

Social Issues of Reconstruction

Beneficiary Participation in Construction

Observation

- *Based on some of the initial surveys conducted, the participation of the beneficiaries in the construction process ensured satisfaction with construction quality. Mobilizing such participation was an explicit goal of the Reconstruction, Repair and Strengthening Program (RRSP), while for many reasons such direct participation in the construction process was not a goal in the relocation villages.*

Discussion

Community participation was an important component of the project from its inception, both in the relocation villages and in the Reconstruction, Repair, and Strengthening Program (RRSP). Different community participation consultants were engaged to handle participation in each component (see TISS, 1997 and SPARC, 1998). In the relocation villages, a village level committee (VLC) was established as the vehicle for participation. This committee reflected the collective interests of the village, as well as the power structure and community alignments existing in each village (Vatsa, 1999). The initial outline of the community participation approach in the relocation villages specified that the views of all sections of a community were to be considered. The World Bank urged the GOM to share all its early policy decisions with the people, partly through the issuance of Government Resolutions (GRs). These GRs were to be issued to all the NGOs, the government staff in the field, and the Sarpanches (village mayors). In turn, they were expected to share these resolutions with all the various groups identified in the villages and to discuss with people the meaning of each of these decisions.

Because of time constraints imposed by the emergency nature of the project, the massive scale of rebuilding required, the fact that it was a grant program, and the psychological state of the traumatized villagers, the GOM and NGOs managed the entire construction program in the relocation villages.

The beneficiaries were not directly involved in the actual construction in their villages. They did play an important role, however, in selecting sites, house types, layouts for their villages, location of amenities, bifurcation of villages on communal/caste grounds, allocation of houses, and inspection and supervision of construction. To help encourage participation, community participation consultants were brought in to work with the engineering consultants and contractors to help explain the program to potential beneficiaries. Their role was to ensure beneficiary participation in policy formulation and planning options and strategies (TISS, 1997). The use of community participation consultants was new to the GOM, and their role evolved over the three years of involvement. Complicating their involvement was the fact that they were brought into the process after many policy decisions had been made by the PMU and district officials. However, as noted by the GOM in a progress report in June 1996 (GOM, 1996b), these consultants were in the field regularly to disseminate information to the villagers about the program. Specific activities included:

- Assisting the GOM in conflict resolution issues such as plot allotment, finalization of the beneficiary list, and forwarding problem-specific recommendations to the district and state level.
- Maintaining periodic contact in all the relocated villages and identifying key issues and problems in each village such as the quality of construction and the availability of basic amenities like drinking water.
- Planning for a follow-up training program for VLCs and women members of the Gram Panchayat (village council), Talathis (Revenue Department official at village level), and NGOs.
- Enhancing community participation in demonstration villages.
- Acting as liaison with the PMU on NGOs' involvement in MEERP.
- Coordinating with the local NGOs to empower the Mahila Mandals (community-based organizations) in the village.



Figure 46 Beneficiaries participated in the construction in the repair and strengthening villages. Here they are curing masonry by hand-pouring water from containers.

- Addressing specific issues of social and economic development like smokeless chulhas (ovens), social forestry (villagers planting trees on nonforest land and other public spaces), and savings groups in the demonstration villages.
- Observing and providing feedback to the PMU on the nature of social adjustments in the relocation villages.

As noted by one official involved in the program, the problems that arose with community participation in the relocation villages were related to the occasional abuse of power on the part of a handful of community leaders. Village leaders, including the Sarpanch (mayor) sometimes used their influence to condemn the quality of housing, to obstruct contractors, to damage houses, to demand changes of beneficiary

lists, to demand additional houses, or to hold up the allocation of houses (Godavitarne, 1999).

In contrast to the relocation villages, beneficiaries directly managed the construction process in the RRSP. Because the repair and strengthening villages did not have the universal coverage of entitlement that the relocation villages did, the challenge with this component was to convince villagers to participate. It took time to mobilize and motivate beneficiaries, and to develop, test, and modify the strategies that proved most successful in encouraging participation. Participation evolved slowly, but as awareness about the entitlements and the owner-driven program spread, villagers, particularly women, came forward to participate en masse (Vatsa, 1999) (Figure 46).

