PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLE OF A LOCAL INDIAN NGO IN A WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IN CENTRAL INDIA

by

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Abstract

“Participation” has become an increasingly important discourse within the global practice of development. Rhetorically used by a disparate array of development organizations ranging from government departments and large multi-national development agencies to small local non-government organizations (NGOs), “participation” has come to broadly represent the attempt to involve local individuals and groups within the planning and management of the development activities directly affecting them. The far-reaching and enthusiastic acceptance of what participation conceptually represents, however, has tended to definitionally cloud the more intricate and human matter of how participation as a development process is to be practically achieved at the local level. How macro-level conceptual policies of institutionalised development, such as “participation”, become visible in the micro-level realities of rural communities is a central question.

This dissertation examines the work of a small Indian NGO (INDEV), involved in a participatory watershed development project in Madhya Pradesh, India. How participation emerged as a social process between INDEV and local farmers to bring about social, economic, and ecological change is documented. Essential to the emergence of a process of meaningful participatory development is the intersubjective accomplishment of meaning. Therefore, the local-level experience where the social construction of knowledge and relations of power were negotiated daily within the interactions between INDEV, local farmers and the government district administration is emphasised.

Participatory development can be an empowering activity for marginalized communities, but this depends on a shift in power relations between development officials and local individuals. The meaningful participation of communities can be severely limited when state development policies, often inextricably tied to rigid management practices, fixed time frames and quantitative measurement standards, are favoured over local knowledge, local time frames and a social space in which participation happens through the unmeasurables of trust, compromise and self-confidence. This research focuses on INDEV’s struggles with both the district administration’s reluctance to surrender control over development actions, as well as the hesitancy of local farmers who, in light of their past interactions with the authoritative nature of government development activities, often see non-participation as the best way to avoid risks to their short and long term economic survival.
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Chapter One
Participating in Development: Introduction of Concepts and Approach

A Process Approach to Development

The heat of the day was slowly dissipating as Chandra and I sat beneath the shade of a tree and gazed up at the small hills in front of us. Chandra, a development worker from a small Indian nongovernment organization (NGO) called INDEV working in the district of Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh, India, was quietly excited as the day’s participatory development work had gone very well with the farmers with whom he was working in the village of Samoi. Chandra was overseeing the day-to-day activities of this central government financed participatory watershed development project for which INDEV had been hired as a project implementing agency (PIA) by the local district government administration. Tired but pleased with what had taken place in Samoi, Chandra grinned at me and forcefully exclaimed how in “three years there will be water flowing uphill in this place!” When I jokingly observed that he would probably have a tough time getting the local district government Collector¹ to believe this as it would be hard to measure, Chandra shook his head and commented that “yes, measurement was always a problem in development.” He then began speaking about the barriers he felt existed to participatory development, a common topic within our many discussions about development and the

¹ The District Collector has overall authority and responsibility for the general and revenue administration of a district.
work he and the other INDEV workers were engaged in with local farmers.

Development, he asserted, should never be understood to represent a fixed and rigid structure of actions. Rather it should be understood as a complex and fluid social practice that evolves through time and that privileges the social interactions that take place between people central to those development actions. Understanding how development activities take place between these individuals and groups, Chandra claimed, is more than simply documenting fixed development actions which can be objectively measured. A preoccupation with material targets, he claimed, leads to the disruption and “breaking up” of development practices as it disregards the need to address the many diverse but interconnected areas of an individual’s personal and community life. An approach that only looks at measurable, concrete outputs, Chandra remarked, will not be successful in producing a form of development that is socially, economically and environmentally sustainable. Furthermore, it is less efficient and cost effective.

Motioning to the village houses around us Chandra quickly laid out a scenario combining both what had so far taken place in the village with what he envisioned for the future of the participatory development process that was emerging in the Samoi village watershed. This village, he explained, had decided to grow grass on the hills and the villagers were paid by their village watershed committee to treat the land by digging counter trenches to stop water runoff and soil erosion. A portion of the wage made by the Samoi villagers then went into a village bank account that had also been set up through the participatory watershed development project. The villagers, Chandra continued, had also stopped grazing their cows on the hill and instead kept them in stalls and fed them the grass that now grew ungrazed on the hillside. The cows, now receiving better feed,
would produce more milk allowing for a surplus which could be sold by their owners through the milk co-op in the area. The growing of the grass on the hill also helped to prevent erosion and would increase the watertable, therefore there was more moisture in the soil and an increase in the level of water in the wells which in turn could be used to help increase the crop yield. As the cows were now kept in stalls the children did not have to spend as much time tending them in the field and so now had more time to go to school. Recognizing this, the village watershed committee in Samoi began to plan to support small community or phalia\(^2\) schools using the profits from selling the grass and from the contributions from the wages paid to the farmers that had been saved in the village watershed bank. The village watershed committee also used this village watershed bank to authorize loans to local Samoi village farmers at a low rate. This would save the villagers from resorting to the necessity of borrowing from the money lenders in the nearby town, which, in turn, reduced the need for the farmer and much of his family to migrate to urban areas to work for wages to pay-off the high interest loans. This would mean that more families could stay in their homes throughout the year and care for the land which now had a better chance of raising more than one crop each year due to the increased availability of water resulting from the planting of the grass on the hill.

Chandra explained that effects from development actions cannot always be envisioned solely as a linear connection. While conventional development strategies reduce and classify development activities into sectors and by categories amenable to statistical evaluation, the often indirect and cyclical connections between social,

\(^2\) A phalia is a grouping of houses. There can be many phalias interspersed within the boundaries of a single village.
economic, and environmental aspects of change must also be qualitatively assessed.

"Bushels of grass is one way to measure successful development", Chandra noted, "but how do you quantitatively connect the growing of grass with children being able to go to school." Furthermore, how do you measure confidence, skills and capacity building by local villagers learning to make their own development decisions? And yet it is these social factors and processes that are at the root of successful development and sustained positive change. This positive change is a difficult process to measure and demonstrate using standardised quantitative indicators. It demands an approach that recognizes its complex processual nature. Approaching participatory development conceptually in terms of a single project with prefixed targets, set objectives and rigid time limits is prohibitive to thinking about development in processual or social terms. Chandra's observations echoed recent thinking surrounding development where, "common sense and experience tells us that the simple project model is dangerously far from reality; that the relationship between inputs and outputs is not linear; that responses to inputs are often non-proportional, that action generates unpredictable effects and that the same inputs under similar conditions do not always produce the same results" (Mosse 1998:5).

Instead, development thinkers and practitioners are now starting to take a process approach to development which focuses on project flexibility, emphasising the holistic and intertwined nature of relationships (social, economic, environmental and political) and the institutional contexts in which they have emerged. Increasingly it is being recognized that a focus on the social interactions central to development activities is critical. It is within these social interactions that the production of meanings that inform and direct the character and activities of a development project are socially constructed. It
is through the exploration of these social interactions that an understanding is gained of how a project is affected by conflicting interests, the social dynamics of dominance and power, and the relevance between stated and unstated individual and institutional objectives. A processual view of development, therefore, is not concerned with the notion of progress towards an end objective, rather it is “open-ended” and “... concerned with the dynamics of ... different perceptions of relationships, transactions, decision making, or conflicts and their resolutions” (Mosse 1998:10). Chandra demonstrated in his scenario about the village of Samoi some of the positive and far-reaching dynamics of a processual and participatory approach. Unfortunately, as he also noted, this type of processual approach is often at odds with more conventional development strategies. As a result, development practitioners need to overcome numerous conceptual and practical barriers in pursuit of a processual approach. It was the social interactions, and the organizational cultures involved in development that fascinated me, and which I set out to study in Jhabua District, Madhya Pradesh. One processual and social approach to development interested me in particular - a participatory development approach.

**Participation as a Process Approach to Development**

This process-oriented approach is best exemplified by the concept of participatory development. Often referred to as a “people-centred” development, it is a development process attentive to social relations and cultural factors and not simply with physical outputs and the managerial strategies of development. From this perspective participation is about power and providing an access to resources previously denied to marginalized populations (Chambers 1994b: 1444).
While participatory development attempts to address the lack of access to and control of material resources by the poor and marginalized, it also attempts to change the self-perception of powerlessness pervading the ethos of many of the world's poorer people. David Mosse notes that “process refers to the dynamic, unpredictable and idiosyncratic elements in development programmes; those things which are not easily amenable to planning and management control but which are nonetheless central to success or failure.” (1998:5). By making social processes its foundation, participatory development pays attention to social relations as a first step in equalising previously unequal relationships through the inclusion of the poor and marginalized in decision-making processes.

The construction of knowledge and relations of power must be envisioned in process terms (Prus 1998). Both are products of human interaction and therefore must be analyzed as such. Knowledge is always partial, fragmented and local as individuals or groups will bring to their interactions various views and perspectives. As a result of this there can be diverse meanings and multiple realities. Thus analysis of a development situation must pay attention to these interactions where meaning and knowledge is negotiated and used to form the foundation for human group life.

Power does not exist in a vacuum but must be seen as a process that emerges and is defined through social interactions. Power “most fundamentally is a social, meaningful enacted essence. It is dependent on people for its contextualization, implementation, resistance, adjustment, and impact” (Prus 1998:272). Meaningful participation is not only made up of social processes, but even more importantly, it is about how the construction of knowledge and power is shared. It is an intersubjective construction. Participatory
development is the transformation of relationships that would see the marginalized controlling their own development. What I mean by this is that relations of power can exist within distinctions of gender, class and social standing, ethnicity, caste, age, economic status and nationality. If part of the agenda of participatory development is to bring about a more equitable balance among people in both decision-making and material resources, then it is essential to acknowledge that there are differences in power between individuals and groups and that these differences can be reflected in many different ways. Therefore how these differences are practically manifested, defined, enforced, and sustained within a development project between NGOs and sponsors as well as between the NGO and local beneficiaries are central to the understanding of participatory processes in development.

The concept of participation and its central focus on development as a social process, has become a dominant topic within development discussions. For a growing number of practitioners it represents the new path towards an alternative form of development. As Chandra commented, however, the way of valuing and evaluating a development approach focused on the achievement of objective targets are quite different from those used to evaluate a development approach based on social processes, such as participatory development. Worse, the potential benefits of a participatory development approach are in jeopardy if it is made to conform to conventional or out-puts-oriented approaches. If for no other reason, participatory development emerged as a direct reaction to this type of conventional practice that has functioned with an overwhelming econo-centric bias driven by external knowledge systems. If participatory development is to emerge as a useful process, then conventional approaches must allow for new
understandings and practices to ensure that meaningful participatory development is encouraged and supported in both thought and action.

**Background to the Study**

My interest in participatory development and my decision to study the work of a NGO in Jhabua District were due to a combination of elements. In 1994 I was offered the opportunity to take part in an interdisciplinary research project in Jhabua District, India undertaking research on rural communities in ecological and economic distress. Sponsored by the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute, this project involved a number of Canadian and Indian researchers. I went to Jhabua with a team of Canadian researchers who each studied a different aspect of the inter-related environmental and social problems faced by local communities. Similarly, Indian researchers studied social and environmental issues in Lillooet, B.C..

Prior to this offer, I had become interested in the association between anthropology and the field of development while completing my Master’s degree in Visual Anthropology. More specifically, I became interested in the new approach of participatory development taken by many NGOs and some development agencies. Working with a colleague I had participated as a researcher in a UNDP funded study that attempted to assess the potential cultural, social, economic, and environmental impacts that a major hydro development project would have had on a remote, isolated valley in eastern Nepal. Our involvement in the impact study was to visually document the actions of the various research study teams of a Nepali NGO as each team travelled the length of
the valley talking with local people about the different aspects of the proposed dam and the service road that would accompany it.³

Participation, used as a development term in the early 1990s, had already achieved considerable use within alternative streams of development. For mainstream development institutions like the World Bank, however, participation as a development philosophy was still new.⁴ In a new effort to include the local population in its evaluation strategies, participatory assessments of the potential impact of the hydro-development project were undertaken as part of the UNDP-funded pre-construction study.

I found that both the concept of local participation and the different views on how it should be enacted to be very interesting. While aware of the philosophy behind the concept of participation, I had not had much previous exposure to its use in the field. The vision of participation, as I would come to see, was often not accomplished because of the way in which a study or project was carried out. My involvement in this research project, however, also allowed me to see the benefits of research undertaken with a concern for the opinions and perspectives of local people. One situation that took place in

³ This NGO was called The King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC). KMTNC was a large local NGO that was most well known for its work in setting up the management of the Annapurna Conservation Area with its integration of the concerns of local populations, ecological restoration and preservation, and the management of the impact of tourism in the area.

⁴ I mention the World Bank as they were the principal executors of this hydro dam project. The research work that I undertook on this project took place from October 1990 to November 1991. The video produced about the study was completed in 1992. It was precisely at this time, 1991-1993 that the World Bank explicitly recognized the potential and importance of the need for “popular participation” in the development activities that it supported (see preliminary report for makeup of this larger study, Bhatnagar and Williams 1992). The World Bank therefore initiated a three year “learning process” and dialogue on “participation” that would assess twenty World Bank supported operations selected as representative of participatory approaches to development. The World Bank had commissioned other broad studies on participatory actions in development (see Paul 1987); as well as employing some of the early leaders on the theory and practice of participation (see Cernea 1983). The World Bank also readily acknowledged the work of UN bodies that had warmed to the philosophy, if not the practice, of participation far earlier.
the valley had a compelling and lasting impression on me and served as the impetus to continue my interest in participatory strategies, social processes and NGOs.

People in the valley knew about the plans to build a dam and a road to service it. It also quickly became common knowledge that research teams were actively soliciting the opinions of local people and that their views would be heard by those in charge of the project. One day, while working with one of the research teams in a small side valley, we were asked to come to a meeting that was being held by a local irrigation committee. During the meeting the researchers asked the local farmers what they thought about the road and where it was to be placed in the valley. A number of the men immediately responded that they had not previously been asked about the road and where it should be built. They told us that the survey engineers responsible for the road layout had come to the valley to do their work without speaking to the farmers. As a result of this lack of consultation, the planned layout of the road would have run directly through a local irrigation canal. This canal fed water to the fields of over 300 families without which they would have been forced to leave the area. As one of the farmers from the valley stated, “if the road destroys the canal then we do not want the road, but if it helps the canal then we want the road” (Kelpin and Tulachan 1992).

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5 There were a number of these teams that covered different research areas. These areas included; environmental (wildlife and vegetation), social institutions, cultural heritage preservation, economic strategies, and women’s issues.

6 I am convinced that the engineers did not cross the irrigation canal with the road layout on purpose. When I had the farmers show me the location of the canal I realized that I would not have found it on my own. Spanning only a few feet across, this canal could be easily missed in some places due to the grass and bushes covering it. Equally restrictive was the fact that the survey work was done during the dry season and therefore there was no water running in the canal to draw attention to its purpose. Consulting the local people could have stopped such a mistake; even when outsiders believe that a path or plan is clear, they may not be aware of local conditions.
This engineering problem was corrected soon thereafter with the road being re-aligned to miss the irrigation canal. We did not remove this discussion with the local farmers however, from the video documenting the impact study. We felt that this was a good example of the benefits that a participatory approach could provide to the practice of a development project. Unfortunately this view was not initially held by the World Bank. Soon after we had submitted the video to the World Bank for its initial comments, we were told to remove the section that showed the consultations with the farmers. In their eyes, the participatory approach used by the researchers in their dialogue with the local farmers had accomplished its goal in recognizing a potential problem. As this problem had now been solved, it was felt that there was no longer any point for its inclusion in the video. The World Bank’s view of development activities did not recognize this emerging participation by local farmers as part of an ongoing process to be integrated within the ongoing practice of development. Rather, the activity of “participation” was simply another tool that could be applied to a situation and then put aside.

After much lobbying and stressing the importance of seeing participation as a process, the World Bank agreed that the dialogue with the farmers should be left in as an example of participation. This event took place over eight years ago, and the attitude to participation, even among the World Bank, has now changed considerably. Yet at the time I was struck by the different conceptualisations of participation which existed within development. Development understood as a continually evolving and inclusionary social process was very much in opposition to the institutionalised view of participation.
expressed by the World Bank and its use of participation simply for its instrumental value in meeting material or technical problems.

**Rationale and Focus of the Study**

The present research has resulted from my interest in the alternative approach of participatory development and the role of NGOs in undertaking this approach. My focus on participatory development emerged from an interest in interactions that take place between individuals within a particular social context. I saw these interactions as primary to the character of the development which takes place. This is substantially different to the conventional approach that sees social interactions as secondary events.

An examination of participation is important as it is a relatively new approach to development that is rapidly gaining ground and is influencing even conventional approaches in the search for sustainable development. While its broader use as a development approach is increasing, participatory development still faces an uphill battle in the struggle to gain recognition in a field dominated by econo-centric development strategies. The change in paradigm between conventional development and alternative development allows for a fascinating look at the two cultures of development, and the use of the word “participation” by both.

The World Bank experience interested me in the conflicting views of participation, but it also interested me in NGOs as the key groups interpreting this development philosophy. Development agencies like the World Bank may espouse participation, but it is often NGOs who translate this into actual practices. While working for the World Bank, I saw that NGOs often hold different views of participation from government and development agencies and that these NGOs found certain conditions and
procedures (set ironically by the same institutions that desired participation) to be harmful to its achievement.

This work is an examination of this struggle from the standpoint of a small Indian NGO tasked with undertaking a government-funded participatory watershed development project in rural India. This work, therefore, offers an understanding of a particular development approach currently utilized world-wide from the perspective of an NGO in one area of India. Rural India is the social and environmental context within which this study was undertaken. This work is not, however, an ethnography of a specific area within India but rather the study of a particular approach to development as seen through the actions of a specific Indian NGO and the context within which its members undertook their work.

In many countries, the front lines of participatory development work have been increasingly undertaken by NGOs. Whether funded directly by aid organizations or by working in partnership with local government bureaucracies, NGOs are emerging world-wide as one of the primary actors in this participatory approach to development. Focusing on an NGO involved in participatory development work offers the best opportunity to study the different aspects involved in the implementation of a participatory process in rural development. This study explores the barriers to and support for a participatory development process at the NGO level. It also looks at the relationship between the government and the NGO tasked with undertaking a participatory development project and the relationship between the NGO and the local communities.

I was specifically interested in examining how participatory processes were initiated and used by an NGO such as the one I studied, INDEV, in its implementation of
a participatory development project. Perceived as "discursive institutions" (Rew and Brustinow 1998; Stiefel and Wolfe 1994) that can effectively interact with local communities, NGOs such as INDEV are given the challenging task of initiating participatory processes and then overseeing the operation of the project in conjunction with the community while under the watchful eyes (and control) of local government bodies or external funding sources. The ideological premise intrinsic to participatory development, however, demands that NGOs act as more than simple "cheque signers" or "translators" of external and often complex project directives. Rather, NGOs like INDEV must assume an active and mediating role within the project, interacting with both communities and government forces in the attempt to facilitate and build the foundation for a process of meaningful participatory development.

The Culture of Development

Instead of studying the culture of a specific group of people in a given area, I was interested in using an anthropological approach to studying a different type of culture -- the culture of development and specifically the culture of participatory development as viewed and implemented by an NGO. The representation of development as a global flow of knowledge, ideas, and power is not a new one. Equally important is the recognition that control of the flow of information has traditionally been dominated by Western knowledge systems. Development has often occurred with the exclusion of local cultures,

7 While the list is long and growing longer, a range of the more central authors and written work on participation can be seen in Bhatnagar and Williams (1992); Burkey (1993); Carman (1996); Cernea (1983, 1991a, 1992); Chambers (1983, 1997); Gabriel (1991); Kothari (1988); Mathur (1990, 1997); Nelson and Wright (1997a); Oakley 1991; Rahman (1993)).
the people who embody these cultures and the knowledges that they possess about their situations (Wolf 1982; Wallerstein 1979; Mintz 1985; Nash 1979; Tsing 1993).

The global flow of knowledges and ideas about development have, until very recently, always been Euro-American responses, although there exists a "globally defined field of possibilities" for responses to global problems (Appadurai 1996: 31).

"Development" is being increasingly understood as a culture with its own language, rituals, procedures, values and beliefs (see Ferguson 1990:257-261; Escobar 1995; Pigg 1992; Wood 1985). This culture is predominately Western in nature with Western ideas of how poor countries should change and what the end goal of that change should be. Now, more than ever, development increasingly "deterritorializes" the world with its application of normative development knowledge which, in turn, continues to dominate the conceptualization and practices of conventional development actions. The culture of development is not only western in nature, but this orientation brings certain values, structures and goals to development practice. For example, Vandana Shiva notes that due to a predominance of Western culture in development practice, categories are created and more natural and local holistic knowledges are lost. As well as the organization of development and how it is imagined, what is considered valid is subject to Western views. Scientific and econo-centric discourses thus dominate the conceptualization and practices of conventional development actions. Vandana Shiva, calling attention to the "colonizing" tendencies of western knowledge, maintains that the dominance of a knowledge system based on scientific reductionism is continually reinforced as it marginalizes and silences alternative ways of knowing. This produces a "monoculture of
the mind” (1993), where Western ways of understanding and acting are seen as normal while other ways of knowing are marginalized as wrong or unscientific.

When local knowledge does appear in the field of the globalizing vision, it is made to disappear by denying it the status of a systematic knowledge, and assigning it the adjectives ‘primitive’ and ‘unscientific’. Correspondingly, the western system is assumed to be uniquely ‘scientific’ and universal. ... Positivism, verificationism, falsification were all based on the assumption that unlike traditional, local beliefs of the world, which are socially constructed, modern scientific knowledge was thought to be determined without social mediation. Scientists, in accordance with an abstract scientific method, were viewed as putting forward statements corresponding to the realities of a directly observable world (1993: 10-11).

Shiva states that the artificial and “fragmented linearity” that is inherent to a western scientific analysis, disembeds local knowledge from its holistic context, disrupting the integration that exists between social and environmental systems. In this way “local knowledge slips through the cracks of fragmentation” and disappears (Shiva 1993:12).

Often expressed within and by a language that is more the property of the developers than of the communities being “developed”, conventional development strategies can function with the implicit bias that social progress is coupled directly to economic enhancements amenable to scientific knowledge and technological inputs. However, as development planners have increasingly discovered, change brought about through development is never as simple as clearly foreseeable outputs resulting from carefully planned inputs. Past and often present practices of development, implemented through the static and bounded structure of the development “project”, have tended to approach people as targets for development, objects to be manipulated or used within a set of externally constructed actions to meet an equally externally perceived problem (Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1990). Although many development programs have moved
beyond the causational language of inputs leading to outputs, the philosophy is deep-seated and often remains implicit in development projects. In Chapters Four and Five, I will discuss the problems which this reliance on outputs causes for participation.

The institution of development can be understood as a “large-scale perspective” (Appadurai 1996) that prescribes a global one-size-fits-all solution to diverse and complex local situations. This perspective has become deeply embedded in the everyday lives and philosophies of those directly involved in development work. This externally constructed knowledge about other places, people, and their situations, touches down as “organized fields of social practices”, frameworks for action that bring real consequences to people and the environments in which they live. For many individuals, this global, normalised culture of development is thought to offer a positive field of opportunities for those in need. For others, however, it represents a process of domination and control that imposes an external vision of how others could, or should, live and work.

**Alternative Voices in Development and the Process of Participation**

In development, as within most cultures, there are many voices. Within the culture of development, alternative voices question the appropriateness and even the legitimacy of the conventional approaches outlined above. Central to this alternative approach is the philosophy of empowerment and participation. Development, in this alternative approach, becomes a process through which people become empowered to gain control over the development of their communities. It is a social process whereby beneficiaries meaningfully participate in the conception and management of development activities using their skills and knowledge. This represents a radical change from conventional development in which local people are often used for their sweat and labour in the
physical execution of external policy directives. There is a broadening recognition therefore, that the need to involve local people in a meaningful way is integral to sustainable social, environmental and economic development practices. A complication however, is that participation is now spoken of and inserted into both conventional and alternative development approaches. The depth of this local involvement can vary from superficial consultation to privileging the actions, decisions and perspectives of local people. This can be roughly delineated as the difference between conventional development, which is often done for people by outside “experts” who may or may not consult local people, and an alternative process-oriented development which respects local cultures and local knowledge by actively engaging the local population in the planning and self-management of development.

Similar to any culture, the culture of development often has many voices speaking on the same topic. While the conceptual use of participation as an “organizing concept” or an “evolving vision” of what should or could be is evident in both alternative and conventional development circles, there are many different understandings of what the concept itself represents and how it should be undertaken in practical terms.

While conventional approaches increasingly champion the concept of participation, their understanding of the concept is often heavily influenced by a reliance on external experts and knowledge systems based on Western institutional narratives of

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8 I speak of two broad categories of development, conventional and alternative, but in reality the line is not so clear. The purpose of this study is not to delineate between the two, or to outline a “pure” alternative development. These broad categories help to show that participation -- the focus of this study -- can be understood and implemented in many ways. Understanding conventional, globally-defined development in comparison to alternative, locally-defined development helps to set the stage for this study of how a local Indian NGO tried to implement its vision of participation in the face of those who followed more conventional approaches.
economics, technology and science. Supporting a different understanding of the concept, alternative approaches to participatory development privilege the nurturing and use of social processes which lead to social empowerment for local people, the inclusion of local knowledge and skills and local control over participatory development activities.

