

## Local Governance in Groundwater Systems



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## **1 COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT IN GROUNDWATER**

### **1.1 Rights and registration**

With groundwater centre stage in agricultural development in Central America, South Asia, China and North Africa and important pockets outside these regions, the need for managing rather than just developing groundwater is increasingly clear. Groundwater is the main stay of large agricultural economies and a major source of drinking water in many rural areas, towns and even mega cities. However, declining water tables, saline water intrusion, increased levels of arsenic and fluoride in drinking water, land subsidence are all pointers to resource management that needs to be set right. The concerns over groundwater utilization have the ring of the infamous 'tragedy of the commons' – unlimited access to a common pool, leading to its decline. Solutions advocated are reminiscent of the old 'tragedy' discussion: defining access – registration of abstraction points, issuing permits, defining groundwater rights (even tradable ground water rights). But the real drama appears to be that not much of these rights based solutions are around in practice.

Take this quote from a recent World Bank technical paper for instance. While advocating the importance of regulating groundwater through defining rights, it also makes the point that: 'The technical, administrative and social aspects of rights definition pose a major difficulty...First, groundwater systems are often poorly evaluated and monitored and the quantitative basis for defining rights tends to be weak. Second, in some countries the number of wells that would need to be monitored is extremely large, many being located remotely on private land.. Third, water rights systems are socially complex and often based on deeply-embedded cultural values..' (Foster et al, 2000, 68). Add to this the weak enforcement that prevails in many parts of the world, exemplified by the fact that many wells for years are illegally connected to the electricity grid or have very large dues and the case for external regulation and defining groundwater entitlements becomes weak.

### **1.2 Self-regulation**

Self-regulation - decentralized collective management of groundwater resources by water users – is often mentioned as the alternative option. It is either advocated as a self-standing solution, or proposed as a complement to external regulation. The same technical paper, quoted above, for instance states that: 'Where feasible, active self-governance is (in the long run) preferable to the imposition of government rules' (op. cit., 63). There are indeed examples from high-income countries, in particular the American West and Spain, described by Blomquist (1992), Smith (this volume), Hernández-Mora et al. (this volume) among others, where groundwater users have with various degrees of success federated to safeguard the sustainable supply of water.

This chapter concentrates on countries with poorer economies. With the poorer economy usually comes a larger dependency on agriculture, a larger number of groundwater users and in general weaker external enforcement mechanisms. What is the scope of self-regulation in groundwater in these circumstances?

To explore this question the chapter examines a number of examples of local groundwater management from Pakistan, India, Egypt and Mexico. These examples of local groundwater management are still few and far between – dots in a sea of no management. Furthermore, there appear to be no examples of ground water users regulating groundwater quality nor are there cases of self-regulation in areas with large unconfined aquifers.

Yet particular in areas with shallow, semi-confined aquifers collective management systems have come about, home-grown usually, sometimes quite rudimentary, but what is more important in some cases at a scale that matches the extent of groundwater overuse. Particularly where the impact of recharge or pumping is immediate and dramatic, self-regulation has developed. Often the local rules concerns the shallow water bearing strata or the ground water travelling down to the aquifer proper. For this reason it makes sense to make a distinction between groundwater management and aquifer management .

The focus is on groundwater management here. The next section documents a number of cases of local groundwater management and looks into the mechanisms that caused the self-regulatory

institutions to come about, become effective or disappear. The two cases from India describe groundwater recharge movements, augmenting supply. In Pakistan, Egypt and Mexico cases the focus is on regulating demand. In the Mexico and Egypt example organizations developed, whereas in the Pakistan and India example management was by norms, that developed in response to intensive ground water use. The different political systems may explain the difference with the sometimes rowdy democracy in South Asia giving space to popular movements, whereas the more sanitized one-party rule in Mexico and Egypt more likely to translate in organized organizations. On the basis of the cases an attempt is made to find the common denominators in the geographically and politically diverse examples and analyse what makes self-regulation work and where it stands constrained. The chapter ends by summing up a number of ideas on promoting self-regulated groundwater management.

## **2 CASES**

### **2.1 Balochistan, Pakistan**

Groundwater development in Balochistan, Pakistan's great south-western desert has a long history. The area is arid to the extreme (50-400mm rainfall annually) and has little surface water. For a long time scattered springs, minor rivers, animal-driven Persian wheels and particularly karezes sustained small residential agriculture. These karezes (called qanats in neighbouring Iran) are engineering marvels. They consist of a string of shafts connected through a tunnel. The tunnel picks up water from a motherwell – either an underground spring in the piedmont zone or a subsurface flow on the bank of temporary river. It then conveys water over a length of 500 to 3000 meter before it daylight close to the agricultural command area. The cost of establishing karezes is high and in most cases prohibitive for individuals. The systems were typically constructed on a collective basis – either by the future owners or by a team of specialist kareze developers working on behalf of farmers-investors. A typical kareze in Balochistan will yield anything up to 200 litres per second and will serve a maximum of 200 shareholding families. Not only establishment costs are high: kareze maintenance is equally expensive. The co-operative strength of the kareze shareholders is thus constantly tested.

In the second half of the sixties dugwells became a popular alternative to karezes. A range of government programmes that provided subsidized equipment to farmers stimulated this development. Groundwater supplies were considered to be limitless. The vision in these days was to turn the arid land into a Green Oasis with the aid of pumped ground water. In addition to the installation of subsidized dugwells, groundwater usage was further promoted through the provision of cheap electricity, as elsewhere in South Asia. For ease of collection of dues, moreover, a system of flat rates was used for most electrified tubewells, which further encouraged intense pumping. To that the low (minus 50%) recovery of electricity charges can be added, with farmers assuming an almost 'riparian' right to the electricity grid crossing their land. By the eighties dugwell and tubewell development had gathered an enormous momentum.

