

## *Democratisation of Water Management - Nurturing Democratic Change; the Tamil Nadu Experiment 2003-2005*

Vibhu Nayar I.A.S.,  
Project Director, TNRWSP, on behalf of Change Management Group, TWAD Board, Chennai,  
Tamil Nadu, India Pin: 600 005.  
Phone & Fax: 91-44-28524907, E. mail: [pdvibhu65@yahoo.com](mailto:pdvibhu65@yahoo.com).

*“A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history.”* - Mahatma Gandhi

*“What does it matter if people look upon us as dreamers”*- Mahatma Gandhi

### **Preface**

This is a record of an ongoing experience of a government organisation, the Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Drainage Board (TWAD)<sup>32</sup>, which initiated a process of critically reviewing its practices and values, its work culture and performance, its vision and achievements. Arising from this churning began the process of organization transformation in light of the new vision identified for itself. The intention of documenting the experiences is also to share and invite the concerned to become a ‘co-traveler’ with the participants of the change experiment undertaken with the support of UNICEF India, with the hope that learnings of this experiment will provide a model for an alternative governance paradigm.

### **Democratisation of Water Management**

The overarching conceptual framework that has emerged as the wellspring of the entire transformation exercise currently underway in the organisation is the theme of ‘Democratisation of Water Management’. The various activities which have been initiated all go to support the democratisation process within and outside the organisation. While the democratisation process is still being evolving, the core principles around which the change effort is currently being constructed can be described to encompass the following:

<b>Inside TWAD</b>	<b>Democratisation Parameters</b>	<b>With the Community</b>
Ensure free flow of information across different levels	1. Information flow	Share all necessary information including transparency about schemes.
Choice of strategies and methods made in an informed manner, after broad based deliberations	2. Choice	Enabling and ensuring choices made democratically and by the people themselves.
Decisions are made with widest possible involvement of all groups and based on acceptance of decisions by all concerned	3. Decision making - Consensual - Inclusive	Encourage and ensure that decisions are made securing participation of all stakeholders, seeking to build consensus at all stages and ensuring equity
All sections own up for decisions accept individual	Accountability, responsibility and ownership	Community owns all schemes and assumes responsibility

<sup>32</sup> TWAD has exclusive mandate of providing protected water to the 32 million rural population of Tamil Nadu (a southern state in India).

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and collective responsibility and remain accountable for ensuring equity based water management.		for implementation, management and control.
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## Why this transformation exercises? The Context ...

There are two situational factors, which propelled the organisation (TWAD) to search for a creative solution to address vital issues of organisational relevance and change:

- the growing water crisis and
- the identity issue within the water sector.

Both these issues presented the concrete context, which together compelled and accelerated the attempt to find an integrated solution to manage the water crisis while dealing with internal issues of sustainability, efficiency and effectiveness of the water delivery system.

### Growing Water crisis

Following several years of failed monsoons the state of Tamil Nadu had to deal with the crippling effect of severe drought. This drought and attendant water scarcity situation was preceded by over exploitation of ground water, poor expansion of water recharge structures and neglect of traditional water sources including wells, ponds and springs. Greater urbanization of peri-urban areas was placing tremendous demands on water supply.

There was growing realisation that the 1980's strategy of addressing water problem as merely an issue of water supply was a limited one and that a new perspective had to be adopted water and environmental conservation.

It was also becoming increasingly clear that mere financial and technological interventions had limitations and by themselves were not producing improvements or drought proofing the state beyond a point. The issue had to be looked at from a fresh angle; this involves addressing the challenge of bringing about:

- attitudinal transformation,
- perspective change and
- institutional reorientation.

### The Identity Issue: Changed Working Context

The crippling water scarcity was also raising issues of "search for solutions" in the public fora. Civil Society started looking at the water sector and role of organisations working in it, with a critical eye.

A focus group set up within the organization examined various alternatives to approach the above problem, ranging from stricter monitoring, and increasing investments to Changing Mindsets. In the initial months the organisation tried doing more of the same, viz. well drafted guidelines, reviews, decision to focus on recharge, but still the spark was missing.