The transformation of alternative development policies into practical development actions, however, is difficult as the conventional rubric of development has co-opted much of the rhetoric of the new alternative participatory approach. Many development experts have commented that with a term that is so easy to describe and yet so difficult to achieve, the definitional range of the process of participation in development has become quite broad. It is this "conceptual confusion" over the meaning of participation, as well as the "political ambiguities regarding its practical implications," that often contribute to the inability of the participatory model to realize the high expectations many alternative practitioners and theorists hold of it as a development process (Stiefel and Wolfe 1994:226):

Lack of conceptual clarity about the meaning of participation [makes it]...difficult to avoid the impression that vagueness and ambiguity in the use of such terms are not accidental and that conceptual confusion serves a purpose; it allows international organizations...to limit themselves when convenient to general proclamations and advocacy of participation without having to spell out the practical implications, the political aspects, and thus the power consequences of participation (Stiefel and Wolfe 1994:223).

While the wandering rhetoric of participation continues to gain persuasive strength, the balance between current policy discourse and the ground-level reality of participatory development actions needs to be constantly evaluated for consistency.
As noted above, participatory development increasingly gains official institutional legitimacy in both conventional and alternative development approaches as an efficient and sustainable way to undertake rural development (Stiefel and Wolfe 1994:220). What is so intriguing about a participatory approach, however, is the Janus-like nature of its conceptualisation as a development process. In essence, the discussion surrounding participatory development is embodied by a global debate about the increasing need to “localize” development actions in terms of the conceptualisation of development by including local people in planning and management activities. However, this discussion about how and in what form participatory development should emerge in local situations is still often constructed in development and academic offices distant to the communities where that development is to take place. What “local” represents for participatory development actions, how it comes to be socially defined and by whom, becomes a site of contestation within the culture of development between various social actors (government departments, NGOs, local communities) as they each struggle to have the social meanings they attribute to the concept of participation used to direct local development actions.

Arjun Appadurai questions what is “the place of locality in schemes about global cultural flow?” (1996:178). If we conceptually approach the culture of development as the embodiment and dissemination of particular kinds of understandings about the world, then development projects represent the practical “local” manifestations of this global flow of cultural knowledge. Development may be a global phenomenon that attempts to utilize similar institutionalized policies and directives across many different areas, but its actions at the local level, while still bearing resemblance to master narratives, often bear
the mark of having been locally shaped in ways both planned and unplanned. Appadurai's questioning about the place of “locality” in the face of such a global cultural flow has, therefore, special resonance when applied to recent alternative development concepts like participation which privileges local actions and knowledge. Understanding how these local social worlds are open to “the possibility of divergent interpretations of what locality implies” (Appadurai 1996: 55), and what these divergent interpretations represent in terms of the conceptualization and practice of participatory development are central to this research.

**Why Look at NGOs?: NGOs as Agents of Participatory Development**

With the increasing dependency on NGOs to deliver developmental assistance throughout the world, a clear understanding of their pivotal role in the process of local participatory development is critical. NGOs are essential to study when looking at the culture of development, and especially at alternative or participatory development. While many studies focus solely on villagers, the NGO and its relations to both government and to local people is crucial to the success or failure of participatory development projects. NGOs have become numerous and often employed for participatory development projects for a number of reasons. For these same reasons they are important to study: they form an important part of civil society; they are seen as effective; they play a key intermediary role between the government and local people.

**Civil Society and the Role of NGOs in Development**

NGOs, as one of the “critical ingredients of civil society” (Clark 1995:593), are often thought to bring with them a certain amount of autonomy and operational flexibility to development encounters with state institutional structures. Although many, if not most
NGOs receive government funding in one form or another, they remain a vital part of civil society in their (varying) ability to put their own ideas into practice. Although some NGOs may be forced to directly implement ideas of a government, many have an amount of flexibility that allows them to try new ideas and to follow a different vision than that of their government funders. These alternative practices may in fact influence the government’s development practices. The effectiveness of NGOs in providing an alternative voice to dominant development structures of the state and international development institutions is seen to depended on their ability to retain their autonomy and flexible operating styles.

It is within this climate of increasing emphasis on civil society, reduced financial assistance, deepening poverty, and the recognition of bureaucratic ineffectiveness in implementation practices that has prompted the focus on new approaches to development. With the recognition of the possibilities for corruption in politically centralized and bureaucratic controls of development assistance and the growing anti-development sentiments that this fosters among the poor (Sheth 1987: 236), development alternatives

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Some authors, like John Clark, seem to harbour little hope for a collective gain made through independent and alternative NGO actions in development. Clark expresses doubt as to the claim that NGOs offer “realistic alternative pathways”. As he states; “NGOs can play an important role in helping certain population groups, or filling in the gaps in state services, or in pressing for a change in the national development strategy, but they rarely offer realistic alternative pathways. Their innovations may test out new approaches, but these only become sustainable or of significant scale if they influence national development” (1995:596). Clark, later in the paper, makes an odd statement claiming that when and if a NGO development alternative becomes a nationally implemented approach it then “becomes mainstream rather than alternative” (1995:596), thereby somehow no longer being “alternative” in nature or connected to its conceptual roots through the innovative activities of a NGO. Surely an “alternative” approach retains those elements that made it desirable, even while being expanded to a broader or “mainstream” frame of activity. Fisher, in commenting on the micro-practices of NGOs and their contribution to alternative change, argues that; “the process within which NGOs participate can contribute to social restructuring around and under the state and market, undermining traditional foundations and forcing adaptations to changed practices and circumstances.... NGOs and social movements may come and go, but the space created in their passing may contribute to new activism that builds up after them” (1997: 457-459).
that concentrate on the “self-organizing” capabilities of people and the strengthening of local institutions (NGOs) to manage and plan for the use of their local resources have emerged.10

Korten stresses however, that this type of local capacity building must take place within an environment that consists of more than just the decentralization of power associated with government authority. Rather, “at least as essential is the development of the complex mosaic of independent yet inter-linked local organizations through which people define and pursue their individual and collective interests within a guiding framework of national policy” (1987: 147). Korten also emphasizes that these local organizations will remain severely restricted in their impact if they are not supported “by institutional structures and policies that create the necessary social and political space for them to function in their members’ interests” (1987: 147). This draws attention to the nature of the relationships that exist between NGOs, states and donors.

Many governments, in the face of structural adjustment policies, have had to drastically reduce budgets targeted for social welfare assistance. Mirrored in the actions of major international development organizations, this financial reduction for development assistance has resulted in the off-loading of responsibility for social programs to local development organizations. Increasingly the task of transforming external development concepts into practical everyday actions in local community settings has been left to non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Over the previous two

10 Some of the early proponents of this “people-centered” approach are: Schumacher 1973; Korten 1980; Chambers 1983; Kothari 1988; Cernea 1983: Paul 1987. Many others could be added to this list, especially in the 1990s, when this approach become identified with the concept of “participation” as a development model. A broader discussion and analysis of the concept of participation and the “people-centered”
decades there has been a rising interest among large aid organizations and national
governments in the possible roles that NGOs can assume in development projects. With
the proposed shift from conventional development practices towards one that is
“participatory” and “people centred” (Chambers 1983; Cernea 1983, 1991b; Korten
1980, 1990; Rahman 1993; Oakley 1991; Schumacher 1973) and focused more on social
processes than on structured economic principles and technological innovations (Mosse
1998), this interest in and subsequent use of NGOs has greatly intensified. 11

NGOs, valued as much for their non-governmental position as for their often
localized base, have become important alternatives in the shift away from centralized
bureaucratic and government institutions to the use of more socially “democratic” and
participatory structures responsible for undertaking development assistance activities. In
India alone there has been a huge growth in the number of NGOs formed. Some estimates
have been made that the number of NGOs that are in operation throughout India’s states
may run as high as 100,000 (Sooryamoorthy 1998; see also Wood 1999; Ames and
Whittaker 2001).

The increasing awareness of the central role of civil society in rural development
activities has enhanced the central position filled by NGOs in what has been recognized
as the “third sector” between that of the public (state) and private (market) sectors

1997a; Farrington and Lewis 1993; Farrington and Bebbington 1993; Fernando and Heston 1997; Fowler
1997; Fisher 1993, 1998; Fisher 1997; Heyzer, Riker and Quizon 1995; Korten 1980, 1987; Riddell and
(Uphoff 1993; Hulme 1994; Salamon 1994). NGOs, benefiting from the institutional perception of enhanced commitment, often minimal bureaucracy, and ability for experimentation and operational flexibility, are considered to be locally-based organizations uniquely placed for implementing participatory development projects (Clark 1991, 1995; Edwards and Hulme 1992, 1996; Riddell and Robinson 1995; Carroll 1992; Chambers 1992).

NGOs as Efficient Implementors of Development Programs

Especially true in rural areas, the use of NGOs in development assistance work has increased at an amazing rate as funding donors and governments look to them as a cost effective and locally efficient means to take over an ever increasing share of development assistance work (see Salamon 1994).

Their popularity is also due to the perception that they possess a certain expertise that allows them, as a “local” organization, to be extremely efficient at inducing the “participation” of communities in development projects. NGOs therefore often hold significant roles in the implementation of participatory projects. NGOs play a dynamic role in the process of participatory development as they actively assist and facilitate communities in developing and enhancing their skills, knowledge and appropriate

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12 Uphoff stress that this “third sector” is more than a “residual conception” or a “subdivision of the private sector”. He outlines in an extended discussion the clear distinctions between the three founded on the different “theoretical bases for compliance or cooperation” for organizations within each sector (see Uphoff 1993: 611-614). While Uphoff locates NGOs in the third sector with GROs or collective organizations (1993: 611), his later work (1996) seems to place NGOs more firmly in the private sector. As he states in this later article, “the real third sector, located somewhere between the public and the private sectors in institutional space, belongs not to NGOs but rather to people’s associations and membership organizations. These differ from institutions in the public and private sectors in that they undertake voluntary collective action and self-help” (1996:23). As NGOs become progressively entrenched in the operations of development and their function of “service” providers, it seems that they are increasingly defined more by their associations with those who fund them and less by those who they work with in the field.
institutional organizations needed for sustainable self-reliance (Cernea 1983, 1988; Clark 1991; Edwards and Hulme 1992). With their ability to meet with communities frequently and often for extended periods of time, locally based NGOs have the opportunity to foster with communities the close social relationships critical to the emergence and growth of meaningful development activities.

As NGOs gain increasing centrality (and acceptance) in development, they are faced with real opportunities for influencing policy and undertaking development actions on a much larger scale. As NGOs shift from “doing” to “influencing” (Clark 1991:84; see also Drabek 1987), they find themselves having to establish and maintain relationships with institutions that may disrupt their previous autonomy (Farrington and Lewis 1993; Farrington and Bebbington 1993; Hulme and Edwards 1997a; Kothari 1986; Cernea 1988; Clark 1991,1995; Esteva 1987). This has raised questions as to the instrumental use of NGOs by state and international development institutions in implementing development strategies that may have been externally defined and planned. Of equal concern is the current neoliberal slant to many development approaches and programs. NGOs are increasingly looked upon by both the state and international development organizations as efficient “service delivery” organizations expected to act in professional, business-like ways (Robinson 1997; Biggs and Neame 1996). This possesses a very real danger to the operational flexibility of NGOs, considered to be one of the main elements contributing to their success in development activities. This emerging (and normalizing) attitude directed towards the character and structural operations of NGOs is evident in the remarks made by a CIDA official who stated “We nurtured NGOs and encouraged them to be professional organizations, now we should be able to use them’.... [In the future]
there will be even more of a business emphasis on awarding and completing contracts” (Cockburn 1999b: 101). As Drabek cautions, this is a real liability for NGOs as they risk “becoming yet another system of aid managers and disbursers rather than development agents in their own right” (1987:x).

NGOs as Intermediaries

A development project is a meeting ground where external institutionalized visions of development, like the concept of participation, meet local social and cultural realities as understood, experienced and expressed by the people who live there. How ground-level organizations such as NGOs mediate this encounter and attempt to establish meaningful participatory processes with local communities can often be directly impacted by the relationship that these local NGOs experience with authoritative bodies overseeing their work. The institutionalized culture of development and the conventional approaches it has traditionally preferred have not always been open to the inclusion of the perspectives, knowledges and ideas of local populations or even local development organizations like NGOs. An understanding, therefore, of the character, form and impact of the relationships shared between ground-level organizations and those who wield institutional power and authority can be as important in determining a successful participatory process as is an understanding of the relationship shared between ground-level organizations and the communities with whom they work.

NGOs have become important intermediaries between funders, whether government departments or international aid organizations, and local populations who are the beneficiaries of these aid projects. Often first to implement new alternative policy directions, NGOs have to be equally responsive to both the local communities that they
work with and the funding sources that support their work. With the increasing occurrence and centrality of participatory approaches in development activities, NGOs have come to assume a pivotal and multi-layered task of translating to local communities the cultural, social, ecological and technical parameters deemed necessary for “localizing” a participatory development project defined by external development knowledge. NGOs, therefore, have the combined pressures of rendering external concerns into local priorities, as well as giving equal, if not more attention, to making sure that local concerns also become external priorities.

The role of NGOs in enabling the poor and marginalized in articulating their perspectives and needs is therefore increasingly seen as a major element of their work. As Bratton, commenting on the enhanced role of NGOs as representative organizations for the poor explains: “Once the question was ‘how can development agencies reach the poor majority?’, now it is ‘how can the poor majority reach the makers of public policy?’” (Bratton 1990 in Clark 1995:595). NGOs, in addition to their participatory development work that concentrates on assisting local communities to become economically self-reliant, are now increasingly depended upon to also support local communities in their social and political attempts to create and access meaningful links between state and local organizational structures.

Scope of the Study

In my research, I wanted to understand how the process of participatory development was conceptualized by one NGO such as INDEV and to examine through its experiences how it attempted to transform this conceptualization into actual development practices while under the direct influence and control of an overseeing institutional body.
The decision to study only one NGO was based on local circumstances as well as time constraints. While there were many NGOs located within the town of Jhabua, there were very few who were undertaking participatory projects. The Rajiv Gandhi Mission on Watershed Development (RGMWD) program embodied the alternative, participatory development principles that I wished to study. In the Jhabua area (chosen by the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute as the research site), three NGOs were designated as Project Implementing Agents (PIAs) within the RGMWD program. INDEV was the first NGO that agreed to allow me to conduct a complete study their work and as the NGO was newly formed, I thought that it would provide me with the opportunity to understand its work from the very first steps. The other two NGOs had been established a number of years previously. Due to the highly competitive atmosphere and animosities between INDEV and the other NGO located in Jhabua, it was not possible to work with both. The third NGO was located in a town approximately one hour from Jhabua and worked in villages even further away. I also found that choosing one NGO allowed me to conduct an in-depth study that spanned an entire year’s work.

Because the intention of my study was to look at how an NGO implemented participation in a multi-village project, I chose not to focus solely on one particular village out of the possible fourteen within INDEV’s area of watershed responsibility. Due to the great deal of suspicion with which all outsiders were regarded by the indigenous (Adivasi) people, it would have taken me more time than I had available to learn the local dialects and languages and to gain access to the communities without the assistance of

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13 Mr. Narain, the head of INDEV, as well as INDEV’s assistant project officer had worked at the competing NGO in Jhabua and had both quit due to differences of opinion regarding the operation of the
INDEV. Due to negative past experiences, many Adivasi people were not only reluctant to speak to outsiders, but were occasionally openly hostile. INDEV staff had themselves spent many months gaining the trust of the villagers. My access to the villagers was based on this trust.

While recognizing that there were many differences between the villages, and within the large population (over 13,000) involved in INDEV’s work, the focus of the study was to assess the overall operation of INDEV and its policies and actions vis a vis all the villages. By using specific examples and quotes from individuals within the villages, I do not imply that they represent the views of every single person in that village. With such a large group of people the comments of various villagers gave me a general indication of how successful INDEV’s attempts at participatory development had been. Perhaps more important than these comments, I looked at the familiarity, tension, openness to dissent, ease and character of the interactions between INDEV and the local people. INDEV held, and I agreed, that it was not possible to know all of the divisions and social dynamics among all 13,000 people in the 14 villages, and that even if it were possible, it was preferable that the local village watershed committees worked through any local tensions and imbalances. INDEV saw one of its main tasks as helping to prepare and encourage each local village watershed committee to do this. My central interest was not in how the watershed committees worked through these local dynamics, but how INDEV established a program to help support the watershed committees to undertake this work.
In studying INDEV, I looked at the relationship that it had with the villagers and the reactions of these local people to its work and participatory approaches.

Similarly, my access to government officials was limited by local suspicions and practices. INDEV had spent much time convincing the villagers that I was not connected with the government and therefore implied that I should not spend a great deal of time with government officials in case a villager saw me. I believe that INDEV wanted to limit my access to the government for more reasons than the impression it would have left with the villagers. INDEV seemed to prefer that I spend the majority of my time with them, and while they arranged interviews with government officials, on several occasions they suggested that I not accompany them to meetings with government officials in case it "led [the officials] to the wrong impression." INDEV worried that the government officials' would disapprove of a foreigner being involved with them and that this would have negative repercussions on their relationship with the government. Not wanting to jeopardise my access to INDEV and our trust, I limited my contact with government members.

The local government officials themselves also prevented in-depth access. While agreeing to one-on-one interviews, they declined my requests to observe internal meetings that may have exposed more than they wished to tell me. As with the villagers, I looked at the government as it related to the work of INDEV and examined the relationship between the two and how this impacted on INDEV's work. I wanted to understand what conditions, barriers and restrictions to attempts at participatory development were encountered by INDEV due to its interactions with the local district government administration. I wanted also to examine competing and conflicting
conceptualizations of participatory development within the institutionalized culture of
development; and how they impacted the working environment of INDEV in its attempt
to encourage and maintain a meaningful participatory process with local communities.

By focusing specifically on the worldview of one NGO called INDEV within the
culture of development, this research looks at how different understandings of
participation emerge and are socially constructed. This is accomplished by examining the
interactions of those social actors involved in the implementation of the participatory
development project. It examines how this production of knowledge about participation is
used by these social actors as the guiding narratives for development actions and explores
how the struggles which ensue over these social meanings result in certain meanings and
definitions being valued over others. This research, therefore, focuses on the often
conflicting ideologies which can be central to tensions between implementing agents such
as the NGO INDEV and overseeing government administrative bodies and how these
tensions can directly influence the form and use of participatory development activities.

An Introduction to the Participatory Development Project Implemented by INDEV

In Jhabua District, Madhya Pradesh, India, subsistence agriculture provides the
main source of support for most of the local population of farmers. Over time and with
the pressure of increasing population, diminishing resources and intensifying ecological
stress, the ability of farmers to sustain this type of livelihood in a harsh semi-arid
environment has become reduced. In an attempt to help these agricultural communities,
state development activities have remained a constant within the life world of the Jhabua
District farmer.
While such state-planned and managed development projects have met with some success, many of these rural communities, and the land on which they depend, continue to fall increasingly in need of assistance. In response to this deepening problem, the Indian government, through a critique of its own development actions, initiated a new national participatory watershed development program in 1994. In line with the current world-wide atmosphere of devolution and decentralization of governments’ social responsibilities, the Government of India (GOI) has included participation within this new program as a key method of engaging civil society (NGOs and citizens) in providing their own social services.

In the state of Madhya Pradesh this program was called the *Rajiv Gandhi Mission on Watershed Development* (RGMWD) which began in Jhabua District shortly before my arrival in India. While implemented directly by local district administrations under state direction, the RGM on watershed development was designed to provide for the incorporation of the opinions, perspectives and skills of farmers in the process of local development planning and management; a procedure previously controlled solely by state institutions. Financial support for this participatory watershed development program would occur through the redirection of funds previously allotted to the state through certain centrally (GOI) supported rural development programs already in existence.

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14 I speak here of the development term “participation” as an outside concept with a very real impact on local lives. This is not to say that people in India have never participated in their own development efforts. People historically undertook their own efforts individually and collectively to better their lives. After the advent of colonialism, however, and following the influence of Indian government bureaucracy, the solutions for local problems were most often provided by external “experts”. This external idea of local incompetence, perpetuated by government bodies and foreign institutions, has been an enduring belief underlying development assistance and has had a severe and negative effect on local feelings of confidence and ultimately on capabilities to deal with issues.
The basic parameters of this new participatory development program were outlined in the document entitled The *Guidelines for Watershed Development*. This document was prepared by the Ministry for Rural Development (GOI) and described the design and operation of this new centrally sponsored development program.

This watershed development program was unique in that it attempted to incorporate a number of innovative conceptual and practical elements. The foundation of this development program was to be based on a “participatory” process that was to actively include local communities in the planning and management of any development activities. As part of this process of participation, local ground-level organizations such as the NGO INDEV were to be actively included as implementing agents of the watershed project in rural areas.

Also intriguing was the use of the concept of “watersheds” as an integrating planning component. The design of this development program aimed to consolidate the many social, environmental and economic stresses encountered by communities within an integrated planning approach. By using ecologically defined “micro-watersheds” as the conceptual and practical boundaries for all development activities, it was believed that more cohesive and holistic solutions could be pursued by communities as they confronted the wide range of concerns facing them.

Equally important was the mandate which actively sought the inclusion of NGOs in the implementation of the participatory watershed development project. In Jhabua District INDEV was one of the three NGOs acting as a project implementing agency
Briefly stated, the overall objectives for this development project in Jhabua District were to use the boundaries of natural watersheds to plan for the renewal of the ecological base of the environment and to prevent its further degradation. Of equal concern, and addressed in concert with this ecological degradation, were the social and economic hardships experienced by the local inhabitants as their land became increasingly unable to support the growing population depending on it. This participatory watershed program, therefore, held both environmental and socio-economic goals. It aimed to halt and eventually reverse the rapidly deteriorating condition of the local land but also tied the physical treatment of the land to the support of various social initiatives within the village.

The role of the PIAs were to act as facilitators assisting the villagers with the initial planning and operation of the watershed, and to then gradually withdraw their services leaving the villagers to manage their own micro-watersheds by the third year of the four-year project time period.

**Timeline and Location of the Study**

My research took place soon after INDEV had begun its work in the villages and continued to follow the work of INDEV for the next twenty-two months (from November 1995 to September 1997). Visiting the fieldsite in Jhabua District on three separate occasions, I spent a combined total of twelve and a half months in the field. This

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15 See Amita Shah (1998) for a comprehensive overview of the use of watershed development programs in India. See Turton and Farrington (1998) for an interim report on the GOI's Watershed Development
research, therefore, concentrates specifically on the first two years of the four years that
the project was expected to operate with government financial support. The first months
of a participatory project can be especially important as it is at this time that the character
of the social interaction between local communities and development organizations is
shaped. The form that this interaction takes is instrumental to the type of participatory
development that emerges and whether that participation will result in development
activities that are socially, economically and environmentally sustainable.

My initial research in India took place over a seven month period during the dry,
hot weather of November through May. During this time I realized that I would need to
extend my time in India to include other seasons of the year to gain a full understanding
of the development situation that was taking place. With most of the farmers involved in
subsistence agriculture livelihoods without the benefit of large-scale irrigation, the
different seasons heavily influenced what farmers did and when. During the dry season,
when there was limited (if any) rainfall, major agricultural work on their land did not take
place with many of the farmers then migrating to urban centres for labour work. As I
would see this had a direct impact on which individuals from the villages would be the
first to become involved in the participatory development project as often those families
most economically well off did not need to have as many of their family members
migrate for wage labour.

Subsequently, I returned to India the following September for a three month
period through the end of November, and then again in the following June through
August. With these three research periods covering the yearly agricultural cycle, I felt that
I was in a better position to adequately gauge the actions that took place between the NGO INDEV, with whom I was working, and the farmers within the participatory watershed project. These different time periods allowed me to see and understand how INDEV adjusted its work in the development project and what it tried to accomplish with the farmers at different times of the year.

**Overview of the Chapters**

This chapter has outlined the area of investigation (participatory development and NGOs) and its scope, and why this is a crucial area of enquiry in the study of development. It gives a rational and background to the study. It has briefly outlined the culture of development, which encompasses conventional and alternative approaches to development, the project implemented by the NGO studied and the timelines of the study.

Chapter Two gives concrete findings and facts about the area, INDEV and the project; the geographical location, population figures, the environmental, social and economic context of the study. It discusses the RGMWD watershed project and INDEV’s role in this project in-depth. Details on INDEV, the various actors involved in the project and the co-ordination and financial structures of the project are outlined.

Chapter Three outlines the two major theories pertinent to this study: symbolic interactionism and empowering participation. The use of symbolic interactionism as the foundational theory of the investigator as well as the investigator’s position in the community is discussed. The philosophy and characteristics of participation, and the specific approach to participation taken by INDEV is examined, including ideas on evaluation and measurement.
Chapters Four and Five give findings and analysis of the work of INDEV in the field as it attempted to undertake a process of meaningful participation. It looks at the three major areas of work that INDEV undertook in the RGMWD: restoration of the land, community organization and training of the local people as well as the important process of building trust, key to all these activities. An analysis is provided of the consistency between the NGO’s vision of a participatory process and its actual implementation. These chapters provide evidence and field examples of the barriers to undertaking a participatory approach. They outline the directives and guidelines set by the Government of India and their interpretation by the local district administration as well as the clashes between these directives and INDEV’s actions. The issue of measurement of a social process (participation) and how conventional means of measuring development goals can undermine meaningful participation are also highlighted.