In many valleys of Balochistan karezes started to collapse. Groundwater reached below the level to which the tunnel section of the karezes could be deepened. This left no choice but to develop dugwells to chase the falling groundwater table. Where these fell dry the quest for water was continued with tubewells with submersible pumps. In some places, however, – such as Kuchlak in Quetta Valley – even tubewells have hit rock bottom. The demise of karezes and the proliferation of private wells have often been construed as the victory of the individual over the collective. In this theory the first to release their share in the communal systems were the larger farmers, who had the resources to develop a private well. The heavy burden for maintaining the drying kareze then fell increasingly upon the smaller farmers. This was true in many cases but another part of the story is that it was often the have-nots, the farmers that did not have a share in the kareze that were the first to use the opportunities offered by the new technology. At the end of the groundwater rush however there has in several valleys been a concentration of access to groundwater in the hands of rich farmers. This happened in particular in the areas; where with groundwater tables fallen drastically only deep tubewells nowadays can produce water. Cost of a deep tubewell is in excess of

US \$10,000. This is a price, which only few can afford.

Neither under customary law nor under government jurisdiction rules existed to control the decline in groundwater tables and the resulting concentration of access to groundwater. Neither did any government organization have a mandate to handle groundwater management. In response to the crisis, the Government of Balochistan issued a Groundwater Rights Administration Ordinance in 1978. The Ordinance - as several others of its kind - established a procedure for licensing wells. These were to be sanctioned by District Water Committees with the possibility of appeal to a Provincial Water Board. A special and unique feature of the Ordinance was that the licensing had to be based on area-specific guidelines. Unfortunately no such area-specific guidelines were ever formulated, if only because it could have provided a welcome opportunity to discuss groundwater management strategies. Instead everything was left to coincidence and the Ordinance was hardly ever used, in spite of a dramatic decrease in groundwater tables in many parts of the Province. There were two valleys that have been an exception to the seemingly unstoppable course of events. First was Mastung valley, separated from Quetta, the capital of the Province by the Lak Pass. Karezes had sustained perennial irrigation in Mastung for several centuries. This was changed as elsewhere in the Province when diesel-operated centrifugal pumps were gradually introduced in the late 1950's and early 1960s. Their impact was not immediately felt, but in the mid-sixties after a spell of dry years the flow of several karezes started to decline. Conflicts between kareze shareholders and dugwell developers became frequent. A number of local leaders imposed a ban on well development in the area, which was considered the recharge zone of the karezes. Disputes however continued, inducing the local administration to formally ask the tribal elders of the area to formulate rules on groundwater use. In 1969 a meeting was convened. At this time the interests of the kareze owners prevailed, if only because they outnumbered the new dugwell developers. The dugwell free zone was confirmed, yet at the same time it was decided not to allow any new karezes either in this zone. Outside the zone minimum distances were specified and a permit procedure was agreed. The latter was not put in practice. Apart from the rules a panel of three important elders was nominated to oversee the rules and the permits. They however found little time to devote to their duties and after a few years the responsibility shifted to the civil administration. Though the rules were by and large enforced, the tragedy was that they were not strict enough and could not prevent overdraft. From the mid-seventies the annual decline in groundwater tables was 0.7 meters. With several large karezes beyond salvation this type of irrigation became more and more derelict. Slowly also the political clout of the kareze owners eroded. A number of attempts were made to exploit loopholes in the Groundwater Rights Administration Ordinance and get a formal permit to develop wells in the dugwell free zone. This finally happened in the nineties. It also signalled the end of the karezes in Mastung and the local groundwater use rules. Ironically the Ordinance issued to facilitate groundwater management signalled its undoing in Mastung. The second valley where self regulating groundwater management came into existence - but more successful - is Panjgur, part of Makran Division. In the past most of the land was irrigated from trenches (kaurjo) that were dug in the bed of the Rakshan River, the main stream in Panjgur. In recent decades however these flood-prone systems were replaced with karezes, feeding on the subsurface flow of the Rakshan or the infiltrated run-off from the surrounding low hills. The rapid expansion of karezes in Panjgur is almost an anachronism. It is rooted in a number of socio-economic changes - the disappearance of the local feudal overlords, the inflow of cash from remittances from manual labourers working in the Gulf States, leading to a sudden emancipation of former have-nots with the capital to invest in water resource development. Concomitant with the expansion of kareze irrigation, a rule came into being that put an all-out ban on the development of dugwells and tubewells. The restriction did not extend to new collectively owned karezes. These could still be built, effectively giving everyone an equal opportunity to access groundwater. The rule came into force after kareze owners in Panjgur had eye-witnessed the rapid decline in the groundwater table in other parts of Makran and the disastrous effect this had had on the karezes.

The limitations on the development of dugwells were widely understood, but not precisely formulated. They differ between the villages, but a minimum distance of 5 kilometres from an existing kareze is used in various places. After some upheaval drinking water supply wells were

exempted from the ban. The implementation of the ban is highly informal. Basically each kareze owner has the moral right to intimidate each potential investor in a dugwell. If this has no effect the local administration is approached, that invariably sides with the majority group of kareze owners, if only out of law and order considerations. The groundwater rules in Panjgur have the character of a social norm. They are not supported by a special organization and no attempt has been made to define individual. The rule rights simply consist of an embargo on certain groundwater abstraction technology and does not discriminate between prior and later users. This has undoubtedly helped to have the norm enforced by social pressure.

## **2.2 Rajasthan, India**

Very similar in aridity to Balochistan is the Indian state of Rajasthan. Western Rajasthan, constituting large part of the Thar Desert is mostly arid. With annual rainfall of 300-500 mm, Eastern and Southern Rajasthan are semi-arid with pockets of extensive groundwater overdraft. In Eastern Rajasthan, many NGO's have been able to catalyze community action in rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge. Some of the most notable work of this kind is by NGOs like Tarun Bharat Sangh and PRADAN, which offer important lessons about alternative modes of organizing for community-based groundwater resource management.