In effect the process of engagement in the organisation was not conducive to internalization.

Most critically, what had to be urgently addressed was the issue of attitudinal changes amongst engineers who were now being asked to play new roles of becoming 'social engineers' requiring them to perform engineering functions within a social matrix, in which they were required not only to deal with scientific facts and technology issues but also required to be sensitive to social dynamics.

The difficulty was that there was no forum or established process within the organisation's functioning, which could facilitate a process of open and critical exploration. Hierarchy bound and status conscious practices also inhibited open exchange amongst even those few who perceived the

nature of challenge and crisis before them. It was in such a context, that the present transformation intervention process was initiated and a pair of external consultants invited to help plan, implement and partner major change exercises throughout the organisation.

## The Building blocks of the transformation process

### Shifts in mind sets

The TWAD Board enjoys an exclusive mandate for providing water supply in Tamil Nadu. So far the Water Board executives functioned as exclusive specialists answerable only as providers. The challenges of the water crisis however have dramatically altered their situation and context. The engineers now have to re-negotiate their relationships with a whole new plethora of interest groups and stakeholders. Detailed internal deliberations on drought proofing, led to identification of a need for community based approach to ensure sustainable water systems. Thus from being sole decision makers, the Water Managers have to now function as a body whose future is intrinsically linked with community choice.

All this calls for a major re-examination of the nature of relations between the TWAD and the larger public, by individuals in the TWAD at their personal level and the TWAD as an institutional entity. The exploration will naturally have to cover the issues of social, cultural and economic relations and forces.

Strategically, this process required that a conscious intervention focus on:

- Attitudinal changes amongst individuals
- Attitudinal changes within the organisation
- Attitudinal Changes amongst key stake holders

### The thrust of institutional change

The TWAD Board is a repository of the accumulated wisdom, knowledge and experiences of hundreds of highly qualified engineers and a vast treasure house of information about the water sector in Tamil Nadu. It is thus strategic to utilize the technocratic and managerial expertise of the Board as the starting point to transform the organisation into a more *people focused, community responsive and publicly accountable organisation*.

We may highlight the challenges before the Board as one of transforming the organisation into one of being

<i>Responsive</i>	in	RELATIONS	and	<i>Responsible</i>	in	PRACTICE
<i>Transparent</i>	in	CHARACTER	and	<i>Participative</i>	in	ACTION
<i>Accountable</i>	in	ATTITUDES	and	<i>Democratic</i>	in	APPROACH

The dynamics of such a change process will typically cover the following dimensions:

- (1) Ensuring 'Convergent Community Action' by bringing together state service providers and officials with an active involved and better-informed community.
- (2) Establishing meaningful interface between community and service delivery systems
- (3) Ensure convergence and coherence in policy formulation, planning and implementation.
- (4) Strengthening service delivery systems by focusing on improving transparency and effectiveness of individuals and systems and self-sustaining change efforts.
- (5) Capacity building of different stake holders including government officials, women and local communities, local bodies and NGO representatives and elected representatives.

## The Training Design: Three Core Thrust Areas

There were essentially three thrust areas covering the training design:

### 1. Breaking Barriers – Building Bridges

Addressing issues of the 'person' and the 'personal', *exploring the ways in which people relate to one another.*

### 2. Confronting Challenges – Creating Convergences

Exploring issues of collective living and survival as members of different stakeholders based on an assessment of each other's priorities and conflicts.

### 3. Synergising Strengths – Strategising Success

Examining the strengths of different stakeholders critical to the success of any venture, to bring about synergy in the use of energies and resources and evolving strategies to ensure success.

## The Basic Construct:

The difficulties of working in a hierarchical, government system made it necessary to address some critical issues at the very beginning of the process...

- To break hierarchical modes of relating and encourage free interaction
- To ensure people do not take recourse to strategic 'silence' in presence of seniors
- To prevent people saying 'Yes' when they actually meant NO!
- To instil a sense of individual and collective ownership of the process of change.