A fairly elaborate plan for encouraging participation was developed. A number of different individuals were involved at the village level, including the house owner, the JE, personnel from the PMU, the Gram Panchayat, (village council) the village-level committee (created for this MEERP project), Revenue Department officials at the district level (collector and others), and the community participation consultants.

Homeowners made the decision about the construction option—repair and strengthening or reconstruction. They were given cash through bank checks and building materials through coupons that could be exchanged at material depots. They were encouraged to contribute labor, advance money for materials, supervise masons, and ensure the earthquake safety of houses.

The state government organized building materials at below-market prices and provided financial and technical assistance. The government created village-level committees to facilitate the reconstruction program. The Sarpanchs or chairperson of the Gram Panchayat (village council) headed these committees. Their intention was to create “collective purchasing committees, provide information, and entuse house owners to contribute labor, finance, and supervise houses” (SPARC-SSP, 1998, 3). The Gram Panchayats negotiated with officials to obtain resources and to standardize practices related to documents and land. Samvad Sahayaks (village communication assistants) and Mahila Mandals (village-based organizations with women members) assumed the task of monitoring homeowners and interacted with officials on the program implementation.

While the success of the approach to community participation and information dissemination in the relocation villages and the RRSP villages will be determined when the various evaluation studies are completed, early indications are that the program design was only partially successful in the relocation villages. The draft report prepared by the Center of Studies in Social Sciences indicates that in the relocation villages there is an increasing level of dependence of villagers on the government and other agencies. The report states:

...The disadvantages of this dependence are seen in the general level of apathy in doing the work themselves, in reduced cooperation and in

lack of unity. The future efforts in the newly relocated villages should be directed towards increasing the community involvement in enriching the level of living in these settlements. The involvement of women in Mahila Kendras [women-owned centers] could be a starting point in this direction. Strengthening of Gram Sabhas [plenary village meetings] should also become a subject of attention for the future (CSSS, 1998).

The community participation consultants in the relocation villages expressed a certain level of frustration with the process, since the government was new to the idea of community participation and unclear about its role (TISS, 1997). In their final report they note that:

When the socioeconomic indicators were field-tested in various villages in order to see the extent of citizen participation in planning, distribution, training and follow-up of the packages, it was observed that most of the critical decisions were taken at the state level and did not involve the beneficiaries. Mechanisms to involve them were inadequate (TISS, 1997).

The program was structured in such a way that in the relocation villages there were fewer opportunities for direct participation on the part of beneficiaries. In contrast, in the repair and strengthening villages the owner-driven process and the direct participation of owners in construction helped immensely to achieve success. The CSSS study indicated that 99 percent of the respondents in the RRSP villages acted as their own agency for repair/reconstruction. Over half of these respondents reported receiving assistance from the government to guide the households in the repair work; about 40 percent of the households received information from advisory organizations. Over 88 percent reported receiving guidance about earthquake-resistant technology, in almost all cases from a government engineer. Most of these same respondents (94 percent) reported being satisfied with the construction or repairs. Over 90 percent reported making their own contribution of either cash, material, or labor, in addition to the assistance received from the government (CSSS, 1998).

Role of Women and Community Organizations

Observations

- *A major innovation of this project was its emphasis on empowering women. A number of programs were developed with a particular focus on women.*
- *The project initially had difficulty encouraging beneficiaries to participate in the RRSP. It ultimately took off when the GOM and the community participation consultants used women's groups and community-based organizations to communicate with the beneficiaries. This strategy was supported by experience in other earthquake rebuilding efforts where existing community-based organizations were more successful in understanding community dynamics and culture and therefore were more effective as organizations involved in recovery at the local level. In particular, the strategy empowered women to be vocal leaders in their communities.*

Discussion

A number of strategies were developed to address the particular needs of women in rebuilding and development. These included:

- For the first time, women were given the right to own property jointly with their husbands. (All houses allotted under MEERP have the joint title of male and female members of the family.)
- Widowed women received houses in the relocation villages.
- Over 1,000 daycares were constructed so women could go out to work.
- Resource centers were set up to train women in various skills.
- Fifty-two community centers were constructed to be used solely by women.
- Women were represented on all the village-level committees.
- A village development fund was set up to encourage women to form savings groups and to borrow funds.