PRADAN, a multi-state NGO, began working in Alwar District during 1980's with the local administration in Kishangadh Bas to improve the implementation of anti-poverty programmes. Following this beginning PRADAN, Alwar developed a water conservation project in the Mewat region that aimed at the revival of the traditional Pal system of rainwater harvesting. A Pal is a bund built along a contour and in many ways is a miniature version of a tank but without sluice gates and canals. A typical Pal is made of earth, around 8-12 feet high and around 12-15 feet wide at the base; but some of the larger Pals are 80-100 meters long. Grass or vegetation is grown along the sides so that the soil erosion is minimized; and the top of the bund is used as a cart road. PRADAN helped build over 110 pals in Alwar in a watershed planning framework with some watersheds having several pals. The development of the recharge structures was preceded with an intense effort in developing democratic and representative community organizations.

The Pals serve a number of functions: [a] they prevent the massive soil erosion that floods otherwise cause, making the plains as bare and rocky as the surrounding hills; [b] by reducing the velocity and force of rain water run-off, they greatly reduce the pressure that the floods would place on the dams constructed down stream; [c] they make the flood waters spread over a large area than happened earlier; and [d] each pal forms a mini-tank of shallow depth; water stays for 50-60 days during which over 60% percolates to the shallow aquifer while the rest gets evaporated. The last two ensure large-scale recharge of groundwater bearing strata and facilitate well irrigation. PRADAN has been able to build modest scale without losing on quality. Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS), operating in the same district, has used a different approach to community participation in local water management. In its Johad building programme, TBS has achieved what most NGOs want but fail to--scale. They work in roughly 550 villages spread over 5 sub-divisions of Alwar district. In comparison, its effort in developing community organizations has been less intense and comprehensive. The water harvesting work of TBS covers approximately 6500 square kilometres area; and therefore, its impact is visible to outsiders as well as to people living in these villages. It has been working with a variety of water harvesting structures including bund (bunds), johads (small ponds or reservoirs), medbundi (farm bunds) etc. However, the centrepiece of their work has been the johad. They have built around 2000 of these already. They began slowly at a rate of 20/year but have gathered momentum and since mid-1990's, have done around 350-400 every year.

A Johad basically is no different from the Pals that PRADAN works with. Its purpose is to check rainwater in gullies and riverbeds, impound the water so checked for 50-60 days while the land in the submergence area 'drinks water, quenches its thirst and fills up its stomach as camels do' (as the local farmers would say). Spill-ways called uparahs are provided to allow excess water to overflow. After the water dries up, crops are grown in the 'peta' lands; and wells get recharged so that

additional irrigation becomes possible. Pals are designed similarly. However, Johads are invariably designed as semi-circular structures; whereas Pals are normally straight bunds. Essentially, there is no difference. Both are low-cost but priceless devices for capturing, storing and optimally using limited rainfall in an undulating topography.

An important lesson TBS's work offers in development is that scale begets scale. Once the benefits of development work becomes visible and talked about amongst villages, demand for similar work comes forth on its own; and once a demand system gets created, half the job of eliciting farmer participation gets done. TBS has built large concentrations of johads in the areas where they began work in 1985 or thereabouts. These concentrations have produced what many believe are demonstrable impacts on farm economies as well as the ecology of these areas. Wells which a few years ago were completely dry or could be hardly pumped an hour a day now abound in water and can be pumped for as long as farmers need them. Several small rivers and numerous natural streambeds that had dried up for decades have suddenly sprung to life and many flow perennially. Farms which had not been cultivated and given up as wasteland have begun growing crops like arson, wheat, make, etc. To TBS's endless worry, some sugarcane cultivation has begun, too. Many abandoned wells have been recommissioned. And an area, which had become a basket case, has become green and is poised on a reverse road to prosperity. Even up-lying lands, which did not benefit yet by TBS's interventions seem to command a better market price. Some of the prime land in areas with johad concentration has shot up to US \$ 10-12000 per hectare.

A major impact of johad concentrations has been in checking both floods as well as draughts. The parts of Alwar district which have dense concentrations of TBS supported johad and other water harvesting structures, the effect of the 1996 flood was minimal or absent all together; elsewhere, floods devastated villages, destroyed pucca bunds and in general created great havoc. So their earlier surmise that johads are effective draught-proofers was surpassed by this experience. A dense system of johads cuts the pace and fury of sheet flows that race down the hills with fearsome pace and force, and thus pre-empt what might otherwise become a flood.

TBS's works are cheap compared to government structures. A couple of middle-sized pucca bunds cost only around US \$ 700 each besides farmers' contributions. The same bunds would have cost US \$ 9-14,000 at least had they been built by the Irrigation Department. In the areas where johads are built in clusters, surrounding areas have become lush green and rapeseed yellow; wells had water at 3-4 meter; the number of diesel pumps had begun soaring, and small streams and rivulets had begun flowing. The traditional institutions of managing water harvesting structures were beginning to get revived pretty much on their own; and there was an enhancing of the water retention. In Hammirpur, for instance, the land under the bund belonged to a private farmer; the village Gram Sabha persuaded him to give his land for building the bund and compensated him by creating a new holding by cutting up small pieces from the lands belonging to farmers in the submergence area.

Several lessons emerge from the comparative experience of PRADAN and TBS. First, PRADAN's emphasis on building sustainable local institutions improved the quality of their work but checked the speed and scale of their work; in contrast, TBS's functional approach to building ad-hoc local organizations helped them quicken and upscale their work. Second, building water-harvesting structures in clusters enhanced the impact of each in impounding water, checking flash floods and recharging the aquifer. Finally, as communities got involved in 'producing' water, new norms about water management, appropriation and use began to emerge which were absent when water was seen as gift of God.

### **2.3 Saurashtra Gujarat, India**

By far the most energetic and inspired response to the intensification of ground water scarcity globally has come in the form of mass movement for well recharge and water conservation in Saurashtra in Gujarat (India). As Rajasthan and Balochistan Gujarat is a low rainfall area. Even more than the other areas it has seen a widespread decline in groundwater tables, bringing with it

added problems such as fluorosis.

