



Fortnightly column

Village Dynamics Insights

Community-driven development initiatives finding success

An ICRISAT study on community-driven initiatives in VDSA villages shows that their effectiveness depends on the level of local community participation in the selection of projects and their involvement in its implementation. Widespread participation and local institutional support also ensured the benefits flowed to a large number of households, including those from minority and socially weaker sections.

To test how such initiatives work, in 2011, six VDSA villages – two in Telangana and four in Maharashtra – were granted US\$ 7,000 (₹ 315,000 in 2011 prices) for projects to collectively meet community needs. The villages first discussed their community problems and needs. The identified interventions were then endorsed by the *gram sabhas* (local village general assemblies).

Better systems for providing household water (in two villages) and village computer centers for students (in three villages) were the most successful types of community-driven initiatives. The study found community-driven initiatives are more likely to achieve success when:

- There is support from local institutions, village officials and informal leaders;
- The grant is given to a community rather than a single person (village head or any other local official);
- The grant is for a new project, not previously started incomplete work; and
- Transaction and administration costs for implementing the project are minimized by participation of the local communities at different levels of operations.

Collective action

The research showed that securing a public service requires collective action at and across multiple scales in a community. For example, in Aurepalle, where seven mini water tanks were built, 324 households and 325 students from the surrounding area gained better access to drinking water. Discussions and field visits revealed that user groups which had effective norms/rules for providing cash and labor for repairs had better maintained tanks.



One of the seven mini water tanks installed in Aurepalle village to supply drinking water.

Table 1. Village grant schemes and beneficiaries in six villages.

Village	Grants schemes	Beneficiaries	Benefits/year
Telangana			
Aurepalle	Mini water tanks (seven tanks)	324 households + 325 students	US\$ 5,526
Dokur	New pipeline for drinking water	420 households	US\$ 6,890
Maharashtra			
Shirapur	Computer center	335 students	US\$ 2,422
Kalman	Computer center	450 students	US\$ 3,488
Kanzara	Mini <i>dal</i> mill	20 households	US\$ 82
Kinkhed	Computer center	34 students/month	US\$ 650 (3 months)

Note: Only tangible economic benefits (2013) have been quantified.

In Dokur, the grant was utilized to connect an additional 203 households to the village water tank with pipelines system for drinking water, with households contributing ₹ 2,000 (US\$ 31.33) per new connection and all users paying a monthly user charge of ₹ 15 (US\$ 0.23). Increasing scarcity of drinking water and the high-cost of alternatives prompted the communities to come together, evolve new rules and share the additional funds to meet the daily supply of drinking water.

Transformative

Computer knowledge centers established in publicly accessible schools of Shirapur, Kalman, and Kinkhed have a high enrolment rate of students, benefitting 335, 450 and 110 students respectively. A user fee of ₹ 100-150 (US\$ 1.55 – 2.35) per student is charged per session (three months), with advanced diploma courses at a significantly lower cost. Within two to three years these computer centers helped transform the teaching process in the schools as computer-based teaching aids are increasingly being used.

On the other hand, the mini-processing unit for pigeonpea established in Kanzara is having a limited impact on the community, benefitting only 20 households. Seasonality of demand for the processing unit of pigeonpea (three months in a year) and a decline in area under pigeonpea cultivation resulted in no or low economic benefit of the grant compared to the grants to the other five villages.

Different perspective

The community member's perspectives towards the village grant differed from the use of grants from government programs, possibly reflecting a different collective action and community level participation on the projects.

If well implemented, village grants also have the potential to improve local governance. Experience with village grants may also encourage community members to think of alternative options for local development and engage and participate in other community development activities. ■

References

- [Process Documentation, Research and Impact of Community Driven Development Grants Research in Rural India](#)
- [Process Documentation Research and Impact of ICRISAT Village Grant](#)

Project:
Village Dynamics
in South Asia

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