## The Koodam:

The transformation process was begun with an invitation to the Engineers participating in the process to create a '*Koodam*' in which they would interact with each other as equal persons engaged in the common purpose of learning from and with one another, without distinction of rank, position or privilege. The *koodam* is actually a traditional concept and practice in Tamil society. (with parallels like Choupal etc. in North India)

*Koodam* refers to the geographical space in a village which is held sacred, where all participants meet as equal adult members of society and discuss all issues to arrive at a consensus. Within the *Koodam*, the norms for relating as members are based on the acceptance that all are equal irrespective of differences in status, wealth and learning. The *Koodam* is an honoured space, sacred because all participants value and respect it.

In a dramatic manner, the concept of the Koodam helped establish a new sense of relating, belonging and purpose for the 150 Senior Officials who had been invited to be part of the exercise to bring about changes within the organization. The officials were of various ranks ranging from Chief Engineers to Assistant Engineers.

## Integrating Learning through Field Visits

Intrinsic to the learning process was the integration of the critical and open reflection process initiated in workshops with actual field conditions. Based on the recommendations of participants of the preliminary workshops, field visits was incorporated as part of the training design so that members involved in the reflection exercise were made to engage with field conditions and include the perspectives of the people they were meant to serve. This part of the training matrix enabled a reality check and ensured that the reflective exercise was anchored in actual village conditions.

## The Churning Process: Some Glimpses

Over a period of 4-5 days participating members explored numerous issues covering their work. Some of the important outcomes are shared to give a glimpse of the churning process initiated in the organisation.

### Understanding the water crisis: Am I Part of the Problem?

An important issue that needed to be addressed was (i) whether there was a water problem at all, and (ii) if there was indeed a problem, then where did they see themselves vis-à-vis the problem! This was the most challenging and difficult of exercises, but nevertheless a crucial stage to be crossed.

While initially there was strong resistance, eventually the groups concurred that they had a role both in being part of the problem, as also in being part of the solution. While there were different levels at which participants responded, at the end of all workshops, most participants because of the Koodam were considerably open and non-defensive to looking at the varieties of issues involved in reforming the rural water management sector, including about the need to change themselves and the way they functioned individually and organizationally.

### ‘Maraimalainagar Declaration’

The series of Change Management Workshops culminated with a major break through in the fourth workshop held at Marimalai Nagar. The churning process resulted in evolving a new paradigm of operation by the engineers themselves. This came to be known as the ‘**Maraimalainagar Declaration**’.

- We will evaluate the existing schemes and ensure that the schemes are put to optimal use first.
- This will be followed by rehabilitation wherever necessary along with revival of traditional sources.
- This approach will be followed before taking up any new schemes in the block.
- We will also aim at 10 % increase in coverage with the same budget.

### Evolving Concentric Circle of Consensus on MM Nagar declaration

Initially there was opposition to the declaration among the officials/organisation. Some saw in it a criticism of past policy; others saw it as striking at the very core of the functioning of the organisation and felt that the declaration was not saying anything new. Yet others saw it as articulating something that many felt, but had not yet put together into the right perspective for action. In order to evolve a consensus, discussions were initiated at formal and informal level throughout the organisation on the Maraimalainagar Declaration. Naturally issues of water crisis, sustainability and the historical role of TWAD and the need to initiate change came to be debated.

Despite the contested nature of the Declaration, slowly a consensus evolved that the Declaration was not only acceptable but also required to be pushed through inside the organisation, with the involvement of other stakeholders too. The process of widening the consensus and ensuring implementation was strengthened by bringing on board administrative heads, policy makers and other opinion makers who then endorsed the declaration.

What is noteworthy is that the declaration was also shared with a cross section of civil society too. The build up of support ensured that the Maraimalainagar Declaration did not remain, as a rhetorical statement but became an article of faith, guiding future actions and interventions across the state. The adoption of the Maraimalainagar Declaration, and the subsequent endorsement by the policy maker at the highest level set the stage for the next phase of the transformation exercise in the organisation.