The Saurashtra recharge movement was catalysed first by the Hindu religious teacher Swadhyaya Pariwar and subsequently joined by other sects of Hinduism as also by scores of NGOs and grassroots organizations in the aftermath of the three-year draught during 1985-7. Way back in 1978, speaking at the inauguration of a common property forest (Vriksha Mandir), another charismatic leader, Pandurang Shastri Athawale, or Dada as he is popularly known amongst his devotees, had told his followers, 'If you quench the thirst of Mother Earth, she will quench yours..'. I found this teaching prophetic, but 10 years later the warning seemingly became true. The three successive draught years that Gujarat—in particular, Saurashtra and Kutch—faced during 1985-87 brought water issues to their cyclical peak in the public mind. Taking a clue from Israel, Pandurang Athavale began asking his followers why can farmers in North Gujarat and Saurashtra not adapt and improvise on the techniques used the world over for harvesting and conserving rainwater in situ. 'The rain on your roof, stays in your home; the rain on your field, stays in your field; rain on your village, stays in your village', was the talisman he gave to the people of Saurashtra. Many Swadhyayee farmers began trying out alternative methods of capturing rainwater and using it for recharging wells. In the 1989 monsoon, there were isolated experiments throughout Saurashtra; but in some Swadhyayee villages, the entire community tried out such recharge experiments on all or a majority of the fields; and here, they found the results stupendously beneficial. The beneficial results of early well recharge experiments by Swadhyayee communities began getting communicated and shared widely during 1990. Come 1991: the well recharge experiments began multiplying in scale. 1991 was a good monsoon, which helped these experiments to succeed. It was in the 1992 monsoon that these recharge experiments began taking the shape of a movement. Farmers of all hue—Swadhyayees and others—began collecting as much rainfall as they could on their fields and in the village and channel it to a recharge source. This was exactly opposite of what they had done for ages so far; during the monsoon, the standard operating procedure was to divert rain-channels to a neighbour's field or a common land or a pathway; not now; now everyone wanted to link all natural water carrying channels—in private, public or no-man's land—to his well or farm pond for recharge. Stories began doing round within and outside the Swadhyaya Pariwar about groups of Swadhyayees building check dams or deepening tanks or building anicuts or working together to recharge all private wells of the village. By now, many small and big NGOs joined the movement, each trying to help in its own ways. A resource centre (Saurashtra Lok Manch) compiled information about technologies used by different groups of farmers for well recharge, printed it along with illustrative pictures and made these leaflets available in every nook and corner of Saurashtra. The well-recharge movement had caught on like wildfire; and now, it was not just Swadhyayees; farmers of all persuasions joined in. After 1995, many local NGOs took to groundwater recharge activities in a big way. Another major influence was that of diamond merchants in the city of Surat. Over 700,000 households in Saurashtra depend on diamond industry for all or part of their livelihoods. While most Saurashtrians work as workers in diamond cutting and polishing units in Surat, some hit it big as diamond merchants and acquired great riches. All these have strong roots in Saurashtra; and in recent years, diamond merchants have been at the forefront of Saurashtra's recharge movement not only as resource providers but also as catalysts and organizers. More recently, the Government of Gujarat's 'check dam' scheme—under which government contributes 60% of the resources required to build a check dam if the village comes forth with the balance 40%—has provided further stimulus to the popular water harvesting and recharge movement. Some 12000 check dams of various sizes have been constructed under this scheme.

There are no formal studies of the actual scale of the well recharge work; however, many different sources suggest that between 1992-96, between 92-98 thousand wells were recharged in Saurashtra; and some 300 Nirmal Neer (farm ponds for recharge) were constructed. Swadhyaya Parivar workers were so enthused that they set themselves a target of over 125000 wells and over 1000 farm ponds during 1997. It is widely believed that if 500,000 wells in Saurashtra are recharged, the region can solve its irrigation as well as drinking water problem.

Two aspects about the well-recharge movement are significant: first, the dynamic of the movement, especially with respect to appropriate technological innovation in water harvesting, conservation and

recharge; and second, why did it succeed in attracting as broad people's participation as it seems to have. According to some observers, since 1992, several dozens of new methods have been designed for capturing rainwater, conserving it and using it for recharge. In terms of complexity, these are no big deal; most of these are improvisations of old methods; but they have been devised by farmers experimenting, learning, improving, perfecting and then propagating. The Swadhyaya Pariwar has an ingenious communication machine that propagates information about new techniques widely and rapidly; Shamjibhai Antala of Saurashtra Jalsewa Trust, acted as a one-man communication machine taking the message of well recharge from village to village. The basic technique of well recharge is simple and involves drawing channels to direct all the rainwater in a sump or sink-pit (typically 1.2\*1\*1 meter) made besides the well; a channel is made from the sump to the well 15 cm above the bottom of the sump so that dirt and soil in the water settles at the bottom and the water that flows into the well is free from them. Over time, the well-recharge movement has brought in its wake a veritable revolution in experimentation and improvisation in recharge techniques. Starting with wells, the movement began encompassing other recharge sources such as rooftops, water logged lands, soak pits, rivers, tanks. Also, starting with Swadhyayees, later Swaminarayan Sampradaya and other religious sects played a crucial role in capturing this continuous learning in print and propagating it across the countryside. What makes this a movement is that none of the participating organizations play a domineering role in supporting or spreading the activity; in most senses, thus the movement is self-orchestrating, self-co-ordinating and self-propagating.

