

# DISOWNED INSTITUTIONS IN HILAUNGAD WATERSHED

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Poor rural households in the marginal upper catchments of the Indian Himalayas face critical food security and livelihood challenges. Lack of ownership and restricted access to natural resources, including water and forests, combined with low productivity of these often degraded resources, invariably result in seasonal or permanent out-migration leading to more insecure livelihoods and vulnerability to a range of environmental and other hazards. In response to the growing public pressure in these regions and in recognition of the diminishing returns of the earlier policies, the Government has made attempts to alter some of their approaches. Greater attention is now being paid to afforestation and ensuring availability of water for irrigation and drinking purposes, etc. Decentralisation as a concept has been institutionalised in the form of Panchayati Raj and Nagar Palika Acts. In the last one decade, community managed forestry, farmers managed irrigation and village level financial institutions are being promoted by the government along with participatory micro-watershed development.

People's Science Institute (PSI), Dehradun, India in partnership with Department of Irrigation (DOI), Nepal, Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), York, Institute of Water and Human Resource Development (IWHRD), Nepal and International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Nepal has undertaken an action research project titled "Linking Community-Based Water and Forest Management for Sustainable Livelihoods of the Poor in Fragile Upper Catchments of the Indus-Ganges Basin" supported by the Challenge Program of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). The objective of the study is to undertake watershed based planning for integrated community management of natural resources for livelihood security. Separate studies were done in Nepal and in Uttarakhand state of India to gain insights into the integrated management of natural resources. Each study included the following activities: (a) An analysis of the existing legal, policy, and institutional frameworks and alternatives and (b) Assessment of the local resource base, its management and relationship to local livelihoods. This paper presents the results of the institutional assessment. The paper provides insights into the constraining factors in the operation of the institutions and makes recommendations for changes in the institutional framework and policies for integrated resource management.

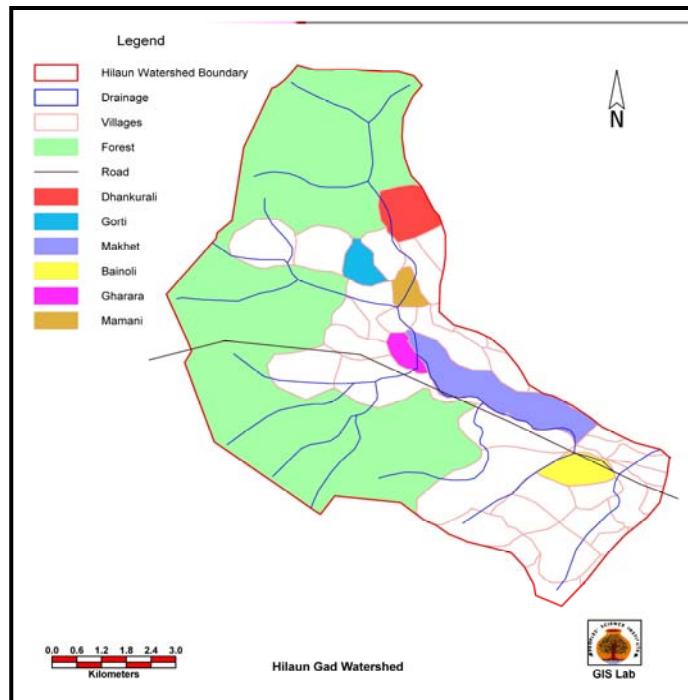
## II. METHODOLOGY

Field studies were conducted with the assistance of Himalayan Jan Kalyan Evam Bal Vikas Samiti (CDI), Rudraprayag in the Hilaungad watershed (a sub-watershed of Lastargad watershed) located in Jakholi block of Rudraparayang district in Uttarakhand for understanding the ground realities.

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For the purposes of the study, six villages were selected in the upper, middle and lower slopes of the watershed. These are Dhan Kurali and Gorti (upper slope), Mamani and Gharara (middle slope), and Makhet and Bainoli (in the lower slopes). Participatory research was carried out with the six selected communities to study the local resource use patterns, livelihoods and the institutional framework for resource management. Assessment of livelihood security has been carried out to estimate the gaps in availability and requirement of resources through PRA exercises, household surveys, biomass estimation etc. Apart from the above, focus group discussions and interactions have been held with the local resource users groups as well as with various government and non-government stakeholders and their institutions at the district and block level to develop an understanding of the functionality, accessibility and importance of local institutions in relation to resources management.



### III. COMMUNITY BASED INSTITUTIONS

Local institutions are considered to be the social assets of a particular village. Traditional and new institutions co-exist in the Himalayan region. They often manage the local resources, primarily forest and water.

The most important rural development institution at the village level is the Gram Panchayat (GP). The study villages come under six GPs, namely Bajira (Dhan Kurali) Gorti (Gorti), Uroli (Mamni), Gharara (Gharara), Makhet (Makhet) and Srikot (Bainoli). These GPs have been formed under the Seventy Third Amendment Act (1992) of the Indian Constitution. They are statutory bodies with clearly defined functions and responsibilities.<sup>2</sup> The GPs are responsible for managing local resources in accordance with the wishes of the local people and implementing development projects. Various sub-committees like water and sanitation committee, disaster management committee, education committee, etc., are supposed to be constituted at the village level under the GPs.

In Uttarakhand, Van Panchayats (VPs) are democratically elected village level institutions set up for the management of community forests. VPs are responsible for the management of grazing, collection of fuel wood, fodder and timber, and protection of community forests. A Van Panchayat can be formed if one-third of the inhabitants of a village

<sup>2</sup> -----: The Constitution (Seventy-Third Amendment) Act, 1992. As Passed by Lok Sabha on 22nd December, 1992.

resolve to form one.<sup>3</sup> At the village level, it is the sole arbitrator for the management of the Van Panchayat forests. It has linkages with the Forest Department for technical assistance and for the preparation of developmental plans. The formation of Van Panchayats started in the late 1920's, but it was only after the Van Panchayats Regulations notified by the British in 1931, they were formally given legal status. Under these regulations, boundaries of Van Panchayats were demarcated and their constitution, functions, powers, duties and accountability were detailed. The Panchayat Forest Rules have been amended from time to time, major amendments having been made in 1972, 1976 and recently in the year 2001 respectively.<sup>4</sup> At present the formation and functioning of the Van Panchayats in Uttarakhand is guided by the Uttaranchal Panchayati Forest Rules, 2001 and as amended in 2005.