## Pioneering Change: Consolidating the Transformation Process

### Formation of the Change Management Group (CMG)

The increasing acceptance and implementation of MM Nagar declaration pushed the change process to the next phase emphasizing the need for formation of a core group at the state level, which would spearhead all change activities. Whether members decided to undertake change projects aimed at increasing employee morale or on evolving a comprehensive database or on conducting similar training interventions it soon became apparent that all future change or transformation efforts would need to be coordinated and planned. This led to the formation of a Change Management Group (CMG) at the state level.

Building on the spirit of the koodam, CMG members were those who volunteered to be part of the exercise. Their work as CMG participants would be over and beyond their regular work and they would not get any special concessions or rewards for being CMG members. Care was taken to ensure that the CMG was a representative body having representatives from different age groups, covering all the regions of the state and having a cross section of people. The newly formed CMG evolved its own mandate for functioning:

- To work further on the MM Nagar declaration & strategize for future change.
- To be an in-house group to dialogue with the rest of the system.
- To develop skills in managing change through Pilot Projects.
- Empowering – capacity building & creating a core team to envision and lead the change process.
- Covering all employees as associates

After detailed deliberation and introspection at both formal and informal levels the CMG members decided to identify and imbibe certain values by which they would like to be recognized. The group committed itself to upholding of these values in all their transactions as individuals or as an organisation.

### CMG Values

We collectively resolve to adhere, adopt and imbibe the following values:

- **Democratic:** In every activity we will adopt a democratic approach.
- **Team spirit:** We will work together as one.
- **Voluntary Membership:** We are self -committed, self -propelled and self –reliant
- **Revolutionary:** We shall pioneer the partnership revolution
- **Self-Evaluating:** We are willing to analyze, learn and if necessary correct ourselves
- **Trust:** We value trust amongst colleagues and the community.
- **Dedication:** We dedicate ourselves to our collective vision.
- **Empathy:** We empathize with fellow human beings.
- **Respecting others:** Listening, analyzing and accepting views & opinions of one and all

### Change Projects

The CMG initiated change projects to demonstrate to itself and to the rest of the organisation its commitment to the change process as well as to show case the potential uncovered by the process. The CMG took up change projects around three broad areas of activities:

- **People Oriented,** - focusing on impact on people, both internally as also outside the organisation.
- **Task Oriented,** - focusing on issues related to work and the formal areas of organisational functioning, and
- **Process Oriented,** - encompassing issues of communication systems, decision making processes within the organisation, leadership within the organisation and other related issues.

Different projects were undertaken in the three areas as described below:

#### ***People Oriented***

- Community Water Supply and Sanitation Village Micro Plans
- Institution building - Village user committee formation in Grama Sabhas
- Communal Revival of traditional water bodies
- Ground Water Demand Management
- Involving School children through, "Our Water" projects.

#### ***Task Oriented***

- Spot settlement of Audit paras
- Improved data base & reporting system.
- e-group formation and interaction among members

#### ***Process Oriented***

- Koodam internalization – Monthly meetings
- Creation of new koodams – practicing at district / regional offices
- News letter – encrypting the activities and sharing experiences
- District level CMG launching and broad basing towards village level

## **Democratisation of Water Management Project**

### **Outcomes of 472 Villages under 145 Village self governments across 29 Districts.**

The capacity building intervention was from the beginning conceptualized around a field reality. A lab to field approach was adopted wherein all the engineers involved in the change process also worked with these new principles in selected villages in their Districts. It was visualized as laying the basis of a more sustained reintegration of the essential work system and work culture within the organization. The field projects were the testing grounds for experimenting with the learning of the Workshop. In a sense, the project villages were the experimental workspace to implement many of the concepts learnt through the exploratory process of group learning in the Workshop. The engineers took up community based water management in 472 villages involving 3.5 million people.