Why did the well recharge experiment catalysed by the Swadhyaya Pariwar and crusaders like Shamjibhai Antala grow into a movement? Several reasons can be advanced; but the correct response is probably a combination of several of these. First, the strong allegiance of core Swadhyayees to Athavale, and their readiness to give a serious try to his ideas catalyzed the first generation of well-recharge experiments in Saurashtra. Second, Athavale 'marketed' the message of well recharge in the package of instrumental devotion; at no stage in the early years did the Swadhyayees ask farmers to recharge their wells because it was economically profitable; they untiringly cited Athavale's teachings that, 'if you quench Mother Earth's thirst, she will quench yours'; this helped to underplay the economics of well recharge in the making up of the individual mind; early pioneers undertook recharge experiments as an act of devotion to God and to follow the path shown to them by Dada. Third, the fact that Athavale's ideas about well-recharge had to do with one of the most pressing, urgent and critical problems facing the people of Saurashtra explains why the movement took off in Saurashtra rather than in districts like Kheda or Baroda which are also Swadhyaya strong-holds. Fourth, and critically, the spread of Swadhyaya movement is in the form of communities. In numerous cases, there are entire villages that have turned to Swadhyaya; even otherwise, in the countryside, it is more common to find group allegiance to Swadhyaya movement than by scattered individuals. This meant that in early recharge experiments, either the entire village or a substantial proportion of a village's farmers agreed to participate. As in the Alwar case described above, this helped the community to internalise the positive externality produced by each recharged well. If, instead, only isolated farmers had recharged their wells individually, it is doubtful if the early results would have been as strikingly beneficial as they were found. That the internalisation of the positive externality of well recharge has produced powerful 'snow-balling effect' on people's participation is evident from the experience of many villages. Fifth, post-1994, however, the large-scale adoption of well-recharge through promotional and extension effort of NGOs and other religious movements was facilitated greatly by widely shared reports about highly beneficial productivity and income effects of well-recharge programmes on farming. It was at this stage that the driving force of the movement began to change gradually; well recharge as an act of instrumental devotion began to get replaced by well recharge as a technically rational economic act as the movement began spilling out of the Swadhyaya Movement and Swaminarayan Sampradaya. Probably, even amongst the followers of these, there was an added economic impetus to do the devotional act. Sixth, and finally, post-1995, the scale of participation—and the resulting momentum—that the movement has achieved spontaneously itself has been a powerful engine for the movement to grow. In terms of the theory of externality, the reluctance of individual farmer to

invest in well recharge is explained by his inability to internalise the positive externality produced by his investment. However, if a substantial proportion of farmers take to well recharge, it progressively makes more and more sense for the farmer on the margin to recharge his own well. Following the investment in recharge structures basic ground rules on how to use groundwater developed in a number – though not many – places in Gujarat. One of the ground rules in water harvesting and groundwater recharge work by diamond merchants in Saurashtra, for instance, establishes that nobody pumps water directly from water harvesting structures. Utthan, a local NGO too has met with successful experience in Rajula where people in several villages have accepted the norm of not allowing tubewells deeper than 65 meter. In Panch-tobra village of Gariadhar taluka, the community agreed that no new wells would come up within 30 to 100 meters of the water harvesting and recharge structures constructed. In Dudhala the local drinking water and recharge committee issued a ban on drilling wells within a 60 meter radius from a recharge structure and no wells beyond 20 meter depth were allowed (Kumar 2001). Similarly, Shamjibhai Antala has asserted that 15 villages in Amreli and Bhavnagar have adopted a new social contract for more responsible water use after water harvesting and recharge structures have been constructed.

#### 2.4 East Delta, Egypt

The vast majority of farmland in Egypt depends on surface supplies from the Nile. Faced with a finite water stock, but a burgeoning population growth the Government of Egypt is trying to increase the land under irrigation, among others by the reuse of drainage water and increased use of groundwater. In the development of new area the Government of Egypt has followed a policy of giving out land concessions to private investors – both small and large scale.

One such area is Salheia in the East Delta. Landowners, many based in Cairo, purchased smallholdings, in anticipation of the extension of the surface irrigation network to this area. As the development of surface irrigation was considerably delayed, many found an alternative source of water in developing shallow wells, tapping the shallow groundwater (20 meters) at the fringe of the irrigated area. As the recharge of groundwater of the area was limited, the different well owners however soon found their pumping operations interfering with one another and neighbours turned into competitors. Well yields and well reliability went down. Worse even, saline seawater started to intrude in the Salheia area.

In 1993 one of the land owners-investors took the lead in preventing the situation becoming chaotic. He organized a get-together of the 400-odd landowners in the area of 1000 ha. Given the relatively small number of players this was a manageable effort. The meeting decided on a hydro geological survey for the area, to determine safe yields and establish a common management system. The background of the initiator-investor is interesting: a water professional – with ample background in local organizations.

Following the hydro-geological survey, the land owners-investors decided to continue pumping from a limited number of wells only and develop a common network of pipelines. The investment of the network was some 300 US \$ per hectare, which was to be recouped from the water charges. The individual system was thus transformed in a collective asset. The agreement between the farmers led to the establishment of the Omar Enb al Khattab Water Users Association. The Association also decided on a ban on new wells in the area. Apart from regulating groundwater the Association lobbied for the extension of surface irrigation.

When this finally came – after several years – several of the farmers remained to rely on groundwater as many of the fields were far away from the canal. The network and the wells continued to be operated as a common utility. A problem was that some landowners discontinued using the land, speculating that the value would increase. This left the burden of paying the capital costs of the common network on a smaller number of farmers.

The Salheia case then moved beyond coordinated individual responses to groundwater problems and even 'communalised' groundwater by linking all lands to a common pipeline network. A local groundwater associations opens up a large range of management options that do not exist in a social norm based mode of groundwater management (as in Balochistan for instance), as the next cases illustrate as well.

