

## *Who's Water? Learning from Public-'Private' Partnerships in Gujarat*

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### **Introduction**

Collaboration is increasingly seen as the sine qua non for achieving synergy between different stakeholders in the water and sanitation sector (WSSCC 2000). While such collaboration can take many different forms, both formal (legal) and informal, it is essentially, perhaps naively, based on certain principles, which recognise the complementary roles, rather than conflicting interests, of different partners and the plurality of approaches. In addition, effective collaboration needs timely communication, transparency of information and mechanisms that enable participatory decision-making. Partnerships are one form of collaborative engagement in the water sector (Evans et al. 2004) and public-private partnerships (PPP) are typically seen to involve a public, i.e. government agency such as the local municipality and the private sector, for example a water company in the planning, management and delivery of (paid) water services.<sup>37</sup>

In this paper we look at the term 'private' differently in that it defines a community of water users, private citizens facilitated by civil society organizations (CSOs) to form community water institutions through which they can collectively managed their water resources and delivery services. Arguably, we could define this as a public-public partnership, but the scope of this PPP is located in the financial rationality of a market approach rather than in the empowering principles of citizens' (democratic) action for better water governance. Launched in 1997, the Ghogha Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project (GRWSSP) in coastal south Gujarat, India is a partnership of more than 10 organisations, including three NGOs, coordinated by the quasi-autonomous Water and Sanitation Management Organisation (WASMO). While the GRWSSP is defined as a 'third generation' Dutch-supported bilateral project<sup>38</sup> seeking to build community capacity to develop and manage local water resources, supply systems and sanitation services, WASMO looks at partnership as 'contribution' enjoining citizens to join the state government in providing better quality water infrastructure through:

- Contributing to the costs of water supply (user fees) and operation and maintenance (O&M) of systems
- Sharing capital costs for in-situ village water supply systems as well as, where appropriate, water treatment plants and regional water supply schemes

Nowhere in the WASMO information brochure on building partnerships (Government of Gujarat, GoG 2004) does the objective of collaboration go beyond the narrow instrumentality, important as it may be, of financing water systems and services: "All of us have always been *receivers*. Now the time has come to *pay back* to the society," (Ibid, emphasis added). Such an approach undermines the very purpose of collaboration and partnership building as an empowering process, raising questions on the efficacy and sustainability of community institutions designed to run, manage and maintain local water supply systems once facilitating organisations (the state, NGOs) effectively withdraw. Drawing on a recent assessment of the GRWSSP for the Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE) in which both the authors were involved, this paper argues that multi-stakeholder collaborations require flexibility and

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<sup>37</sup> There is a vast literature on the positive and negative aspects of PPPs in the water and sanitation sector which is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>38</sup> First and second generation projects were still supply-driven and involved NGOs and CBOs only to a limited extent. The GRWSSP is the first demand-responsive project under the water sector reforms.

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must provide for shared learning spaces, which go beyond the typical reporting of ‘problems’ to evolve a more contextualised and nuanced understanding of water governance (Reynders et al. 2004).<sup>39</sup>

## State-Civil Society Collaborations around Water in Gujarat

Water is a state subject in India, that is, while the central government (Government of India, GoI) provides a broad framework for managing the nation’s water resources in which drinking water is accorded priority (the first charge), it is the state-level government, which is responsible for planning and allocating scarce water resources between competing sectors and users. In line with the global discourse on water management, both the GoI and the GoG recognize that the delivery of water can no longer be seen as a free service to be provided by the government. Sector reforms introduced in 1998-99 as part of the overall mandate on structural change are based on the following principles:

- The need for **restructuring of institutions**: the state as promoter and facilitator of water resource development.
- **Financial efficiency** in relation to water use and provision through **cost recovery** from users (demand management): water is no longer a free good.
- Decision-making at the lowest appropriate level: **community participation** and **decentralised management** as the key to sustainable services and equitable distribution.

The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments (1993) under which Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) were restructured gave these local governing bodies the added responsibility for water supply and sanitation.<sup>40</sup> Public health engineering departments and state water boards, which had been driving the centralist, approach to water supply since independence, were considered monopolistic, overstaffed and lacking accountability to users, especially the poor, marginalised groups and women. PRIs were expected to be responsible for the choice of technology, recovery of operating costs and the maintenance of village water supply and sanitation schemes through elected *pani samitis* (water committees).

The Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) for the first time called for people’s participation at all stages of project implementation right from the selection of technological options to implementation and maintenance.<sup>41</sup> However, both the National Water Policy (2002) and the draft Gujarat Water Policy (2004) look at communities as homogenous categories. Although drinking water needs of ‘human beings’ and animals are re-asserted as the first charge for any available water, the question of equity (i.e. *who has access to how much water, when, for what?*) is not addressed. Special attention is to be focused on the needs of marginal groups when developing water projects, but the ‘disadvantaged’ are only broadly identified as scheduled tribes and castes and gender is not considered as a category of social stratification or exclusion *within* these marginalized communities.<sup>42</sup> Written in the framework of demand management, the policy regards the household as a unitary category, overlooking questions of *who pays* for water, not simply in financial terms, but also recognising women’s unpaid time and her ability to access productive opportunities (social and transactional costs).

Established in 1978, the Gujarat Water Supply and Sewerage Board (GWSSB) is the nodal agency responsible for the provision of water in rural areas and small towns according to government norms.<sup>43</sup> While the Board has several inherent structural limitations it has over the years initiated some consultative processes with CSOs such as the Gujarat Jal-Disha or Water Vision 2010 (Ahmed 2002). However, although NGOs in Gujarat have traditionally enjoyed greater political space than in other states, the current right-wing government known for its abuse of human rights has made it increasingly

<sup>39</sup> The views expressed here do not necessarily represent the views of all team members.

<sup>40</sup> PRIs are essentially a three-tier system of local, elected and representative governance – the village level *panchayat*, the block level, *taluka panchayat* (a cluster of villages), and the district level, *zilla panchayat*.

<sup>41</sup> Development has been a planned process in India since independence – both central and state governments prepare five year or annual plans allocating resources based on socio-economic and political criteria.

<sup>42</sup> Scheduled castes and tribes are administrative categories recognized by the Indian Constitution allowing the state to address social inequalities through positive discrimination measures.

<sup>43</sup> These include 40 litres per capita per day in rural areas, 70 lpcd in arid regions to account for livestock use, and 110 lpcd for towns without sewerage and 120 lpcd for towns with sewerage facilities.

difficult for some organisations to participate in collaborative water initiatives and the GRWSSP is no exception.

## The Ghogha Project: Objectives, History and Strategy

*“The overall purpose of the project is to develop, integrating with water resources management, the improved, safe, reliable and sustainable drinking water and environmental sanitation provisions in 81 villages and 1 town of Bhavnagar district in Gujarat, where facilities will be community owned and managed through the local pani-samitis,” (from Amendment to Grant Agreement, dated 2 December 2002).*

The Ghogha project was originally designed (1994) as a conventional rural piped water supply scheme, drawing water from the Shetrunji Reservoir<sup>44</sup>, to be implemented under GWSSB management. Considerations of lessons from past projects (first and second generation Dutch bilateral aid programmes) and a feasibility study, which suggested that the pipeline was untenable, led to a demand-responsive approach: the building of local institutional capacities to set up and manage local piped water supply systems, based on improved local water resources. Under the new project design formalised in 1997 external piped water would only be provided to no-source villages.

Three NGOs were invited to facilitate community capacity building and with the support of Dutch technical assistance (IWACO), undertook participatory appraisals on water related issues and the socio-economic context (demand assessment, willingness and capacity to pay). Pilot water resource management projects were then designed based on local need assessments and pani samitis as well as other groups (women’s self help groups, SHGs) were initiated. However, participatory approaches though recognised as integral to project objectives, were reduced to people’s co-operation and agreement to bureaucratic plans. NGOs were seen as sub-contractors in this process of attitudinal change (the project agreement defines them as ISAs – implementing support agencies) and they had little autonomy partly because of their financial dependence and monitoring by donors.

On the other hand, little progress was made in the implementation of hardware activities as the GWSSB was not interested in the new approach, wherein no major external engineering works were to be undertaken. Instead, GWSSB surveyed ground water potential in the area in such a way to prove the infeasibility of the proposed local source-based project so that it could promote the large-scale and politically desirable Mahi pipeline already coming to the region (from the Narmada River). Subtle pressure was put on the Dutch government to support the Mahi pipeline: GoG indicated that two consecutive drought years in the project area had shown that ‘the local sources do not hold promise’. The Dutch government ultimately accepted the incorporation and partial financing of the Mahi pipeline system, making the Ghogha project a dual source project. The overriding focus on water supply as a means of addressing health and hygiene issues without looking at sustainability that is, water resource management from the inception was one of the main limitations of a project implemented in a drought-prone region.