A conclusion summarizes the main themes of the study.
Chapter Two: Locating the Watershed Development Project

Geographical Location and Population

I arrived in India just as the deep greens fed by the last of the monsoon rains had all but faded from the landscape. Travelling by bus to Jhabua District from the central city of Bhopal through the semi-arid region of western Madhya Pradesh, I was struck by the monotony of endless brown fields that enforced a kind of visual silence on the land. Now and then our path was broken by small towns, where unfamiliar noises, colour and smells jolted my senses as the bus struggled through the tight streets or stopped at the bus square to take on or let off passengers. Eventually we entered Jhabua District which lies on the western margin of the Malwa plateau in central India where steep-sided hills of the Vindhyan range begin to give way to the rolling plains of the plateau.¹ (See Plate 1, Madhya Pradesh District Map, page 106)

Jhabua District is administratively part of Indore division and is divided into six tehsils,² within which there are 12 development blocks. The town of Jhabua, which shares its name with the surrounding district, sits at the base of one of the undulating ridgelines so common to this area and is the political and administrative base for the various local and state bureaucracies in the district. While the town is a small urban administrative centre of roughly 23,000 people, it is encircled by a seemingly endless

¹ The total geographical area of Jhabua District is 6,782 sq. km. This comprises 1.5 per cent of the total area of the state of Madhya Pradesh (Joshi, 1995).

²
stretch of fields used by rural Adivasi farming communities to maintain a lifestyle of subsistence agricultural in a very harsh environment.

Directly overlooking the town of Jhabua is a hill locally known as Char Mandir. Once destined to be the site of a new palace for the local royal family, the hilltop remains vacant except for four small temples that sit perched at the crest of its steep sides. Those who make the short climb to its flattened top are offered a unique view of the town and a sweeping outlook over the surrounding plains that flow outward in all directions. With one’s gaze broken only in the hazy distance by other similar hills, one could see from this perch all the main roads in and out of the town of Jhabua. (See Plate 2, Location of Major Towns in Jhabua District, page 107)

Each road, whether leading west to the town of Dahod and further on to the city Ahmadabad, east to Dhar, Indore and Bhopal, or south through Ranapur and then on to Alirajpur, crossed the rolling plains like footpaths until they disappeared into the hazy distance. Following the road west to Dahod, your eye will quickly come to rest on the state of Gujarat which borders Jhabua District. Farther north and to the west, but out of sight in the far distance, stretches the state of Rajasthan. South of Char Mandir hill, again far away in the haze, is the sacred Narmada river and the border with the state of Maharashtra.

**Population Figures**

Generally, Jhabua District has experienced a population growth of 631 per cent between 1911 and 1991, with the population of rural areas making up 91.4 per cent of the total population of 1,130,405 within the district (as per 1991 census). Jhabua District is

\[^{2}\text{GOI revenue administrative boundary.}\]
one of the three poorest districts in India and the intensifying demand for and exploitation of limited resources like land and water in Jhabua District has resulted in an increasingly precarious situation for farmers relying on agricultural livelihoods (Joshi: 1995:2).\(^3\)

Adivasi communities, which comprise between 85% and 90% of the district's total population and most of its agricultural workers (NCHSE 1993: 73-74), are the individuals most heavily impacted by the intertwining of these economic and ecological stresses.\(^4\)

Jhabua District has a rural population density that is 153 persons per square kilometer which is considerably more that the state average of 116. This situation, coupled with the fact that there is a deficit of 20 to 50 per cent on all crop yields compared to the state average due to harsh environmental conditions, has resulted in the considerably more intensive use of natural resources than that which is experienced by communities in other areas of the state (Joshi 1995:45).

The area in which this research was undertaken within Jhabua District was Ranapur Development Block. The NGO INDEV was assigned a watershed area within this development block by the Jhabua District Collector for which they would be responsible for undertaking work in the national Watershed Development Program.

Ranapur Development Block, which lies to the south of the town of Jhabua, has a rural population of over 56,000 with a population density of 223 people per square mile (1991 census). The town of Ranapur (within Ranapur Development Block) is connected to the town of Jhabua by a paved road. The town of Ranapur, which has a population of roughly 10,000 people, bordered INDEV's assigned watershed development area and held the

\(^3\) In the period 1981-1991 the population growth increased by 43 per cent in Jhabua District.
The Environmental Context of Jhabua District

Water Resources

Even those new to the area like myself quickly realize that Jhabua District bears the characteristics of a place that is caught in a downward spiral of ecological destruction brought about by the necessities of economic survival. With the dry season coinciding with my arrival in India, the plains surrounding the town of Jhabua were flecked by the sun-bleached colours of thousands of tilled fields surrounding small clusters of houses, or phalias, where the farmers lived. Jhabua District is often starved for rain. Falling within an area that is shadowed by seasonal drought, the district receives an annual average rainfall of about 750-850 mm, almost all of which falls in the monsoon period between June and September (NCHSE 1993). With temperatures reaching as high as 48 degrees Celsius as the dry season intensifies from late September to early June, there can be substantial drops in the water levels of village ponds, wells and in the nearby nahlas or small rivers (see NCHSC 1993: 53-55).

The status of groundwater resources in the district is not healthy. While only 1.4% of the area has very good groundwater resources, those areas within the district having moderate and poor potential are 32% and 64% respectively (Joshi 1995: 31). Droughts are common with even a small rain shortfall causing severe hardship for local rural residents already experiencing deepening poverty. Nearly all villages, therefore, have

\[4\] The tribal ratio for Jhabua District can be compared to the national average of 7.8 per cent and the state average of 23 per cent (Johsi 1995: 44)
handpumps that supply drinking water. This seasonal lack of water is further
compounded by the increasing inability of the land to retain the rainwater that does fall,
resulting in the inadequate recharging of the sub-surface water table. With little
remaining vegetation and soil cover due to vast deforestation from commercial logging,
the clearing of land by local cultivators, and agricultural practices such as non-terraced
farming on hillsides, most of the rainfall is lost as it cascades down hillsides that are
unable to slow its descent. This water runoff is extremely destructive leading to massive
soil erosion that has become one of the leading problems faced by both farmers and the
local district government administration. This combination of elements has left both the
land, and the agricultural system based on it, increasingly unable to adequately support
the local rural farming population that depends on it for their livelihood.

As I began to travel each day with INDEV staff out to the villages in Ranapur
block where they were undertaking their participatory watershed development project
with local farmers, I witnessed how the dry season deepened its hold on the land. At first
insidiously and then with more open purpose, the building heat and dryness of this time
of the year sapped the remaining moisture from the ground leaving it parched and fragile
looking. As the dry season progressed the land appeared almost seared, crumbling
underfoot and broken only by the green of trees which bordered slowly narrowing
streams that staggered in wavering lines across chestnut-coloured fields, or by the small
patches of grass which struggled to nourish themselves on the overflow water from the
village water hand-pumps.

One of the jobs of INDEV was to monitor the depth of the wells from which the
villagers took their drinking water. Each well was a good indicator of the sub-surface
flow of water in that area, providing an important measurement gauge as to the success of future water harvesting techniques that would be used on the hillsides. In this first year of the project INDEV attempted to establish a datum measurement against which they could gauge future improvements in water levels once the more physical work of soil conservation and reforestation activities of the surrounding lands had begun over the following years. In the first months of my time with INDEV I watched as the level of the water in these wells fell week after week until it literally outpaced the length of the measuring tapes used to calculate their depth, forcing the measurers to add on the distance of downward stretched arms. With the arrival of the month of April also came the moutou or winter winds, their presence increasingly betrayed by the violent swirl of arid soils forced into the air by the same strong gusts bringing one to a sliding stop on a motorbike as eyes instantly lost their moisture.

Water and its availability was, therefore, always a central concern for the farmers in the villages with which INDEV was working. Any discussion about development between INDEV and the farmers invariably related, either directly or indirectly, to the need to increase the amount of water accessible to farmers for their fields and for personal use. “Bring more water” was the main wish of farmers when asked what they wanted the participatory watershed development project to do for them. Initially the farmers asked INDEV to solve the problem of water scarcity by supplying them with large pumps for lift irrigation systems to bring water directly from the few permanent water sources, or in the construction of ponds in the hollows between low hills that could be used to store water from the monsoon rains. This more conventional means of attaining access to water
were seen by the farmers as the most effective way to quickly alleviate their water problems.

I learned how water can be a destructive force tearing gullies meters deep into bare hillsides as it erodes away what little fertile soil is left, as well as a beneficial gift for the life that it brings, so beautifully displayed by the endless variations on green in the lush vegetation that the monsoon rains would bring. I listened as INDEV and the farmers openly discussed exactly where water would rush down the hillsides with the most force during heavy rains and how the farmers thought that the destructive soil erosion could best be stopped or caught and stored in large ponds to be used for irrigation purposes or for the watering of cattle. I learned from my time with INDEV and local farmers how to look at a row of hills and see not just bare ground, but to recognize the natural amphitheatre shape that when treated with simple water harvesting structures like the growing of grass, contour trenches and gully plugs, would produce a marked increase in the subsurface watertable that fed the wells located at the bottom of the hills.

**Deforestation and Soil Erosion**

During the monsoon season the INDEV workers and I often came face to face with the destructive erosion caused by rainfall runoff. These heavy rains seemed to drag the hillsides down to the valley bottoms, cascading down gullies and ditches and inundating roads under feet of water deeply coloured by the rust red soils it carried. Soil erosion is perhaps one of the most serious obstacles faced by farmers in Jhabua District. The terrain of Jhabua District with its undulating steep-sided hillsides is susceptible to severe damage through soil erosion due to rainfall runoff. This soil erosion has increased exponentially with the denuding of the vegetative cover for firewood, cultivation and
timber. This yearly topsoil loss due to rainfall runoff has in turn severely inhibited the ability of local farmers to adequately undertake a subsistence agricultural livelihood. The loss of topsoil results in progressively decreasing crop yields until the land is placed under long term fallow or is permanently turned into grazing land and lost to crop production.

The primary contributor to the problem of soil erosion is the extensive deforestation and destruction of vegetation cover that has taken place within the district in the previous five decades. Many of the older farmers, like the Tadvi of the village of Samoi who was now close to 90 years of age, recounted to me how 80 years earlier the barren hillocks which now surrounded his village used to be thick with forests and was a place to which the Raj would come often to hunt the tigers that were numerous in the area. Ranapur block has been especially hard hit with only 3.21 per cent of the area still covered in forest. In the past these forests contributed a substantial amount of natural resources to Adivasi communities, a connection that has been all but lost due to severe deforestation. Those areas not under agricultural use have come under severe pressure due to the encroachment of individuals cultivating lands that had once been used for common pastures. Extensive grazing on hillsides has contributed to increased soil erosion as flocks of sheep, goats and cattle are left to overgraze reducing the vegetation groundcover needed to protect the surface soil from being washed away, often to bare rock.
Economic Strategies and Subsistence Agriculture

Agricultural Land Holdings

For marginal communities living in rural areas the need to have access to and control over natural resources is often critical to their survival. Perhaps most important among these natural resources is access to and control over land, especially agriculturally productive land. In Jhabua District scheduled tribe or Adivasi farmers have 91.66 per cent of the total land holdings. Scheduled caste farmers hold only 1.89 per cent of the total holdings with the remainder of the land holdings being made up of other caste members (NCHSE 1993). In Ranapur block where INDEV was working with local farmers, 68.22 per cent of the area was used for agricultural purposes with 11.62 per cent of this agricultural area used to produce more than one crop each year. Of the remaining area, 3.21 per cent was classified as forested, while 15.45 per cent is land not available for cultivation (village common land for grazing and fuelwood), 8.46 per cent is uncultivated land except for fallow, and 4.66 per cent is fallow lands (Joshi 1995: 28).

Within the boundaries of most villages the land use pattern varies between agricultural land, non-agricultural land use (for living quarters, roads), barren or uncultivable lands (exposed rock and degraded land), permanent pasture and seasonal grazing lands (village common lands) and smaller groves of woods used for fuelwood and fodder or as sacred groves. Increasingly, agricultural land in Jhabua District suffers from a very high rate of fragmentation, with marginal (1 hectare or less), small (1-2 hectares) and semi-medium (2-4 hectares) land holdings increasing two-fold since 1971.
Medium and large landholdings have substantially decreased in the same time period. One of the principal causes of this fragmentation of land is due to the increase in population and the division and transfer of a portion of the land to family members. The decrease in the size of land holdings has also been linked to the widening degradation of once-productive agricultural land (NCHSE 1993). Referred to as cultivable waste land, this degradation of agricultural land results when the land held by an individual farmer reaches such a small state of fragmentation that it can no longer be economically managed as viable agricultural land, and its decline into “unproductive wasteland” often becomes inevitable (NCHSE 1993: 144). While this land could be treated and returned to cultivation this is a labour intensive process and so the land often becomes used only as grazing land. Even in those situations where a farmer may retain an adequate section of agricultural land, its quality is often poor in nature. Over the past three decades the percentage of land put under fallow to attempt to rejuvenate its productive potential has significantly decreased. This is an indication of the widening pressure put on agricultural land and its scarcity. The increasingly intensive use of the land results in drastically reduced fallow periods, limiting the ability of the land to regain its agricultural productivity (NCHSC 1993). In many areas of Jhabua District there is virtually no topsoil left (nearly 36 per cent of the cultivated area) or the cultivated land is a gravelly or murrum soil of light red to dark red colour often containing many stones and pebbles (Joshi 1995:29).

Marginal farmers make up 26.56 per cent of total land holdings in Jhabua district. Small farmers hold 27.68 per cent of holdings. Marginal and small family holdings make up 54.24 percent of land holdings in Jhabua district. These holdings comprise just 21.39 percent of the total land in the area. Semi-medium farmers hold 26.68 per cent of total land holdings with 28.99 per cent of the total area of land. Medium
Equally troubling is that pasture lands, grazing lands, and tree groves have suffered over-utilisation due to an increasing population of farming families dependent on these resources. Over-grazing and deforestation are critical problems with many areas of land previously reserved for pasture or as common lands now being transformed into marginal agricultural land. The term *nevad*, “encroached” or “captured” land, describes land used by villagers to which they do not hold legal title. This land is often crucial to a farmer’s attempt to raise enough crops on which to survive. Usually this land was registered as government revenue or forest service land, but had been “encroached” upon by villagers and used for agricultural purposes. While there was the opportunity to try to have the land “legalized” and registered in the name of the farmer, this required the farmer to demonstrate his or her continuous use of this land over an extended period of time. These opportunities to secure ownership of land that had been “captured,” was often dependent on the length of the time that it was occupied before this transfer of ownership was allowed. Thus often considerable bribes and attempts to influence government revenue officers were involved. It was explained to me that having to pay “financial fines” to the government for use of the land was often one way that farmers were able to prove their continuous occupation of a specific piece of land over time (see similar description in Baviskar 1995:154). Within the village, captured lands were understood to be the “private” land of the farmers using them, even when this land had not yet been officially registered with the *patvari* (the government official in charge of registering land ownership and keeping revenue records). Government revenue land that was not suitable

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Farmers hold 16.96 percent of total land holdings and 38.50 percent of total area of land (NCHSE 1993:141). In Ranapur Block marginal and small farmers make up 44.3% of land holdings.
for agricultural purposes was still often encroached upon by villagers and held by them for the growing of grass or for other future uses. These government lands could also be used as a common area by all villagers as a grazing area for cattle and goats. Forest Service land was encroached upon with even greater apprehension due to the nature of the retaliatory actions of the Forest Service in regards to the "illegal" use of this land.

Migration as Part of an Economic Strategy

While 97 per cent of the Adivasi population in Jhabua District are cultivators, the contribution of agricultural production to the total family income has fallen to only 32.6 per cent of total earnings (Joshi 1995: 152). This situation has emerged due to the increasing degradation of the ecological environment in Jhabua District combined with the fragmentation of land holdings and increased risk of crop failure due to lack of adequate water. There is, therefore, a consistent general decline in agricultural potential for most of the area and its contribution to a family’s yearly survival and economic stability. (See Plate 4, Breakdown of Income for Adivasi Individuals in Jhabua District, page 109).

As demonstrated by the above table, agricultural production now makes up on average only one third of a farming family’s total annual income. This trend has worsened in recent years resulting in a substantial portion of marginal or small rural land owners 6 being unable to economically support themselves solely on the agricultural production from their land holdings. The government has put in place many relief measures and employment generation development programs in the effort to partially

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6 These holdings comprise 54.24 percent of total holdings, but just 21.39 percent of the total land in the area (NCHSE 1993:145-46).
alleviate the chronic scarcities that affect many of the local rural communities. These programs however, are usually short term with a limited economic benefit. With almost no large scale industry offering secondary sources of employment within Jhabua District, many of the resident rural farmers therefore take part in a yearly seasonal out-migration to urban areas for wage labour work.\(^7\)

This problem of economic instability for farming families in Jhabua District has accelerated over the past 40 years and has now reached what many feel is a crisis situation. Many families are now involved in a cyclic pattern which sees them putting crops into the ground and leaving them in the care of the oldest and youngest members while the rest of the family migrates to urban areas for the opportunity to earn day-wages as labourers.\(^8\) While very few families migrate permanently, most households begin their seasonal migrations, which will last between on the average 60-110 days, in October-November and in March-April. These initial dates mark the times immediately following the harvest periods for Kharif and Rabi crops respectively and are the periods of heaviest migration (NCHSC 1993:104).\(^9\) Almost all households will return to their villages at the onset of the monsoon season in late May to mid-June. There is, however, some variation with a large percentage of Adivasis also returning home for the festivals of bhagoria and holi in late April to early March. As demonstrated in the chart below there is a constant flux out and back of migrating households with most farming families returning home for

\(^7\) In 1990 the employment capacity of all industrial units in Jhabua District was 666 people (Joshi 1995:44).
\(^8\) See Breman (1994, 1996) on the use of seasonal migration to find wage labour and its use as an economic strategy by individuals in western India.
\(^9\) The "Rabi" season begins in October/November and finishes in February/March. During the Rabi season the main crops raised are wheat and grains. The Kharif season begins with the monsoon in June/July and continues on till September. The crops grown during this time are maize, rice, pulses and lentils. Adivasi farmers generally see the Kharif period as the more important crop season.
planting, harvesting and festival seasons, followed by a re-migration of some members of the family back to the urban centres where they engage in wage labour. (See Plate 5, Calander of Migration Times for Adivasi Individuals In and Out of Jhabua District, page 110).

In Jhabua District, migration is used by a majority (53%) of rural farming families to economically supplement the agricultural production from their lands. With wage labour now accounting for on average 42% of a rural family’s annual income in Jhabua District (see above plate) it has surpassed in importance the income potential (34%) found in agricultural production. Migration is therefore a crucial ingredient in the survival strategies utilized by rural farming families in Jhabua District.

The impact of the migration of a major portion of the resident workforce leaving Jhabua District at different times of the year has had a detrimental impact on both the socio-economic and environmental health of Jhabua District. Reduced agricultural potential is the main factor leading to increased migration by the resident workforce. Migration of farmers, however, leads in turn to further degradation of the land due to the limited time in which resident farmers have to work on the land between migrations and the limited number of people available to undertake this work on village lands (Joshi 1995: 2-3). The ecological condition of agricultural lands therefore, continues to degrade as available time and manpower restricts the effort that farmers will put into the upkeep of already marginal agricultural lands that promise only limited economic returns.

The Social Well-Being of Adivasi Communities

The living conditions for many of these communities, therefore, has remained sparse as both agricultural and non-agricultural land falls under continued and extensive
use while suffering from severe deforestation and its accompanying soil loss. The poor condition of the agricultural land and its inability to adequately retain water for agricultural purposes proved to be a severe strain on the capability of farmers in the area to provide a stable agricultural livelihood for themselves. At the same time, however, it is also these individuals who often have the least ability to respond or manoeuvre socially, economically, and politically to cope with the constant pressures associated with the uncertainty of the area’s marginal agricultural potential. The state government, in responding to the increasing nature of this economic and environmental degradation and the obvious connections to social stress, had attempted over time to provide support to these farming communities through various rural development and employment schemes.

These development programs, however, have concentrated primarily on the distribution of financial assistance through short-term wage labour for various make-work projects in the area. Understandably, many farming families have therefore come to associate their continued existence to the presence and actions of district administration departments and the disbursement of financial aid. However, this historically re-occurring pattern of autocratic top-down development assistance taking place under the auspices of various government departments has also greatly limited local community self-initiatives. Equally troubling for local Adivasi farmers, and linked to the way in which this development assistance has been undertaken, is the limited access to power and to the process of decision-making over development activities which directly affect them.

This marginalization of Adivasi populations has persisted in many tribal areas since independence as India has pursued a policy of development that exercised
... its prerogative of claiming eminent domain—the greater good of the people—to pre-empt resources for itself. Yet the pursuit of these policies has brought about rapid exploitation of natural resources in tribal areas, violating the interests of dispossessed Adivasis. The acceleration of extraction has been matched by the expansion of administrative control to further restrict Adivasi use of the land and the forest (Baviskar 1995:82).

The rights of Adivasis to their land and the use of its resources has often been ignored in favour of the demands of an Indian state that vigorously uses the activity of development as a strategic element within its political, social and economic agenda in their efforts to independently support its population (see Gadgil and Ghua 1992, 1995). This situation has resulted in a historical and often well-founded sense of unease and distrust by Adivasi farmers over the intentions and financial sincerity of the various government departments involved in development work. Every farmer I spoke with had a story relating how they had experienced some form of corruption in their interactions with government officials.¹⁰ Adivasi individuals are equally disadvantaged in their dealings with local urban and predominately Hindu shopkeepers and moneylenders upon whom they depended for staple goods and for financial loans. Restricted by social position, illiteracy, and lack of access to resources, the economic stability of many Adivasi farmers therefore remains uncertain. The disheartening cyclic nature of the economic and environmental situation experienced in Jhabua District has resulted in a rather pessimistic ethos expressed by many of the Adivasi farmers as to their long-term economic stability.

**Summary of Environmental Stresses on Jhabua District**

Farming communities and the government administration in Jhabua District therefore face a complex intertwining of social, economic and environmental factors
inhibiting sustainable and ecologically sound socio-economic development. The basic environmental problems affecting rural Jhabua District farming communities are as follows: A) the fragmentation of agricultural land due to a growing population and family obligations. This can lead to individual agricultural land holdings being reduced to a size that is unable to support the family reliant upon it. B) Due to loss of vegetation cover and the pressing need to cultivate marginal lands, soil erosion has become a major problem. Each year vast amounts of top-soil are eroded, leaving barren hillsides scarred by gullies and increasingly unable to support healthy crop growth. C) In concert with this soil erosion is the decreasing amount of water available for both agricultural and non-agricultural purposes. The degraded nature of the land, which encourages a rapid runoff, also greatly inhibits the ability of the land to retain water and restore the sub-surface water table. D) These interconnected aspects which embody the contextual situation in Jhabua District have led to an increasingly marginal economic existence for farmers reliant on their agricultural production. With little opportunities for secondary employment in the area, local farmers, faced with declining agricultural potential due to these social and ecological pressures, increasingly rely on alternative economic strategies, such as out-migration for wage labour in urban areas, to survive.

**A New Approach to Development by the Government of India (GOI)**

In areas such as Jhabua District that are economically suppressed and environmentally degraded, the attempt to overcome poverty through local government development assistance has been an enduring reality over time. India has historically

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10 The nature of this corruption and its effect on the relationships formed between development organizations and Adivasi individuals will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Four.
favoured a centralized bureaucratic structure that retains the authoritative control over its
development actions. This has often led to a form and practice of conventional
development consistent with a top-down blueprint model of planning, implementation
and management of development actions.

Due to this form of implementation, past development programs in India have
been less than satisfactory in achieving the objectives for which they were designed. The
GOI, however, has not allowed the status-quo to remain and has engaged in a sweeping
self-critique of its development actions across the country. This critique has resulted in
the GOI’s Watershed Development Program which addresses and attempts to rectify the
gaps and problems within its implementation attempts, while emphasizing those areas of
development which have been notable successes.

While the responsibility for the implementation of rural development programs
lies with the state government, its institutional presence, as well as the presence of the
federal level of government, is represented at the district administrative level by the
document *Guidelines for Watershed Development*. This document prepared by the GOI’s
Ministry of Rural Development explains the foundational structure of the Watershed
Development Program and provides the main operational guidelines, regulations, targets
to be reached and rules to be followed by both district administrations and project
implementing agents operating at the local level across India. This document, therefore,
provides not only the outline of the projects infrastructure, but demonstrates the current
perspective held by the GOI regarding the content and activities of watershed
development projects.
Conceptually designed and planned by the Government of India’s (GOI) Ministry for Rural Development, this Watershed Development Program was to be implemented in rural areas throughout India. In the state of Madhya Pradesh this participatory watershed development program was officially recognized as the *Rajiv Gandhi Mission On Watershed Development* (RGMWD).

The RGMWD specifically addressed the problems associated with the economic poverty experienced by local farmers. This improvement of the economic stability of the local rural population is directly linked to the agricultural potential of the area. Any improvement in the level of economic poverty experienced by local farmers was therefore understood to be directly linked to the sustained environmental rejuvenation of the land on which rural populations depend. This link between economic improvement and the practice of environmental restoration was recognized as essential to any development activities undertaken to help the local rural population. While this two pronged approach was essential, it was also recognized that there had to be a process of meaningful participation by local people in the development process - a process that had not existed in past government development activities. This meaningful participation had to ensure that local Adivasi farmers received access to not only material resources but also participated in a process of social empowerment associated with their involvement in any decision-making processes that directly affected their agricultural livelihoods. Based on past experiences in government development programs, by not fostering this process of meaningful involvement the likelihood of a sustainable and equitable use of resources by local rural communities through development activities was doubtful. The program’s goal was, therefore, to encourage a process of sustainable participatory development to
revitalize the local economic structure in a long-term and environmentally-supportive manner. At the same time, it attempted to grant equal attention to providing short-term economic help to those who, while most in need, were also those most important to any development program’s long-term sustainability and local success.