## **2.5 Guanajuato, Mexico**

Guanajuato State is part of Mexico's arid and semi-arid centre and northwest of the country. It exemplifies the rapid agricultural and industrial development of this part of Mexico. Guanajuato is the centre of high value horticultural production for the North American export market. Sanitary requirements demand that the export vegetables are irrigated by 'clean' groundwater. At present the State accounts for 21% of all registered wells (3300) in the country. The over commitment of groundwater in the area has resulted in serious decline in groundwater with almost all of the 20 aquifers in the region in overdraft. For a long time the magnitude of the problem was unknown. Countrywide inventories of groundwater were only undertaken at the end of the 1960s. There have been a number of attempts to self-regulate groundwater use. The first attempt occurred in the 1960s in the Costa de Hermosillo (Wester et al 1999). An employee of the Water Resource Secretariat convinced groundwater users – mainly farmers - to bring back extractions from 1100 M cubic meter to 800 M cubic meter over a four year period between 1963 and 1967. This was largely achieved by installing water meters, canal lining and a shift to less water consumptive crops. New investigations in 1967 unfortunately showed that the reduction in water consumption in the previous period was inadequate and that abstraction would need to be brought down to 350 M cubic meter. This finding was the undoing of the restriction programme. Farmers judged the 350 M cubic meter target unachievable. Since then a second program of restrictions on groundwater use was launched but abstraction continues to cruise at 650 M cubic meter. There is clear parallel with the experience in Mastung (Pakistan), described in section 2.1, where restrictions were effective, but turned out to be insufficient resulting in the termination of the local water management regime. A second effort in local groundwater management concerned the COTAS. COTAS stand for Comités Técnicos de Aguas Subterráneas – technical groundwater committees. The National Water Law, which was accepted by the Mexican Congress in 1992 created the possibility to establish these local committees. The National Water Law however is vague. It contains articles that simultaneously suggest that anything goes as well as the opposite. An example is "water users must organize themselves to be financially self supporting bodies and improve water use efficiency. All these organizations will be monitored by the National Water Commission". The vagueness leaves big questions on the autonomy of the COTAS and the role of external regulation by the government. One example of a COTAS is the Querétaro aquifer. This aquifer is primarily used by urban and industrial consumers with agriculture taking care of 20% of extractions. An intense effort to organize groundwater users in Querétaro was undertaken in 1998 on the directions of Vincente Fox, the then Governor of Guanajuato. A team of sociologists worked for eight months in organizing meetings at national, state and local level. The core groundwater management issues were identified with local experts and then presented to an assembly of authorities and groundwater users. The users formed a COTAS and identified a series of water saving activities – in irrigation improvement and wastewater reuse. The COTAS also formulated a number of groundwater use regulations. The promising model and process were then adopted as a model for other aquifer systems in Mexico. Unfortunately the scaling up was done without consideration to the intensive process that went on before. As a result of the more hurried process COTAS tended to drift towards becoming a consulting platforms only attended by persons, who do not necessarily have the inclination to self organize or self manage the shared groundwater resource.

## **3 COMMON DENOMINATORS**

### **3.1 Self-regulation at work**

The cases present a spectrum of self-regulation by groundwater users, from the development of local norms to recharge and regulate groundwater - to user organizations with a programme of water saving and mobilizing 'new' water resources. Some examples have been successful, others failed. Most cases are spontaneous responses to a severe local groundwater crisis. Without wanting

to suggest that all can be taken care off by local management, the case studies confirm the idea that self-regulation in groundwater management is possible - at least in a number of situations. In fact in the areas studied collective groundwater management was the only thing that worked. Groundwater legislation existed in law documents but not in courts; well registration, let alone top down regulation, never started and rights were all but possible to formulate.

There are a number of common themes in the cases:

- The importance of universality – of not excluding any potential user in the regulations. None of the cases barred a new entrant from having access to groundwater or defined the quantitative right of one well owner over another
- The fact that groundwater management is possible without a formal local organization – loosely enforced norms in several situations are a powerful alternative, but there are limitations to what management by norms can achieve
- The importance of information and getting it right. Mastung and Costa de Hermosilla are both examples of promising initiatives gone wrong because of inadequate understanding of the water balance, whereas in Egypt the geohydrological survey was a main joint activity of the ground water users.
- The possibility of supply side management – as in the Gujarat – most regulations have not put any one out of business. Instead either supply and recharge of groundwater have been improved (Gujarat, Rajashtan, Querétaro), efficiency measures have been undertaken and areas where groundwater can still be safely developed have been identified (Panjgur, Mastung).

### **3.2 Norms or rules rather than rights**

Informal rules and norms even without a formal or informal organizations can effectively control groundwater exploitation. The examples from Panjgur and Saurashtra show this. This is nothing new. A very early groundwater rule, the harim (border), mentioned in Islamic law and is still loosely in force in several parts of the Middle East. The harim defines a no go area for new wells – usually 250 metres in soft soil and 500 meters in hard rock from an existing well or kareze.

The norms that developed in Panjgur, Mastung and Gujarat were all surprisingly simple: a ban on certain types of wells; zones where no well development is allowed; no drilling beyond a certain depth; water for drinking water only; or a strong discouragement of water-intensive crops. In the watershed movement in Maharastra similar simple rules came in force: no irrigation well to be deeper than a drinking water well and no second well for a family (Anna Saheb Hazare, pers. com.). In Hiware Bazar, a model village in the same state, bore wells were forbidden and the cultivation of high water demand crops is only allowed with drip systems. All these norms are easy to monitor by anybody. Compliance or non-compliance is visible and does not need a special organization to enforce it. Any person can through open contempt or intimidation withhold another person from breaking the moral code. This is in fact what happened in Panjgur.

A second characteristic is that none of the norms exclude any body from using groundwater. They they are non-discriminatory do's and don'ts, based on universal access. They are different from rights, which would entitle some more than others. It is difficult to see how such rights would be enforced by social pressure. This was in fact the reason that in many parts of Balochistan karezes could not hold. In fact groundwater rights would almost 'need' an organization to protect those whose interested is defined by the rights against those who are excluded.

This has a number of implications. First is that the scale of groundwater overuse in many areas is such it can only be addressed by a 'movement', able to achieve a wide coverage fast, as in the case of the Saurashtra recharge movement. A 'rights and organization' approach on the other hand would take time and resources, that in many areas are not there. This is also where in Rajashtan the intense organizational approach of PRADAN was less effective than the informal movement of the TBS. To further illustrate the argument one may look at the efforts of introducing participatory irrigation management and promoting water users associations. In spite of considerable effort the coverage of such organizations is still limited . Similarly, the efforts in determining rights and establishing local organizations at the scale of South Asia with an estimated 24 M groundwater users are too daunting. In describing groundwater management in the High Plains (US) Burke and

Moench (2000) also provide an important footnote to the pre-occupation with participatory organizations. The groundwater districts in the High Plains are not 'fully participatory', as only a few users are actively involved in the management of the districts. The groundwater districts however are able to reflect popular preferences and have the public recognition, which goes a long way to effective local management

This leaves the development of local norms and more loosely structured organizations as a viable option. Blench (1998) has questioned the preoccupation with the 'community' as the focus of development and local management and has argued that local structure should be analysed before going for the standard option. There is evidence from the different cases that an equalitarian group helped the development of norm-based resource management, but it does not seem a prerequisite. In terms of transaction costs – when the costs of enforcement are low, the community organization that supports it does not need to be very forceful. As the experience in Saurashtra shows the community is not necessary the organizing mechanism, but it provides the network where adoption of recharge techniques and groundwater use norms reaches the required density to sustain it. There is however a limit to what norms can achieve. First they are do's and don'ts – but to come with a more comprehensive groundwater management strategy that includes supply side measures in many cases a local organization is required – this can however grow 'from below' rather being introduced part and parcel. This route is particularly open when the groundwater system allows access to all – as in the example from Salheia, Egypt.