In the last two decades, Mahila Mangal Dals (MMDs) and Yuvak Mangal Dals (YMDs) have also come up in the region. The MMDs are village women's welfare associations responsible for village cleanliness, use of forest resources and maintenance of community assets. Similarly, YMDS are village youth's association involved in social, cultural and environmental activities. More recently, the Government of Uttarakhand has directed the Minor Irrigation Departments to promote the formation of Water User Groups for participatory irrigation management of *guhls*.<sup>5</sup> Self Help Groups are the more recent village level institutions promoted by the Central and State Governments as means for provision of credit and other financial services to the poor so as to raise their living standards.

Apart from the above, other institutions have also been promoted in the Hilaungad watershed. They have been established with the introduction of various development programmes in the region. One such institution, i.e., the Village Development Committee has been formed in a few villages during the course of implementation of a watershed development programme under the Himmothan Pariyojna supported by Sir Ratan Tata Trust, Mumbai.

The formation, composition and operation of the above institutions existing in the selected villages of Hilaungad watershed have been analyzed. These are discussed in the following paragraphs.

### **Institutions for Forest Management**

In Bainoli, a Van Panchayat was constituted in 1995 whereas in the remaining villages (except Dhankurali), the process of constitution of Van Panchayats for Community Forest Management (CFM) was initiated in 2004-2005 by the *Patwari*, who is a government official from the state revenue department, in accordance with the Uttaranchal Panchayati Forest Rules, 2001. No Van Panchayat could be constituted in Dhankurali, where community lands meant for the purpose had been encroached. The current status of the Van Panchayats in the selected villages is summarized in Table 1.

Under the provisions of constitution of Van Panchayats, a minimum of 4ha of land is to be allocated from the civil soyam area or the community land. The land site was located and decided upon by the villagers, the *Patwari* and officials from the forest department. It was

<sup>3</sup> M. K. Gupta (2007): "Promoting Self Sufficiency through Carbon Credits from Conservation and Management of Forests", in a research paper submitted to Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts, USA.

<sup>4</sup> V. K. Mishra (2004): "Van Panchayats in Uttaranchal, India" (unpublished).

<sup>5</sup> ----- (2005): Letter No. 338/11-2004/2005, Principal Secretary and Commissioner, Government of Uttarakhand, March 2005.

measured using the Kanji<sup>6</sup> measurement technique by the *Patwari* and was provided for the purpose as per the stipulated provisions. However, these institutions soon became defunct in all the villages except in Bainoli. The Van Panchayats in Gorti, Mamani, Gharara and Makhet are virtually non-existing, as the registration process has been completed by the Nodal Officer (Tehsil), even after submission of all required documents. Worse still, the villagers do not possess any proof of submission of the registration documents.

**Table 1: Status of Van Panchayats**

Village	Dhan Kurali	Gorti	Mamni	Gharara	Makhet	Bainoli
Year of Formation	Not formed	2005	2005	2004	2005	1995
Composition of Executive Committee	-	9 Members (5 M & 4 F)	9 Members (5 M & 4 F)	5 Members (3 M & 2 F)	7 Members (5 M & 2 F)	9 Members (9 M)
Area under Van Panchayat's jurisdiction	-	5.7 ha	4.14 ha	8 ha of which 2 ha has been encroached	22.14 ha	13.93 ha
Registration Status	-	Registration pending	Registration pending	Registration pending	Registration pending	Registered
Operational Status	-	Dysfunctional	Dysfunctional	Dysfunctional	Dysfunctional	Functional

Source: Focus Group Discussions with villagers and Mahila Mangal Dals, 2006-07

**Gorti:** A Van Panchayat was constituted by the *Patwari* in Gorti village in 2005. However very few people are aware of its existence. The Van Panchayat was given 5.7 hectares from the civil land (community grasslands). The site was located and decided upon by the *Patwari* in consultation with a few villagers. No further meetings have been held since the formation of the body and the registration is still pending. At present, the Van Panchayat land is subject to open grazing. Therefore the Van Panchayat is virtually non-existing.

**Mamani:** A total of 4.14 hectares were allocated from degraded community lands to the Van Panchayat constituted in 2005. However, the institution is lying in a defunct state, as it has not been registered. The villagers are not even aware about their rights in the Van Panchayat land. At present, the Van Panchayat land is divided into small individual plots for the purpose of meeting the fodder requirement of their livestock. Under the 'Himotthan Pariyojana' of Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT), plantation of fodder plants, viz., *lahsuniya*, *sahtut*, *kachnar*, *aonla* and *bheemal*, has been undertaken on these small individual plots and women look after the maintenance of the plantation area.

Gram Panchayat Uroli, consists of two revenue villages, viz., Mamani and Uroli. The villagers are mostly dependent on Reserved Forest (RF) for their fuel and fodder needs, as the community land cannot meet their requirements. In 1990, the Gram Panchayat resolved to negotiate from the Forest Department, access to a 30ha out of the RF in the neighbourhood of the village for meeting their fuel and fodder needs. This resulted in a meeting with the then DFO and getting verbal assurances. A committee, called the Van Sanrakshan Samiti was informally constituted (with 8 male members) at the initiative of the Gram Panchayat. Two '*chowkidars*' (guards), one from each village, were posted to protect the forest areas from being vandalized by outsiders. They were to be paid Rs. 100 each by each household once in every six months. In

<sup>6</sup> Kanji is a type of a foot-rule which is used for measuring distances on a laid-out map on a table.

addition, rules and regulations were also framed informally defining the ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’ of extracting forest produce from the RF. Some of these rules are:

- No outsiders will be permitted to extract any forest produce from the 30ha forest area allocated to the villagers.
- No lopping of green tree trunks or clear felling of trees is allowed.
- The villagers can collect grass from the area twice in a year. One head load of grass can be collected per household from the area.
- Villagers wanting to avail timber for construction can do so only after submitting an application to the DFO and obtaining necessary permission to do so.