There was a symbiotic relationship between the workshop and the project villages, which were used as laboratories to test the newfound insights of democratic water management and exercise their minds of the apprehensions of giving a voice and choice to the community. The statewide project involved about 80 Rural Water Supply sub divisions of TWAD Board. The focus of the project was to take up a holistic approach to water supply by involving the community in planning, formulation, implementation and subsequent management of water systems including revival of traditional practices. The fruits of this new way of thinking and working, started manifesting early, highlighting the potential of such change processes in improving the delivery systems of vital services.

Some of the important outcomes of the Democratisation of Water Management Project were in the following areas: -

#### **Community involvement**

As a measure of the involvement of the community and its sense of ownership, the project has envisaged 10% of the capital cost as community contribution, in cash or labour. Over a period of one year the community has contributed \$ 0.3 million in cash apart from various shramdans. Nearly 35,000 households have contributed to implement water supply or recharge schemes in 145 village panchayats. (This is equivalent to a months wage of 1.5 lakh families)

#### **Cost Reduction**

One of the most significant impacts, which portray the inherent potential of this process of personal and institutional change, is the reduction in the capital cost per House hold by 40% in the Project

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villages. It has been found that the average cost per House hold has reduced from Rs.4,436/- to Rs.1,555/- In real terms this means possibility of additional coverage of four lakh households or 2 million people every year, with the same budget.

### **Cost Effective solutions**

More than 50% of the schemes are low capital intensive, focusing mostly on rehabilitation, EPL, MPP/HP. This reflects a different way of decision-making, based on community ownership, choice and willingness to manage the operating costs.

### **Better Targeting**

In the project about 65% of the schemes have targeted villages with more than half the population declared below poverty line. This is in sharp contrast to the generally low targeting of regular schemes.

### **Savings**

In line with the Maraimalai Nagar declaration many of the Districts have taken up vigorous scrutiny of all investment proposals, in the search of a sustainable and cost effective solution. The savings over the annual budget has been as high as \$ 2.2 million in Namakkal, and \$3.6 million in Virudhunagar District (varying from 8% to 33% of the budget). In fact in Namakkal the District team has utilized the savings to take up a unique community participatory source rehabilitation programme in 220 habitations by involving the community in planning and financing the projects.

### **Planning**

In all the 145 village panchayats detailed village water supply master plans were prepared by the community with the assistance of the engineers and approved in the Grama Sabha. The Master Plans had sub plans on ground water recharge, water quality and environmental protection including subsequent management and financing issues. After approval the mater plans were taken up for implementation along with the community.

### **Institution Building**

It was felt necessary to provide a formal forum for the community to spearhead its water and sanitation interventions. For this purpose Village Water and Sanitation Committees were proposed in all the project villages. In all 157 VWSCs were formed in the project villages by the community with the approval of the Grama Sabha. The unique feature of the VWSC was that there was a positive bias towards the disadvantaged. The women self-help group leader was the treasurer of the VWSC and 1/4<sup>th</sup> membership was earmarked for women. The community was also convinced to provide adequate representation to SC and ST population of the village. TWAD Board engineers had many structured and informal interactions with the VWSC and focus groups for capacity building and to assist in tackling water and sanitation issues assisting the community towards self-management.

### **Conservation and recharge**

The finiteness of water availability was a constant message of the project. The community was encouraged to take up ground water recharge activities including revival of traditional water bodies as a first step to revisit historical practices of community living and sharing of scarce resources. Water balance studies informing the status of water availability at micro level, for the village, was carried out in all the 145 village panchayats and shared with the community. The community also participated in the physical implementation of 45 ground water recharge schemes. In all the project villages special Grama Sabhas were convened on October 2<sup>nd</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> January to take up cleaning and revival of traditional water bodies.

## **The Journey Continues... Next steps**

The encouraging response to the various change projects initiated by the CMG and other members of TWAD and the gradually evolving external support for the efforts of the CMG led the CMG to prepare for the second year of the larger transformation exercise: to institutionalize change management within the practice and praxis of the organisation and to begin the process of exploring issues impacting on working relationships, work culture and performance within the organisation.

