

Community Partnership in Irrigation: A Study of Nira Deoghar Project in Maharashtra

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Scope of community partnership in irrigation is an emerging area of research in Maharashtra. It is difficult to complete the ongoing irrigation projects with government funding. Private sector is unwilling to join hands with the government due to stringent regulations. The paper raises the issue of completing Nira Deoghar Irrigation Project, major irrigation project in Pune District, by community partnership. It is based on a primary survey and Focus Group Discussions. The difference in the average area under crop and expenditure made to avail the irrigation facility is tested between two talukas. The impact of membership of Self-help Groups and Water Users' Associations on the farmers' willingness to contribute towards the capital cost has been tested with the help of a logistic model.

I Introduction

Irrigation increases farm intensity and thereby raises labour demand. At the same time, it plays a role in food security, poverty alleviation and improvement in economic condition. Availability of water is crucial for creating an efficient irrigation system. Scope for expansion of agricultural land is limited and so improvement in productivity through modernized, efficient and intensive irrigation is needed.

Irrigation sector is facing multifold challenges of finance and asset management. The budget provided for this sector is meagre and with the available government funding it is almost impossible to complete the ongoing irrigation projects. Various options including Public Private Partnership (PPP) have been explored by the Government of Maharashtra (GoM) to arrange requisite funds for the irrigation sector. However, the efforts (in 2003) had proved futile given the reluctance of private players to get involved in irrigation sector.¹ The privatization of the Nira project, a major irrigation undertaking, was initiated by the Maharashtra Krishna Valley Development Corporation (MKVDC),² Maharashtra, which set the policy and terms for privatization of irrigation projects. It was successfully challenged by a non-governmental

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