However, the Van Sanrakshan Samiti in Mamani gradually became defunct. Only two meetings of the committee took place in the initial years. The two *chowkidars*, who belonged to poor families, looked after the forest and continued to collect their dues from the households once every six months for their sustenance and livelihood upto December 2006. At present, no one is responsible for the maintenance of the allocated area.

**Gharara:** In Gharara village, the *Patwari* constituted a Van Panchayat in 2004. An executive committee of five members was selected without the presence and consent of the selected President and two other members. The village has four hamlets, Gharara, Matkhani, Bhirani and Thapli. The habitations are mostly scattered. An area of 8ha was allocated from the community lands and forest department’s land. This was collectively decided by the villagers, the *Patwari* and officials from the forest department. However, the villagers have encroached about 2 ha of the Van Panchayat land. The body is at present defunct, as neither the Van Panchayat nor the village community has shown any interest in pursuing its registration.

In the months of January and February, one woman from each household collects a head load of grass from the Van Panchayat land. The village women, *Patwari* and the officials from the forest department have collectively decided this rule. The forest department has appointed one *chowkidar* from the village for the maintenance of the land. Though the *chowkidar* gets an honorarium of Rs.700 per month from the forest department, he is negligent about his responsibilities and duties. In the past efforts have been undertaken by the forest department to carry out plantation in the concerned area. However, at present the survival rate of the plantation is barely 30 per cent. This reflects upon the community’s sense of ownership of the Van Panchayat lands.

**Makhet:** A Van Panchayat was constituted by the *Patwari* in Makhet in 2005. But very few people are aware of its existence. This body was given 22.14ha from the community grasslands. As in the case of other villages, the site was located and collectively decided upon by the villagers, the *Patwari* and officials from the forest department. However, the purpose for which the land was allocated was defeated as the Van Panchayat soon became defunct. No meetings have been held since the formation of the body and the registration is still pending.

Since 1996, the Van Panchayat land is being informally maintained as a closed area by the village women for their fodder needs. They prefer this instead of trudging to a RF at a greater distance where they also have to compete with other women from more than seven neighbouring villages who come to the same forest for collecting fodder. The two hamlets of Makhet have divided the area into two parts, with Udainagar having a larger share of the land.

The women of Makheth hamlet have appointed a woman guard from the village, who is also a widow, to prevent the fodder from being stolen and also to protect the plantation. She is paid an annual remuneration of Rs.160 per household at the time of harvesting the fodder grass. In case, any household defaults on payment, the amount is collected from the concerned household by visiting the family. A household, which intentionally defaults on payment to the woman guard, is debarred from collecting fodder grass from the protected area. The Van Panchayat land is opened for harvesting fodder once a year in February - March. A family's share of grass is decided by the amount of grass that is cut by a single woman from each household in a period of two hours. The area is closed for any further entry from April onwards. The part of the land allotted to Udainagar hamlet has been encroached by most of the families for collecting grass for their own use.

The Forest Department had earlier undertaken plantation activity on the present VP land with the consent of the Gram Panchayat in 1990. In the following years it continued to carry out plantation activity in the area. At present the survival rate of plantation is as low as 50 per cent. The saplings comprise mostly of chir pine and other ornamental varieties such as cypress and silver oak. In addition, a shrub called 'Tungala' in local dialect has also been also planted. The villagers, however, are not able to derive any benefits in terms of fuelwood as the plants are still young. Hence, they are mainly dependent on the RF for their fuelwood requirement.

**Bainoli:** A Van Panchayat was constituted in Bainoli in 1995. It is the only functional Van Panchayat among the six villages selected for the present study. This institution was allocated 13.93 ha of land for use and management.

A committee with a tenure of five years and comprising of nine executive members, all males, has been constituted for managing the forest. All households in the village are *de facto* members of the Van Panchayat. The following rules and regulations have been framed for management and smooth execution of the benefit-sharing arrangements.

- Nobody is permitted to cut wood without the permission of the Van Panchayat and anybody doing so will be fined Rs.100 for every default.
- Grazing of goats is strictly prohibited and the defaulters will have to pay a penalty of Rs.25 per goat.
- Grazing of buffaloes and cows is also prohibited and the defaulters will be required to pay a fine of Rs. 50 per animal.
- If anybody is found felling a chir pine tree without the consent of Van Panchayat, then a fine of Rs. 500 will be imposed.
- If anybody is found felling an oak tree without the consent of Van Panchayat, then a fine of Rs. 300 will be imposed.
- The area would be opened for harvesting grass once a year in February-March and nobody will be permitted to extract any grass from the area beyond the above period. Any body found defaulting would have to pay a fine of Rs. 500.

The tree species in the Van Panchayat land are mostly chir pine, oak, and other planted varieties such as *chanchari*, *bheemal*, *aonla* and *kachnar*. Benefits mostly accrue in the form of fodder. The modalities of harvesting grass from the area are decided at village meetings. On the appointed date and time, the area is opened by the Van Panchayat chowkidar for the women to harvest grass. A family's share of grass is decided by the amount of grass that is cut by a single

woman from one household between 10 AM to 2 PM. Following a whistle signal from the village *chowkidar*, the women stop cutting grass and come out of the area. In addition to grass, another benefit derived from the forest area includes resin from chir pine trees, which is of commercial value and is extracted only by the Van Panchayat. Proceeds from the sale of this resin are divided in a ratio of 30:10:60 respectively among the Zilla Panchayat, the Forest Department and the Van Panchayat.

The amount of money realized as fines for various acts of commission and omission as well as from the benefit sharing (resin from chir pine) is deposited in the Van Panchayat account and is used for carrying out repairs, maintenance and plantation activities. At present, the Van Panchayat has a total of Rs. 86,000 in its account.

The Van Panchayat of Bainoli actively maintains relationship with the other departments and institutions, which is given in the table below:

**Relationship of Bainoli Van Panchayat with other Institutions and Departments**

Institution	Relationship with Van Panchayat
Forest Department	Van Panchayat prepares a work plan for the Forest Department for plantation The Forest Department undertakes training of Van Panchayat members
Zilla Panchayat	Van Panchayat draws funds from the Zilla Panchayat for forest maintenance and plantation
Self-Help Group	Plantation in Van Panchayat land is undertaken with the help of SHG members
Local NGOs	Supports plantation activities in the Van Panchayat land

The Van Panchayat prepares and proposes an Action Plan for plantation to the Forest Department according to its need. It carries out plantation in its own area by mobilizing women members of the Self Help Groups (SHGs) who eventually benefit from this activity. Plantation activity has motivated all the women in the village to become members of the SHGs. This has contributed to their economic prosperity.

