

**Water for Domestic Use on
Irrigation Cooperative's Agenda**

*The Experience of Kesimpa Women
Dharoi Irrigation Project, Gujarat*

**Case study
(PIM)**

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(2005)**

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1.0 Background

1.1 Women and Natural Resources

Although women are among of the main stakeholders in natural resources, they neither stake their claim on NR, nor participate in their management readily. For instance, women do not use canal water to meet their domestic needs; in their perception canal water is meant solely for agriculture.¹ However, if they were allowed to use this resource, life would become easier for them. As they are unlikely to articulate their needs and interests on their own, women's needs have to be brought out by someone else. In Participatory Irrigation Management (PIM) villages, women do not participate in canal irrigation management though they are directly or indirectly involved in agriculture activities. Thus, there is a need to encourage them to put forward their needs and stake their claim on canal water and participate in its management.

Development Support Centre (DSC), an NGO based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, focuses on creating workable models and options that can help women in defining their stakes in natural resource management (NRM) programmes. DSC wanted to make it possible for an important resource like canal water to serve women's needs better. Hence it took the initiative to get them to stake their claim for domestic consumption and to identify their role in improving canal management. DSC introduced on an experimental basis, washing and washing-cum-bathing ghats,² constructed in five villages of Gujarat; viz. Kesimpa, Sundhiya, Kiyadar, Dedasan and Kansa. Kesimpa

¹ A DSC study "Women, Water, Irrigation: Respecting Women's Priorities" (Anil C. Shah, March 2001), highlights problems faced by women due to water crisis for their domestic use though canal water is available.

² A *ghat* is a paved platform near the source of water – well, river, tank, etc. – used to bathe and wash clothes.

was the most successful in terms of participation by both, men and women. Kansa, which constructed its ghat in 2005, learned a lot from the Kesimpa experience. DSC's main aim is to gradually involve women in canal management. Constructing a washing ghat was seen as a first step in that direction.

1.2 Kesimpa Irrigation Cooperative

Kesimpa is located in Vadnagar Taluka of Mehsana district in Gujarat. The population is about 4,250, with 613 households. Muslims are the dominating community. Next come Rabaris. There are several other communities, but their number is small. The main occupations are agriculture and animal husbandry.

The total area of the village is 526.12 hectares, out of which 394 hectares are cultivable. The village has 482 farmers. The Kesimpa command area, measuring 192 hectares, lies in the head-reach of Branch 2 canal and is irrigated by the sub-minors M-1-R, M-0-L, B-S-M-1-R, and M-2-R. There are 250 beneficiary farmers in the command area. Other sources of water are open wells and tube wells.

As part of its initiative in PIM, DSC started organizing the farmers (mainly men) in the command area, so that they could solve their problem regarding canal management. The irrigation cooperative, Shri Kesimpa Naher Piyat Sahakari Mandali, was registered in April 2000 and the Memorandum of Understanding for transfer of the canal was signed in January, 2001. The total number of regular members of the society is 196, which includes three women who own land. In addition, 84 women are nominal members.

2.0 Defining the Problem, Finding a Solution

Generally women do not get involved in the primary irrigation activities; nor do they deal with the operator of the IC directly. However, the situation at Kesimpa was somewhat different. Here, in about 50% of the households, the husbands had migrated to the Gulf countries, in order to augment their family income. Under the circumstances, women had to manage the agricultural operations, including irrigation. They had to rely entirely on the management of the men in the IC, as not being landowners, they were legally not allowed to become members. Women's involvement in the management of the IC became a felt need in the village and DSC took it up as a challenge.