Figure 47 Mahila Mandal supervising the work in a repair and strengthening village.



Figure 48 A group of women Sahayaks with the community participation consultant (left) in the reconstruction, repair and strengthening program in the Kamkheda village, Latur district.

Many women became economically independent through small-scale activities including bangle and basket making, sewing, goat and cow rearing, and managing provisions/grocery stores. The concept of women's self-help groups in the relocation villages proved effective as resource centers for helping each other financially and otherwise for starting small businesses.

After a sluggish start and difficulties in encouraging beneficiaries to participate in the repair and strengthening program, the GOM and its community participation consultants turned to Samvad Sahayaks, village communication assistants, to facilitate communication between the villages and the GOM and to motivate villagers to participate in the repair and strengthening program. Many Samvad Sahayaks were women from the various villages. They were appointed by Mahila Mandals, or village-based organizations, with the oversight of the District Collector and the GOM. Between April 1996 and March 1998, 300 Samvad Sahayaks were appointed in as many villages. Up to that point the Mahila Mandals had not been active in the reconstruction program; rather, they were involved in social and cultural activities, including adult literacy, health programs, and income generating plans (Figure 47).

The strategy of involving women's groups and community-based organizations was very effective

in reaching the villagers and involving them in the reconstruction. With the involvement of the Mahila Mandals, the utilization of the payment installments reached 90 percent in Latur and even higher in the Osmanabad district. "As entire communities and leadership were mobilized to participate, individual house owners, especially women, were motivated. Contributions by individual house owners dramatically increased in terms of cash, labor, recycled materials, and participation in ensuring earthquake resistant features" (SPARC-SSP, 1998, 40).

Initially, it took many meetings and village visits to convince the first batch of 25 Mahila Mandals to appoint women as Sahayaks.

Women were initially ridiculed, "Oh! You have now become an engineer." However, once women got involved, they were quick in negotiating on materials, designs, and matching resources to the type of construction. The Samvad Sahayaks did not waste any time. Immediately after their appointment they conducted a house-to-house survey. Soon enough they knew all the beneficiaries. They met house owners, spoke of construction techniques, negotiated support from the village committees and Gram Panchayats, and demanded accountability from the government Junior Engineers (JE). They attended the meetings with taluka (subdistrict) officials to draw attention to procedural problems (SPARC-SSP, 1998, 33).

Although the use of Samvad Sahayaks was only adopted well into the program in an attempt to encourage more participation and was therefore limited (only 300 were appointed), it does appear that where they were involved, they were able to acquaint people with technology, explain the importance of the technology, and facilitate communication between the JEs and the beneficiaries. Greater recognition and visibility were given to women's participation through involvement of the Mahila Mandals and Samvad Sahayaks. The program clearly established the need for involving women's groups in planning, monitoring, and implementation (Figure 48).

Information Dissemination at the Village Level

Observation

- *The information dissemination and participatory strategies used as part of this program, particularly in the RRSP, had been successful in other types of information campaigns administered by the GOM, such as literacy and health. They were based on techniques the villagers were familiar with and trusted.*

Discussion

A wide range of techniques was used by the GOM, its community participation consultants, and the Samvad Sahayaks and Mahila Mandals to encourage village participation in the program. They thought of themselves as community resource teams, working together and sharing ideas. Some of these techniques included:

- **A variety of information dissemination techniques**, including posters illustrating earthquake-resistant design, audio-visual demonstrations, street theater (Figure 49), guidelines, and facilitators to explain personally the details of the program.
- **Setting up cluster units and collective purchasing committees** to make the purchase of building materials less expensive and to share information easily. People at the cluster level volunteered to supervise construction.
- **Peer learning through melavas** (traditional village get-togethers used for information dissemination). These melavas helped enhance the visibility of Mahila Mandals as agents of village development. Government officials were invited to these melavas, which helped each side understand the strengths and limitations of the other.
- **Widespread information dissemination campaigns**. Techniques included melas (village cultural fairs), exhibitions, posters, workshops with village contact personnel and training of Gram Sevaks (Rural

Development Department official at village level), Sarpanches (mayors), and all elected officials; exhibitions on local market days; jatras and yatras (expeditions on foot covering long distances to temples and places of religious interest) to convey information on the program and to provide education regarding earthquake-resistant construction; and the production of a 15-minute video to motivate homeowners, particularly women, to participate in house reconstruction.