It can be seen from the above, that barring Bainoli, in the remaining villages the Van Panchayats were formed hurriedly as per the state government's directive without proper follow-up and guidance. Van Panchayats in three villages could not be registered even after all necessary documents had been submitted to the authorities. This has led to defunct bodies and alienation of the communities from the concerned land reflected by the poor survival rate and encroachment of the areas.

### **Institutions for Water Management**

In the Hilaungad watershed irrigation is mostly done by earthen guhls and cement-lined masonry canals. The Irrigation Department (ID) and the Minor Irrigation Department (MID) execute most of the irrigation works in this valley. The Gram Panchayats, the Zilla Parishad and the Soil Conservation department have also built some of the canals. The present status of the irrigation systems in the six selected villages is given Table 2. As for household water supply, Jal Sansthan has made arrangements for all the villages except Makheth village.

**Irrigation Systems of Irrigation Department (ID):** The ID makes only large-sized canals. It has made large irrigation canals in four out of the six selected villages. It has uniform construction and management procedures for these canals. It begins work on building any irrigation canal after receiving proposals from the Gram Panchayat directly or through proposals

forwarded by the Zilla Parishad. The ID then deputs a junior engineer to conduct site selection for the canal. The engineer is supposed to discuss the technical feasibility with the potential beneficiaries in order to select the site. In case a household suffers any loss in the process of the canal construction, it is compensated. After the construction of the canals, the ID is responsible for conducting repairs and maintenance of the canals. It deputs a watchman-cum-supervisor at the canal head to regulate flow of water to the fields during the cropping season. It charges Rs. 40 per hectare per year from every beneficiary household in two installments and the amount is collected after every six months from the beneficiaries. The construction work is mostly entrusted to contractors through a tendering process.

**Table 2: Status of Irrigation Systems**

Village (No. of Households)	Type & Length (Year of Construction)	Constr- uction Agency	Manage- ment	Irrig. Area (in ha.)	Benefited Households		
					SC	OBC	G
Dhankurali (58 - All General)	850 m PVC guhl (2005)	VDC	UG	3	-	-	45
	700 m lined guhl (2006)	MID	Villagers	2	-	-	15
Gorti (147 – 74 General, 72 SC and 1 OBC)	800 m lined guhl (2002-03)	MID	Users	0.5	7	-	-
	1200 m guhl (100 years' old) of which 800 m is being lined, along with tank	MID	Villagers	3.0	50	-	35
Mamani (65 – 64 General and 1 SC)	150 m lined guhl (1991)	SCD	Users	0.7	-	-	12
	1800 m lined guhl – in progress (2000)	ID	ID & Users	-	-	-	-
	70 m lined guhl (2005)	ZP	Users	0.3	-	-	8
	2" x 1" hydam (2005)	VDC	UG	0.5	-	-	8
	1500 m lined guhl (2006)	MID	Users	7.0	1	-	24
Gharara (88 – 43 SC, 35 OBC & 10 General)	150 m unlined guhl (Before 100 years)	Villagers	Users	2.5	-	-	8
	3000 m lined guhl – under repair (1979)	ID	ID (Dysfunctional)	-	25	-	-
	100 m lined guhl (1991)	GP	Users	1	-	-	9
	150 m lined guhl (2004)	MID	Users	3	20	30	18
	1500 m lined guhl (2005)	ID	ID. & Users	4	28	30	-
Makhet (96 – 66 OBC & 30 General)	350 m unlined guhl (100 years old)	Villagers	Users	3	-	32	9
	800 m lined guhl – in progress (1999)	ID	ID & Users	5	-	50	-
	300 m lined guhl (2003)	MID	Users	1	-	18	7
	400 m lined guhl (2003)	MID	Users	2	-	18	22
	500 m lined guhl (2006)	ID	Users	4	-	40	7
	Hydam (in progress)	MID	-	-	-	-	-
Bainoli (61 – All General)	5000 m lined guhl (1963)	ID	ID	10	-	-	47
	100 m lined guhl (1985)	MID	Users	1.2	-	-	6
	500 m lined guhl (1991)	MID	Users	2	-	-	47
	1200 m lined guhl (2006)	MID	Users	8	-	-	14

Source: Focus Group Discussions with Villagers; Irrigation Department and Minor Irrigation Department, Block Jakholi, District Rudraprayag, Uttarakhand (2006-07)

MID: Minor Irrigation Department; ID: Irrigation Department; SCD: Soil Conservation Department; GP: Gram Panchayat  
ZP: Zilla Parishad; VDC: Village Development Committee; UG: Users Group; G: General



The ground situation, however, is quite different than what the ID claims. The beneficiaries revealed that in almost all cases for site selection, the department engineer interacts only with the Gram Pradhan. According to the villagers, the beneficiaries themselves have to manage the water flow during the cropping season because the ID's watchman-cum-supervisor is usually not present. It was also reported that the ID does not take timely and adequate care of the irrigation canals in cases of leaks or breakages. This is despite the fact that the beneficiaries regularly pay the irrigation tax to the Department. In the case of a defunct guhl in Gharara (Bhirani hamlet), the beneficiaries have now even stopped paying the irrigation tax. The day-to-day operation and maintenance of the ID's irrigation systems are in effect in the hands of the beneficiaries.