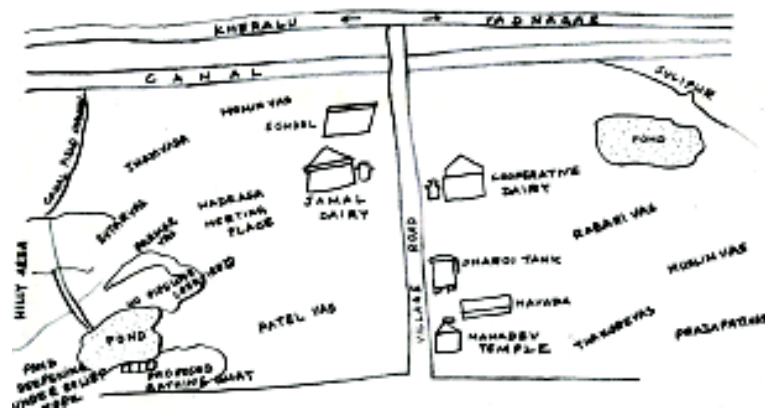
2.1 Community Mobilisation

DSC adopted a strategy of sensitizing men while mobilizing women separately. As the population was predominantly Muslim and women followed the purdah system, DSC found it difficult to communicate with the women directly. In order to overcome this cultural barrier, they sought the advice of the maulvi. After gaining his approval and support, DSC organised meetings with women of different faliyas (hamlets) separately. In these meetings women got a chance to speak their mind freely.

The mobilization process took about 4-5 months, at the end of which, it was decided to organize women around the savings activity. Five SHGs were started by the women, which in due course, matured and formed a federation called Mahila Mandal. These initial interventions with the women had helped to build their confidence of the women and prepared them for taking initiatives in the dairy sector, as well as in PIM.

In 2003, DSC thought of motivating the women of Sundhiya village to take up the idea of the washing ghat. However, the Kesimpa women showed greater interest and grabbed the opportunity. , On their request, DSC organised a meeting in Kesimpa, to which all men and women whose land fell in the command area of the IC (which included other villages besides Kesimpa) were invited. About 80 women and 25 men from the two main communities attended the meeting.

In this meeting, a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercise was carried out. First, the existing water facilities in the village



PRA Map

were mapped and water requirements were estimated. The exercise was targeted mainly towards women. It established that while the need for drinking water was met through tap connections in every household, the need for domestic water, especially for washing clothes, was not.

Kesimpa women used canal water only once a year, mainly for washing heavy winter clothes like blankets and quilts. They took the clothes to the canal bank to wash them. There were no protective barriers to prevent women, children or animals from falling into the canal — one Tahiraben³ actually slipped and fell into the canal while washing clothes. Thus washing clothes on the bank of the canal was not only inconvenient, but also hazardous.



Women Washing Clothes on canal bank without Washing ghat

In a discussion to alleviate water-related problems of women, the following suggestions were made:

- Fill the pond with canal water through pipeline.
- Build a bathing ghat near the pond and one near the cremation ground. The latter for the rabari women who have to take a bath outside their home after the death of a family member.
- Build a washing ghat on the bank of the canal.
- Build a platform (visama otla) on which women can unload the pack of fodder they carry from field to village and take rest.

³ President of one SHG

After examining the options, it was decided to construct a ghat on the bank of the canal. DSC assured the women that it would provide funds if the following conditions were fulfilled:

- Women raise 10% of the total construction cost.
- Women shoulder responsibility of the entire ghat project, from getting permission from the Irrigation Department (ID) to contributing towards the cost of construction to constructing the ghat and maintaining it.

2.2 Capacity Building

It took four months to build capacity among women so that they could take up the project. DSC held as many as 13 meetings in the village and screened three video films thrice to raise awareness among women. It organised two exposure visits to similar projects; first, to Sadguru in Dahod and second, to AKRSP in Netrang, so that women could see for themselves how other women participate in projects. Six training sessions were held, each focusing on a different aspect.

They ranged from mobilizing women for participation to teaching them how to choose material for construction to how to maintain accounts. The men were quite positive and allowed their women to attend all the training. In some cases, men first visited the DSC office and verified their work and were happy to send their women with them. Their positive attitude could be attributed to the initial work done by DSC staff in sensitizing men, while building the capacity of the women.