In 2002, WASMO was formed with partial support from the RNE, to operate independently from GWSSB and to involve CSOs and water professionals in its steering committee. Essentially WASMO was thought of as a ‘learning organisation’ which would actively “promote new mind-sets capable of a genuine paradigm shift in the sector. Communication skills and human resource development opportunities within WASMO will therefore be critical...in encouraging all stakeholders...to accept new roles and responsibilities upon which change now depends,” (GSDWICL 2000: 81, abridged).<sup>45</sup>

A revised project agreement was approved in 2002 with WASMO as the lead agency. While there was little change in the institutional structure of the GRWSSP, pani samitis with adequate/proven capacity were now given additional responsibilities: they could manage or undertake the construction of

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<sup>44</sup> The Shetrunji River is the second largest river in peninsular Gujarat.

<sup>45</sup> It was intended that WASMO would take the lessons from the Ghogha project and extend these to the wider context of sector reforms in Gujarat, i.e. support demand-responsive water management through community institution facilitated by NGOs and without the bureaucratic procedures of the GWSSB.

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village-level systems, rather than only allocating this task to private contractors as in the earlier phase.<sup>46</sup> They would also be responsible for water resources management interventions (e.g. check-dams) and collecting community contributions as well as the operation and maintenance (O&M) of all village installations after the official 'handing-over' of all assets to the village.

## **The Ghogha Project: social context and institutional practice**

The total Ghogha project area of 81 villages and the old port town of Ghogha, from which the project derives its name covers a population of about 200,000 (Census 2001) in Bhavnagar district. Communities are predominantly Hindu, the district sex ratio of 936, like the state's and the country, is biased against women and rural female literacy rates are also low (about 30-40% compared to male literacy rates of 50-70%). Although Bhavnagar is not a poor district relative to other parts of Gujarat, the excessive withdrawal of water for agriculture, water-logging and saline intrusion in coastal villages, coupled with erratic rainfall in recent years has led to water scarcity, deprivation, competition and conflict, often violent. Most farmers can only manage 1-2 crops in the year and seasonal male migration to diamond polishing units or the ship-breaking yard at Alang is common. Women bear the drudgery of water collection and ensuring household food security in a social context where patriarchy and masculinity are strongly embedded.

The GRWSSP package involves the pumping of water from a local built/improved/regenerated source (well, bore well) in 53 villages or the delivery of water through connections to the Mahi pipeline in no-source villages.<sup>47</sup> In both cases, water is first stored in an underground sump and then pumped (when there is electricity) to a smaller, elevated overhead tank where it is treated (chlorinated only) and then distributed, through gravitational flow, to the various village infrastructure: community standposts, household connections (limited), cattle troughs, bathing and washing places for women and school sanitation blocks. Drainage (soak pits), environmental and household sanitation as well as hygiene awareness are other aspects of the project.

While the project evaluation, which this paper draws from assessed many aspects of the GRWSSP, for example the technical quality and sustainability of village water supply works, we would like to focus on social and institutional aspects underlying collective action and collaboration at, (i) the community level and (ii) the overall project partnership with implications for technological choice, knowledge dissemination and shared learning.

## ***Pani samitis*: formation, functioning and social inclusion**

Historically, rural communities in Gujarat were responsible for the development and maintenance of local water sources such as tanks, ponds and wells. However, the indiscriminate exploitation of water for irrigation under the 'green revolution' agricultural strategy and the increasing identification of the state as water provider (pipelines and tankers for drought relief) led to the alienation of communities from the management of their water resources. This, in turn, has impacted on access to water (availability, affordability) by the poor, vulnerable groups and women. It is in this context that building community capacity for and 'ownership' of local water resources becomes critical to ensure sustainability, equity and water security.

*Pani samitis* as a sub-committee of the village *panchayat* were first constituted under the Gujarat government resolution of 1995 and then reconstituted in 2002 with clear guidelines on the number of women members (one-third of the 10-12 members) and representative inclusion of marginalised groups. While each *samiti* can co-opt interested community members (e.g. local teacher, health

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<sup>46</sup> It took *pani samitis* almost two years through repeated demonstrations and confrontations to convince the Ghogha bureaucracy that they were capable community water managers (see Ahmed 2005).