**Irrigation Systems of Minor Irrigation Department (MID):** According to the Minor Irrigation Department, it makes smaller canals, as per its rules. MID's junior engineer holds initial discussions with the villagers through the Gram Panchayat for selecting a suitable site. Later, he is supposed to hold discussions with the beneficiaries and constitutes a Users Group (UG) comprising of all the beneficiaries. Constitution of UGs has been initiated for works, which have commenced from April 2005 onwards. The President of the Users Group is the Gram Pradhan while the Secretary is the concerned junior engineer of the MID. The members of the user group are constituted out of the beneficiaries. The UGs is responsible for repair and maintenance of the canal. As per the guidelines of MID, 3 per cent of the total estimated budget of the canal is deposited in the UG account, which is supposed to be utilized towards canal repair and maintenance works in the future. The Gram Pradhan and the junior engineer jointly operate this account. The beneficiaries are also required to contribute a part of the proceeds from their agricultural produce to the above account to make sufficient funds provision for repair and maintenance works. The construction of the canals begins with the sanctioning of the budget following which the work is entrusted to the Gram Panchayat. The Gram Panchayat then commences work on canal construction along with the beneficiaries, i.e., the Users Group and technical input is provided by the junior engineer of the MID.

However, no functional User Groups exist in any of the MID irrigation systems. The beneficiaries revealed that they knew very little about the UG concept or its existence in their village. The accounts of the UGs were opened but nobody knows anything about them except the junior engineers and the Gram Pradhans. As far as maintenance of the systems is concerned, informally the beneficiaries look after the canals. They usually consult the village priest for deciding an auspicious date for commencing irrigation in their fields. Before releasing the irrigation water, the beneficiaries go together to the canal head and undertake necessary repairs with mud and stone. Attendance of all the villagers for the purpose is not compulsory and there is no penalty for keeping away from the repair works. Once water is released into the canal, villagers whose fields are covered by canal irrigation do the work of repair and maintenance along its length. Deficiencies of irrigation water in the canal sometimes give rise to minor conflicts that are resolved mutually.

**Household Water Management Systems:** As stated earlier, in the selected villages of Hilaungad watershed, barring Makheth, Jal Sansthan is responsible for the supply of household water. In these villages, the Jal Sansthan itself takes care of installation and maintenance of all household water supply pipelines and standposts. Households are billed for the water supply according to private or public connections and they pay water dues to the Department on a bimonthly basis. The average daily per capita household water consumption in the villages

ranges from a minimum of 14 litres (Gorti) to a maximum of 27 litres (Bainoli) whereas the minimum State norm is 40 litres per capita per day.

In 2000, Swajal Yojana was launched in Makheth village for supplying household water. Khadi Gramodyog, a voluntary organization, initiated the work. The pipelines that had been earlier installed by the Jal Sansthan in the village were pulled out by the residents in the hope that they would get better water supply through the Rs. 1.1 million Swajal Project. However, the project provided water to the people for just two months. This was because a committee that had been constituted of the beneficiaries for carrying out repairs and maintenance could not fulfill its obligation. This was mainly because the new pipeline, which passed above the road surface, got damaged during clearance of roads by PWD workers after landslides and villagers found that frequent repairs were too expensive for their pockets. The committee members too found it inconvenient to approach the beneficiaries with demands for money every now and then. The beneficiaries on the other hand, complained that they hardly received any water and therefore refrained from giving any contribution towards the repair works. At present, the villagers have to collect water from a spring from which the Gram Panchayat has provided a pipeline. People also collect drinking water from nearby springs. For washing clothes, utensils and for livestock, people are dependent on water supply from a local stream.

Thus, it can be seen that the role of Gram Sabha is also undermined in the case of water management. It is the Gram Pradhan who is actually consulted for site selection and construction of irrigation canals. UGs for irrigation systems of MID only exist in records. The operation and maintenance of the systems, be it ID or MID, is informally undertaken by the beneficiaries collectively. As for the household water supply, the community has neither ownership nor responsibility for operation and maintenance.

### **Financial Institutions**

In Hilaungad watershed a number of Savings and Credit Groups (SCGs) have come up during the last decade. These institutions are supposed to provide credit support to people in the village and aim at improving the socio-economic status of the households, especially the poor. Each of these groups consists of about 10-20 women members who have come together and created a common fund by contributing small savings on a regular basis. These groups have developed their own management systems and accountability for handling the resources generated. Decision-making is based on participatory mechanisms. All the groups in Dhankurali, Gorti and Mamani manage the pooled resources in a democratic way and give small interest bearing loans to their members. The rate of interest has been kept at 24 per cent on an annual basis for the purpose of loans. At a later stage, these groups are expected to obtain credit from outside sources to support income-generating activities. About a third of the SCGs, in Gharara (4), Makheth (2) and Bainoli (3) have restrained themselves from inter-lending activities so far. These groups also take active interest in village development activities.

Local NGOs like Jan Vikas Sansthan (JVS) and GRASS have played a key role in promoting these groups in the valley. There are about 25 Savings and Credit Groups in the six selected villages. About 53 per cent of the village households have membership in these groups. However, income-generating groups (IGGs) exist only in Bainoli village. The present status of these two types of financial institutions is given in Table 3. Discussions were held with the members of these institutions regarding the operational systems and benefits accrued by them.

**Table 3: Status of Savings and Credit & Income Generating Groups**

Village	No. of Households (Caste)	Type of Group	Year of Formation	Total Savings (in Rs.)	Members (Caste)		Status
					Male	Female	
Dhankurali	58 (All General)	3 SCGs	2003-06	26,200	-	51 (All General)	Functional
Gorti	147 (72 SC, 1 OBC & 74 General)	5 SCGs	2002	49,450	-	50 (All SC)	Functional
Mamani	65 (1 SC and 64 General)	3 SCGs	2003-06	22,090	-	43 (1 SC and 42 General)	Functional
Gharara	88 (43 SC, 35 OBC & 10 General)	6 SCGs	2001-05	62,880	-	51 (12 SC, 30 OBC & 9 General)	Functional
Makhet	96 (66 OBC & 30 General)	5 SCGs	2001-06	1,26,620	-	50 (32 OBC & 18 General)	Functional
Bainoli	61 (All General)	3 SCGs	2004	28,800	-	30 (All General)	Functional
		Milk Dairy (IGG)	2002	40,000	-	30 (All General)	Functional
		Bee keeping (IGG)	2005	-	10 (All General)	-	Defunct
		Vegetable cultivation (IGG)	2001	90,000	11 (All General)	-	Functional

Source: Focus Group Discussions with Savings and Credit Groups and Income Generating groups, 2006-07

**Dhankurali:** In Dhankurali three SCGs have been formed with 51 members, all of whom are women belonging to the general category. These groups were constituted between 2003 to 2006, under the aegis of Jan Vikas Sansthan. Every member in the SCG deposits Rs. 10 every month in the collective fund and also avail small loans from the group in order to meet their requirements. The total amount collected so far in all the three SCGs is Rs. 26,200 and the inter-loaned amount is Rs. 121,646. The group has so far earned an interest of Rs. 8,195.