To enable women to save money regularly so that they are able to contribute towards the project cost, DSC helped to form five self-help groups (SHGs). The total project cost was estimated to Rs 40,000, contribution to be made was 4000. Per family, women collected Rs 10. The total collection towards contribution was Rs. 6,000. From this Rs. 3,700 was used towards construction costs and Rs. 2,300 was kept aside for future maintenance.

For constructing the ghat, a Maha Mandal handling milk cooperative was responsible. It was made up of 15 women, three members from each of the five SHGs. The entire Mandal would manage the ghat construction and later, on its maintenance. It had three committees - an accounts committee

which was responsible for keeping the accounts of the cash flow and maintaining the register; a supervision committee, which supervised the work at the site and managed the labour; and a material purchase committee which ensured that high quality material was purchased at a fair price and used in construction.



Kesimpa women participating in the training sessions

2.3 Getting Permission from the Irrigation Department

The women themselves went to the ID to take permission for constructing the ghat. The details of the encounter are important since it was the first time Kesimpa women met the authorities on their own.

Ten women, two from each of the five SHGs and one community organiser (CO) from DSC, went to see the Executive Engineer (EE) at the Visnagar office. The CO remained outside the EE's chamber; only the women went in. When they put their proposal for the washing ghat before the EE, he sternly refused saying that he cannot give permission for the project, because the women did not have the required competence to build the ghat. Even after women explained that DSC would be guiding them throughout the process, he was not convinced and rejected their request.

Disappointed, the women came out of the room. The CO encouraged them to go in once again and explain their problems to him. This time Tahiraben⁴ who had fallen in the canal narrated her experience, saying that she was present in the room because of her good luck. The next woman to slip and fall may not be so lucky. The EE appeared to mellow somewhat, but was concerned about the funding of the project. When he was assured that no government fund would be demanded, since the DSC will contribute 90% of the project cost and the women, the remaining 10%, he changed his mind and finally gave them permission.⁵ Thereafter the women took permission from the WUA president.

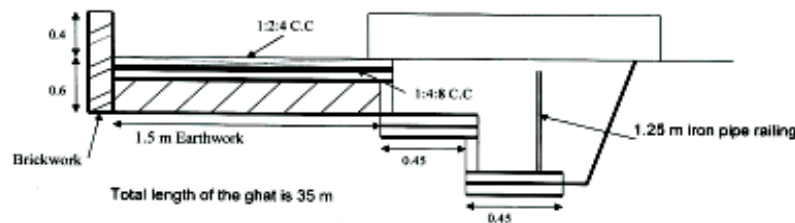
2.4 Designing the Ghat

The women presented their requirements for the ghat to the DSC. They had calculated that about 100 women would wash clothes at different times during the day in lots of 25-30. The length of the ghat had to be fixed accordingly. It should have a hard platform; two steps going down to the canal so that even

⁴ President of Mahamandal. Her husband stays in Saudi Arab. He visited DSC and after verification allowed her to support DSC and work with them. She has helped in motivating women to come forward.

⁵ Normally, it takes them more than three months to get permission from the government department for any construction activities, men from the IC reported.

when water level is low, the canal can be reached from the lower step; along with a railing for protection, which may also be used for hanging clothes. The platform and steps were to be made of cement concrete with Kota stones placed at regular intervals on the platform for beating clothes. The DSC engineer noted the requirements and prepared the structural design, taking them into account (see Figure 1).



Design of a typical ghat built by the ICs

2.5 Construction of the Ghat

The women performed a puja and began the construction. First, they cleaned the canal space for the ghat, dug up the place, and put the foundation stone; then the ghat construction began. They hired labour and supervised them closely, while constructing the ghat. In technical matters, they relied on the advice of DSC's engineer who was made available to them during the design and construction phases.