Secondly norms and social pressure may not develop everywhere. Where groundwater availability simply cannot sustain universal access, as in the case of many deep aquifers, it is difficult to see how social pressure would come about. In Balochistan in many valleys a few farmers are left pumping from deep tubewells: no management regime develops here and most likely they will continue pumping till the water runs out

Thirdly loose self-regulatory systems are vulnerable, particular where they effect groundwater demand. When the local rules and claims to groundwater use are not recognized, they may be easily subverted by other developments. An example comes from the basalt plains south of Asmara in Eritrea. A local norm prescribed that when the water table fell below a certain depth water would only be pumped for domestic purposes. This local management regime came unstuck, however, when the surface water that recharged the groundwater system were diverted by a new dam (Burke pers. com).

### **3.3 Supply versus demand side management**

In none of the cases of successful local management any groundwater user was forced to give up pumping or reduce his farm business. Instead in all cases the options for either for augmenting supply (through improved recharge) or higher water efficiency were exploited.

There are still unutilised options - ultra low cost drip irrigation

In many parts of South Asia, the only long term solution to sustaining groundwater irrigation without hitting farm production and rural livelihoods is through technologies that produce more by pumping less. Drip and sprinkler technologies have been aggressively promoted in India since mid 1980's; yet, today, the area under these is only 60,000 ha. A big part of the problem is subsidies that, instead of stimulating the adoption of these technologies have actually stifled their market. Subsidies have been directed at branded, quality-assured systems, but in the process have not allowed viable, market-dependent solutions to mature. There is growing evidence that suggests, however, that once farmers realize the benefits of drip irrigation, its use can spread amongst large as well as small farmers. A good example that illustrates this is that of small growers in Maikaal (Madhya Pradesh) and Kolar (Karnataka), where IDE, an NGO committed to promote market-based rural technology, introduced low-cost drip irrigation systems.

In both areas the program was in direct competition with irrigation equipment companies like Jain and Pineer, the mainstream players in this business. Their equipment typically costs US \$1750/ha,

which puts it out of reach of most farmers – apart from the few that manage to access the subsidy programmes. IDE promoted a low cost drip system that costed 40% of this (US \$700/ha). The adoption was initially confined largely to middle peasantry, but then began to spread to small and marginal farmers. A common aspect of both regions is a vibrant farm economy under siege from groundwater depletion. Maikaal's organic cotton growers and Kolar's mulberry farmers find that protecting the core of their livelihood systems is their biggest challenge. After two failed monsoons, in Maikaal as well as Kolar, a typical well can be pumped for 30-45 minutes at a go after allowing it 'to rest' often for 2-3 days. When the affordable drip irrigation was introduced, farmers in Maikaal and Kolar received it like a Godsend. Not only did they adopt the technology in a hurry, but they also began to experiment with it and improvise over it. The grey market of unbranded products offers limitless opportunities for economizing on capital investment. Most farmers laid drip systems at US \$ 350/ha by assembling them with grey market material. Their grey market dealers also offer them written guarantee of 5 years, which most farmers' trust would be honoured if invoked. Some farmers who have been using grey products since 1996 are quite happy. As the drip technology gets internalised here, the name of the game is cutting its cost down to the minimum. Grey sector entrepreneurs recognized that many first time users would try out drip technology only in a drought to save their crops with little water. They also recognize that their demand is highly price elastic. To encourage such small farmers to try out drip irrigation, one innovative manufacturer introduced a new product labelled 'Pepsi'— basically a disposable drip irrigation system consisting of a lateral with holes. At US \$ 90/ha, Pepsi costs a small fraction of all other systems but for small farmers who are trying out the technology for the first time, the disposable system offers an important alternative. As one Patina farmer mentioned, 'if I can buy a system at the cost of the interest amount, why should one invest capital? Why spend US \$ 30 on a filter when a piece of cloth can serve the same purpose as effectively?'

As a result no one was put out of business by the self-regulating institutions. In Saurashtra and Alwar the route to restoring the balance ran through farmer investment in a variety of recharge structures. In several cases, norms on not to overuse the water recharged by one's neighbours efforts were corollary to individual investment in the common resource. Similarly, in Mastung, Panjgur, Salheia and the various Mexican examples no one was forced to give up irrigated agriculture. There were still areas earmarked for expansion, whereas changes in using water more judiciously enabled groundwater users to continue farming. The transaction costs of establishing these self-regulating mechanisms were low, as there were no losers to negotiate with. The question this poses however is what to do when the options for increasing recharge or increasing water productivity are exhausted. It seems that in those cases only external regulation (of which in large parts of the world there are few convincing examples) or the physical collapse of wells will restore balance.

The remarkable point however is that in many areas that are going through a crisis of rapidly falling groundwater tables options for recharge or increasing water use efficiency are not activated. One can speculate why. It may be because recharge options or water efficiency options are not known or not available at the right price. The spread of low cost drip irrigation in Western Maharashtra and Karnataka after a number of failed attempts illustrates the point (see box). Worldwide, farmers primarily adopt water saving technologies not to save water but to sustain farm yields and household incomes. Water saving technologies moreover often have other benefits, which encourages their adoption – lower energy costs, convenience, better crop management. Where self-regulating mechanisms are in place and where there is a heightened understanding of the limits to groundwater consumption, they facilitate the acceptance and adaptation of the different options to reverse groundwater overuse. This can be done through individual choices or through agreement between water users, as in the Mexican examples.