**Gorti:** In 2002, 'GRASS', another local voluntary organization, helped in constituting five SCGs in Gorti village, with a total of 50 women members, each depositing Rs. 50 per month (except one group, where monthly saving is Rs. 20/member) in the collective fund. All the members belong to the Scheduled Caste. The total amount collected in all the five SCGs is Rs. 49,450 at present. All the members avail small loans in order to meet their requirements. The inter-loaned amount is Rs. 40,300, while the groups have so far earned an interest of Rs. 6,614. Three groups have also been linked with a bank and have availed loans amounting to a sum of Rs. 300,000 for a dairy.

**Mamani:** In Mamani village too, Jan Vikas Sansthan has constituted three SCGs since 2003. They have a total of 43 members, all of whom are women. One of these women members belongs to the Scheduled Caste. Every member in the SCG deposits Rs. 10 every month in the collective fund and the total amount collected in all the three SCGs is Rs. 22,090 at present. All the members also avail small loans in order to meet their requirements. The inter-loaning amount is Rs. 86,848 and the group has so far earned an interest of Rs. 8,223. None of the groups have been linked with a bank.

**Gharara:** Between 2001 and 2005, SCGs have been constituted in Gharara village. Two of them have been formed by GRASS. These groups have a total of 51 members, of which 12 belong to the Scheduled Castes and 39 are from the other backward classes (OBCs). The members of groups formed by the block deposit Rs. 10 every month whereas those formed by GRASS deposit Rs. 50 every month in the collective fund. The groups have a total collection of Rs. 62,880. Only two groups (formed by GRASS) do inter-loaning (amounting to Rs. 14,000), whereas the others do not resort to any inter-loaning in order to avoid any conflict among its members. They have, therefore, deposited the savings in a bank. None of the groups have been linked with a bank.

**Makhet:** Makhet has five SCGs out of which four have been constituted by GRASS. These groups were constituted between 2001 and 2006. There are a total of 50 members in these groups, of which 18 belong to the General Caste and 32 are from the other backward classes (OBCs). The monthly savings of the members varies from group to group, ranging from Rs. 10 to Rs. 50 every month. They have a total savings of about Rs. 126,620. Three out of the five groups do inter-loaning (amounting to a sum of Rs. 74,400). Two groups have been linked to a bank and have availed loans amounting to Rs. 150,000 for agricultural activities, especially pulses and vegetables cultivation.

**Bainoli:** There are two types of financial institutions -- SCGs and IGGs in Bainoli. These were constituted by GRASS, a local voluntary organization, between 2001 and 2005. There are six groups in all, of which three are SCGs and three are IGGs.

The three SCGs were constituted in 2004 and have a total of 30 members. The groups have collected a total saving of Rs. 28,800 but do not resort to any inter-loaning and have deposited their entire savings in a bank instead. The three IGGs conduct dairying, bee-keeping and vegetable cultivation activities.

- (i) **Milk Dairy:** This is an all-women activity in which the members collect milk and sell it at the nearby market. The members earn a monthly income of Rs. 1500 from dairying. Each member deposits Rs.20 as savings in a fund every month, out of the proceeds of the milk sale. The total savings of about Rs. 40,000 are kept in a bank.
- (ii) **Bee Keeping:** This is basically an all-male group, which was constituted by GRASS in 2005. In the initial phase, GRASS provided the 10-member group with training support and materials. However, owing to low income and consequent loss of interest, it is in a defunct state.
- (iii) **Vegetable cultivation:** This group consisting of 11 all-male members was constituted by the Agriculture Department of Jakholi block, Rudraprayag in 2001. All the group members equally share profits from the sale of vegetables. The members earn an annual income of Rs. 30,000 from the sale of vegetables.

It can be seen from the above that the SCGs are in an early stage of growth. They have so far helped in mobilising the self-confidence of the village women. However, the groups, particularly those in Gharara, Makhet and Bainoli, lack proper direction. Mere savings without inter-loaning activity belies the goal of providing funds to poor households at the time of their need. The groups engaged in inter-loaning activities need to be linked with commercial banks for access to additional funds for productive purposes.

## Other Institutions

Gram Panchayats are the most important representative village institutions, which are responsible for undertaking all development activities in a village. Besides, panchayats with the help of its sub-committees are also responsible for school education, managing minor irrigation and household water related activities, disaster management and forest management with the help and assistance of the concerned departments. Besides, panchayats also help in resolving conflicts arising out of social and economic disputes in the villages. Other village level institutions include the Mahila Mangal Dals, Yuvak Mangal Dals and Village Development Committees. The details of these institutions along with their functional and membership status are given in the following sections.

**Institutions for Village Development:** Gram Panchayats in Hilaungad watershed have undertaken various village development activities such as construction of schools, village roads and lanes. However, the Gram Sabhas have not been taken into confidence during their planning and execution. It is the Gram Pradhan and other executive committee members who dominate and run the show in the region. Thus there is lack of participation.

Gram Shiksha Samitis (Village Education Committees) have been constituted in all the six selected villages. They were constituted to monitor educational quality and address problems regarding primary school education. The five-member executive body of these Samitis consists of the concerned Gram Pradhan, the headmaster of the primary school and ward members. These bodies were originally mandated to hold a meeting every month to take stock of the schools' progress and also resolve problems, if any. However, except in Bainoli and Mamani, the Samitis in the other three villages do not hold regular meetings and rarely carry out the assigned functions owing to lack of interest on the part of their committee members. In these villages, the teachers run the school affairs.

An Aapda Prabandhan Samiti (Disaster Management Committee) has been constituted in only one village, i.e., Mamani. It was established in 2005 by a *Patwari*. It consists of 15 members (4 female and 11male). The executive committee consists of 5 members. This institution was originally constituted to combat situations arising out of the occurrence of natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods. However, the *Samiti* is dysfunctional at present.