On the whole, the construction process went off smoothly, except for two problems. First, the storage tank at the site was not large enough and hence women had to bring water from a distance. Secondly, the process of welding suffered due to unreliable supply of power. The women realized that water requirement has to be assessed beforehand and an appropriate-sized tank should be arranged. Rivets should be used where possible in order to do away with the welding process since the former does not require electricity. These lessons proved invaluable for the ICs that followed Kesimpa.

At the organisational level, another problem had arisen. Only two communities, Muslims and Rabaris, had made contributions

towards the project; the remaining had shown little interest. However, once completed, women from other social groups began to take interest. They were now willing to contribute even a higher amount than the original contribution, in order to become members/ users of the ghat. These and other issues related to the use of the ghat were tackled by the Mahila Mandal, by forming appropriate rules and norms.

2.6 Use of the Ghat and Maintenance

The use of the ghat is at its highest when water flows in the canal. On an average, 100 women wash clothes daily in four lots (25-30 women can use the ghat at a time) SHG members are given priority. The various committees had made a set of rules for the upkeep and use of the ghat as mentioned below

- Ghat has to be kept clean.
- From every family that uses the ghat, Rs. 5 is collected towards its upkeep. After water stops in the canal, damage is repaired every year.
- Penalty is collected from anyone who damages the structure.
- Non-members using the ghat are also liable to make contributions.
- Heavy clothes like blankets should not be hanged on the railing; they should be kept on the platform.
- Widows are given the more convenient morning slot for washing clothes.

3.0 Achievements

Their achievements have been two-fold, irrigation-related and social. Women have become better informed, their skills have been upgraded, and their self-esteem and self-confidence have been enhanced. The last is particularly significant in a conservative, male-dominated social set up like Kesimpa. It is even more noteworthy that not only women's attitude towards themselves has changed; men's attitude has changed too.

Women are better informed

- Women developed a better understanding of PIM and the

roles and responsibilities of Irrigation Cooperatives as evidenced from the discussions with them.

- Women began to share information with other women about the decisions taken in the meetings with the IC. Now they are well informed about the number of waterings and its schedule and participate in IC's crop planning exercise too.
- Out of a total of 87 SHG members, 83 are nominal members and three of them are regular members of the IC. One woman is also a member of the executive committee. Now women are kept informed about the IC meetings and invited.

Women have developed a sense of ownership towards the canal

- Women realised that the sides of the canal were being damaged due to washing of clothes when there was no ghat. The damage had to be repaired by the IC. They have now developed a sense of ownership for the canal. For instance, they stop people from misusing and wasting water.

Women have been able to influence decisions

- Women can influence the decision making process of the IC. For instance, they were able to arrange that the widows and other women farmers were provided water during daytime, as a night turn would be inconvenient for them.

Women's skills have been upgraded

- Women have developed the basic technical skills for supervising construction. Some of them have supervised the construction of their own homes.

Women now have more self-confidence and higher self esteem

- Self-confidence and self-esteem of the village women is enhanced. Now women go to other villages to motivate local women and share their own experience. They also go as resource persons for imparting training.

Men's attitude towards women has changed

- Women have earned the respect of men. For example, not only are SHG members now given a proper invitation for the

national festivals like Independence Day; but they are also seated in the front row. Earlier they were not invited, and if they came, they had to stand at the back.

Kesimpa Women have learnt to save

- Women now save Rs. 25 per family every month. The women's SHGs have collected about Rs. 1,30,500. They use this fund for providing loans to their members. Till date they have given loans amounting to Rs. 15,000. The saving habit has made them self-reliant as far as borrowing money is concerned.

An enduring institution has been created

- Before the ghat was built, there was one SHG, but it became defunct soon. The five SHGs facilitated by DSC are functioning well.

Women have stepped out of their homes into a wider world

- For the first time, women have come out of their homes, temporarily setting aside their domestic chores to meet their common requirements.