**The Rajiv Gandhi Mission on Watershed Development Program (RGMWD): Mission Objectives**

The RGMWD emerged from initial research work undertaken by a study team from the Government of India’s Ministry of Rural Development. This GOI research team had travelled throughout India visiting many examples of watershed projects undertaken through various different government development programs. The GOI research team then incorporated the knowledge and experiences of individuals from NGOs, government administrations, research professionals and development organizations who had worked within these development projects into a cohesive report entitled *Guidelines for Watershed Development*. This document contained a common set of “operational guidelines, objectives, strategies and expenditure norms” based on the most successful elements of the various programs (GOIa 1994: 1) and was to be used by all state governments within India, and their project implementing agents (PIAs) at the district level, in the undertaking of the Watershed Development Programme throughout India.

In Jhabua District the *Rajiv Gandhi Mission on Watershed Development* therefore represented a specific kind of development intervention initiated by the central government in the attempt to organize the actions and behaviours of local farmers in a particular way. The stated intention of this new watershed development program was to
address concerns related to the increasing ecological degradation happening in areas throughout India through “simple, easy and affordable technological solutions and institutional arrangements that make use of, and build upon, local technical knowledge and available materials” (GOIa 1994:5). At the same time, individual projects would also strive to “promote the economic development of the village community... through optimum utilisation of the watershed’s natural resources and ... employment generation and development of the human and other economic resources of the village in order to promote savings and other income generation activities” (GOIa 1994:5).

A holistic approach which stressed the interconnection between the economic well-being of communities and the ecological health of the natural resources upon which local farmers depend upon was emphasized. Equally important was the recognition that many of the current problems faced by India’s rural poor have deep-seated social causes prompting the need for a development process of “sustained community action for the operation and maintenance of ... natural resources in the watershed”. This would mean placing a special emphasis, on improving “the economic and social condition of the resource-poor and the disadvantaged of the watershed community such as the assetless and women...” (GOIa 1994:5). The need for a more community-focused process of development which identifies and attempts to overcome the limitations and lack of access to resources for marginalized populations was explicitly expressed in the introduction to the Guidelines for Watershed Development document.

The breakdown of traditional institutions for managing common property resources and the failure of new institutions to fill the vacuum has also

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11 The document Guidelines for Watershed Development will also be referred to as the Guidelines throughout the remainder of this work.
been responsible for the denudation of natural resources. The traditional community based institutions have given place so far to individualised or market-driven exploitation of natural resources without any regard for adverse externalities of such actions and to numerous official programmes for the development of land and water resources which are dependent almost entirely on the top-down bureaucracy with very little participation from the village communities (GOIa 1994:i).

The Guidelines document further noted that throughout India development projects which had actively involved the participation, knowledge and skills of local communities in the planning and management of development actions were the projects that produced the most noteworthy accomplishments. Referring to mistakes made in past government development programmes, the Guidelines therefore makes clear reference to the need for a form of meaningful participation stating that “while the programme guidelines do emphasize the importance of peoples’ participation in development programmes, most successful experiments, ... indicate that success is achieved through Government’s/VA’s [voluntary agencies] participation in peoples’ programmes rather than the other way around” (GOIa 1994:2).

In recognition of the need for a process of sustained community involvement, participation therefore becomes paramount in the organizational structure of the RGMWD program. Bypassing previous levels of institutional control, empowered groups of farmers at the village level will bear the responsibility over and organizational control of local implementation of the development process taking place in their communities. This was to be a process of development that would hopefully lead to the “sustainable use of natural resources by an empowered and aware community” (GOI 2001),
The Rajiv Gandhi Mission For Watershed Development (RGMWD): Conceptual Design

The *Rajiv Gandhi Mission on Watershed Development*, was initiated in Madhya Pradesh in August 1994. While initially starting in 297 development blocks of 37 districts in Madhya Pradesh in 1994, this program is currently in 2001 being implemented in all 459 development blocks of the state. This geographical area equals roughly 44,348,000 hectares, of which 20,000,000 hectares is sown agricultural land with only 25 per cent assured a source of water through access to irrigation. While the RGMWD is now undertaken in all blocks in Madhya Pradesh, it will cover an area of about three million hectares. In Jhabua District the RGMWD program in 1995 covered an area of 102,000 hectares of land (RGMWD 1995:23). The area assigned through the RGMWD to INDEV in Ranapur Block, Jhabua District, was an area of 5805.22 hectares. This was 14.53 percent of the total geographical area of Ranapur Block.

A majority proportion of Madhya Pradesh’s agricultural lands are solely dependent on rainfall as the source for water used in agricultural activities. The unpredictability of rain-fed agriculture in concert with increased pressure on natural resources from a growing population has lead to an increasingly fragile agricultural existence for many Madhya Pradesh farming communities (GOI 2001). In attempting to reach the stated “mission goal” of “sustainable use of natural resources by an empowered and aware community”, the RGMWD uses a more holistic and participatory process of development than has been previously utilized in Indian government development programs. With the lives of farmers intimately interlinked with the environment, the ecological health of the natural resources on which they depend is critical to their
continued well-being. In predominately rain-fed agricultural areas such as Ranapur Block in Jhabua District any attempt at improving the socio-economic situation of these farming communities must therefore attend to the need to both restore and ensure the sustainability of the natural resource base of the area. A major component of the RGMWD, therefore, was to focus on soil and water conservation strategies to help revitalize the natural resource base. This strategy, it is felt, will lead to an equally improved level of agricultural productivity resulting in the strengthening of the economic stability of local farmers at the village level (GOIa 1994, GOI 2001).

A primary goal, therefore, of the RGMWD was to restore and sustain the ecological condition of agricultural and non-agricultural lands through the improvement of soil and water conservation strategies leading, in turn, to improved agricultural production. The implementation of this strategy for natural resource revitalization, however, was recognized as being dependent upon the sustainable participation of communities at the village level. Equally important, therefore, was the goal of nurturing a process of social empowerment and organizational capacity building among village-level community organizations. This process was to assist farmers in securing power over decision-making and the sustainable management of development activities, as well as the continued and equitable distribution of benefits after government support was withdrawn. As outlined in GOI mission strategies for the program, “The success of the mission is dependent on the institutionalization of these village level community organizations and participation is key to it. People’s participation is facilitated right from the planning stage to the stages of implementation and evaluation” (GOI 2001).
The Use of Watersheds as a Conceptual and Practical Approach to Development Planning

The use of participatory principles encouraging the active and sustained participation of local community members in the planning and management of development actions was a new central component of the RGMWD. Equally innovative within the conceptual design of the watershed development program was the necessary consolidation of the many social, environmental and economic stresses encountered by communities within an integrative planning approach using the concept of “watersheds”. By applying ecologically defined “micro-watersheds” as the conceptual and practical boundaries for development activities within a specific area, more cohesive and holistic solutions that integrated social, environmental and economic concerns could be pursued by communities as they confronted the wide range of concerns facing them.

Since the late 1980s, India has used the concept of the “watershed” as the basis for its planning in a number of development programmes undertaken in drought-prone rural environments (GOIa 1994:1; see Shah 1998). Considered as the “unit of development” the watershed concept entails the recognition of an environmental boundary based on the natural drainage that takes place within a geographic area, rather than boundaries based on administrative necessities. Its application as a unit of development demands an interdisciplinary and holistic approach that attempts to incorporate different forms of environmental management such as forestry, horticulture and animal husbandry, as well as the integrated application of social and economic services and enhancements.

Within the RGMWD program, project implementing agencies (PIAs) such as NGOs or government departments, were assigned by the district administration a set
geographical area referred to as a “milli-watershed”. These milli-watersheds ranged from 5,000 to 10,000 hectares in geographical size. Within these milli-watersheds are what is referred to as “micro-watersheds”. In 1995-1996 Jhabua District had 24 milli-watersheds made up of 204 micro-watersheds totalling 102,000 hectares (RGMWD 1995). Each micro-watershed was defined by ecological boundaries such as ridge-lines and drainage patterns and usually consisted of a geographical area of 500 to 1000 hectares in size.

Within the RGMWD program it was felt that a total of 10 interconnected (geographically) micro-watersheds within a single milli-watershed would be the optimum number to be under the responsibility of one PIA. While generally defined by ecological boundaries, each micro-watershed usually coincided with the historical boundaries of lands associated with specific individual villages. More than one village, however, could be included within one micro-watershed. An example of this is seen in the milli-watershed assigned to INDEV. INDEV held responsibility for a single milli-watershed in Ranapur block of Jhabua District. This milli-watershed was 5805 hectares in geographical size and was divided up into eight micro-watersheds sharing geographical boundaries. Within these eight micro-watersheds were the lands of fourteen villages. Three of these eight micro-watersheds in INDEV’s milli-watershed had only one village within one micro watershed area. Of the remaining five micro-watersheds, four had two villages within one micro-watershed, with the eighth micro-watershed having the lands of three villages within its area. Each village, however, even if more than one village was included in a single micro-watershed, had its own village watershed committee (VWC) that was made up of, and elected by, members from that specific village. It is from these village watershed committees that the responsibility for all decisions and planning
originates for the development activities that take place in specific village watershed lands. (See Plate 6, Location of INDEV's Micro-Watersheds and Villages, page 111).

**Administrative and Co-ordinating Institutional Structures:**

**Traditional Framework of Indian Rural Development Administrative Structure**

With India's attainment of independence from Britain, there was a shift away from Gandhi's vision of development (village autonomy and self-sufficiency) towards a national policy of economic growth through the development of an industrial base. India is still dominated, however, by a predominantly rural population with approximately 74 percent of its people living in rural areas and roughly 43 percent of India's total land mass under agricultural cultivation. Development polices intended to raise the general social and economic well-being of India's inhabitants have accordingly always considered rural development and agricultural production, as a priority within successive five year plans (Maheshwari 1995:14-15). The administration of this rural development, therefore, is always a central consideration with political and economic planners in India, gradually evolving since independence through a series of approaches and changes that are reflected in both its current administrative structure and bureaucratic practices.

Rural development in India is a concept which incorporates a multitude of numerous elements and functions ranging from agriculture and irrigation, to animal husbandry, public health and education. Its administrative structure therefore, demands a close working relationship with many different specialized government departments.

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12 A more detailed look at the components of each of the micro-watersheds within INDEV's milli-watershed, and the role and makeup of aspects such as village watershed committees, will be outlined in more detail in later sections of this chapter.
Administratively covering a wide range of concerns in rural areas, the Ministry for Rural Development, a central government ministry, was established in 1979. This is the nodal ministry in the area of rural poverty, particularly among the vulnerable groups in the society, i.e., scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, landless labour, and rural artisans. Its jurisdiction covers land reforms, village and cottage industries, rural roads, town and country planning in rural areas, elementary and adult education, rural electrification, rural water-supply, housing for the landless rural people and nutrition programmes. Besides, it co-ordinates the various components of rural development programmes for the rural poor including scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, women and freed bonded labour. Besides, it attends to all matters relating to Panchayati Raj (Maheshwari 1995: 209-210).

While the direct responsibility for rural development falls under the jurisdiction of the state government, the central government provides most of the financial support and often the design and planning of most rural development programs. Maheshwari describes how this contested control becomes a space of constant friction due to the centralized nature of this planning for rural development. Restricting state governments by granting them almost no allowance for local adaptation or input, the state administration is confined to the basic implementation of rural development programmes. Maheshwari contends that this restrictive practice has been compounded by an increasing "passivity" at the state level. Even when the central government loses interest in a programme, the state government does not have the initiative to carry on with the programme, modifying it to specific regional concerns and breaking its dependency on the central government for direction (Maheshwari 1995: 230).

Many of the components of present day rural development programs represent important extensions or modifications of India's earlier planning attempts at rural development attempted in previous five year plans. In 1952 the CDP or Community Development Planning (CDP) programme was introduced.
Development Programme (also known as Community Development Projects) was launched under the direct administration of the Planning Commission and implemented by state governments. This program initiated administrative changes and the creation of institutional structures which provide the basic foundation for rural development programmes that persist through to the present. Evolving out of the British colonial administration, the district has remained as the basic unit of administrative control under the overall responsibility of the district collector. The collector was responsible for development programs such as the CDP and also for the co-ordination of the various technical departments involved in rural development programs. Perhaps the most fundamental change undertaken by the Indian government, and initiated within the CDP, was the introduction of an administrative system which brought development planning and operations into more direct contact with people in rural areas. The development block was formed encompassing approximately 300 villages and covered roughly the same area as the older colonial revenue tehsil. This new division meant that the level of district, which had previously been the lowest Indian administrative unit, was now divided into many development blocks and became the new administrative unit at which most rural development initiatives were undertaken. Overseen directly by the block development officer (BDO), each development block has representative extension officers from each of the technical departments at the district level (such as the departments of agriculture, soil, irrigation) who are responsible for the work done by their departments within a development program. Development work at the village level was carried out by village level workers (VLW) who worked with the villagers directly in the integrated
The Community Development Programme was largely seen as failing to meet its intended objectives (Maheshwari 1995; see Korten 1980: 482). In an attempt to address these problems and shift decision making closer to the people, the central government initiated in 1957 a decentralization of power in its system of governance under the name of Panchayati Raj. This initial concept of the Panchayati Raj was the first generation within a process that has progressed through successive institutional forms, inconsistent application in different states, as well as a cyclical falling in and out of political favour with central political powers, through the following four decades. In 1992 the central government passed the Panchayati Raj Act, a constitutional provision that assured the place of these local level governing bodies with mandatory local elections held every five years and a guaranteed continued existence outside of state politics. The institutional structure for this rural local government consists of three tiers; the gram panchayat or village level, the panchayat samiti or intermediate level and the zilla parishad at the district level. While the political offices of the Panchayati Raj are locally elected, the scope and powers given to these local institutions are provided by the state government which supplies the necessary resources. This allows the Panchayati Raj to operate as local units of self-government and to take on the responsibility for initiating and undertaking a wide range of social and economic development activities within local communities (Maheshwari 1995: 76-78).

Many of the elements of the administrative frameworks that emerged out of these past development programs still exist within current rural development approaches.
While limited successes have occurred, a majority of these rural development programs have failed to reverse increasing environmental degradation and social and economic decline taking place in many rural communities. While some of these successive development programs explicitly attempted to address the lack of consultation with local people, the historically configured top-down structure of bureaucratic administration has made the participation of local people in the planning and management for the sustainable use of their local environment rather problematic.

This lack of consultation with local communities is explicitly addressed in the latest rural development program to come from the Ministry of Rural Development, the Watershed Development Program. In commenting on the failure of past development programs within India, the Guidelines states that “experience has shown that watershed development projects under different programmes often fail to achieve their physical and financial targets on account of inappropriate administrative arrangements or inadequate management skills of the project staff. Even in cases where progress has been satisfactory, development has not been sustainable in terms of operation and maintenance of assets created and common property resources because of inadequate participation by the village communities...” (GOIa 1994:2). The most successful projects throughout India were consistently those that actively incorporated local people into the planning, design, implementation and management of their own development (GOIa 1994:2).

This new Watershed Development Program, therefore, focuses on restoration of agricultural lands and the halting of environmental degradation through integrated watershed planning that addresses social, economic and environmental elements within a holistic approach. Stressing the need for local planning and management, a critical
component of this new program is the emergence and growth of community based organizations. Influenced by current global discussions centred on the development discourse of participation, the Indian government has acknowledged that without the active and meaningful involvement of local communities in rural development, any new program is destined to remain ineffective or will repeat many of the problems and failures that have occurred in past Indian rural development programs. Therefore the use of participatory development processes to enable communities to achieve self-reliance through sustainable development activities by strengthening their social, economic, and organizational abilities, is of primary importance within this watershed development program.

**Institutional Administrative Framework of the RGMWD: Overview**

The RGMWD brings with it some major changes to the institutional administrative structure that is in place to manage development activities taking place in a specific development block. While the complete administrative authority and control of the District Collector remains constant, other aspects of the traditional administrative control have been altered with this current watershed development program. Previously development initiatives undertaken in a development block were directly overseen by the District Block Officer who retained control over the approval of finances and the implementation of development actions through the various government departments and their extension officers. The RGMWD, however, provides a new structure through which development activities are both implemented and financed. For many specific larger development actions such as the financing and implementation of the digging of bore holes for drinking water, the installing of lift irrigation systems or sprinkler systems, or
the participation in numerous self-help economic and agricultural initiatives offered to individuals in rural communities, the BDO continues to retain control over the approval of financial expenditures and allocation of government department services. Under the RGMWD, however, the bulk of state development funds under the DPAP and EAS programs previously channelled by the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) through the office of the BDO for the undertaking of development activities in specific villages, now goes directly to that village and their Village Watershed Committee (VWC). Under the RGMWD, it is the VWC that retains authority over the expenditure of these development finances and control of the implementation of development activities.

Similarly, the funds available for development activities under the RGMWD are separate from the social and economic development funds currently channelled through the Panchayti Raj. In essence, the structure of the RGMWD program presents a new

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13 Drought Prone Areas Program (DPAP), Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS). Financial support that comes from the central and state levels of government allocated for rural development is often channelled through the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA). While highly integrated within the Indian government’s institutional system for controlling development, the DRDA is an autonomous body registered under the “Societies Registration Act” and is responsible for the implementation of rural development programs.

The formation of the DRDA occurred due to the financial restrictions on the disbursement and spending of government funds directed at development activities. Government departments must spend the financial resources allotted them by the central government within the financial year that it is allocated for use. Within India funds often arrive for the present year’s development work with only months remaining in the current financial year. This often results in a hectic rush of spending to use these financial resources before the financial year ends. As can be imagined this results in a less than favourable environment for development that is both well-planned and thoughtfully implemented. The DRDA was formed in response to this situation and was given its autonomous status to free it from the tight government regulations regarding financial spending practices. The DRDA is therefore allowed to roll over unspent financial resources allocated for rural development work from one financial year into the next financial year. This, at least in theory, allows for a more secure, measured, and continued release of funds during the full year without a danger of the loss of funds due to government financial time restrictions and regulations.

14 A important aspect of the RGMWD program, however, (and undertaken by the PIAs involved) was to encourage farmers to take advantage of the numerous social and economic initiatives and subsidies offered them through application to the office of the BDO. The village organizational structures, such as the VW
organizational structure for implementing development activities in addition to a new financial conduit through which development funds now move bypassing previous channelling through offices of the BDO or the local Panchayati Raj representative. This new financial disbursement structure, however, presented new challenges for the undertaking of development activities in Ranapur Block. As will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Four, the disruption of traditional financial conduits through which all development funds flowed also disrupted traditional lines of authority normally associated with the access to and control over these funds. Over time and in many ways the VW Committees would come to represent a third and increasingly powerful block in the administration of substantial development funds flowing into individual villages.

Co-ordination at State Level:
State and District Level Administration of RGMWD

While in liaison with the government departments and agencies of the central GOI, the state government of Madhya Pradesh holds overall co-ordination authority of the RGMWD program. (See Plate 7, RGMWD Coordinating Structure, page 112). The Department of Rural Development in Madhya Pradesh is the nodal agency through which mission policies regarding the program are produced or amended in reaction to emerging situations at the district level. At the district level the District Collector remains central to the overseeing and evaluation of the RGMWD, however the responsibility for the implementation of the watershed guidelines falls to either the Zila Parishads (if in operational form) or to the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA). In Jhabua District the DRDA was the agency responsible for the implementation of the RGMWD.
In general these responsibilities included the selection of PIAs, the approving of watershed development plans, the forwarding of funds to both PIAs and village watershed committees implementing watershed development activities at the village level, as well as evaluation and monitoring strategies for the watershed development work.

In Jhabua District the "sub collector" (or assistant collector) was both head of the DRDA as well as president and chairman of the Zila Parishad. The various project implementing agencies (PIAs) are assigned by the DRDA to a specific "milli"-watershed consisting of integral "micro"-watersheds within which the PIA would be responsible for undertaking watershed development activities as outlined in the *Guidelines for Watershed Development* document. These PIAs were directly responsible to the head of the DRDA for their development actions in the RGMWD program. In Jhabua District, however, the Collector at the inception of the RGMWD, Mr. Manoj Jhalani, also took a very active interest in the activities associated with the watershed program and so worked in close co-ordination the Jhabua District Subcollector, Dr. J. Rajora, in overseeing the functioning of the program, the interpretation of policy directives received from the state level of government, and the forwarding of implementation directives to PIAs in the field.

**Co-ordination at Block Level:**
**District Administration and Project Implementing Agents (PIA)**

While the overall administration and co-ordination of the RGMWD in Jhabua District was under the direction of District Collector Jhalani and the Subcollector/ Head of DRDA, Dr. Rajora, the implementing of the watershed development activities at the initiatives through different government departments such as Horticulture, Fisheries, Health or Education.
village level was undertaken by various government departments and NGOs acting as implementing agents or PIAs. Government departments have always been involved in the village level activities of development projects. Embarking on a new path, however, the RGMWD program encouraged the increased participation of NGOs as PIAs within the program on the recommendation of the GOI's Ministry of Rural Development research team as outlined in the *Guidelines for Watershed Development*. The GOI research team found that there was a much higher percentage of successful development project implementation by NGOs within India. Acknowledging this success in previous Indian watershed development programs, the involvement of NGOs was encouraged in the new watershed development program based on the recognition of two strengths. First, their adeptness at facilitating this participation of local groups. And secondly, for their holistic non-hierarchical approach to development that shied away from the standard sectoral approach based on bureaucratic divisions between social, economic and environmental aspects. This form of sectoral approach, favored by government administrations, was criticized in the *Guidelines* as an approach that suffered from a lack of coordinated strategies resulting in ineffectual project management (GOIa 1994:2).

In Jhabua District there were initially 15 PIAs working under the RGMWD program. Of these fifteen PIAs,\(^1\) seven were from the Forestry Department, three were NGOs of which INDEV was one, with the remaining five PIAs made up from various government departments such as irrigation or soil conservation departments.\(^2\) Each PIA

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\(^1\) This was the initial number of PIAs involved in RGMWD program in Jhabua District in 1995-1996.

\(^2\) The makeup of these PIAs could be quite diverse as noted in *The Guidelines*: "...it is desirable and necessary to involve VAs and other institutions such as Universities, Agricultural Research and Training Institutions, Corporations, Co-operatives, Banks, Public and Private Commercial Organizations, Panchayati Raj Institutions and Government Departments in planning, co-ordinating and supervising the
was assigned a milli-watershed by the DRDA in which they were to undertake their watershed development activities as outlined for the RGMWD in the *Guidelines for Watershed Development* document and was to report directly to the DRDA. The primary role of the PIAs was to provide support to communities through community organization activities and training while also overseeing the implementation of the broader environmental goals of restoring the natural resource base. The role of the PIA, therefore, was to act as a facilitator assisting the villagers and the village watershed committee with the initial planning and management of the watershed, and then gradually withdrawing their assistance leaving village watershed committee to manage their own micro-watersheds by the third year of the four year project time period.

Each PIA carries out its development actions within a milli-watershed through a structure called a Watershed Development Team (WDT). As outlined in *The Guidelines* this WDT “may have at least four members - one from the disciplines of plant sciences, animal sciences, civil/agricultural engineering and social sciences” (GOIa 1994:15). While the qualifications for WDT members was to be at minimum a professional degree or post graduate work in social sciences, practical experience was also credited and the minimum qualifications could be relaxed to let in individuals who had relevant extensive field experience. If a government department was acting as the PIA for a milli-watershed formulation and implementation of Watershed Development projects in groups of selected villages (GOIa 1994:13).

17 Within the Guidelines for Watershed Development document the role of PIAs was defined as: “...to motivate with the Gram Panchayats to pass the necessary resolutions to make public contributions, conduct Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercises to prepare the development plans for each watershed, undertake community organization and training for the village communities, provide technical guidance and supervision of watershed development activities, manage project implementation, inspect and authenticate project accounts, undertake action research to adapt low-cost technologies and/or validate and build upon indigenous technical knowledge, monitor and review the overall project implementation and set
then the WDT would be assembled from the officers within the department who held the desired qualifications (GOI 1994:15). Project Implementing Agents (PIAs) received funds directly from the DRDA with these funds released to project accounts which targeted certain development activities undertaken by the PIA in its work within the milli-watershed.

**Co-ordination at the Village Level:**
**INDEV, Its Staff and Its Role as a Project Implementing Agent (PIA)**

The NGO INDEV was formed in 1995 by its director, H. G. Narain. INDEV was based in the town of Jhabua and the RGMWD program was the first development work undertaken by the NGO. Prior to forming INDEV, Mr. Narain had worked for another NGO undertaking rural development work in Jhabua District. While overseeing notable award-winning successes in rural development work with this previous NGO, Narain left its employment in 1994. However, due to his extensive experience and success in rural development work in the district, Narain was asked by the Jhabua District Collector, Mr. Manoj Jhalani, to form a new NGO and participate in the RGMWD program which was just beginning in Jhabua District.