Other than the Gram Panchayat and its allied committees, Village Development Committees have been constituted in two out of the six selected villages, i.e., Mamani and Dhankurali, under the provisions of the Himmotthan Pariyojana by Jan Vikas Sansthan, a local voluntary organization. These committees have been mandated to implement watershed development activities under the Himmotthan Pariyojana. The composition of the committees and activities undertaken by them are given in Table 4.

**Table 4: Status of Village Development Committees**

Institution	Dhankurali	Mamani
Year of Formation	2004	2004
Executive Committee	9 Members (2 Female & 7 Male)	9 Members (3 Female & 7 Male) including one SC
Development Activities undertaken	Irrigation works, plantation on community lands, horticulture, and soil and water conservation	Irrigation works, plantation on community lands and Van Panchayat land, horticulture, agriculture, and soil and water conservation

Source: Village Meetings, 2006-07

At present, these committees are working in close coordination with the local people towards achieving the targets under the watershed development plans drawn by them. User Groups (UGs) comprising of beneficiaries have also been formed under the programme for the management and supervision of the various works carried out. However, the future of these institutions is at stake, especially when the watershed programme comes to an end in 2007.

**Institutions for Women and Youth Welfare:** As stated earlier, Mahila Mangal Dals and Yuvak Mangal Dals exist in the selected villages and are primarily responsible for women and youth welfare respectively. The status of these institutions is given in Table 5.

**Table 5: Status of Mahila Mangal Dals and Yuvak Mangal Dals**

Village (No. of Households)	Dhankurali (58)	Gorti (147)	Mamani (65)	Gharara (88)	Makhet (96)	Bainoli (61)
Mahila Mangal Dal						
Year of Formation	1999	2003	1994	2003	1990	1982
Total Members with Caste breakup	32 (All females) – 32 General	70 (All females) – 40 General & 30 SC	65 (All females) – 64 General & 1 SC	40 (All females) – 5 General, 15 SC & 20 OBC	62 (All females) – 30 General & 32 OBC. *	45 (All females) – 45 General
Executive Committee	7	7	7	7	7	7
Status	Non registered & dysfunctional	All are registered but dysfunctional				Non registered & dysfunctional
Yuvak Mangal Dal						
Year of Formation	Not Formed	Not Formed	Not Formed	Not formed	1997	1997
Total Members	-	-	-	-	30	40
Executive Committee	-	-	-	-	7 (All Male)	7 (All Male)
Status	-	-	-	-	Dysfunctional & non-registered	

Source: Village Meetings with Mahila Mangal Dals and Yuvak Mangal Dals, 2006-07

\* Households of Udainagar hamlet not represented

Mahila Mangal Dals (MMDs) have been constituted in all the six villages by the Block Development Office. Four of them are also registered. These institutions have carried out important social and environmental campaigns including anti-liquor and sanitation campaigns, and plantation activities in the past. In the initial years, the MMDs used to conduct meetings on a regular basis and collected Rs.5 per member on a monthly basis for operational expenses. However, at present none of the MMDs conduct meetings and the collection of membership fees has also stopped. Due to lack of direction and cooperation from the government machinery, these institutions are now in defunct state.

Yuvak Mangal Dals (YMDs) have been constituted in two out of the six villages. The Block Development Office established these institutions and its main objectives were to foster the development of the local youth. However, the government machinery has neither paid any attention to these institutions nor ensured that they function according to the mandate. As a result, the youth could not derive any significant benefit from these institutions. There is

significant out-migration of the youth from the villages in search of livelihood. The two YMDs are also presently defunct.

#### IV. DISCUSSIONS

In order to incorporate an element of decentralized governance, the government in the last few decades has encouraged, established institutions at the grassroots level in the rural areas. However, the local officials who are given the responsibility for their formation have treated it in a very casual way. As it is mandatory on their part to establish community level institutions, the local officials send compliance reports regarding their formation. The entire process is reduced to a mere formality of the establishment, as the officials show no interest in nurturing or guiding their growth. Even though such institutions continue to proliferate, what is essentially lacking in them is the sense of ownership by the community, which looks at the entire initiative as a government exercise.

In the case of Van Panchayats, apart from limited territorial jurisdiction there are a host of other administrative and legal problems. The reasons behind the Van Panchayats not functioning efficiently include the fact that they have not been exactly in the priority list of the administration. It has been pointed out that the only fulltime officer for Van Panchayat is the Inspector who has to administer an area beyond his capacity. For example, in Almora district there are four Van Panchayat Inspectors who have to look after 1801 Van Panchayats.<sup>7</sup> Another report points out that in Nainital district there are 211 Van Panchayats and only one inspector. Besides, the Van Panchayat Inspectors are appointed from among the revenue officials like Kanungos and Patwaris who are trained in revenue administration, which has a different culture and working environment and they have no training in forestry. In addition, historically there has been dual control over Van Panchayats of the revenue and forest department with all administrative powers being vested in the revenue department and technical powers with the Forest department. Recently, the forest rangers have replaced the *Patwaris* as secretaries in the Van Panchayats, which has resulted in a considerable loss of interest on the part of the latter in looking after the affairs of the Van Panchayats. This is very much reflected from the field studies where the registration process of Van Panchayats stands pending.

According to the various stipulations, which are in force at present, the state government controls everything related to collection, retention and distribution of water and water resources.<sup>8</sup> The legal regimes have time and again emphasized government control on natural resources, thus leading to more and more alienation of the people. In fact the Kumaon and Garhwal Water (Collection, Retention and Distribution) Act 1975 has a drastic provision saying that “*On and from fifteenth day of July, 1975, all the existing rights (whether customary or otherwise and whether vested in any individual or in village communities) of use of water, if any in the areas to which this Act extends, shall stand abolished.*”<sup>9</sup> The very next section of the Act then empowers the State Government to regulate and control water and water resources and then more as a sop than anything else adds that while exercising its powers the State Government will “*give*

<sup>7</sup> V. Upadhyay (2006): “Water-Forest Management, Law and Policy in Uttarakhand: Issues, Constraints, Opportunities”, People’s Science Institute, Dehra Doon (Unpublished).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> -----: Section 3 of the Garhwal and Kumaon Water Act 1975.