- **Cluster-level dialogue workshops**. These workshops usually involved five to ten villages at a central location and were intended to help the beneficiaries discuss problems that they could not solve within their villages and to give them feedback on their progress. The meetings allowed villagers to compare their progress, problems, and solutions. At the village level, the police patil (an honorary post), Sarpanch, headmaster, and other leaders were present. The collector (county administrator) adopted this idea, called it a circle workshop, and used it for redressing grievances. Banks were also included in these meetings.
- **Construction supervision workshops for Mahila Mandals and village volunteers**. They, in turn, educated homeowners on technical aspects of construction. According to an evalua-



Figure 49 A dance troupe illustrating principles of earthquake-resistant construction at a village meeting.

tion by SPARC, the NGO responsible for the community participation effort in the RRSP villages, people were aware of the earthquake-resistant technology, but needed assistance to ensure its implementation. The Samvad Sahayaks played a key role in bridging the information gap. In March 1997, for example, 25 Mahila Mandal teams in the Latur district assisted the SPARC team at a week-long exhibition attended by over 30,000 people. Posters on earthquake-resistant construction, model houses, slide shows on construction techniques, and videos to motivate owners were among the techniques used.

- **Contracting for labor as a group.** For beneficiaries who had a problem mobilizing labor, the Samvad Sahayaks advised homeowners to contract labor for 10 to 15 houses at a time.
- **Promoting cost-effective designs.** The Samvad Sahayaks, through training workshops, learned about design and construction and were then able to help homeowners with cost-effective designs.
- **Conducting pilot projects.** Sometimes Samvad Sahayaks initiated a project in one village that served as a pilot or demonstration project for other villages to consider.
- **Conducting study tours to view demonstration sites and best practices.** The Samvad Sahayaks took homeowners to “best practice” villages. These success stories were then used to motivate other villagers. The visits and study tours were useful tools for sharing information and for contributing to the general improvement of the quality of construction.

Earthquake Mitigation and Community Development

Observation

- *The local community-based organizations working in the villages showed a great capacity to work not only on reconstruction but also on other development issues. Their involvement furthered the government's goal of improving the standard of living for beneficiaries.*

Discussion

Within the rehabilitation project, the Mahila Mandals (village-based organizations) showed a great capacity to work not only on reconstruction but also on other development issues. As community organizations involved in cultural and social issues prior to the earthquake rebuilding program, they were well-positioned to advocate for development issues such as health, education, savings and credit, self-employment, and water resources management. The SPARC report describing the community participation effort in the villages of Wadala and Masobavadi notes:

More than a year after the project's inception, Wadala and Masobavadi still stand as examples of community participation in the post-earthquake reconstruction process. People in these villages changed regarding issues of village development. They no longer wait for government to deliver but take the first step. Social relations have been altered between different social groups and between men and women. People now understand that by working as a group for the development of their villages they are stronger than individuals. In addition, the important role that women's collectives can play in the development of the village is now widely recognized, and their work is not discharged as 'women's business' anymore (SPARC-SSP, 1998, 45).

Because the earthquake-rehabilitation program had such a strong component of housing rebuilding that resulted in the renewal of the entire housing stock of the area, the program took on the dimension of a housing movement. Improving housing in these villages is a major development issue that is larger than earthquake rebuilding. The earthquake allowed this development issue to be addressed on a wider scale and in a more rapid time frame than otherwise would have been the case. In addition, the program spurred owners in the RRSP villages to contribute their own savings in the reconstruction effort. One informed estimate suggests that individual homeowners invested in the repair and reconstruction work an average of 10 to 20 percent more (from their own savings) than they received in grant assistance.