<sup>47</sup> Local source villages will also have access to the Mahi system through a valved second supply pipe to the same sump, but water will only be delivered after signing an agreement with the provider and paying the required charges. Although the government is working on a realistic pricing policy, villages consider the Mahi water too expensive compared to the local source, but an alternative in the summer months when these tend to dry up.

worker) they are compelled to include at least 4-5 members from the ruling *panchayat*, including the deputy leader. Each *samiti* works under the administrative control of the Block Development Office and the technical guidance of the local GWSSB engineer, and has to maintain minutes and records (quantum of water pumped, salaries paid, user fees collected, etc.).

Focus group discussions with *samitis* in most of the 19 villages visited during the assessment revealed that members were aware of their roles and the objectives of the *samiti*, but frequency and regularity of meetings varied greatly. Although most *samitis* try to hold monthly meetings, in a couple of villages these were bi-monthly and the rest acknowledged that meetings were held as and when necessary – when there were O&M contributions to be collected, conflicts to be resolved or technical problems to attend to.

Caste differences and the political power of vested interests have also affected the functioning of some *pani samitis*. For example, when *samitis* were made responsible for supervising water supply works, conflict over *who* at the village level should get the contractors' job, often delayed the start of work. There are also equity issues in terms of access to water and distribution: there are separate standposts in the hamlets, where the scheduled castes (SCs) live<sup>48</sup>. Though most reported that they were getting water according to planned timings, in some cases the number of standposts/taps in relation to the population residing in the area was not sufficient, 'water queues' were common, and the pressure of water was low since the SC hamlets are usually situated at the far end of the village, away from the overhead tank. SC and other poor households cannot afford private connections, nor do they have the space for water storage facilities.<sup>49</sup>

While most *samiti* members have had pre- and post-construction training on the quality of construction work, guidelines for monitoring the same and so on, there has been limited organisational development on technical, financial and management issues or social perspectives (gender and equity in water management). This has a direct bearing on the collection of O&M contributions and other water charges as well as women's participation in decision-making.

### ***Pani samitis*: managing O&M contributions and financial sustainability**

Perhaps the biggest challenge for the *samitis* and the facilitating NGOs has been O&M collection – a prerequisite under the project terms before the start of village water works. Calculated on an annual basis as a percentage of the capital costs (10%) and recurring maintenance estimates, the first half of O&M contributions are meant to be deposited in a *samiti* bank account opened for this specific purpose. It is up to the *samitis* to decide whether to levy the annual O&M on a per capita or per household basis and decide the frequency of collection – monthly, quarterly or otherwise. The evaluation found that 65 percent of the 81 project villages had yet to attain the minimum prerequisite of 50 percent O&M contributions even seven years after the project inception in 1997.

One of the reasons attributed is the mismatch between O&M collection and the delayed start of physical work or slow progress, which made it difficult for the *samitis* to continue collecting water fees as most users did not see any tangible benefits. In some villages O&M funds had been embezzled by corrupt *samiti* members, while in others there were objections to the underlying costs rationale. Poverty was not necessarily the main reason for unwillingness to pay – spatial differences also have an impact on access. For example, the SCs are typically tail-enders in the system and receive less water because of low pressure even though they have their own standposts. In addition, many farmers live on their farms – with their own water sources – during the agricultural season, physically away from the village and its water supply and hence, are reluctant to contribute to a system where they see only partial benefits.

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<sup>48</sup> For reasons of ritual pollution, dominant castes in many villages do not allow SCs to take water from common sources.

<sup>49</sup> In some villages, better-off households have underground tanks with a storage capacity of 10-15,000 litres which they can fill when water is available. Only one village visited had evolved a system of fines if a household was found to be using a pump on their private connection to extract more water to fill their tank.

While it is important that *samitis* have employed flexibility in O&M collection, there is little flexibility or transparency in the calculation and management of contributions, a process determined by WASMO's local Community Management and Support Unit (CMSU) and facilitated by NGOs. Many *samitis* feel that instead of calculating O&M based on contractors/paid labour rates, they would be able to manage O&M at much lower rates, using local even partial voluntary labour, as and when the need would arise.<sup>50</sup> Trust in the process of construction of water supply works and the regularity of water delivery would also ease fund collection.