*preference to the persons or village communities whose rights in respect of water has been abolished*” under the previous section.<sup>10</sup> It would be interesting to see that ever since the State Government has really accorded any preference to ‘*people with abolished rights*’ or not. In any event the two sections under the Act provide a classic example of how a right can be easily converted into a concession under the discretion of the State government. It may also be added here that the Section abolishing all existing rights as of a specified date is arbitrary, draconian and deserves to be taken off the statute books.<sup>11</sup>

Already alienated by such legal, policy and administrative procedures, the rural communities now do not display much interest in decentralization initiatives taken by the government. Thus it is imperative to improve the condition of natural resources but it can only become possible through community management. For this there will have to be a felt urgency to re-establish the traditional arrangements whereby the people not only enjoyed at least de facto ownership status of the natural resources but also managed the resources in a sustainable manner. But current government policy documents do not show any significant movement in that direction. The State Water Policy draft still envisages total ownership of water resources by the state and the role of local institutions, i.e., the GPs is limited to maintenance and repair of water supply systems, even though the document admits that “A paradigm shift towards participation of local community in management of water resources should be done.”<sup>12</sup>

Livelihoods related field studies of the present project show a massive shift from agriculture to off-farm employment.<sup>13</sup> This has serious implications for community-based natural resource management. Studies show that when people shift from farm to non-farm occupations, they are less inclined to be active in community-based institutions.<sup>14</sup>

The history of natural resource management in Uttarakhand -- and in the rest of India -- shows that the state has been singularly unable to effectively manage the natural resources. Integrated resource management will require the involvement of the local communities, since at that level integrated management is possible. This will require changes in the present policy, legal and institutional frameworks. The Seventy Third Constitutional Amendment offers an opportunity for this. GPs are meant to be units of self-governance and several subjects like water management, irrigation and watershed development are to be transferred to them.<sup>15</sup> This needs to be expanded by also transferring jurisdiction of local forest resources to either GPs or VPs.

Recently, the newly elected government in Uttarakhand has made a radical announcement regarding the planning and implementation of rural drinking water schemes. It has ordered that instead of Jal Nigam and Jal Sansthan, it will be PRI institutions such as the village water and sanitation committee (VWSC) which will now prepare, design, plan,

<sup>10</sup> -----: Section 4 of the Garhwal and Kumaon Water Act 1975.

<sup>11</sup> V. Upadhyay (2006): “Water-Forest Management, Law and Policy in Uttaranchal: Issues, Constraints, Opportunities”, People’s Science Institute, Dehra Doon (Unpublished).

<sup>12</sup> R. Chopra (2003): “Uttarakhand’s Draft water Policy: A visionless document”, People’s Science Institute, Dehra Doon (Unpublished).

<sup>13</sup> R. Chopra, D. Sen, S. Bharadwaj & D. Negi (2008): “Livelihood Transitions in Hilaungad Watershed”, People’s Science Institute, Dehra Doon (Unpublished).

<sup>14</sup> J.M. Baker (2005): The Kuhls of Kangra: Community-Managed Irrigation in the Western Himalaya, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, pp. 271.

<sup>15</sup> R. Chopra (2003): Survival Lessons: Himalayan Jal Sanskriti, People’s Science Institute, Dehra Doon, pp. 66.



operationalise, maintain and control drinking water schemes in the villages.<sup>16</sup> There is an impending need to bring about such institutional reforms at the grassroots level. When people exercise some degree of ownership and control over their natural resources, their alienation may end.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

The study reveals that most of the institutions for resource management are dysfunctional. The traditional institutions of caste, class, kinship and panchayats are strong and enduring while the new modern institutions are quite weak. Since many of these institutions have been formed as a result of government orders, villagers display little sense of their ownership. They look at the entire initiative as a government exercise. Some of the community level institutions created by VOs have been able to create an involvement of the local communities in the development process.

The Gram Panchayats are responsible for undertaking various village development activities and managing local resources in consultation with the Gram Sabhas and with the help of sub-committees. However, the Gram Sabhas are not actively involved in decision-making. It is the Gram Pradhan and other executive committee members who dominate and run the show. The affiliated sectoral sub-committees of Gram Panchayat are also non-existent.

Barring Bainoli in rest of the villages the Van Panchayats were formed hurriedly as per Government's directive without proper follow-up and guidance. This has led to defunct bodies and alienation of the communities from the concerned land, which is reflected, by the poor survival rate and encroachment in the areas. The Van Panchayats not only have limited territorial jurisdiction but also suffer from a host of other administrative and legal problems.

The role of Gram Sabha is also undermined in case of water management. It is the Gram Pradhan who is actually consulted for site selection and construction of irrigation canals. User Groups for irrigation systems of MID only exist in records. The operation and maintenance of the systems be it ID or MID, is formally undertaken by the beneficiaries collectively. As for the household water supply the community has neither ownership nor responsibility for operation and maintenance.

The main sources of financial capital are the traditional moneylenders. The existent Savings and Credit Groups are in an early stage of growth. Most of the groups lack proper direction. The goal of providing funds to the deprived households is not fulfilled due to poor inter-lending activity. The groups need to be strengthened and linked with commercial banks for access to additional funds for promoting micro-enterprises. Due to lack of direction and cooperation from the government machinery, the Mahila Mangal Dals as well as Yuvak Magal Dals are also in a defunct state.

Keeping in the spirit of the Panchayat Raj Act of 1992 fund, function, functionaries need to be devolved on PRIs. So far the transfer of funds and functionaries to the PRI has been resisted by the state administrators, elected MLAs and functionaries who see diminishing of their power as a consequence. Without the transfer of funds and functionaries, the transfer of functions is a mockery. Such transfer along with activation of the sectoral Gram Panchayat sub-committees

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<sup>16</sup> -----: 'Nigam Va Sansthan Se Chini Gramin Peyjal Yojnaein', Dainik Jagran, Dehradun Edition, April 21, 2007

can lead to an improvement of the services provided to the local communities. Capacity building of Gram Panchayat, its sub-committees and Mahila Mangal Dals need to be undertaken through VOs and other institutions.

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