4.0 Conclusion

The entire experience of creating a ghat as part of the PIM activities proved to be a great learning opportunity for both, the facilitating agency and the villagers. At the village level, men have realised that women can meet their needs themselves if they are given proper guidance. Women realised that they have to recognise their own needs themselves, demand that they be met and take up the responsibility for meeting them. They also discovered that they could develop capability to do so. For instance, they learned the skills of material identification and construction management and handled construction of the ghat themselves. The Kesimpa experience shows that one of the pre-conditions for securing involvement of women in canal management is that men must have a positive attitude and must be open enough to accept any changes in social relationships.

Some of the key factors leading to success at Kesimpa could be summarized as:

- Sequential approach to community organisation: DSC adopted a "Problem to Solution" approach and found that it pays, but one has to be patient. The solution emerged after the causes of the problem were analysed. Alternative solutions offered by the villagers were considered and one of them was selected. The DSC staff did not hasten the villagers towards the solution the staff had in mind.⁶ Sequential approach of community organising has to be followed, taking one step at a time as the village communities proceed from problem towards solution.

- Taking into account local conditions: For instance, if the canal passes close to the village and women are willing to use it, then the Kesimpa solution is appropriate. However, if it is far away, then other options, like constructing a ghat near the village and putting a pipeline to draw water from the canal, have to be considered.

- Supportive role of men: In the case of Kesimpa, since more than 50% of the women were looking after agricultural operations in the absence of their husbands, women were already interacting with men on agriculture related issues. This makes it somewhat easier for DSC to sensitise the men.

5.0 Policy Advocacy

DSC's policy advocacy work is focused on getting PIM rules modified first, to include the use of canal water for domestic purposes by women through construction of ghats near the canals. Secondly, the plan and estimates for rehabilitation expenditure should include the estimates for construction of the ghat on the canal bank.

Hence, DSC is making an effort to legalize the use of canal water for domestic purposes. Once this happens, it can be spread to larger areas. This can be seen as a first step towards greater involvement of women in the management of irrigation cooperatives.

⁶ This approach explained in "Sequential Steps for Empowering Community- Cost Benefit Approach" by Anil C. Shah. September-2004

Development Support Centre aims to provide knowledge based support to people-centred natural resource development.

ABOUT DSC...

Development Support Centre (DSC) was established in 1994 in Ahmedabad under the leader of Emeritus Chairman Mr. Anil C Shah in response to the need felt, from various non-governmental organizations. The DSC provides support to NGOs, government agencies and other administrative bodies, which are involved in participatory management of natural resources in Gujarat. DSC's multi-disciplinary professional team helps in capacity building of key functionaries, performs hand holding operations in the field when required, takes initiatives for appropriate policy changes and carries out field studies related to policy issues.

DSC offers the following portfolio of services:

- Field Support Services
- Research and Monitoring Activities
- Training
- Policy Advocacy
- Communications and Publications
- Networking
- Field Units

DSC's main focus presently is on the following four programs;

Participatory Irrigation Management

DSC is playing pivotal role in promoting the PIM in Gujarat in close cooperation with the state irrigation department and strives to promote the program at state and national levels. The DSC directly implements the program in 66 villages in three projects covering 56,000 hectares of command area.

Watershed Development

DSC has made a significant contribution in the formulation of the National Watershed Development Guidelines and has sustained its involvement in the program. The emphasis is to ensure that the key functionaries appreciate and build necessary skills, attitudes and behaviour to translate the rhetoric of participation into practice.

Agricultural Productivity Enhancement and Improving Livelihoods

To enhance agricultural productivity and improve livelihoods, the DSC has promoted Sajjata Sangh, a network of NGOs, bringing together agricultural scientists; the NGOs and the farmers on a common platform so that the scientists understand the problems and the needs of the farmers, take them into account in their research. The farmers are provided with expert advice in turn.

Joint Forest Management

Gujarat was one of the first states in the country to introduce JFM. However, despite enabling policies and tentative initiatives of the state government, the program has not picked up the desired momentum. The DSC is striving to remedy the situation by advocating changes in the implementation of the program at state and national levels.



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Supported by the AGA KHAN FOUNDATION through the European Commission co-financed SCALE Project

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