## Facilitating women's participation

Gender discrimination, patterns of female seclusion (*purdah*) amongst the upper castes and a strongly patriarchal culture restrict active female participation. Low rates of female literacy also constrain women's ability as *samiti* members to deal with paper work (recording of minutes and resolutions, account books). In some villages women claimed that they could only attend meetings if they were informed by the *samiti* president and that if they had other household-work or family responsibilities they often could not attend. Where upper caste women were leaders of their *samiti* and/or the village *panchayat*, social norms (restricted mobility) compelled them to virtually hand-over all leadership roles to their husbands. On average it is older women who are somewhat more active members of the *pani samitis* since the practice of *purdah* is not so restrictive for them and they have more time (less household chores) to participate.

The strength of women's participation is directly linked to the role of the NGOs. Gender-aware NGOs such as Utthan, with strong leadership committed to transformatory change and supported by a field team, which is not only gender sensitive but also includes women members have been better able to mobilise women's participation (Ahmed 2005). But the process has been slow and has often necessitated the separate organisation of women, for example in self help groups, which provide a safe (culturally acceptable) space for the discussion of issues that touch upon critical dimensions of women's empowerment. SHGs have also provided a forum for the discussion of hygiene and sanitation and more recently, for the promotion of loans for sanitation through a revolving fund.<sup>51</sup>

## Institutional collaboration: a marriage of convenience?

In the typical traditions of an Indian arranged marriage and the nuances of a joint or extended family the institutional alliance underlying the Ghogha project can be described as "a marriage of convenience". The GRWSSP was conceived as an innovative approach seeking to enable rural communities to design and manage their community water systems in an institutional framework which was meant to support learning. However, despite some elements of innovativeness (for example, allowing *samitis* to be responsible for village water works under the 2002 project resolution), the GRWSSP has for the most part been reduced to that infamous syndrome, 'old wine in a new bottle.'

The GRWSSP 'family tree' involves donors, implementing agencies, service providers, facilitating organisations, community institutions and diverse groups of water users all coming together under the same 'canopy' (project objectives) but with poor connectors or, in the metaphor of a tree, supporting branches. That is, inter and intra-agency coordination and communication so important for building commitment and ensuring cooperation was either lacking, or was largely seen as top-down rather than lateral or bottom-up sharing of information. Ideological differences on how and by whom water as a common, scarce resource should be managed, despite the paradigm shift towards decentralisation, are

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<sup>50</sup> Whereas the logic of the *samiti* that the need for water would urge members of the community to contribute easier in case of a breakdown of the system is appreciated, existing social differences still call for a minimum reserve fund for O&M. One village had an un-operative system as there were not enough contributions to buy a new pump, while powerful people had their own water source.

<sup>51</sup> Sanitation has been one of the weakest links in the entire project partly because of the overriding emphasis on water delivery and little attention to the socio-cultural context underlying hygiene practices.

strongly embedded in organisational culture, attitudes, values of staff and often even at the community level (“the government is responsible”).

Capacity building was seen as essential for local communities and NGOs, but not necessarily for the technical implementing agencies, yet a change in perspective and practice requires strong leadership that demonstrates sensitivity to gender, social inclusion and participatory decision-making. Thus, while WASMO was the main driver of the GRWSSP after 2002 because of the urgency to meet project deadlines, there is little evidence that the leadership could provide the transformatory vision necessary to meet project goals of empowered, self-reliant water committees. Instead WASMO and the CMSU have had rapid staff turnover, particularly of personnel trained on social aspects in Dutch institutes, and poor gender parity. The recent appointment of a woman as project leader of CMSU has not facilitated gender mainstreaming (as naively anticipated by the WASMO leadership) because of the overall hierarchal organisational culture, which does not support a team approach to *hard* ‘software’ issues.

Partner NGOs have limited engineering skills to support community implementation and constant conflicts over organisational terrain or responsibilities (with GWSSB or external engineers) have undermined both the scope and timely completion of work, especially on water resources management. However, NGOs were able to negotiate some changes in the project design albeit belatedly, for example, the enhanced role for *pani samitis* and the recognition that the development and conservation of local water resources is critical to ensure sustainability of water supply systems in a drought prone region.

