1. List out the goals and objectives of the organization.
2. Separate the objectives that should have been achieved by the time of the assessment.
3. Ask members to make an exhaustive list of indicators (example - how many, to what extent, records written, site visited, ...) to assess the activities taken up. This is to be done using display cards.
4. Display these cards so that everyone knows what indicators have been listed.
5. Remove duplicates and club similar indicators.
6. Group this final list into categories based on the objectives. The grouping will help in overall assessment.
7. Ask the members to rank the performance of the organization on this list on a scale of one to five.
8. Add up the marks given by each member for the different indicators. Divide by the number of members participating in the exercise.
9. Calculate the score for each category by averaging out the ranks of the indicators in that category.
10. Arrange the indicators in order from the highest rank to the lowest.
    Make two lists - one with all indicators and the other with the only the major categories.
11. Discuss the results of the ranking. What ranked high, what ranked low? Why? This will lead to the identification of strengths and weaknesses and help in planning the future course of action

Nature of Activities	Marks to be given
Excellent	5
Good	4
Fair	3
Bad	2
Poor	1

Calculating the importance score of parameters

Ballot boxes are prepared for the range of the importance score decided upon. For example 3 boxes for a range of 1 to 3. The members are asked to vote an importance score for each parameter. The number of votes polled by each parameter for a particular importance score is displayed on a board in the form of a tally table (see example below). The number of votes polled is multiplied by the importance score. For example, attendance polled 4 votes for an importance score of 2. The value is then 4x2=8 (see top left corner). These values are added for each parameter and the total is divided by number of persons participating in the exercise (column calculations). The final importance score is the rounded of value.

Table 1

Number of participants = 7								
	Importance Score Range							
Parameter		1		2		3	Calculations	Value
Contribution			(6) III		(13) IIII		18/7=2.57	**3**
Attendance	(2) II		(8) IIII		(3) I		13/7=1.86	**2**
Accounts						(21) ЖІ I	21/7=3.0	**3**
Water Managed			(4) II		(15) ЖІ		19/7=2.71	**3**
Links Developed	(1) I		(8) IIII		(6) II		15/7=2.14	**2**
Supervise work			(10) ЖІ		(6) II		16/7=2.29	**2**

Table 2

Indicators	Measures Used	1	2	3	4	5
Financial						
Fund mobilisation	Amounts collected					
Individual Contribution	Amounts collected					
Subscription fee	Amounts collected					
Institutional						
Attendance	Register					
Participation in meetings	Minutes book					
Regularity of meetings	Minutes book					
Implementation of resolutions adopted	Minutes book					
Coordinated functioning	Discussion					
Raising agenda issues	Minutes book					
Record Keeping						
Accounts	Registers and vouchers					
Minutes	Registers and vouchers					
Attendance	Registers and vouchers					
Audit	Registers and vouchers					
Water management						
Neerkatti appointment	Resolution, minutes					
Ensuring water flow at tail end	Discussion, transect					
Repairing distribution channels	Activity plan and completed works					
Institutional linkages						
Linkages with government departments	Visits to PWD, MOUs					
Linkage with Panchayats	MOUs, cost sharing, profit sharing from					
Linkage with others	As above + attendance in WUA meetings and WUA attending their meetings					
Functional						
Supervision of work	Records, minutes, discussion					
Removal od encroachment	Records, discussion, minutes					
Utilisation of training	SDiscussion					
O & M after implementation	Minutes, records, walkthrough					
Conflict resolution	Discussion, minutes					
Gender						
Linkage with others	Discussion with WUAs and SHGs, membership in EC and attendance					

Ranking of parameters

The table below shows the marks given by 7 farmers to a few indicators. The last row is the total for each indicator. The rank is obtained by dividing the total by 7. The maximum score possible thus still remains 5. You can also convert it to a percentage and compare the scores on a scale of 100.

Table 3

Name	Contribution	Attendance	Accounts	Water Managed	Links Developed	Supervise work
Farmer 1	3	5	3	2	4	5
Farmer 2	4	4	2	3	4	4
Farmer 3	3	4	2	3	5	4
Farmer 4	4	5	3	3	5	4
Farmer 5	3	3	1	4	3	4
Farmer 6	4	5	3	3	5	4
Farmer 7	2	4	3	3	5	5
Total	23	30	17	21	29	30
Rank	3.29	4.29	2.43	3	4.14	4.29
Rank on 100	65.71%	85.71%	48.57%	60.00%	82.86%	85.71%
Rank Order	4	2	6	5	3	1
Maximum Score Possible = 5						

Including an importance rank

You might feel that all the indicators identified cannot be compared equally. You can give each indicator a different weightage or importance to reflect this perception. This means that during the calculation of ranks the indicators are evaluated differently. Here are the steps to include an importance ranking in your assessment.

1. List out the indicators that have been selected for the assessment exercise.
2. Decide on an importance scale of 1 to 3 or 1 to 5.
3. Give this rank to each of the indicators. This can be done through a discussion with members or by voting as explained earlier.

Very important	3
Important	2
Not so important	1

4. Multiply the rank given for each indicator in the earlier ranking exercise by the importance score.
5. The maximum score possible in this case becomes "highest rank * highest importance score".
6. Now look at the results and discuss the same. Do the rank orders of the parameters remain the same?

Weighted Ranks of Parameters

Let us give importance ranks to the indicators from the example above, do the calculations and see what happens to the score. We convert the ranks into percentage for easy comparison with the earlier ranking. The table below shows both the simple rank order as well as the weighted rank order. One can see of the importance given changes the picture.

Table 4

Name	Contribution	Attendance	Accounts	Water Managed	Links Developed	Supervise work
Farmer 1	3	5	3	2	4	5
Farmer 2	4	4	2	3	4	4
Farmer 3	3	4	2	3	5	4
Farmer 4	4	5	3	3	5	4
Farmer 5	3	3	1	4	3	4
Farmer 6	4	5	3	3	5	4
Farmer 7	2	4	3	3	5	5
Total	23	30	17	21	29	30
Rank	3.29	4.29	2.43	3	4.14	4.29
Importance Score	3	2	3	3	2	2
Weighted rank	9.86	8.57	7.29	9	8.29	8.57
Rank on 100	65.71%	85.71%	48.57%	60.00%	82.86%	85.71%
Simple rank Order	4	2	6	5	3	1
Weighted rank Order	1	3	5	2	4	3

Average scored by WUAs across parameters

Parameters	Average
Financial	2.69
Institutional	3.12
Record keeping	2.38
Water Management	3.05
Linkages	2.29
Functional	3.04
Gender issues	2.96

Overview of parameters identified by WUAs

ALL WUAs	MOST WUAs	FEW WUAs
Participation of all members in	Transparency of accounts	Encroachments meetings
Co-ordinated functioning	Women's participation (general) Information dessimination	
Thanikatti appointment	Record maintenance	Involvement of women puttadaars
Individual contribution / member-ship Maintenance of tank system	Training fees	
Fund mobilisation/income generation	Linkages developed	