### **Daring to dream!**

An intrinsic issue, which was taken up, was evolving a common vision for themselves and the organisation. Apart from the values that they believed in for themselves, CMG members began the process of collectively sharing their dreams for their organisation and their work. Out of this process emerged the vision for the organisation.

### **OUR DREAM, OUR VISION**

#### **Secure Water for all, forever**

- Conservation of nature as a guarantee for future water
- Vibrant, revived and recharged water bodies
- Assured, equitable and sustainable water for all
- Successful community managed water supply system through active participation including women and poor
- Safe disposal of solid and liquid waste for clean and healthy environment
- Cost effective technology options to ensure local maintenance and sustainable financial management.
- Formation of Common Water Regulatory Authority for judicious use of water for all sectors.

The vision as drafted was shared throughout the organisation at the district and field level and was endorsed on World Water Day 2005 by the organisation and policy makers. It was also shared with the community in the 145 project village panchayats.

### **Towards Total Community Water Management**

To breathe life and to give concrete shape to the vision, the CMG has taken up a community-based project in about 100 villages across the State. As a first step towards achieving the dream, it was decided to implement a time bound project to test out some of the essential learnings of the various change efforts initiated. Out of this process emerged the community based project titled, '**Total Community Water Management**'(TCWM). The essential ingredients of the TCWM project are outlined below:

Encompassing the Vision, CMG set itself to work with the community towards:

- improved systems and system management for better service delivery
- protecting and improving the source potentiality
- revival of all traditional water bodies for other uses and recharge
- ensuring equitable water supply especially to weaker sections
- creating a clean environment in the village
- regular dis-infection practice and periodical water quality testing
- better O&M practice for low user cost
- judicious use of scarce water and to undertake
- conservation measures
- practice of waste water reuse and recycling
- consensus in Gram Sabha regarding regulatory measures
- "Reaching the Unreached"

## Outcomes so far

**Conservation-** Tree Planting has been taken up in schools, in backyards, along streets by the Community in 110 Village. Resolution to adopt a tree per child.

**Revival of Traditional sources** – About 140 Water bodies- like ponds, tanks, feeding channels have been revived through community with provision for subsequent protection and self management. Grama shaba resolution banning defecation or spoiling of water bodies.

**Assured equitable water supply** – In 116 Villages, improvement in water supply system undertaken to ensure equitable and regular water supply.

**Self Management** - By optimizing the pumping hours and supply hours to the actual requirement, O & M expenditure has been reduced from 10% to 30%, making self management feasible.

**Safe disposal of waste-** In about 80 villages, solid waste are being segregated as degradable and non-degradable and disposed in common compost yard or at household level. Soak pits at household level have been constructed in about 50 villages

**Institutional Building** – Village Management Committees and user groups formed in all the villages with roles as varied as environment protection, water conservation and recharge or supply management.

**Demand Management** - Water Balance Studies were carried out in all the 472 villages and shared with a community. Discussion are on, on conservation and reallocation of water amongst various sectors at village level.

**Roof and Rain Water Harvesting** – Under directions from the Government a special drive has been taken up. 90% of all rural houses (covering 8 million houses) an all public and commercial buildings through public participation and funding (of up to \$ 60 million), a true miracle which the whole country is now emulating.

All the above activities were done by the community with no investment from the Government.

## Conclusion

The experience in the “democratization of water management project” have thrown up lot of learnings for the policy makers, the organization as well as for the individuals involved in the project. The experiences would normally enter into the organization’s oral lore following the oral tradition of India. We have sought to capture the experiences of change not merely to record the history but also as a means to help others learn from our experiences.

The Change Management Group (CMG), the offshoot of this change process has attempted to bring these field level change processes into the formal organisational memory by documenting the varied experiences and outcomes of the change process. It may be important to stress at this point that these are just glimpses of the plethora of issues which have been thrown up by this churning at the field level. All the same this is a very important document for those who will follow. Through this document we seek to share not only our experiences but to invite you to join our journey to Democratise Water Management and improve delivery systems in critical sectors across the globe.