My initial approach to inquire about working with the NGO INDEV was a chaotic one. Mr. Narain, the founder and director of INDEV was out of town, so I met instead with the assistant project officer (APO), Mr. Rohit Chandra. Worried about my limited knowledge of Hindi I showed up at the office to find Chandra and three or four other individuals who worked closely with him, busily completing a series of forms and maps. As I introduced myself to Chandra and the others, the activity in the office barely slacked up institutional arrangements for post-project operation and maintenance and further development of the
off. I quickly found out that Chandra spoke English well and feeling a wave of relief, I tried to briefly explain to him the basis of my research and how I would like to be able to work with INDEV and the participatory watershed project in which they were involved. Chandra, pleasant but looking very harried, thought that this would not be a problem but that I would have to come back in a few days to finalize the arrangements with Mr. Narain. Feeling the sense of urgency in the room, I quickly thanked him and headed for the door. Later that night Chandra called on me at my house to apologize for the shortness of the earlier visit in the afternoon and to explain what all the hectic activity in the office was about. Without knowing, I had stumbled into the office on those frantic few days that occurred every couple of weeks when the team has to reduce their recent work in the field to a collection of statistics. These numbers are then entered onto “proformas” or development reports that were used by the district administration to gauge the progress of PIAs (project implementing agencies) like INDEV in their development activities. During the months ahead I would come to see the immense influence that these bi-weekly and monthly proformas had on the substantive form and activities of participatory development taking place in the many micro-watersheds surrounding Jhabua.

A couple days after visiting the office I received a phone call from Chandra informing me that Mr. Narain had arrived in town and would be pleased to meet me.

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assets created during the period” (GOIa 1994:13).

Proformas was the name attributed to these various forms that the district administration required all PIAs to fill in and bring with them to the bi-weekly meetings with the district collector. These forms required filling in categories with numbers documenting such things as village groups formed, meters of field works dug, number of trees planted. These proformas, which at first seemed to me to be simply a book keeping and superficial monitoring device used by the district administration, came to assume a much
Feeling nervous I walked the short distance between my house and the office of INDEV. As I entered the courtyard I could see through the open door that the INDEV staff were clustered around a table that occupied the central office accessed through the courtyard. Standing unnoticed for a few moments on the doorstep I glanced around the room in front of me. The office was not large, consisting of only five rooms. The front door entered into a smaller office where Narain or Chandra often met with visitors. Connected to this front office through a side door was a larger office space filled with tables where the staff of INDEV often worked. Towards the back of the building, behind these front office spaces, was a smaller storage room and a small kitchen. Next to the kitchen was another large room in which cots were set up and were often used by Narain for overnight stays in Jhabua.

Narain, suddenly noticing me at the door, stopped his discussion with the staff members and called for me to come in. As the staff filed out to the other office, Narain immediately made me feel at ease as he asked me to stay for chai. After telling me that Chandra had explained to him about my wish to experience working with his small organization and the research I hoped to undertake, he went on to say that he thought that this would be fine. He told me that he was also attempting to document the work of INDEV in this project and that possibly what I hoped to accomplish would feed directly into and support this documentation. After telling me that I could have complete access to whatever INDEV undertook in this participatory watershed development project, we began discussing in more general terms the state of rural development in India and deeper significance as a form of control and struggle over knowledge about local participatory development actions.
specifically about the new participatory watershed development project with which INDEV was involved.

Narain specialized in watershed management and while he had received his training as an ecologist, he believed resolutely in the centrality of human interactions within the process of development. This strong belief, based on a process based of openness, mutual respect and dialogue, embodied the interactions he shared with farmers with whom he worked. While many of the farmers were cautious in their initial interactions with INDEV and its development work, I quickly came to see that the trust and respect expressed for Narain by the farmers was based on the honesty and truthfulness of his interactions with them. It was on the strength of these relationships shared initially between Narain and the villagers that much of the early development work was initiated. Narain’s interactions with farmers concerning development activities were strictly participatory. Narain would often engage in long discussions with local farmers about the options available to them in regards to development activities. Setting the character of interactions that the rest of INDEV would share with local farmers involved in the RGMWD, Narain was not afraid to quietly argue for a different path to be taken by the farmers in their development work. He would, however, never overrule their decisions even if it differed from his own. Narain believed that the job of INDEV was not to control the form of development taking place, but rather to help local communities build their confidence through the realization of the knowledge and skills that they already possessed and with which they could address the problems they perceived as important to overcome. At the same time Narain stressed that participatory development

\[19\] Tea made with milk and often different spices.
was not about simply redirecting money at people and then leaving them to sort it out on their own. Rather participatory development was about a process of support and open dialogue through which previously marginalized people could empower themselves as they regained control over their social and economic livelihoods.

Narain also operated INDEV in a similar manner. The staff of INDEV were encouraged to speak up on issues and to discuss the different options available in their development work. There was, however, a chain of command with Narain holding the final word. While he depended heavily on the small staff of INDEV and allowed them considerable control over the day to day actions taking place in the village micro-watersheds, he could also be very strict. With a temper that could flare up quickly, Narain could be at times extremely demanding of the INDEV staff, expecting limitless devotion and time spent on the job at hand. And yet at other times he could be very supportive of the staff and free with praise to them when he felt that work had been done well. Narain explained to me that with INDEV being such a small NGO responsible for such a large watershed area (5000 hectares) and its resident population (over 13,000 people), he depended heavily on the staff of INDEV to work independently using their own knowledge and judgement concerning the development work undertaken with the farmers.

INDEV is a very small NGO. Maintaining a primary office in Jhabua close to the district administration headquarters, INDEV also had a secondary field office in the town of Ranapur. The town of Ranapur was located 15 km south of Jhabua but was much closer to the milli-watershed and the fourteen villages that INDEV had been assigned to in Ranapur block by the District Collector. This smaller office was to be used as an “open
meeting place” each Saturday, which was the market day for Ranapur. In this way villagers, while visiting the market, would be encouraged to drop by to talk or to come for help from INDEV with setting up bank accounts or depositing money that was associated with some of the financial aid programs that INDEV was starting within the project. On one of my first visits to this Ranapur office, Narain, pointing to some of the brightly coloured houses that lined the street across from INDEV’s office, expressed doubt that the moneylenders who lived there would be very happy with the future plans of INDEV to start various micro-credit initiatives like village or gram kosh banks and smaller women’s banks. Narain hoped that these micro-credit initiatives would replace the need for farmers to go to these town moneylenders for loans at crushing interest charges of 50 to 100 percent.

The Guidelines document had suggested that the makeup of PIAs include individuals from the disciplines of “plant sciences, animal sciences, civil/agricultural engineering and social sciences.” Narain explained that while INDEV did have “technical experts” he felt that the primary purpose of its work would be in “organizational building” within communities. In a comment that I would hear expressed by him numerous times, he stated that “the villagers and the farmers know how to save their own land, but over time and due to the intrusive nature of the government, they have lost the will to break the dependence they now experience.”

Initially the staff of INDEV consisted of its director, Narain, a specialist in land and water conservation; the assistant project officer Chandra, who was trained as a civil engineer, and two Program Co-ordinators or Community Organizers, Ajit and Sanjay. Also on INDEV’s staff were Prakash who was INDEV’s accountant/office assistant for
the project, and a fieldworker, Vishal. Finally there was the quite-spoken agroforestry specialist, Nihal. These seven people formed the initial staff of INDEV at its inception in late 1995. The number of staff and its composition, however, would evolve through many changes during the time that I undertook this research. In fact, only Narain, Chandra, Prakash and Vishal would remain with INDEV for the complete period of time I spent with INDEV. In addition to these four, other individuals worked for INDEV for varying lengths of time. These other staff individuals included another community organiser, two other field workers, and an environmental specialist. Each of these individuals stayed for varying lengths of time before moving on.

The staff of INDEV were all Hindu and almost entirely made up of males. While Narain actively searched for women to work for INDEV, he had great difficulty in finding any, Hindu or Adivasi women, who would be willing and able to work in the villages that lay outside of the urban centres of the towns of Jhabua or Ranapur. Near the end of my research period, Narain was able to hire two women to work directly with Adivasi women in the villages. One of these women, Samita, spent only a brief time with INDEV, leaving INDEV’s employment shortly before I finished my last visit to the site. The other woman community organizer, Geeta, who was the only Adivasi hired by INDEV, was still in the NGO’s employment when I last departed.

Narain felt that it was a priority to hire individuals from the local area. This often created problems for him as he found it difficult to find qualified people in terms of education or experience who were available and willing to work in an area that was socially and geographically isolated from larger urban centres. Narain felt that he was also hampered in attracting good people by the limited wage he could offer based on the
administrative budget overheads allowed under the RGMWD program. Equally problematic was that many of the young professionals just out of school see working for a NGO as a “career step” on the way to bigger and better things. Therefore they will often only work for a NGO for a limited time before they use the position to advance to something else. Narain also complained that many of the individuals involved in development work in India would not travel to new places preferring instead an office job close to their home. Narain himself did not spend the majority of his time in Jhabua, but travelled to the district for extended periods of time to oversee INDEV’s development work taking place in Ranapur block. Narain’s social ties within Jhabua, therefore, were almost non-existent, yet he was not isolated from the institutional workings of the district administration. Having worked extensively in Jhabua District he maintained friendly yet superficial relations with government officials. He was, however, very critical of the corruption that took place in government circles and, while stating that it made his work more difficult, he claimed to refused to become involved in the social and political games that many see as a necessary part of business in India.

Perhaps most important to the ongoing work of INDEV was the APO Rohit Chandra. Chandra, in his late twenties, has spent much of his life in Jhabua and continues to live there with his wife and one child, sharing a house with his mother and father who is a retired government employee. Educated and trained as a civil engineer, Chandra worked with many construction companies designing and building various structures in the district before beginning to work in development related projects in the employment of NGOs. Before working for INDEV, he had worked as a consultant for another NGO undertaking development work in Jhabua District. His work, therefore, as assistant
project officer (APO) for INDEV’s development work in the RGMWD program would be an important career move for him. Equally important, the location of INDEV’s work in Ranapur Development block also meant that Chandra could remain in the area close to his family and home.

Chandra was very proud of the engineering works that he had designed and managed in Jhabua District. In light of the schooling he had, Chandra considered himself responsible for the undertaking of the construction of the many physical structures that were part of the soil and water conservation strategies to be put into place in each of the village micro-watersheds. Chandra was an extremely devoted and hard worker spending more time in the field visiting the farmers than any other INDEV worker. Fluency in Bhili allowed him to speak directly with the older farmers who often did not speak in Hindi. Chandra was well-liked and respected by the farmers, an attitude which he returned in kind. Exceedingly honest, Chandra shared with Narain an intense dislike of corruption, seeing it as a major barrier to effective development work. Recalling his days of political activism in college, he would often raise this topic with fellow development workers and with the villagers themselves, condemning acts of corruption and debating the topic in often heated exchanges. After one particularly contentious exchange shortly after the beginning of the project, Narain even took Chandra aside in apparent fear for his safety, and, while not telling him to stop, asked him to tone down the force with which he conducted these discussions. However, the obvious openness and truthfulness expressed by Narain and Chandra in both their actions and words when interacting with Adivasi farmers would contribute greatly to the trust that grew between them and the Adivasi farmers and the positive impact that this had on future development actions.
Perhaps most difficult for Chandra was the growth of his own understanding of the process of participation within development. While his attitude would change, Chandra initially felt, (perhaps not out of character given his past work experience), that the social aspects of development work were in fact secondary in importance when compared to the technical work associated with the watershed project. For Chandra if this technical work was wrong then he felt that he had failed in his development job. The social aspects of participatory development work and the need for an emphasis on social processes within development was new to him. When work started in the villages INDEV’s two community organizers began the long process of attempting to integrate the various social initiatives of the RGMWD with the physical and technical aspects of the project. Chandra initially formed a rather dubious impression of both the importance of social interactions to development work as well as the community organizers attempts in establishing these important social relationships with the farmers. Chandra often joked with the community organizers about their job, claiming that “All they do is say ‘Hi, how are you?, OK?, good, good-bye, now I’m finished. Then the real work starts - the technical stuff!’” When others pointed out that it was only through the establishment of good social relationships that the later technical work would be completed, that if people did not trust you they would not cooperate, Chandra would usually sheepishly agree, acknowledging that they should not work like the government by just showing up and telling the people what and how to do the work on their land.

Chandra would come to appreciate first hand the importance of the integration of the social and the technical after INDEV lost both community organizers and he was left to deal with all project concerns on his own. By the end of the time that I spent with
INDEV, Chandra was totally convinced of the primary importance of pursuing
participation as a social process and not simply as an organizational structure used to
reach technical development objectives.

Both Vishal and Prakash were also from Jhabua and had strong family ties to the
town. Prakash, also in his late twenties was trained as an office assistant. In charge of the
financial accounting for INDEV’s development work and daily correspondence between
INDEV and the District Administration, Prakash seldom went out into the field to help
with the development work in the villages, working only in the offices in Jhabua and
Ranapur. Vishal, in his early twenties, had been hired by Narain as a favour to his parents
who were worried about his increasingly wayward ways. While untrained in development
work, Vishal was a hard and dedicated worker who would become an integral part of the
day to day activities and interactions with farmers so necessary for the operation of a
participatory development project.

Ajit, one of INDEV’s first community organizers, was not married and was from
an affluent merchant family living in Ranapur close to the village watersheds where
INDEV worked. His family operated a prosperous store and was rumoured to be involved
in lending money to farmers in the area. In spite of this connection, it seemed that Ajit
was well liked by the farmers with whom INDEV worked. Before joining INDEV as a
community organizer, Ajit had worked, somewhat informally, as a journalist in Jhabua
District. An interested and active participant in the discussion surrounding many local
social issues, he produced articles for local papers. Ajit’s primary concern, however,
centered around the issue of illiteracy and the ways in which it could be overcome in rural
area. Ajit shared this concern over illiteracy with the Jhabua District Collector Jhalani and
through this shared interest developed a personal relationship that would later lead to Jhalani suggesting to Narain that Ajit would make a good community organizer and perhaps could be hired as such once INDEV was formed and operating.  

Ajit was fluent in the local Bhili language and was a very good public speaker. He seemed to be able to captivate the attention of farmers when speaking about village watershed development activities and outlining the role that the villagers would play in its operation. Ajit was also adept at organizing groups, whether women’s banks, informational watershed meetings that INDEV held occasionally for the farmers, or large rallies protesting drinking held by the women in the villages. Unfortunately, as would become increasingly clear in the year ahead, Ajit was not as skilled at following up these initial large meetings with sustained smaller, focused gatherings of farmers where the important and necessary face to face work of community organization takes place. Sanjay was the second community organizer hired by Narain at the beginning of the project. A quiet-spoken man from Jhabua he did not spend long with INDEV, leaving shortly after I began my work with INDEV.

**INDEV’s Role in the RGMWD**

The mission objective of the RGMWD program was to restore the ecological base through social and water conservation management strategies, thereby improving the

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20 This particular collector, Manoj Jhalani, was very involved with a literacy program which he had started in the district. Young school children were used as teachers to provide basic literacy classes for older (15-35 years) individuals. These classes would be held late in the day after the work in the fields had been completed. The supplies for this teaching work were donated by the district administration and the school children volunteered for the teaching duties. Jhalani and his wife often participated in “literacy walks”. This consisted of a group of people who would walk through a specific village at night with candles to draw the attention of other villagers to the need to participate and support the literacy program. Many of the villagers, however, expressed reservations about the program, feeling that both the financial resources and time allotted to this program should be spent on teaching younger children. Older individuals targeted
natural resource base upon which people depended for their subsistence agricultural livelihoods. This development work was to take place utilizing the underlying theme of participation with people actively involved in planning, implementation and management of development activities. Through this participatory process the mission goal of the sustainable use and equitable distribution of natural resources by an empowered and aware community was to take place.

INDEV, as a PIA, was therefore responsible for assisting communities and their Village Watershed Committees in reaching the general mission objectives and goals of the RGMWD program. This process of participatory support was targeted on three main areas:

1) community organization of local communities
2) watershed treatment of land encompassing the ecological restoration of soil and water resources
3) training for watershed community members.

Integral to INDEV’s work in each of these areas was the use of participatory processes within all development activities which ensured the active and meaningful participation of the local communities involved in the watershed development project. In this way both the physical objectives outlined for the RGMWD program for ecological restoration of local agricultural lands, as well as the overall mission goal of the social and economic empowerment of local communities could take place in an integrated and sustainable way. The establishment of a meaningful participatory process is especially important in
the first months of any development project. During this time the character of the relationships that take place between development practitioners and communities is newly formed, directly influencing the pattern of future social interactions through which all development activities will take place.

With the process of participation recognized by the GOI as essential to the operation of the RGMWD, one of INDEV’s greatest concerns was how to ensure that this participation was a process that represented a form of meaningful interactions for the communities involved in the program. Central to this concern was the fact that INDEV’s assigned milli-watershed encompassed a population of 13,325 individuals in 14 villages located within a sizeable geographical area of over 5,000 hectares broken down into 8 micro-watersheds. With INDEV’s small staff this posed considerable challenges in their attempts to foster a process of meaningful participation that would reach as many of the individuals as possible who were involved in INDEV’s milli-watershed.

The village watershed committees (VWC) were designed within the RGMWD program to be the central organization at the village level through which all planning and decisions concerning development activities would be made locally by farmers. This organization would be key, therefore, to the future sustainability of any benefits, social or economic, which resulted from the development activities undertaken. The staff of INDEV realized that it would be impossible for them to interact directly with many of the individuals in each of the villages located in their milli-watershed. A process of meaningful participation, and therefore their facilitation work, must originate and expand from the work undertaken by the VWC. Only in this way would the social, economic and
environmental development initiatives started through the RGMWD be sustainable after
the departure of external organizations.

Co-ordination at the Village Level:
Village Watershed Committees (VWC)

INDEV’s staff travelled daily by motorbike out to the villages. Starting out from
Jhabua where most of the staff lived and arriving half an hour later at the Ranapur office,
the staff would then travel on to the outlying villages. This often involved various lengths
of time on gravel roads or paths. Almost all of the individuals living in the fourteen
villages with whom INDEV was working were listed under the classification of
Scheduled Tribes.21 Only 212 people out of a total population of 13,325 for the fourteen
villages were listed under the classification of Scheduled Castes.22 Generally, the Adivasi
population in Ranapur Block is evenly divided between Bhil, Bhilala and Patalya
populations (Johsi 1995: 56). In INDEV’s milli-watershed, Bhils were largely dominant
with a small population of Patalyas present in some of the more prosperous villages like
Samoi.23

21 In India the application of “tribal” as a designation is still strongly in use. However, the term “Adivasi” is
also used and while not necessarily preferred, is often used by Indian academics and activists to refer to
these indigenous communities. I have used the term Adivasi throughout this paper. Hardiman (1995: 15-
16) states that this term is one that has come to be preferable in the Indian context because it is a non-
insulting term used by these people to describe themselves. Hardiman recounts how the term “...relates to a
particular historical development: that of the subjugation during the nineteenth century of a wide variety of
communities which before the colonial period had remained free, or at least relatively free, from the
control of outside states....Adivasis can therefore be defined as groups which have shared a common fate in
the past century and from this have evolved a collective identity of being Adivasis.” See also Baviskar

22 For a further breakdown of population figures for each village please refer to Appendix 1.

23 Bhil is a traditional designation for a certain group of people. For a general discussion of Bhil history see
The Indian government, like individuals, refers to the different “tribes”, of which the Bhils would be
counted as one. However, many question the use of the distinction and attribution of “tribe” to these
groups, as it is a classification that originates from British colonization. For a discussion on the use of the
classification of “tribe” in India for Adivasi groups see Pathy (1988: 21-26) and a related discussion
referring to Bhilalas by Baviskar (1995: chapter four).
Only two of the villages within INDEV’s milli-watershed had what could be thought of as a village centre or place designated by a concentration of buildings where people often gathered. Samoi, one of the wealthier villages within INDEV’s milli-watershed, had such an area which contained seven or eight concrete buildings in which a veterinarian’s office, a school, the local Panchayti Raj office and a tea shop were found. The rest of the village of Samoi was similar to the other villages in INDEV’s milli-watershed, each made up of a number of phalias which are spread out, often at considerable distance from each other, within the boundaries of each village. A phalia usually consists of a group of houses owned by the farmers whose lands surround them or are nearby. Sitting on higher ground away from threatening monsoon runoffs, the structure of these houses can vary between older houses made of traditional wood-frames coated in mud and plaster, to more modern houses made of mud bricks that have been fired locally and then covered in mud plaster. Near each of the houses are large raised wooden platforms on which grass is stored for cattle. Grains and food crops are stored closer to home, kept in large earthen pots that can sit both inside the house or in the large open “porch” area which opens out from the main entrance. This open porch is a heavily used area where people sleep on charpais during hot nights or gather to sit and talk during the day while dogs and chickens wander about freely as they search for bits food dropped during the last meal.

By following the small footpaths that wind between these individual phalias one can find the water handpumps for drinking water, or the older village wells with water levels which rise and fall with the seasons. Many of these paths pass by local fruit trees and occasionally small groves of eucalyptus or bamboo nurtured in small plant nurseries.
that some farmers own and surround with fences of strong cactus-like plants to stop the straying of hungry cattle.

**Village Watershed Committees**

Attempting to meet *en masse* with farmers in the villages was often a long process for INDEV due to the dispersed nature of the villages and the fields in which the farmers worked. Many village watershed meetings often took hours to begin as individuals fanned out on the connecting paths to bring the farmers together in a central place. The Village Watershed Committee (VWC) was the organizational body from which all planning and management decisions were to originate in regards to watershed development work undertaken at the village level. Community participation, as the underlying theme in the implementation of the development actions to be undertaken through the RGMWD, was to be co-ordinated through the Village Watershed Committee of each micro-watershed which planned for and co-ordinated the development activities to be undertaken. Where more than one village was included within the boundaries of a single micro-watershed, each village would have a VWC responsible for all development activities taking place within the village lands. The Village Watershed Committee was to work in co-operation with the PIA assigned to their micro-watershed as well as liaising with the Gram Panchayat in the planning and management of development actions such as soil and water conservation structures and the encouragement of social and economic capacity building activities among village members.

The composition of these Village Watershed Committees usually had a minimum of ten to fifteen members, but could range to as many as 25 members. These committee
members were to be members of the village for which that Village Watershed Committee was being formed. These individuals are nominated in a village assembly meeting of the Watershed Association. The *Guidelines for Watershed Development* outlined the selection process from these Watershed Committee members stipulating that each committee should include representative numbers of individuals from user groups, self-help groups, women (at least 33%), and Scheduled Castes/Tribes groups. There should also be 2-3 members of the Gram Panchayat nominated to serve on the Village Watershed Committee. After the Village Watershed Committee has been formed it selects a chairman (or president) who has signing authority for financial expenditures along with the Village Watershed Secretary and a member of the PIA assisting them.

As stated previously, the Village Watershed Committee is the village level organizational body responsible for the planning and management of the development activities taking place within a village micro-watershed. It is through the Village Watershed Committee by a majority decision of 60% that decisions are made as to what development actions should take place within the micro-watershed including the direct control over the allocation of finances necessary to undertake this work.

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24 Village level political institution.
25 The process through which these VWC were formed and their watershed president or “chairman” nominated will be discussed in depth in Chapter Four.
26 The Watershed Association is in essence all the members of the village where the micro-watershed is located. The Watershed Association is defined in The Guidelines as: “Where a watershed is coterminous with a Village Panchayat or its area is confined within the boundaries of a Village Panchayat, the Gram Sabha of the Panchayat concerned will be designated as the Watershed Association. However, where a watershed comprises of areas coming under the jurisdiction of more than one Panchayat, members of the community who are directly or indirectly dependent upon the watershed area, will be organised into a Watershed Association” (GOIa 1994:15).
The Watershed Secretary (WS)

While the Village Watershed Committee is responsible for the planning and management of the development activities which take place within a micro-watershed, the Watershed Secretary is the individual most directly involved with the daily implementation of RGMWD projects objectives at the village level. Each micro-watershed has a Watershed Secretary who is selected from the village within that micro-watershed. In the case where more than one village is located within a single micro-watershed, each village would have their own Watershed Secretary to organize the development activities on the lands of specific villages. A second alternative is for one Watershed Secretary to be shared by the different village watershed committees and to co-ordinate the work on each village’s land. The Watershed Secretary works directly under the supervision of the Watershed Chairman of the VWC within each micro-watershed.

The Watershed Secretary is a pivotal position in the operation of the micro-watershed at the level of village co-ordination of the RGMWD. Acting as the direct liaison between the PIA and the village as a whole, the Watershed Secretary is responsible for the documenting and undertaking of all decisions reached by the Watershed Association and the Village Watershed Committee. The Watershed Secretary is also responsible for the maintaining of all financial accounts and records of the Watershed Committee and their management of the micro-watershed. The Watershed

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*Individual groups formed around resource use (grass production of hills, access to stored water), or groups formed with the purpose of developing alternative economic opportunities (the collection and selling of fruits, distilling of oils from grass, plantation production).*
Secretary is also responsible for assisting the user-groups and self-help groups in documenting their financial transactions and accounts of the work undertaken.

In the day to day operation of a micro-watershed, it is the Watershed Secretary who works closely with the PIA and the Village Watershed Committee to plan out future development actions within a specific micro-watershed. While the VWC will make the necessary decisions as to what should be undertaken, the actual undertaking of the physical work or institutional arrangements are left to the supervision of the Watershed Secretary. The PIA also relies heavily on the Watershed Secretary to monitor the progress and competency of the work undertaken as well as keeping records of the individuals who undertook the work and the amount of work for which individual villagers are to be paid for their wage labour by their VWC.