Process documentation and the creation of shared learning spaces has been nominal in an institutional alliance from which there is so much to learn in terms of replication. WASMO maintains that it is using the ‘learning’ from the GRWSSP for its water and sanitation partnership in earthquake affected regions of Kutch, but it is unclear what this learning is that is being transferred given the lack of documentation (e.g. case studies). In the first phase of the project the RNE and the Dutch support agency, IWACO, facilitated workshops to build conceptual understanding and analytical tools amongst all partners (WASMO 2001). Ironically with the transition to WASMO, designed as a learning organisation, all learning stopped with the overriding focus on meeting project targets and producing monitoring reports.

## Lessons learned

In sum, though slow in implementation and with physical, financial and process constraints, the Ghogha project approach has at least demonstrated that the state can work in partnership with citizens and communities, but that this partnership needs the sustained support of gender aware and social justice motivated civil society organisations and individuals. Better listening skills and more frequent communication between the different agencies involved would have increased community confidence in the project, speeded up progress of physical works and facilitated collection of contributions. While external consultants, including the Dutch Royal Haskoning group, are supporting some of the communication, documentation, technical and institution building initiatives (for GRWSSP, sector reforms and the Kutch rehabilitation project), basic principles and perspectives need to be internalised by all partners and cannot simply be ‘engineered’ by outsiders and advisors.

That the project has had an impact on the availability of water and on sanitation and hygiene practices is best described by women themselves: one woman leader maintained that the project had added five years to her life (Monghiben at a focus group discussion in Neswad village, November 2004). In some villages, women reported that water consumption had increased by nearly 50 percent, there was a visible drop in skin diseases and in the level of diarrhoea, attendance of girls in schools had increased and they had more time for productive work, caring for the sick and elderly and socialising. Such positive impacts need more rigorous assessment as they were largely visible only in villages where *pani samitis* were functioning regularly and women’s groups were strong.

In this context, limited attempts by one of the NGOs to federate *pani samitis* into a larger institutional structure, which can negotiate conflicts and inter and intra-village resource allocation is an important beginning, as augmented water resources have to be managed holistically and in conjunction with other livelihood needs. However, such a federated structure needs to be sensitive to social inclusion and gender and must operate with clearly mandated principles on water rights and entitlements recognising the first priority to domestic water needs and sanitation.

## Beyond Ghogha: Scaling-up and replication<sup>52</sup>

Today WASMO's role in the water and sanitation sector in Gujarat is clearly recognised as being able to aptly, albeit top-down and hierarchical at times, drive the agenda on demand-responsive, decentralised water management initiatives. WASMO is now the lead agency for supporting sector reforms, particularly large programs such as Swajaldhara and has the ability to facilitate partnerships between a wide variety of actors in the sector (professionals, technical consultants, NGOs and community institutions). That the partnership agenda is still largely determined by WASMO is not surprising as it has the resources (financial, human) as well as leadership support (from the state's chief minister), raising questions of 'autonomy' which need to be explored.<sup>53</sup>

The most significant project where WASMO sees the lessons of Ghogha being implemented is the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation (ERR) project initiated in 2003 in three districts of northern Gujarat affected by the 2001 earthquake with financial support from the RNE and the Centre. Perspectives on partnerships were developed through capacity building workshops with all 28 partners NGOs (still referred to as ISAs!) focussing on team-building, role clarity and shared responsibilities deriving from complementary skills. Perhaps the most important learning at the community level is the strong focus on water quality surveillance with *pani samitis* provided with need-based water testing kits and trained to run indicative water quality tests supported by the development of district water quality testing labs.

There is also an 'evolved approach' to community contributions which allows communities to determine their own O&M systems based on a realistic listing of all O&M activities and expected costs rather than prescribing them according to government norms. Attempts are being made to ascertain that all village-level resolutions come from an empowered *gram sabha* (village general body) rather than only the *pani samiti*, and that bureaucratic procedure is streamlined to ensure efficiency in planning and fund disbursement. For example, all decisions regarding material procurement, etc. are made at the community level with the *pani samitis* and in the presence of one member from the WASMO district office as well as the concerned NGO. Senior officials in WASMO claim that they have tried to isolate corruption – kept away all local political interests – but some critics feel that the local scrutiny mechanisms provide scope for personal gain. In sum while there are a lot of positive changes that are being implemented in the ERR according to the WASMO team leaders these still need to be objectively assessed.

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<sup>52</sup> This postscript is based on discussions with senior leaders in WASMO only and not from field insight.

<sup>53</sup> WASMO defines itself as an autonomous organization but this autonomy is largely from the bureaucratic GWSSB and not necessarily from the power or policies of the state.

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