### **3.4 Accelerating self-regulation: the role of information**

An adequate local groundwater management regime is well served by an understanding of local hydrogeology. The ultimate failure of groundwater management in Mastung is an example of the

importance of knowing the constraints to the common resource. Unfortunately the work of professional geohydrologists hardly travels to groundwater users who would stand to benefit most of it. Since pumps in most places have been around for a few decades, a groundwater crisis is usually the first of its kind and there is usually little knowledge on the magnitude, quality and dynamics of the invisible resource. The Participatory Hydrological Monitoring (PHM) programme developed in Andhra Pradesh, India under the APWELL project (Govardhan Das 2001) is a unique experiment in trying to overcome this obstacle. Under the PHM farmers are being trained in measuring groundwater parameters themselves. They are provided with:

- A drum and a stop watch to measure the discharge of a number of their wells;
- A water table recorder to measure the depth of water table;
- A rain gauge, installed in a sheltered place.
- Ready reckoner tables and training to make crude water balances.

The farmer group reports its finding to a field hydrologist, who helps to analyse the results and provides routine to the measurement efforts. The PHM has had a marked impact in the areas, where it has been used. It has been combined with agricultural extension focused on crops and cropping techniques with high 'water productivity'. Floriculture, castor seed, cotton, maize have been promoted as alternatives to highly water demanding rice cultivation. At present rice accounts for less than 5% of the area under crop, a marked departure from other groundwater dependent areas.

Another breakthrough was the promotion of vermiculture. With the aid of worms waste is transformed into compost, which significantly improves soil water retention capacity and brings down ground water consumption. Further farmers have been taken a number of steps to improve recharge close to their wells – sink pits and small check dams. PHM and agricultural extension have been effective in introducing local demand and supply side alternatives. In Andhra Pradesh the next step is to turn the current awareness and understanding into local resource planning as well as to scale up the effort. In this respect the State offers a number of promising 'leads' – there is a plan to have an observation well of the Groundwater Department in each village and have this monitored by the local community or watershed group. Also in the last annual government 'mass contact' campaign senior government staff were sent out with simplified water balances to discuss in village meetings. Though the implementation was not perfect or comprehensive, the initiative was probably 'a first of its kind' – a massive effort to bring groundwater knowledge to groundwater users.

There are a number of clues from these beginnings – training groundwater user groups and local experts in the operation of observation wells, integrating local observation in state wise monitoring, both components reinforcing one another and promoting effective improvements – higher water productivity and local recharge systems, as in Saurashtra. All these are a great improvements on the now often esoteric nature of hydrological science.

#### **4 CONCLUSIONS – CHANGING THE AGENDA**

The magnitude of intensive groundwater use in many parts of the world is so big that the main management challenge is scale, providing some order among very large numbers of groundwater users (see Burke, in this volume). Against the examples in this chapter where the tide was reversed, there is multitude of cases that have gone from bad to worse. Much of the rapid urbanization in groundwater dependent areas is attributed to the groundwater resources being overstretched. In several parts of coastal Gujarat groundwater depletion in dry season is so serious that for part of the year people move out of the areas for lack of drinking water. In many other parts of South Asia drinking water tankers have become a regular feature even in rural areas. Whether 'external regulation only' will work is questionable – groundwater bills have been around now for many years in several countries with serious overdraft problems, but they have not translated in anything that approaches real life. Extensive studies have documented the magnitude of the groundwater problems, and in the meantime valuable time is lost.

It is clear that a new agenda is required – strengthening local water resource management and taking lessons from the few success stories of self-regulated and self orchestrated groundwater movements. The Dublin Principle of subsidiarity in water management needs to be taken far more seriously among groundwater professionals. Elements of a new agenda should be:

- a) Focus on wide coverage, density and scale of improvements – ‘rights’ based approaches, if they could be made to work at all, will in many areas consummate time and social energy, that is better utilized on setting up functional organizations and promoting new rules and norms.
- b) Create wide awareness on the limits to groundwater utilization and on effective action to reverse overuse (recharge; efficient use) – casting the net widely and hoping to find champions, even among the unlikely – such as the religious leaders and diamond merchants in Gujarat;
- c) In support of the above - reverse the orientation of hydro geological science – the outputs of which are now often shrouded in secrecy or vagueness: models, studies, formulas impervious for the non expert mind; a large effort is required to bring hydrogeology to the field and create capacity to study and analyse groundwater behaviour locally; linking central and local monitoring programmes may help;
- d) Actively develop and promote alternatives to intense groundwater use – the examples show there is wide range of effective options – vermiculture, ultra low cost drip, sink pits, recharge bunds, etc. each suited to certain local conditions. At present however these techniques still need to be adjusted and promoted so as to become part of the standard repertoire of groundwater users;
- e) Build local groundwater management into watershed improvement programmes – avoiding that watershed management programmes deal exclusively with increased recharge of groundwater, while ignoring the way that water is used. Moreover creating enough density to show the impact of watershed improvement and encourage active management of water supply and demand. Similarly build local groundwater management into community water supply and sanitation programmes;
- f) Develop enabling rather than regulatory legislation and facilitate the development of local management organizations and local rules; the COTAS in Mexico are a promising opening, provided they are not relegated to a marginal consultative role. Further energy needs to be devoted to make local management organizations work – either by local champions or external facilitators. This is brought out by the experience of the Groundwater Rights Administration Ordinance in Balochistan, by the COTAS in Mexico and also by the groundwater associations in Spain (Hernández-Mora et al., this volume);
- g) Make much more of local management and monitoring of groundwater quality (often linked to over extraction) – there are few examples at most where groundwater users are involved in managing the quality of the groundwater resources – but given the extent of groundwater pollution and quality deterioration, much more has to be done in this field. In controlling surface water pollution by industries in countries with relatively weak formal enforcement mechanisms good results have been obtained through public disclosure (World Bank 2000). In groundwater quality management there are large opportunities for improvement along these lines too.

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