It was stressed within the *Guidelines* document that Watershed Secretaries should be from the village within the watershed where they were undertaking the duties of Watershed secretary, or at least from a village nearby. The Watershed Secretaries were also expected to have a “graduate” level of education and agree to live in the watershed village during the project (GOIa 1994:16). In many cases this educational requirement was problematic. In INDEV’s milli-watershed in Ranapur Block there were considerable problems trying to find individuals with this level of education due to the overall low general level of literacy among the Adivasi population which dominated local rural communities. INDEV successfully petitioned the Jhabua District Collector to have this standard of education requirement lowered so that they would be able to select local individuals from the villages within the micro-watersheds to undertake the role of Watershed Secretary.
Financial Structure for the Allocation of Funds Under the RGMWD

As stated earlier, The Watershed Development Program was initiated by the central government’s Ministry of Rural development. Funding for the program would flow from the central government to the state level with the reallocation of funds targeted to specific areas through already existing programs. This would mean that 100% of the funds under the Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP), the Desert Development Programme (DDP), the Integrated Wasteland Development Project (IWDP), and 50% of funds targeted to these areas through the Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) and the Intensified Jawahar Rozghar Yojna (I-JRY) would be used exclusively for the implementation of the various activities envisaged for this watershed development program (RGMWD).

The allocation of finances for individual milli and micro-watersheds covered within the RGMWD was to be based on an expenditure norm of Rs. 4000 per hectare as stipulated in the overall financial structure of the GOI Watershed Development Program (GOIa 1994: 20-21). In the case of INDEV’s development work undertaken in Ranapur Block, a total of Rs.23,220,880 was targeted for their milli-watershed work over the projected four year life-span of the RGMWD project. This figure represents the multiplying of the total number of hectares within INDEV’s assigned milli-watershed of 5805.22 hectares by the expenditure norm of Rs. 4000 per hectare.

INDEV’s milli-watershed was covered under the pre-existing DPAP and EAS financial structures. These funds, however, are not just lumped together into one operating budget to be distributed between all the micro-watersheds within the milli-
watershed. Rather, the individual villages within INDEV’s milli-watershed each fall under either the DPAP or the EAS from which operating funds are provided for the development work undertaken in respective individual village micro-watersheds. In INDEV’s milli-watershed five villages fell under the DPAP (comprising two micro-watersheds), with the remaining nine villages (six micro-watersheds) falling under the EAS. Financial support for any development work done under the RGMWD project within a specific village micro-watershed is therefore provided only through the development program under which that village falls. As INDEV would discover this separation of funding sources often leads to an uneven development process among the various village micro-watersheds within the milli-watershed due to the different financial release schedules of the two centrally controlled programs or schemes.

The disbursement of DPAP and EAS financial allotments earmarked for use within the RGMWD micro-watersheds within Jhabua District was controlled by the DRDA. The DRDA was the nodal agency at the district level to which funds were released by the state level of government, who in turn, received the funds released from the central government in line with the aforementioned DPAP and EAS funding allotments for the area. The DRDA then released these funds directly to either the Village Watershed Development Accounts operated by Village Watershed Committees, or to PIA project accounts used to finance their development operations in the milli-watershed. Overall, the percentage of total finances allotted within a RGMWD milli-watershed towards specific project components were divided among the following budget areas (GOIa1994: 17):

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28 In terms of 1996 exchange rate, this sum was equivalent to $928,835.20 Canadian dollars.
i) Watershed Treatment/ Development Works/ Activities 80%
ii) Watershed Community Organization 5%
iii) Training 5%
iv) Administrative Overheads 10%
v) Total 100%

The specific breakdown of the funding percentages based on the total project cost, and the allocation of these funds to either Village Watershed Committees (VWC) or to the PIA during each year of the four year period of the RGMWD program, are shown below (GOIa 1994:87).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% Instalment</th>
<th>% Agency</th>
<th>% Budget Heading</th>
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<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>First</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>PIA</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1) Administration</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>2) Community Organization</td>
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<td>4) Entry Point Activities</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Second</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>VWC</td>
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<td>1) Development Works</td>
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<td>Second</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>1) Development Works</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Total 100% 100% 100%

PIA = Project Implementing Agent; VWC = Village Watershed Committee

29 These budget percentages are to be followed both at the milli-watershed level and at the individual village micro-watershed level of expenditures.
Release of Funds at the Village-Level: Village Watershed Committees and PIAs

Each village micro-watershed receives a total financial allotment of funds dependent on the geographical area in hectares of each village within a micro-watershed. These funds, however, are not released to either the PIA or the VWCommittees all at once. Rather, the funds are released on a staged basis by the district administration (through the DRDA) as it in turn receives these funds from the state government. While the total geographical area of INDEV’s milli-watershed was 5805.22 hectares, each village was allotted funding based on the total geographical area of the village lands within a micro-watershed. The percentage of the total funds allocated to any one micro-watershed was therefore dependent on the percentage of geographical area that the land of each village (or villages) made up of the total geographical area of the milli-watershed.

For example the village of Budhasala within INDEV’s milli-watershed had a geographical area of 473.99 hectares. Under the financial structure in place for the RGMWD, this micro-watershed (in which there was the single village of Budhasala) would receive a total of Rs. 1,895,960 to undertake its development activities over the four year project life span (8.2% of the total funds allotted to INDEV’s milli-

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30 In the initial year of the project, there was considerable lag in the arrival of funds from the state level of government to the district level for distribution to the PIAs and Village watershed committees. INDEV often had to postpone work it had planned with the VWC in fear of funds not being available to the VWCommittees who would need to pay villagers for their labour work. This lack of payment would then seriously affect the level of trust and confidence that the villagers held for INDEV and their belief that this new form of participatory development represented a change from past government development actions.

31 When more than one village was included in a single micro-watershed, there was, as noted earlier, a village watershed committee for each village within that single watershed. Each village watershed committee therefore received funds from the DRDA directly into their Project Account (funds allocated from either the DPAP or EAS depending on which program the village was placed under).
watershed). These funds would come from the Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) under which the village of Budhasala was located.

**Village Watershed Committee Accounts**

In accordance with the stated participatory nature of the RGMWD, the finances targeted through the Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP) (100%) and Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) (50%) for the undertaking of development actions at the micro-watershed level were channelled directly by the DRDA to the Village Watershed Committees (VWC). These VW Committees retained control over the development activities taking place in the village micro-watersheds. These funds were not channelled through the PIA overseeing the development activities within the milli-watershed but were sent directly to the Village Micro-Watershed Development Account which fell under the direction of the Village Watershed Committee. Each VWC had control over three accounts set up with the assistance of the PIA.

These separate accounts were:

i) Village Micro-Watershed Development Account
ii) Maintenance Fund Account
iii) Village Bank or Gram Kosh

The Village Watershed Development account contained funds to be used by the VWC only for the payment of wage labour and development costs related to the micro-watershed activities authorized by the VWC. Funds were transferred directly into this account from the DRDA for development activities as well as administration costs such as honorarium for watershed secretaries and watershed volunteers.

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Please see Appendix 1 for a complete listing of the villages within each of the eight micro-watersheds, the geographical size in hectares of each micro-watershed, as well as a further breakdown of the individual
The Maintenance Fund account was to hold funds in reserve until after the project had completed its initial four-year cycle and government funding ceased. This maintenance fund would then be used to fund any maintenance work on the social and water conservation structures that had been constructed during the RGMWD program. This fund was financed through a percentage being deducted from the wage labour payments given to villagers working on development activities. The size of this percentage deducted from the wage labour payments to the villagers was decided upon by the VWC.

The Village Bank or Gram Kosh was a third account. Not originally within the GOI Guidelines to Watershed Development, this fund was started by INDEV as a community organization initiative which was later adopted within Jhabua District as a standard component of the RGMWD on the endorsement of the Jhabua District Collector Manoj Jhalani. These village banks were supported with a fund of 50,000 rupees by the district administration. The funds in this village bank increased over time due to a percentage subtracted by the VWCommittee from any wage labour payments made to villagers and then deposited in the village bank. This growing fund was under the control of the VWCommittee and was to be used to finance economic initiatives and low-interest loans for village members in each village micro-watershed. Interest payments paid by villagers on the loans they received from the village bank also contributed to its financial growth. This interest rate was decided on by the VWC.
PIA Accounts

Development funds were also released to the PIAs directly from the DRDA in accordance with the funding limits outlined in the Guidelines For Watershed Development. The PIAs held three accounts:

1) Community works
2) Training
3) Administration

The Community works account held funds that were to be directed towards community organization work, such as rallies, trips to other watershed sites for the farmers, and initial support through loans for self-help and user groups. Training account funds are to be used in the education of VW Committees, User and Self-help groups, Watershed Secretaries and project volunteers. The administration account held funds to be used for payment of salaries to PIA workers and for the administrative costs entailed in basic operating costs.

The Interface of Local Development: Who are the main social actors involved in this study?

Approaching a development project as a life-world that is socially constructed is to acknowledge that there can exist multiple meanings and interpretations about development. The RGMWD, with its underlying theme of participatory development, was an alternative approach to the more conventional structure of development found in Indian development programs. Because the program attempted to break down barriers to sharing power and control, new social spaces were opened. Within these spaces, new and often conflicting views of development emerged as participating groups manoeuvred to have their meanings and actions understood and privileged.
In order to clearly understand how a development program is implemented, and whether or not it has been a success, it is crucial to understand the various actors and opinions involved in that program. David Mosse has cautioned that there has been "...inadequate attention... paid to the social processes underlying participatory development..." (1998: 18). Understanding how these social processes emerge and direct development actions is important to gaining an insight into the links between national policy directives and the implementation of these policies, such as participation, at the level of the local project. By examining this "social interface" (Long 1989b, 1989c, 1992a, 1992b) within a development project, attention is focused on the...dynamic and emergent character of the interactions taking place and to show how the goals, perceptions, interests, and relationships of the various parties may be reshaped as a result of their interaction. However, [it] should also explore how these interactions are affected by, and in turn themselves influence, actors, institutions, and resource fields that lie beyond the interface situation itself (Long 1989b: 2).

In the RGMWD program in Jhabua District, this development interface was embodied by the perspectives and social interactions between four different groups. These social groups included the NGO INDEV, the local Jhabua District administration, local Adivasi farmers, and the distant presence of the state and central government levels (GOI's Rural Development Ministry). While the federal (and state) government was never directly involved in the daily face-to-face encounters of the development project, its presence was embodied through the Guidelines for Watershed Development (GOI 1994) that defined the organizational role of "participation" within the watershed development project. The vast majority of the face-to-face interactions and negotiations occurred between INDEV and the local farmers and INDEV and the district administration.
INDEV played a pivotal role by interpreting the views of the farmers to the district administration and vice versa. Although my opinions were rarely sought, and my influence on the project was minimal, my own presence was also a factor in the program. By virtue of being a westerner, I brought some status to INDEV, and the impression that the NGO was important enough to study. This may have lent some weight to INDEV’s approach with the district administration and with the villagers. I also played a more active role within the NGO by playing “go-between” for the staff, seeking information and clarification from the head of the NGO.

How “participation” was defined by each group through their social interactions with others, and how these various meanings were then used by individuals and groups to influence the development taking place was not a set process. For the villagers, their interactions with INDEV offered them access to levels of government normally closed to them. For the federal and district levels of development administration, INDEV was the entrance into rural village life. INDEV, therefore, as a PIA in the RGMWD program, held a pivotal position in the social interactions through which these competing meanings about participatory development were constructed and negotiated. As Long has pointed out it is at these “critical points of linkage or confrontation” that “...social interest, cultural interpretation, knowledge and power are mediated, perpetuated and transformed...” (1989c:221). Exploring the nature of these interactions and the centrality of local organizations such as INDEV to these development situations, helps us to understand the social processes that organize the activity of a local development project (see Long 1989a; Long and Long 1992; Grillo and Stirrat 1997; Moore and Schmitz 1997; Arce et al. 1994).
While INDEV was only a small local Indian NGO involved in a local rural participatory project, it was immersed in social and organizational relationships that reached from the very local level of the village and district administration directives, through to national government guidelines and policy directives. Local interactions, such as those shared by INDEV with local villagers or with the district administration in Jhabua, were not simply a case of strict enactment of national development dictates. Rather, it resulted in a socially complex, and more culturally relevant reading of these global development discourses such as “participation.” As Arjun Appadurai reminds us, “the megarhetoric of developmental modernization...in many countries is still with us. But it is often punctuated, interrogated, and domesticated by micronarratives...which allow modernity to be rewritten more as vernacular globalization and less as a concession to large-scale national and international policies (1996:10).
Plate 1: Madhya Pradesh District Map
Source: www.mpwatershed.org/html/district/jhabua.htm
Plate 2: Location of Major Towns in Jhabua District
Source: www.mpwatershed.org/html/district/jhabua.htm
Development Blocks

1. THANDLA
2. PETLAWAD
3. MEGHNAGAR
4. RAMA
5. JHABUA
6. RANAPUR
7. UDAIGARH
8. BHABRA
9. KATTHIWADA
10. ALIRAJPUR
11. JOBAT
12. SONDWA

Plate 3: Development Blocks in Jhabua District
Source: Compiled from: Joshi 1995: 22
Per Household and Per Individual Annual Income from Different Sources of Sample household

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income from</th>
<th>Annual Income in Rs.</th>
<th>% share of individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Per household</td>
<td>Per individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crops</td>
<td>3,671</td>
<td>576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>821</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poultry</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale of animal</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work as migrant labourer</td>
<td>4,788</td>
<td>751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract labour</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work as labourer within village or nearby</td>
<td>1,045</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relief operations</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest produce</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade/household industry</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remittance from out station members</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Negligible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>11,285</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,769</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average size of household is 6.4.

Plate 4: Breakdown of Income for Adivasi Individuals in Jhabua District
Source: Joshi 1995: 61
Plate 5: Calendar of Migration Times for Adivasi Individuals  
Source: NCHSE 1993:105
Plate 6: Location of INDEV's Micro-Watersheds
Source: INDEV 1995:1
Rajiv Gandhi Mission on Watershed Development
Co-ordinating Structure

State Level Mission Office
(Policy Decisions, Propagation of Concept and Administrative Input)

Collector - Mission Leader

District Level
WS Advisory Committee

Zila Panchayat
Nodal Agency at District

MPs and MLAs
Panchayat Raj Members
Technical Departments

District Level
WS Technical Advisory Committee

All District Heads
(Technical Departments)

Project Implementation Agency
(For each Milli-watershed)

Officials
(Government)

Village Watershed Committee

Watershed Chairman
Watershed Secretary
Members

Women
Representatives of Self-Help Groups
Representatives of User-Groups

Plate 7  RGMWD Co-ordinating Structure
Source: www.mpwatershed.org/html/district/jhabua.htm
Chapter Three: Theoretical Approaches

This chapter looks at the two major theories that were key to the study. This includes both the theoretical approach that guided my work (symbolic interactionism), the academic context of my work (the role of Anthropology in development) and the theory that informed the approach taken by INDEV (empowering participation). I briefly outline my place in Jhabua and how I was seen by others as well as outlining the lens through which I viewed them. After examining the theory of participation in depth, I then look at the interpretation of participation used by INDEV and how it viewed government attempts to measure its participatory work. Understanding the philosophy and theoretical characteristics of participation was key to my work, as I wanted to compare this to how the process of participation was actually carried out in practice (discussed in Chapter Four).

Anthropology and Development

Anthropologists have, for quite some time, actively worked within the field of development.1 While in the past, anthropologists have occupied marginal positions within the development hierarchy (Cochrane 1979; Sacherer 1986; Hoben 1982; Cernea 1991a; Seddon 1993), increasingly they find themselves in positions that offer opportunities to

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make a direct impact on development policy and planning—a realm still often dominated by economists and engineers. This new-found acceptance in development has come in tandem with the rising interest in development as a field affected by culture.

While knowledge about culture has always been recognized as the expertise of anthropologists, their contribution to the development project cycle remained within conventional entry points of pre- and post-development project cultural assessments. This work most often consisted of ethnographic work documenting the lives of local people that was then quickly ignored by development planners, followed by an analysis at the completion of the project to help explain why it had failed to reach its objectives (Cochrane 1979).

With a changing perspective in development policy that looks to a process of development planning from the bottom up (Burkey, 1993; Oakley, 1991; Chambers 1983), there is now a recognition that the cultural attributes and social processes inherent to local communities have to be incorporated within the planning and management of projects. Social scientists are increasingly relied upon for an understanding of cultural consequences of development and for contributions to the construction of sustainable development policy that understands the active inclusion of local people and local knowledge (Cernea 1983, 1991, 1994; Gabriel 1991; Pottier 1994a; Salman 1987, 1994; Seddon 1993; Slim and Thompson 1995). As anthropologists are drawn ever deeper into the institution of development, they may well face a number of concerns over development's renewed (and supposedly re-configured) interest in culture.²

² Escobar (1991) delivers a scathing denouncement of anthropologists and their involvement in development work. He questions the short memory of the discipline of anthropology claiming that the
One of the most striking observations that I made while researching this thesis is that the field of development is conceptually struggling with the idea of "participation" in much the same ways that anthropology has struggled with the concept of "culture." This is not surprising, as culture has become a popular topic within development circles—often seen equally as a problem and as an asset in increasing the effectiveness of development projects. The link between the development discourse of participation and the concept of culture, specifically "local" culture, is not always explicit, but it underlies the philosophy and actions of organizations and governments involved in rural development.

In earlier development approaches, culture was a totalizing concept representing the organizational structure that was felt to dictate behaviour. Development theorists and practitioners envisioned a culture as a discrete, bounded and static entity that could be transformed, along with the people it "contained", from a state of passive and unchanging traditionalism to one of dynamic modernism. In this approach, all that was needed was the application of a range of economic inducements, the right "values" and attitudes, and set development activities.

Knowledge produced within the field of development anthropology is a construction determined as much by the field of institutionalized development as by the interactions between anthropologists and Third World communities. As Escobar states, "in the transition from the colonial to the development encounter, anthropology's historical awareness has left much to be desired" (1991:661). He accuses anthropologists of participating in the objectifying of local cultures by confining and representing them as "cases" or within "categories" that are defined by the institution of development. These institutionally recognized "targets of development" are them approached within a "development rationality" that defines both the problems to be met and the solutions that are then offered. As Escobar sums up his understanding of the role of anthropologists in development; "...development anthropology, for all its claim to relevance to local problems, to cultural sensitivity, and to access to interpretive holistic methods, has done no more than recycle, and dress in more localized fabrics, the discourses of modernization and development" (1991:677).

Now, however, the inclusion of culture within development activities has come to represent for many the inclusion of the human factor within development approaches. Culture, from which human action originates, is seen as representing a diverse range of perspectives, attitudes, knowledges and practices that are socially and contextually produced, and permeate and organize all aspects of human group life. The concept of culture, understood in this way, continues to be seen as central to the organization and management of development activities. Currently culture is seen by many as something not to be transformed but rather utilized in the process of organizing how development change is accomplished in ways that are culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable (Gabriel 1991). The connection made between the development process of “participation” and its role in the recognition and systemic inclusion of local “culture” within a development project, while not always explicitly stated, is nonetheless strongly implied.

As INDEV was to facilitate and assist local groups to plan and manage their own development it was expected by the district administration that INDEV’s work should be demonstrably “localized.” The production of this “locality” (Appadurai 1996) was to be achieved through the process of participation that, in theory, served to access local culture and allowed it to influence the development that took place in the village watersheds. The development process of participation (and the discourse which defined and supported it), the role of participation as the inclusion of local culture in development projects, and by including this local culture, the production of a localized form of development, were all linked in the imaginations of the district administrators about how this local rural development should take place.
Theoretical Approach of the Investigator

It is impossible for an investigator to be a “blank slate” devoid of all opinions, experiences or cultural biases. All researchers possess personal and professional experiences that affect how they interpret their research, including interactions with people from other cultures. In both scientific and social science research, the researcher is now understood to have a very great impact on the research through the questions he or she sets, how she or he interprets the data or reactions of people and how she or he structures this into a report. Michael Burawoy believes that it is important to understand the views and biases of the researcher: “...the purpose of field work is not to strip ourselves of biases, for that is an illusory goal, not to celebrate those biases as the authorial voice of the ethnographer, but rather to discover and perhaps change our biases through interaction with others” (1991:4).

Even before arriving in Jhabua, I held ideas about how I could study the interactions of people. I was very interested in participation, but my key organizing theory was symbolic interactionism. This approach offered the best way to study the interactions of an NGO undertaking participatory development. I wanted to retain a degree of flexibility in my work. One of the criticisms of conventional approaches to development (and anthropology) is that preconceived models and ideas are imposed from the outside, and conclusions are reached even before entering the area. Symbolic interactionism allows for flexibility, as it does not attribute certain universal meanings to events, but concentrates on the interactions of people involved in the events and the meanings that these people create.
Symbolic Interactionism and Its Use in Understanding Participation

The concept of participatory development is based on the premise that development actions are to be planned and carried out by sharing views, perspectives and knowledges between development practitioners and local communities. Crucial to this process of social interaction, is the ability of these social groups to reach agreements on the form that this development activity should take. With its emphasis on the social interactions and relations of power which emerge between people and groups, participatory development takes as its centre the relationships that people share with each other.

Brohman states that “if development is about processes of human action and interaction rather than just about goods and resources, then it is clear that development theory must deepen its understanding of what it is to be human. This involves incorporating a hermeneutic component into development studies that addresses the ways in which mutual actions and social relations are linked with intersubjective values and meanings” (1995b:306). The quest to understand how meaning is socially constructed was central to the work of Herbert Blumer (1969). The approach that became known as symbolic interactionism can be especially helpful in understanding participatory development at the local level. This approach strives to understand how people make sense of their everyday experiences and, through the social process of their interactions with others, construct the activities which constitute human group life (Prus 1996:10). Meanings, in symbolic interactionism, are central to the construction of everyday actions of individuals and groups.
Ideally, participatory development is primarily concerned with making sure that the mechanisms for the how of a meaningful process of participation are put in place; how the social processes necessary for the meaningful interactions of people are incorporated into the organizational structure of a development project. INDEV was central to this process of participatory development work in the RGMWD program. Enmeshed daily in social interactions with both government officials and local communities, the character and quality of these social relationships experienced by INDEV directly influenced the structure of the development activities which took place. With INDEV occupying a crucial position in the RGMWD as a PIA, examining its interactions with others offered a unique position from which to observe the activities of a participatory development project as the “practical accomplishment of group life” (Prus 1997).

This activity, emerging through an interpretative process central to the social interactions, relies heavily on the construction of shared meanings about the experience of development. For Blumer, this “practical accomplishment of group life” depends upon the social interaction between people where shared meanings are socially constructed and become attached to the objects of everyday life. Whether these objects are physical things, social relationships, or even abstract thoughts, objects in and of themselves never possess “intrinsic” meanings (Blumer 1969:4). Instead, meanings are “social products,”

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1 I make this statement while acknowledging that there is a diverse range and size of NGOs operating at the local, national and international levels. As NGOs become more central to the process of development some national and international NGOs have come to rival small governments in their size, financial expenditures and employment of people. Similarly, the operational methods used by various NGOs can differ widely. Smaller, locally based organizations will have more direct contact with local communities. Larger NGOs, however, while often unable to have this direct contact with local communities, will attempt to channel their programs through local organizations. This is especially critical within participatory development projects that demand meaningful interaction between development organizations and local communities.
created, formed and transformed through an ongoing interpretative process. In this interactive and dynamic social process individuals indicate to others what meanings objects hold for them, while in turn, interpreting the indications made by others towards them (Blumer 1969:66). In this way, development comes to be defined in certain ways by people. Over time, and through multiple experiences both the local district administration and local farmers had come to expect development to represent certain things and actions. Through this interpretative social process individuals come to define commonly held meanings about objects and adjust and re-adjust their actions and behaviours in relation to each other in the production of human group life (Blumer 1969:5).

Human group life, however, is made up of more than the sum of individual actions. While the solitary actions of individuals are always important to the activities of situations such as a development project, how those activities come about involves a complex process of social interaction between individuals. The activities that embody group life, of which a participatory development project can be a major part, are produced through an intricate social process of anticipation, adjustment, and co-operation between individuals. As individuals reflect and consider their individual actions and the actions of others, they conjointly construct the shared activities which embody everyday group life, attaching, discarding or reshaping common meanings held in relation to social situations (Prus 1996:14).

NGOs, at least until this point in time, have shown a greater propensity than government institutions to privilege the need for this local participation. The social construction of “commonly held meanings” does not, however, imply that these meanings are necessarily constructed from a position of equality among the social actors. A commonly held meaning of development could represent for Adivasis and government officials the recognition that government officials hold complete control over how development actions are to be undertaken. While this can be a
While the social meanings produced through this interpretative activity need to be continually re-affirmed through social interaction, individuals do not construct anew the social reality of a situation each time.

As people develop ways of conceptualizing and acting toward the world they begin organizing their lives around those particular themes and practices. These “lifeworlds,” “ways of life,” “social worlds,” and the like, are important since they entail the stocks of knowledge, frames of reference, and senses of direction that people constituting this and that community take into account in developing their lines of action (Prus 1996:248).

The social process of interpretative activity, through which human group life is produced, is grounded in these ongoing “ways of life” that “...take place in real time, in concrete places, [and]often in relation to highly particularized forms of knowledge” (Gubrium and Holstein 1997: 164).

Development was not a new occurrence in Jhabua District. As a social context, development has been historically constituted by the interactions that have taken place through time between Adivasi farmers and government development practitioners in Jhabua District. Using past experiences to assist them in the ongoing process of social interactions, shared (but not necessarily equal) meanings are reached about development.

Because most situations encountered by people are often “defined” or “structured” by them through the understandings formed by past interactions, new situations require new understandings: “Interpretations have to be developed and effective accommodation of the participants to one another has to be worked out. In the case of such ‘undefined’ commonly held or shared meaning about development acknowledged by both groups, it is obviously not a meaning constructed from a position of equality between them.
situations, it is necessary to trace and study the emerging process of definition which is brought into play” (Blumer 1969:86).

The presence of a new participatory watershed development program (RGMWD), as well as the participatory actions of INDEV, represented a new experience for both district administrative officials and for Adivasi communities. As this new development situation arose, Adivasi farmers had to begin to rework the interpretative process through which they structured their past actions when involved in interactions with external development agents. This interpretative process, however, while newly configured to meet these changing circumstances, still emerges from a structure of interpretations and meanings that have been foundational to past social practices. Interpretative activity that informs social action becomes “...not so much situationally evanescent as it is conditioned by recollected experiences, anticipated futures, concrete objectives, localized functions, and available resources that can produce enduring, even anticipatable, effects” (Gubrium and Holstein 1997: 165). As Blumer states,

The participants involved in the formation of the new joint action always bring to that formation the world of objects, the set of meanings, and the schemes of interpretation that they already possess. Thus, the new form of joint action always emerges out of and is connected with a context of previous action. It cannot be understood apart from that context; one has to bring into one’s consideration this linkage with preceding forms of joint action. One is on treacherous and empirically invalid grounds if he thinks that any given form of joint action can be sliced off from its historical linkage....In the face of radically different and stressful situations people may be lead to develop new forms of joint action that are markedly different from those in which they have previously engaged, yet even in such cases there is always some connection and continuity with what went on before. One cannot understand the new form without incorporating knowledge of this continuity into one’s analysis of the new form. Joint action not only represents a horizontal linkage, so to speak, of the activities of the participants, but also a vertical linkage with previous joint action (1969:20).
Focusing on the interactions between individuals and groups involved in the RGMWD program leads to an understanding of the process through which shared meanings about development, both past and current, are socially constructed.

The approach of symbolic interactionism poses several key questions. How did this shared construction of meaning between INDEV and both the government administration and local communities, directly shape the overall development actions that constitute a participatory watershed development project? What experiences, both new and old, are used by individuals and groups to gauge the actions of those with whom they are interacting? How do these experiences guide individuals and groups in the current and future construction of shared meanings about participatory development? How did the NGO INDEV integrate the multiple and different perspectives of the district administration, their own views, and the views of farmers into actual development practices that attempted to nurture and maintain empowering participation? In other words, whose realities count (Chambers 1997a) or are dominant in the construction of meanings about participatory development activities?

What social processes and conditions enable or prevent a type of empowering participation to be undertaken by an NGO such as INDEV operating in a government sponsored participatory development program? Interwoven with power relations and control over what is considered knowledge, this is a critical question directly affecting the emergence of local self-reliance and autonomy among marginalized communities through the activities of participatory development. Symbolic interactionism and its analytical focus on the social processes that take place between people and groups, such as those
involved in a participatory development project, help to foster an understanding of how meanings emerge between individuals and how these meanings then form and direct the development actions which result.

**Seeing and Being Seen**

**Seeing**

How do investigators approach an understanding of different cultural experiences? As individuals we bring ideas and thoughts from our own social experience, but when outside of our own culture, how do we make sense of the expressions of other people and their cultural experience, as well as our experience of them? In what way can we approach, with any certainty, the production of an account of our experience, the writing down of one version of that place? What weight, both intended and unintended, will our words carry when we do put them down? James Clifford commenting on this engagement in the practice of “writing culture,” states that

> if ethnography produces cultural interpretations through intense research experiences, how is unruly experience transformed into an authoritative written account? How, precisely, is a garrulous, overdetermined, cross cultural encounter shot through with power relations and personal cross purposes circumscribed as an adequate version of a more-or-less discrete “other world,” composed by an individual author? (Clifford 1988:25).

Jackson argues that any understanding of group life emerges for the ethnographer not only from their reflections on the social interactions of others, but equally out of the everyday experiences and social interaction that the ethnographer shares with those they are observing. This is a position from which one is continually reminded that “ideas and words are wedded to the world in which we live....” As Fabian observes;

> Knowledge belongs to the world of our social existence, not just to the world of academe. We must come to it through participation as well as
observation and not dismiss lived experience - the actual relationships that mediate our understanding of, and sustain us in, another culture, the oppression of illness or solitude, the frustrations of a foreign language, the tedium of unpalatable food - as “interference” or “noise” to be filtered out in the process of creating an objective report for our profession (Fabian in Jackson 1989:9).

Looking back at my fieldnotes I realize that even early on, much before the actual writing commenced, I was worried, questioning the relationship between what I perceived was taking place in front of me and, later, how those perceptions contributed to the establishment of meaning for me about that event. One day while I was in Jhabua District I, quite unexpectedly, received an invitation to take a jeep ride of some 90kms to another district separate from where I was carrying out my research. I accepted because it was a Sunday and nothing was happening. A jeep ride meant a cool breeze and I would see some new countryside. When I am riding my motorbike or seated in a jeep and positioned in the front (where I am usually placed), I am always facing forward and approaching people who see me from a distance and I receive questioning stares until I have passed. I felt that I disturbed the normal flow of events. I questioned what would have happened if I weren’t there. This gives one a certain view on things. But if riding in the back of the jeep, as I did this time, no one saw me coming, nor knew I was there and I received a totally different perspective looking out the back flap. My effect on people, and the effect of the jeep hurtling towards them, seemed to recede as people went on with what they were doing before they were interrupted. Its a wholly different, however brief, glimpse of India that made me wonder how easily I might be missing or influencing events and observations in my research.
Even the aspect of things receding rather than rushing at one while hurtling along in the jeep, gave me the feeling of extended time so characteristic of India. Things persisted in my view longer. Thinking of my perceptions, and how these could change from the front to the back of the jeep, reminded me of filmmaking. Making up the physical structure of film are thousands of individual still frames. Each of these frames, when exposed, catches a single image. Each succeeding image, however, contains a slightly different picture from the previous frame. When the frames are all shown together at 24 frames per second, these images visually blend together to form the perception of continuous movement—a process known as “persistence of vision.” The mind cannot process the separate frames fast enough, so it blurs them together and uninterrupted movement is produced. Riding in the front of the jeep produces quick snapshots, the single frames. It is in the back of the jeep, however, that one actually gets closer to the movement of India. The point is that it is easy to perceive something one way, leading one to the belief that an understanding of the situation has been reached. But as I suddenly realized during the jeep ride, there are many perspectives beyond those of which you are directly aware. One perhaps knows this but tends to forget that it is necessary to continually search out new ways in which to discover and attempt to understand these different ways of seeing.

**Sights and Sounds**

Sensed experiences, unusual and bewildering at first, become common place and usual as their meanings become understood. Day after day as one interacts with people, these social insights are gained almost without knowing. When new to an area you quickly realize that an understanding of a place begins simply, as a bewildering
experience of sights and sounds. It is an understanding, however, that lacks context, a sense of history and knowledge and a broader view of those social, economic and political influences on that place that would allow one to attach deeper social meanings to these sites. This is what Clifford Geertz (1973) describes as the “thickness” of everyday life. Instead, what is often first experienced is a simple sense of description where there is an unequal sharing of sights and sounds with those around you. This is a sense of the space where one’s experiences lack the vibrancy of meaning that is the embodiment of a place and is formed only through interactions with others. The task for an individual who is “out of place”, therefore, becomes the attempt to share in these daily interactions and to grasp how people come to understand and construct their everyday lives. This is the social world of “placed experiences” (Feld and Basso 1996:11) where meanings become attached to spaces and their social use through the activities of people.

My everyday life, therefore, became a process of learning to recognize my cultural differences, and set them aside, as I reacted and interacted with others in an attempt to understand their interpretations, thoughts and views. I attempted to share in and represent a place where everyday lived experience is informed by attention to the present, hopes for the future, and the constant intersection of personal, local and national histories.

Miriam Kahn notes that “curiously, it is while anthropologists themselves are most out of place that they attempt to gain an understanding of the place and placement of others” (1996:167). At first one is faced with making sense of the experience of

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5 For a snapshot of the town of Jhabua, where INDEV was located, and my impressions of the town, please see Appendix 2, “A walk through Jhabua”.
confusing sights and sounds, but then, gradually, connections begin to take place. When first in Jhabua, I would shut off the fan in my room before I went outside and was always amazed by the cacophony of noise that would suddenly fill the space around me. It was as if all the jumbled noises of the outside were building up behind the curtain, waiting for that moment when they could flow into the room to fill the silence left by stopping the fan. There was always a moment’s breath, a hesitation, then the noise tumbled into the room. This was always followed closely by the building heat of the early day that had been kept at bay by the cooling breeze of the fan. This sudden noise from the outside always prompted in me a re-connection with everyday life, a re-experience, once again each day, of the neighbourhood that surrounded me. I had slowly begun to turn simple outside noises, into sounds that I could connect to people, actions and feelings.

When I turned off the fan, these outside sounds would become distinct--I heard the voices and laughter of children, radios blaring Hindi show tunes, dogs barking, birds in the early morning and crickets late at night. I make out the clank and clatter of stainless steel and aluminium pots being washed in the outside tap stalls at each house near me and the sound of motor bikes winding their way by on the path close to the house with the more distant sound of trucks and buses, honking briefly as they approach the blind corner on the main road. There is the soft whisper of the wind when it is strong enough to shift the curtains aside as it slips over the window sill, just in front of the sound of singing from the nearby ashram where Adivasi children, gathering in the early morning and at dusk, sing the school song and prayer. There is the sharp but muffled crack of a sound followed by a chorus of shouts that I now know is the sound of a tennis ball being hit by a cricket bat and that if I was watching instead of listening, I would see young boys in
school uniforms scurrying after the ball as they try to get in a couple of alley-wickets before going to school. All of these sounds lay hidden behind the white noise of the fan that turns my room into a deafened noiseless cocoon, a cocoon that I instantly shatter by the flick of a switch before I step through the door to the outside.

**Being Seen**

One day while travelling with INDEV to some of the villages in which they were working, we were stopped by the local sarpanch. While discussing some of the recent development work taking place in the area, a group of Adivasi farmers approached us. As I greeted the farmers, the sarpanch, whom I had met and spoken with on other past occasions, commented to one of the INDEV workers that it seemed that I was becoming part of the place. Apparently he had noticed that I had greeted the farmers in the fashion used by Adivasis which is different from that used between non-Adivasis. For the sarpanch, my use of this simple social greeting, which I now held as commonplace, carried for him the recognition that while I was still a foreigner, I was now somehow more of the place than before. Chandra and Vishal, who were with me that day, looked at me with new eyes when the sarpanch made his comment. They told me that I had become so much a part of their daily lives, that they hadn’t seen how I had started to fit in and to acquire local behaviours. They said that, although they knew that I was Canadian, they hardly thought of me as an outsider.

As every researcher does, consciously or not, I tried to shape how others would see me. It was really important to me that villagers and the INDEV staff see me as an equal, or at least as equal as possible given my economic, race and educational status. One way I tried to achieve this equality was by following INDEV’s lead and sitting on
the ground with the farmers. This simple act holds great meaning, and has been discussed by many development practitioners trying to work with local people in a participatory fashion (see Chambers, 1983).

I also tried to follow this practice, but often ran into considerably more reluctance from the farmers to let me carry out this attempt to meet them on an equal footing. I would always try to sit on the ground, but it seemed like every villager who would come for the meeting or to just chat, would always motion me towards a nearby charpai. I realized that this courtesy that I was often offered, even when the INDEV workers were not, was due to my status as a foreigner, yet it often made me feel that I was being treated in a fashion similar to a government worker. Therefore I was usually quite insistent about staying on the ground. This often led to a confusing silence as the farmer looked to INDEV for support to get me to move. INDEV workers usually laughed and told the farmer to just “leave him where he is.” As the farmers became accustomed to my presence they stopped their efforts to get me off the ground, although sometimes they brought a burlap sack or piece of plastic for my seat. I accepted this compromise, as I did receiving the first cup served when sharing tea with the INDEV workers. Although I tried to equalize my power relations with the villagers, and met with some modest success, I had to acknowledge that there would always be power differences resulting from my education, race and relative wealth.

Learning these social cues, however, is more than a practical problem of entrance to be solved by the researcher. For deeply embedded in these everyday meetings between researcher and the individuals one is researching, are relationships of power and authority, ethical responsibilities, and the rights of those one will eventually represent to
others through writings. These are but a part of the deep critique within anthropology, a discipline shaped by colonialist privilege and Euro-American industrial dominance.

Confronting and questioning these issues begins long before any attempt to remove oneself from the classroom of theoretical anthropological discussion and enter into the everyday experience of fieldwork. It is with this movement, however, into the everyday sharing of experiences with others that these concerns become much more immediate and troubling. Somehow when confronted with the immediacy and intimacy of being asked—"Why are you here?", the distancing academic critique that surrounds the research encounter between "first world" anthropologists and "third world" situations becomes untethered from its epistemological mooring. One is always having to deal with the contradiction between the intrusive character of the research endeavour and the personal necessity of carrying out research work.

This world of interactions is not one-sided. As I tried to place myself in the everyday experiences of others, they too tried to place me within their daily experience. Jhabua, being far off the tourist track, is only occasionally a home for westerners involved in either development or missionary aid activities. With both the individuals from INDEV, and in the Adivasi villages we travelled to each day, I was at first somewhat of a novelty. However, as I showed up day after day, month after month, in the office of the INDEV or in one of the many Adivasi villages, my familiarity began to draw a more open curiosity about the reasons for my being there.

While I continually tried to grasp the way in which people understood and interpreted their lived experiences, my interactions with INDEV and the Adivasi farmers took on different forms. The members of INDEV, most of whom had completed some
form of post-secondary training, were all Hindus who lived in urban areas. Most of the
INDEV staff spoke some English, and had a knowledge of the ways of westerners that
was extensive, if in some cases skewed by Asia's Star TV and its plethora of shows like
"Baywatch" which were recently available in Jhabua. While always discussing the
ongoing watershed project, we also spent many hours over meals or during walks at night
during the hot spring days, talking and sharing stories about our families, our urban lives,
and discovering that we often had more in common than our differences would lead us to believe.

Between rural Adivasis and myself there was an additional language barrier
beyond even that of my basic knowledge of Hindi. In INDEV's watershed project most of
the Adivasis were Bhils. While many of the younger people spoke Hindi, many of the
older people only spoke the local Bhili dialect. Only partially overcoming this barrier of
language when someone interpreted for me, I had halting conversations that often centred
on how much land I owned and what I grew on it.6 Always frustrated by my lack of local
language skills and the inability to speak freely, I was still able, over time, to begin to
understand aspects of their life and to share some of mine with them.

6 It was interesting that this was often one of the first questions that I was asked following the query as to
why I was in India. The importance of land was continually impressed upon me in the actions of the
villagers and in the everyday activity of the development work. As I spent more and more time with
INDEV, I came to see how these concerns were considered a high priority and were consciously integrated
by INDEV into the planning of development activities. The focus on land and its use by community
members is understandable given the basis for the livelihoods. I found it difficult though, and
embarrassing, to tell them that while I did own land, it was as a recreational property used only for
relaxation and on which I did not grow anything except trees. When I did tell them that my grandfather had
been a wheat farmer we then carried on a long conversation about other types of crops raised in Canada,
when was the time to plant and harvest, how the fields were prepared, did the crops need lots of irrigation. I
often found myself feeling extremely inadequate as I reached for every bit of agricultural knowledge that I
could remember related to farming in Canada.
Although I had read a great deal about the problems of translation and the role of translators, I did not fully realize the difficulties that my basic Hindi and lack of local languages would create until I started to travel to the villages on a regular basis. Most of the INDEV staff spoke some English, and so when I was confused as to the content of the fast-moving conversation among villagers, they would come to my aid with translations. During the times that I shared with the INDEV workers alone, our conversations about development were carried out in two languages, Hindi and English, with those weak in either language receiving translation from the others.

Translation of course is more than a simple matter of words being converted from one language to another. Even with correct translation, context and cultural understandings are needed to fully understand a conversation. Because translation was so important, I employed a translator for my work with INDEV that would allow me more flexibility when all of the INDEV staff were involved in work with the villagers. I hired a young Adivasi named Himanshu from a nearby town, who worked with me for most of my first visit to Jhabua District. Bright and eager, Himanshu travelled with me everyday and became well-liked among both the INDEV workers and the farmers in the various villages that INDEV regularly visited. The cultural context, however, both of my culture, and of the local cultures meant that I often did not understand my English-speaking translator and that he did not really understand what I meant by certain questions. As well as needing an understanding of my intentions and implications, Himanshu often had a difficult time understanding my study, and often interpreted the answers of the farmers in a way that he thought would please me. At times he, and a woman I employed for a short time on a later visit to the area, would even ignore entire conversations with local
farmers, judging that their comments were not important enough to pass on to me. In these cases I had to ask what the villagers had said.

As well as the academic difficulties that translation created, I found that having a translator created a social barrier between myself and the farmers. Although in many cases I knew some farmers very well, our friendship was always a mediated one. Our communications and jokes were often passed through a third party, making it difficult to have a clear and directly personal sense of each other.

**Participation as a Development Concept**

The focus of this study, an NGO implementing participatory development, and how it related to both government and local people, demands an understanding of the theory of participation followed by the Government of India and its departments that established the RGMWD program and the NGO that implemented it. With this understanding, a comparison can be made between the theory and how participation was spoken of and put into local practice.

The intersected space of the "development encounter" (Escobar 1991; 1995) has been instrumental in determining the relationship between the Third World and the West. This encounter, however, has granted little space to the voices of marginalized people. The practice of development still results in projects that are culturally inappropriate and economically unsustainable, often causing extensive social and ecological damage. This is despite the fact that the theoretical literature on development is rich in attempts to understand and bridge the distance between rural farmer or villager and the development “expert”.

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Similar to many current situations around the world, the RGMWD explicitly recognized that past development programs initiated by the GOI suffered from a lack of sustained community involvement due to the external nature of development planning and management (GOIa 1994). An institutional structure that traditionally invested power in outside, government departments, removing control over development actions from the rural communities most intimately tied to the natural resource base. Finding fault in both the sectorization and segmentation of development programs that favoured institutional implementation and bureaucratic control, the RGMWD incorporated an understanding of past mistakes into a new bottom-up strategy for the planning and operation of development programs in rural areas. With a recognition of the direct connection between the natural resource base and the social and economic well-being of rural communities, the sustained and meaningful participation of local communities in development activities was deemed paramount.

Participation, unfortunately, can exist within a development project without being meaningful (see Ahmed 1994). What is meant by the term meaningful participation, is a process of dialogue between mutually respectful equals through which knowledge, opinions and perspectives are exchanged within a relationship of patience, support and trust. This relationship becomes meaningful when it actively produces a space for those formerly without power to participate in the decision-making process that directly affects their lives. Development undertaken as meaningful participation becomes a process where the activities of individuals are based on meanings that have been intersubjectively constructed between equals through dialogue and mutual reflection on actions.
“Far from a simple recipe, however, meaningful participation involves a philosophical approach more than a set of mechanical steps. Participation is not an abstract human right or a purely political stance separate from the concrete realities and needs of people’s lives. The right to be involved in decisions that affect one’s life is indivisibly linked to economic and social well-being and positive change” (Cockburn, 2001:12). Robert Chambers emphasizes that participatory work should not be extractive but must be flexible and focus on process rather than on simple, tangible outputs. This means that participatory development must be undertaken with a deep understanding of and commitment to an empowering form of participation. Otherwise, local people will be involved only in a manipulated way. Meaningful participation is not achieved by simply following instructions; it is achieved by working flexibly and respectfully with a particular group of people to develop their capacity to address the issues they identify as important (Cockburn, 2001).

Participation, therefore, shares much with a notion of development as the expansion of “human potential and capabilities”. Both address the “differences in political and economic power among different social groups and classes” (Ghai 1989:218). The empowerment of individuals takes place as they acquire not only access to local power structures and sharing in planning and management of resources, but also with the realization that they collectively have the knowledge and skills necessary to independently analyze their problems and propose their own solutions. As Brohman explains, “empowerment is, therefore, commonly regarded as a multifaceted process, involving the pooling of resources to achieve collective strength and countervailing power, and entailing the improvement of manual and technical skills; administrative,
managerial, and planning capacities; and analytical and reflective abilities of local people” (1996:265).

**Participation as a Philosophy for Empowering Development**

This more inclusive holistic approach to development is not a new concept. First proposed as a conceptual approach in the early 1970s (Schumacher 1973), participation has moved from being seen as a marginal, alternative development process, to now being considered within mainstream development planning and policy construction (see Bharatnagar and Williams 1992; Paul 1987). Subsuming a diverse variety of ever-emerging strategies and techniques for development under the general label of “participatory processes”, this path of development, which places primacy on people and social processes, offers a genuine attempt to produce development projects which are socially, economically and environmentally sustainable.

Participation, as an empowering process in development is not, however, a process through which individuals and communities must labour on their own. While leading to autonomy and self-reliance for communities, participatory development is a process through which individuals and groups are initially assisted in coming to an understanding of the full potential of their creative and collective strengths. Empowered by the realization of the knowledge and analytical capabilities they possess, people then reflectively use these strengths to break the dependence-dominance relations they experience with other groups. Rahman claims that this is a much different approach to development than in the past where formal efforts at social ‘development’ have...been in the hands of elites who have in general considered themselves wiser than the people, and instead of seeking to promote the people’s self-inquiry and understanding
have sought to impose their own ideas of ‘development’.... one cannot
develop with somebody else’s ideas....Only with a liberated mind (of the
people), which is free to inquire and then conceive and plan what is to be
created, can structural change release the creative potentials of the people.
In this sense liberation of the mind is the primary task, both before and

Central to this philosophy of empowerment is the work of Paulo Freire (1972) and
the concept of “conscientization”. Suffering from any of a number of various forms of
social, economic or political marginalization and oppression, the poor, who make up
much of the world’s rural population, see themselves faced with seemingly
insurmountable barriers to overcome in order to achieve social and economic stability in
their lives. Mired in relationships of dependence with the state, local moneylenders and
even development organizations, the poor often feel that their lack of access to
knowledge and education is as limiting as the direct oppression that they labour under
from social and economically dominant forces (CIDA 1999).” Gaining this access is often
fraught with uncertainty and a lack of self-confidence among the poor that has manifested
itself through years of continued oppression. The act of conscientization is the process by
which people overcome these fundamental psychological barriers and begin to question
the economic, social and political systems which perpetuated their situation, leaving them
“poor, invisible and silent” (Wright 1994:54). As Burkey explains,

conscientization is a process in which the people try to understand their
present situation in terms of the prevailing social, economic, and political
relationships in which they find themselves. The analysis of reality must

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7 Participatory development has brought to the forefront the conception of education as awareness,
empowerment and conscientization; elements crucial to meaningful and sustained participation by local
people in the development projects affecting them. Education as awareness becomes the intellectual
movement of people through a dynamic and ongoing process whereby they begin to critically examine and
analyze the reality of their current situation, and then by reflecting on this analysis attempt to define and
then carry out what they feel are possible actions to transform their situations. This is radically different
than a process where education is seen as simply a tool to efficient project implementation.
be undertaken by the people who can decide what their important needs and experiences are, and not by experts. From this analysis the people themselves may be able to take action against the oppressive elements of their reality. This involves the breakdown of the relationship between subject and object, and constitutes the essence of true participation. Those who have been considered objects for development—poor men and women—become active subjects in their own development (1993: 55).

In the words of Freire “in order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform. This perception is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for liberation; it must become the motivating force for liberating action” (1972:34). As Freire cautions, however, this struggle does not end at reflection but must be a form of consciousness that is strongly connected to the everyday actions of daily life. Reflection and action therefore become the central aspects of the process of conscientization, a process that empowers previously powerless people to not only recognize the limitations that restrict their autonomy, but to also plan for and take actions which they see as necessary to overcome the oppression they experience.

While conscientization emphasises the development of necessary confidence and skills of a community to reflect on and solve its own problems, it is also necessary to recognize that the restraints to development are not simply an internal problem of a community. In current development situations there are many external structural barriers that create and maintain the marginalized existences within which many of the world’s poor find themselves. At the international level “structural adjustment polices” eliminate or reduce social services for the poor, while at the national level stringent economic policies enforced by international trade agreements disadvantage the already marginal existence of the poor. Perhaps most inhibiting to marginalized communities in terms of
gaining access to the resources necessary for their livelihoods, is the prohibitive nature of the relationships they experience with local government bureaucracies who are extremely reluctant to surrender control and authority over these resources. Clearly actions and support at the international and national level must also be offered, making space for those at the local level to gain power and access to resources previously denied them.

**External Support for Participation as a Process of Empowerment:**

*Working With versus Working For Communities*

While the empowerment of people is locally directed, it is not, however, a process that must take place in isolation severed from external support and outside ideas. Marginalized groups of people have most often struggled against oppression on their own. Participatory development is not a process that seeks to further this isolation. Rather, the philosophical underpinnings of the concept of participation foresees this isolation broken through a form of support that facilitates and assists marginalized communities in beginning the process of conscientization. As Burkey maintains,

> A truly participatory development process cannot be generated spontaneously, given the existing power relations at all levels and the deep-rooted dependency relationships. It requires a catalyst. The catalyst or change agent who can break this vicious circle is a new type of activist who will work with the poor, who identifies with the interests of the poor and who has faith in the people (Wignaraja in Burkey 1993:75)

Perhaps most important, as asserted by Freire, conscientization is a process “…which must be forged *with*, and not *for*, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity. This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation” (1972: 33). To demand that marginalized groups become self-sufficient on their own, however, is to abdicate a shared
responsibility for the situation in which many of these communities find themselves. Working with communities, encouraging and providing support when asked, can be crucial to helping communities on the path to empowering self-reflection and the building of autonomy. External or outside agencies and organizations such as NGOs and government departments therefore play a key role in initiating this form of local empowerment.

Acting in roles of “animators” and “facilitators,” individuals or organizations work with local people to enable them to realize self-reliance without dependence (see Burkey 1993: chapter 4,7; Alamgir 1989:8-9). The role of the development worker is to assist people in this process, encouraging the growth of “self-confidence,” “assertiveness,” and their ability to reflectively analyze and solve the problems they encounter in their daily lives. This type of externally supportive process is a form of development that is centred within the community and anchored by its respect for the experience, knowledge and skills possessed by the local people who then lead the direction and form of development (see Friedman 1992: 160; Korten 1980). While development workers can bring material resources, knowledge and dialogue to the meeting, the empowering “liberation” only occurs as people develop and rely on their own abilities to form understandings about their circumstances and reflectively analyze and transform their situations through their collective actions (Rahman 1995). Through this “rhythm of collective action and reflection” (Burkey 1993:58) local people establish an ongoing process of empowerment and growing self-reliance that emerges as they not only share in the control of local material resources, but also gain control over the “means
of knowledge production ... including the social power to determine what is valid or
useful knowledge" (Rahman 1993: 83).

There are, however, dangers inherent in a supportive role in the participatory
process. By doing too much or working for communities, one form of dependency can
simply be exchanged for another. External agents therefore must walk a careful path
between limiting their support in the attempt to encourage a community to reflect on its
situation and take control of its own development, and in providing too much support
which creates new relationships of dependency. Asserting that “you cannot make people
self-reliant; people become self-reliant,” Burkey sees participatory development as a
process that supports an emerging self-reliance and autonomy among marginalized
groups (1993: 50). This process is encouraged, however, by providing a context within
which a community can ask for help from a position of increasing self-awareness of their
strengths and weaknesses and an understanding of the actions it wishes to follow.

Normalized Professional Development and Participation

Participation as a development concept can represent many things, some much
more meaningful than others. Equally troubling, therefore, is the current co-opting of the
concept of participatory development within conventional development rhetoric. Often
this produces development activities that continue to allow for an institutionalized top-
down approach that does little in establishing a local process of meaningful participatory
development. Many Third World countries still struggle under the impact of macro-level
“trickle down” economic philosophies. Coupled with current neoliberalism, dominated by
“market-oriented” strategies and subsequent cut-backs in state sponsored social welfare
spending, participatory processes have become increasingly popular as a means of
shifting the responsibility for providing a “social safety net” to local communities (Rahman 1995: 27; Brohman 1995a, 1995b, 1996 chapters 4,5; Mayo and Craig 1995: 3-4; Stiefel and Wolfe 1994:121-123).

Participatory approaches emerged within development partly due to the dissatisfaction with dominant forms of institutionalized development practice. One of the most structured and disempowering aspects of development is the unequal relationship between local people and the professionals who are representative of the institution of development. The roles for professionals working within development are often restrictively defined, whether they agree with it or not, by a reliance on blueprint approaches to development (Roe 1991). In this approach complex and holistic local indigenous systems are normalized through a process of simplification, measurement and disciplinary specialization where the part comes to represent the whole (see Shiva 1987, 1993; Howard 1994).

In what is referred to by Robert Chambers as “normal professionalism” (1983, 1993, 1997b), the privileging of technical expertise (and the possession of the knowledge that supports it) is the rewarded way to think and act. Technical knowledge, displayed through the achievement of physical targets, is used by government development workers to solidify power and authority. Approaches which emphasize the need for power in, and through, people’s participation become secondary with people, and the social processes which meaningfully include them in development, forgotten in the pursuit of the technical

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8 While I am applying the term “normal professionalism” to the approach taken by Indian government development workers, Chambers uses the term to broadly describe a certain approach that can taken by development workers, government or non governmental, from any country.
accomplishment of physical targets. Chambers claims this attitude among development professionals allows for a working environment where actions can be "controlled and predictable" (1997b:36). Thus their work becomes ever more "specialized and reductionist", standardizing and fragmenting through measurement and statistics, and leading to a justification of objectives through reports filled with what Chambers calls, the "three dimensional wonders of graphic myth" (1997b: 40).

Jacqueline Urla claims that "there are probably few features more characteristic of modernity than the notion that we can know ourselves through numbers" (1993: 818). Questioning the prominence of statistical measurement in contemporary "Western modes of knowledge and social description", Urla claims that these "ways of sorting and counting people and specific behaviours" lead to the construction, and management, of certain social categories at the expense of others (1993: 818). Urla argues that "as part of a modern regime of truth that equates knowledge with measurement, statistics occupy a place of authority in contemporary modes of social description; they are technologies of truth production" (1993:819). Statistical discourses, used as technologies of "knowledge and power", become the instruments through which entities such as the state can know and manage the social world and its actors. As Urla describes:

In the statistical imagination, society is conceived of as a population, a bounded and quantifiable entity capable of, and indeed demanding, measurement. Counting practices carve up the population in a myriad of ways, sorting and dividing people, things, or behaviours into groups, leaving in their wake a host of categories and classifications. Furthermore,

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9 See Nelson and Wright (1997b: 8-10) for a general discussion of the different models of power that have been used by theorists to define power relations in development situations. These models range from "power over" and "power to", to "decentered power" relations. See Prus (1998) for a discussion on power as "intersubjective accomplishment". Using a symbolic interactionist approach, Prus describes power as an emerging "process" and discusses the roles of "tacticians" and "targets" in the social interactions of individuals and groups within everyday life.
statistical averages, risks, and aggregate rates often serve as standards against which individuals measure themselves or are measured by others. Such norms, while perhaps not inherently oppressive, are a semantically powerful mechanism used to define people and behaviour as normal or abnormal... (1993:820).

In this way measurement, through the statistical use of numbers, becomes a prime instrument in the social construction of reality and the political consolidation of power and authority.

Such unidimensional statistical treatment drastically misrepresents the complexity of human behaviour. Chambers notes that approaches that define the everyday experiences of people and their situations through “mesmerizing” measurement:

[do] violence to complex, diverse and dynamic realities, ...[by the ways in which they] mutilate, massage and mold them to make countable packaged units. Those who manipulate these units are empowered and the subjects of analysis disempowered: counting promotes the counter and demotes the counted. Top-down, centre-outwards patterns are then self-reinforcing through rewards, status and power (1997b:54).

Applied without consideration of local cultural, social or environmental conditions, this form of normal professionalism is supported by a dominance of western concepts and methods.Privileging narratives of economics and bureaucratic management, development has become one of the most visible sites of this specific way of knowing (Marglin 1990). Participatory development undertaken with these objectives in sight offers little in the way of comprehensively meeting and transforming the systemic relationships of power and exclusion responsible for this large scale poverty (Rahman 1995: 27; Friedman 1992: 31, 70). Conceptually perceived and utilized in this way, current participatory development practice often bears little resemblance to the “empowerment” process achieved through a process of conscientization spoken of by Freire that is necessary for
the autonomous and self-reliant development of the poor and marginalized (see Sheth 1987).10

How participation becomes meaningful is therefore central. The philosophical foundation of conscientization and empowerment is fundamental to a meaningful participatory approach and is inseparable from its practical characteristics. These underlying priorities must be reflected in development actions to represent a truly meaningful and empowering process of development for the beneficiaries involved. As Michael Kaufman explains,

participation does not exist in the abstract. Participation is defined through specific institutions, processes and ideological and cultural factors. It is defined through the individuals and groups of individuals involved (or not involved) in a participatory process. Within any participatory structure, overall forms of social inequality and oppression are usually reflected and maintained. The challenge we face is to develop not only participatory mechanisms of empowerment but the means to overcome the structured inequalities in social power (1997: 153).

There is a critical need, therefore, to transform the relationship and form of interactions that take place between development professionals and local people. The attitudes, behaviour and actions of development professionals and the character of the interaction they have with local people—especially in the first formative years of the project—has an

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10 Sheth states that there is a danger also in “alternative development” coming to represent, just like mainstream development assistance before it, a “universalizing” model that is applicable to all societies. This type of approach once again faces the danger of not considering the diversity of cultural, historical and economic characteristics that embody different areas and its inhabitants. As he states, “the quest for universality ignores the fact that the historical, cultural and civilizational continuities that characterize different societies throw up different universal models around which their respective development may shaped; and that it is through the interactions based on these empirical experiences of development that a new perspective on alternative development has to emerge” (1987: 243, emphasis in original). To ignore this “plurality” from which “competing models can emerge and co-exist,” results in replacing one normalized and universal model of development with another.
immense impact on the process of participation that evolves within the project (Chambers 1997a; see Oakley 1991: 178-79).

**The Characteristics of Meaningful Participation**

The search for a more people-oriented form of development stressing the abilities and knowledge held by local people, therefore entails more than a simple change of practices. As Chambers strongly asserts, it has become increasingly clear that the development professional and their attendant ways of thinking and acting must be "recognized as much of the problem" in current development practice (1997a:30). Therefore crucial to the realization of meaningful participation is the "reversing of power relations" between development professional and local people (1998: xiii). As Chambers states:

> The roles of dominant uppers have then to change. From planning, issuing orders, transferring technology, and supervising, they shift to convening, facilitating, searching for what people need, and supporting. From being teachers they become facilitators of learning. They seek out the poorer and the weaker, bring them together, and enable them to conduct their own appraisal and analysis, and take their own action. The dominant uppers 'hand over the stick', sit down, listen and themselves learn (1997a: 34).

Chambers contends that while practice has often lagged behind theory, participatory development does provide an alternative model that has over time gradually eroded the foundational beliefs upon which many development professionals have based their work. Increasingly the prevailing wisdom which held "poor and local people" as the "problem" and obstacle to development that could be overcome through the application of the knowledge and expertise held by the development practitioner, has been found false under the sharp glare of a reality filled with development failures (1998: xiii). While operational diversity does exist, the process of participatory development has changed
from an approach focused on outsiders learning about rural conditions "from, with and by rural people", to a process that emphasized analysis and learning "by, with and from" rural people (Chambers 1997a:104). Listening to people and responding to local knowledges means that one has to be open to other ways of undertaking development activities (see Slim and Thompson 1995).

Although there are a number of broad characteristics of meaningful, participatory development, perhaps three of the most important to highlight are the roles of knowledge, social process and participation as a means or as an end.

**Participation and Knowledge**

Philosophically, there is increasingly a recognition of the diversity of knowledges and of the sharing of these knowledges through dialogue as being central to shifting previous power relationships in development situations. However, while development literature shows a strong inclination to talk about the inclusion of local knowledges into development theory, its application in the field remains troubled containing serious implications for the notion of power in development relationships. The co-optation of local knowledges through a facade of participation is a very real danger. Participation used only as a technique for undertaking development actions can easily become a process in which the knowledge and agency contained in local concepts is drained away, reduced, and transformed to fit a normalized development language. This institutionally-

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11 Marglin draws a distinction between two systems of knowledge, episteme and techne, that he claims represent different ways of understanding and experiencing reality (1996:227). He associates western science, with its claims to universality based on the production of knowledge through Cartesian rationality and order, as episteme. Alternatively, techne is knowledge that is inherently local, practically tacit and embedded within social relationships located within specific cultural contexts (Marglin 1996:229-233; Apffel-Marglin 1996:22-26). While ideally Marglin see knowledge as the “synthesis” of these two systems
molded and altered version of local knowledge is often then fed back to the very same individuals from whom it came (Pigg 1992; Wade 1985; Sachs 1992). While the rhetoric of participation can be pervasive, its practice can be restrictively shaped to meet the requirements of institutional and bureaucratic approaches to development that do not reflect the principles and actions of a meaningful and empowering process of participation for marginalized groups. (see Cockburn 1999a, 1999b; Ahmed 1994).

The differences between local and external knowledge systems are not merely theoretical, often occurring in development situations with tangible effects on the communities involved in this development meeting ground.12 While working in a village that had undertaken extensive contour trenching and the planting of grass on steep hills, the INDEV workers were approached by an elderly farmer who curiously asked what they were doing. INDEV was preparing to take soil samples from the hills in order to measure the moisture content of the soil (and therefore the success of attempts to raise the water table through the building of water harvesting structures). The farmer listened as the INDEV workers explained how the soil samples would be weighed, dried in a kiln and then weighed one final time in order to measure the moisture content of the soil. The farmer, looking amused, pointed towards the nearest hill and told us that all we had to do was look at the hill to see that the trenches were working. He explained to us, “Where the trenching crosses the hillside, the grass is still green, where there are no trenches, it is already brown.” He pointed out that the grass had also stayed green longer than usual and

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12 The use of the term knowledge systems is a plural use following the definition of Marglin who states “a particular system has its own theory of knowledge, its own distinctive ways of changing the content of knowing, the ideology of knowledge within Western culture has hierarchically positioned the practice of episteme over that of techne. This has obvious implications for development practice.
that it was even a deeper green colour. The trenches must be working, he observed, as the water in the small streams at the bottom of the hills was still running late into the dry season. The farmer was using his detailed observations and historical knowledge of how the dry season usually progressed in order to measure the effectiveness of the trenches.  

It was agreed that the old man’s method of measurement was equally valid and contextually more accurate. While recognizing that western scientific measurements are useful in many situations, Narain expressed frustration that these external ways of measuring were always privileged over local methods of evaluation. He argued that the dominance of external forms of scientific knowledge in what had been envisaged as a participatory project posed some serious problems. INDEV had attempted to prioritize local knowledge, but the district administration insisted that assessment of the project’s activities be done using a form of measurement based on western scientific knowledge. The director expressed dismay that he was not allowed to use the measuring techniques of local knowledge, refined over generations by observing local conditions, in evaluation reports to the district administration (see Gupta 1998).

Therefore, as well as professional knowledge, local knowledge should be recognized and respected in the development encounter. The importance of local knowledge, and, finally, its own rules of governance, both among insiders and between insiders and outsiders” (1996: 127-128).

13 These forms of “local” evaluation have been found to be remarkably accurate assessments of ecological conditions. Chambers refers to the work of Gerard Gill who using PRA methods had asked farmers in a specific region of Nepal to indicate the volume and number of days of rainfall per month. In a very short period of time these farmers produced a record of a rainfall for a normal year and then of a pattern that occurred one year in five. When Gill compared this pattern to the records from a local rainfall station over a previous twenty year period he found that “what initially appeared as discrepancies where the farmers were ‘wrong’ turned out on closer examination to show aspects in which the farmers judgments were superior to that of the averaged met-station....More balanced conclusions are that there are different realities, that farmers’ realities are likely to be linked to agricultural utility and weighted by recent
knowledge was clearly brought to my attention in a discussion with a farmer about "bund" construction. Having spent a fair amount of time viewing bunds in other villages, I felt that I understood the technically "correct" construction of these long earthen mounds. In one particular area, it seemed that the local farmers had constructed more than the necessary number of bunds for such a flat area that did not appear to have a great potential for water run-off. Chandra, INDEV’s APO, and I wondered if the farmers had decided to build so many bunds to ensure more work (and wages) for themselves. Doubting the work of the farmers, Chandra questioned the watershed secretary about the large number of bunds in such a flat area. The watershed secretary’s answer showed us how little we knew about the local context and the technical merit of local knowledge. He observed that the distant hills funneled water at a great force and that this often broke the bunds at the bottom of the field. While the flat field did not seem to need so many bunds, he was using knowledge of the flow of water to slow it down in strategic places so that the smaller bunds at the end of the field would be protected. Chandra and my lack of knowledge of the local flow of water would have led us to designing a series of bunds that would have been woefully inadequate to handle the massive flow of water that came from seemingly small hills in the distance.

Chandra and my experience with this particular microwatershed also pointed out the "normalized" dominance of Western or professional knowledge over local knowledge, to the detriment of local capacity and to the success of the project. Clearly reflecting his conception of the power relations that existed between himself and external experience, and that the issue is whose reality counts, in what contexts, and for what purposes" (Chambers 1997b:146)
development workers, the watershed secretary initially deferred to our opinion and
offered to stop the work and re-design the bunds according to our specifications. To his
credit, Chandra drew out the shy secretary and asked why he had designed the bunds as
he had done. After hearing the explanation, Chandra and I were quite humbled and
realized that our assumed superior knowledge could easily have reversed (and ruined) the
work of these farmers. Chandra apologized to the watershed committee secretary for
questioning his work and thanked him for explaining the local context and for designing
an efficient plan.

This telling experience shows that the meeting ground of development is not even.
Although there has been some attempt to bring local cultures into a largely Western
development practice, Western methods and knowledge remain the standard. The efforts
to include local knowledge have seldom resulted in questioning the foundations of
development. As a result, local knowledge must adapt more to Western concepts than
Western concepts adapt to those which are local. Without meaningful participation in the
above example, local knowledge would not have been seen and respected. Similarly,
without adapting to and appreciating the value of local knowledge, participation would be
superficial.

Mark Hobart claims that the criticism of the dominance of western scientific
knowledge within development stems not from a desire to simply vault local knowledges
to a superior position (1993b; see Chambers 1997a:205). Rather, the issue is that
indigenous and local ways of knowing should be afforded equal authority and respect
with that of western systems as knowledge possibly applicable to a particular situation.
For Hobart, this means approaching all knowledge as “situated practices” and to critically
examine the relationship between this knowledge and the space provided for the potential agency of and for individuals (1993b:4). This is in sharp contrast to the application of western based scientific knowledge within development projects where agency and knowledge is most often held by an external expert, with the local people becoming the “ignorant passive recipients or objects of this knowledge” (1993b:5).

As stressed by Chambers, therefore, the focus on the role of knowledge and its links to power in the relationships shared between development professional and local individuals has become a critical component of the participatory process. This is a recognition of power, however, not so much as a possession held by someone or some group, but instead as the “description of a relation” (Nelson and Wright 1997a:8). “Reversing power relations”, as Chambers put it, focuses recognition on the place of power within the development situation. Participatory development, therefore, attempts to address the power relationships and inherent inequalities that exist within the process of development. Too often development problems and their solutions have been defined solely by outside sources of knowledge with little local input. Within a participatory approach development professionals actively seek out a dialogue and partnership with local people, treating their knowledge with respect as they attempt to learn and integrate this local experience into the social, economic, and environmental development plans for the area.

**Participatory Development as a Meaningful Social Process**

Perhaps more than any other development concept, it is crucial to the understanding and undertaking of participation to see it as a *social process*. Participation, like most social processes, is intricately interwoven within the everyday social
interactions that take place between individuals and groups involved in a development project. It is within this “interplay” between different social actors and the social meanings about development they construct, that the “strategic” actions within a development project emerge and transform over time (see Long 1992a, 1992b).

Participation as a development process is far from a simple activity or a *what* (what is it, what can it do, what has it done?), rather the focus must fall on *how* this process is undertaken. Ideally, participatory development, is a social process that stresses shared and *meaningful* social interactions through which an empowering process emerges as local people realize that the decision making process about development actions begins and ends with them. Participation is not simply a process through which beneficiaries are simply instructed what to do by development workers anxious to reach externally imposed targets. When viewed simply as mobilization, participation becomes yet one more element or input to be managed and systematically controlled by external forces in the effort to reach a project’s planned objectives. This leads some to claim that there is an often “persistent and inevitable tendency [of governments] to translate participation into exercises of mobilization” that often benefit local people only through short term employment opportunities (Steifel and Wolfe 1994:213; see Brohman 1996:271).

By privileging social processes, participatory development actively attempts to set the stage for more equitable interactions to take place in development projects. The relationships of power and authority that have traditionally existed between groups involved in development situations are transformed with previously marginalized populations gaining access and entitlement to resources (social, political, economic and environmental). David Mosse notes that this focus on development as a social process is
increasingly important for while it “refers to the dynamic, unpredictable and idiosyncratic elements in development programmes; those things which are not easily amenable to planning and management control... [they are those elements] nonetheless central to success or failure.” (1998:5). Attention to the interactions that take place between individuals involved in development situations, the social processes so central to participatory development, attempts to ensure that the poor and marginalized actively influence the decision making processes.

Equally important, however, is that this process of meaningful participation extends from government bodies to organizations like NGOs who are intimately involved with local communities. Ideally, fostering a process meaningful interactions between external groups such as NGOs and government bodies and local communities results in culturally appropriate and therefore socially relevant actions throughout the project enhancing the chances that any results will have a greater chance of being socially sustainable over time while also leading towards a more equitable transfer of benefits to those involved.

**Participation as a Means or as an End**

Central to this discussion about the characteristics of participatory development is whether the process is considered as a *means* to other ends or as an *end* in itself. People have always participated in development projects, however, *how* they participate has become the central question within the discussion surrounding participatory development strategies. If participation becomes a means to other ends then its use as a development process can suffer from many of the same maladies besetting conventional development strategies; such as limited short-term economic benefits with no long-term social
sustainability. Participatory development, in cases such as this, becomes defined solely by pre-set and most often material targets reached, and is not evaluated as an empowering social process in itself. As a means, participation becomes a way of utilizing the abilities and resources of local people to achieve a predetermined goal within a development project. Used to improve the efficiency of delivery, or to lower the cost of a development project, participation in this form is usually of short duration and of limited sustained benefit to the people involved.

Participation understood as an end, however, is a much more "active and dynamic" process through which people are enabled to increasingly take part in the social and economic control of the development affecting their community (Nelson and Wright 1997a; Oakley 1991:7-8; see Burkey 1993: 58-59; Moser in Brohman 1996:265). With the participatory process promoted as a primary objective of the project, the core from which all practical activities evolve, then its growth and nurturing will be a central focus. Participation understood as an end in itself focuses on participation which emerges and is sustained as a social process through which local people, their perspectives and their skills are actively incorporated into every stage of development planning, management and evaluation. Participatory development is therefore a meaningful social process which is embodied by the interactions and relationships that people share through their involvement in development activities. It is in these interactional settings and the relationships which emerge between social actors, a focus on what has been referred to as the "social interface" (Long 1989b, 1989c), that meanings come to be socially constructed about development, meanings which lead directly to specific development actions.
Both forms of participation also imply different power relationships, both internally within a community and between the community and external forces like the state or a specific development organization. Participatory development has therefore come to mean different things to different groups of people, as over time it has...positioned people very differently in relation to the development apparatus in the past—as a presence, as objects of a theoretical process of economic and political transformation; as expected ‘beneficiaries’ of programmes with pre-set parameters; as contributors of casual labour to help a project achieve its ends; as politically co-opted legitimizers of a policy; or as people trying to determine their own choices and direction independent of the state (Nelson and Wright 1997a:6).

Nelson and Wright caution against the formation of a definitive notion of participation. They suggest that the “ideal definition ... is only the start to exploring what meanings are attached to it in any context, how they are contested and deployed, and who gains and who loses in the process” (1997a:1; see also Brohman 1996:251; Mathur 1997; Oakley 1991).

This struggle and negotiation over the social meanings attributed to development concepts, policies and directives defines the parameters within which the form and practice of development within a certain place emerges. This “social interface” or interactional meeting ground took place between the local government district administration and the NGO INDEV within Jhabua District. As will be demonstrated in Chapter Four, each group attempted to actualize their respective visions of what participatory development represented and how that process of development should practically proceed. Focusing on the interactional character and content of these social interactions demonstrates how contrasting narratives of “participation” are produced, how these narratives are used by social actors to direct their development actions, and whether
divergent narratives are adapted or resisted by the various social actors involved in this development interface.

Norman Long points out, “development interface situations are the critical points at which not only is policy applied but at which it is ‘transformed’ through acquiring social meanings that were not set out in the original policy statements” (1989b:3). This acquiring of transformative meanings is a social process constructed through the daily interactions that take place between individuals and groups involved in the development setting. The significance of these social interactions is therefore crucial to understanding the form and character of participation that takes place. It is these meanings that inform and guide local participatory development actions and determines whether the participatory process comes to be understood to be an end in itself or is used as a means to other development ends.

INDEV’s Philosophy on Participatory Development and Measuring Its Success

INDEV clearly had a philosophical approach to the work it undertook. This philosophical standpoint can be seen in statements made about participatory work and in what INDEV hoped it would be able to accomplish within the watershed program. This section will highlight the perspective that INDEV held on participatory development and the goals that it set itself to achieve this participation. In Chapters Four and Five I will compare the actions and behaviours of INDEV with its stated philosophy and goals to see if it was able to achieve meaningful participation.
Breaking Dependency and Building Capabilities

INDEV believed that participation should be a meaningful social process that was empowering and would allow villagers to come to decisions about development on their land. It was not interested in setting development priorities for local communities or in doing the work for them. Narain once told me that “the farmers do not need us to tell them what to do- they know very well. We are here to help them realize their abilities and to give them confidence to act on their own.” However, after years of government departments planning and undertaking development projects without involving local people, INDEV’s attitude was a radical departure that the villagers found hard to believe at first.

Participation was a complete shift from the unequal relations experienced with the government and characterized by dependence of farmers on powerful government officials. This dependency deeply affected the self confidence and perceived abilities of the villagers to address their own problems. INDEV believed that promoting confidence building, discussing farmers’ problems and building mutual levels of respect, would break the dependency that had come to represent development in the region.

The INDEV staff knew that the farmers held the expertise and knowledge to undertake the development work within their village micro-watersheds. INDEV also felt, however, that many of the farmers had lost their “work culture” leading to a situation where farmers were often content to wait for, and depend on, government support. The work of INDEV, as seen by its director Narain, “was to rebuild the work culture, to provide the organizational impetus for villagers to manage their own state of affairs and development, but with support.” Narain, like many others involved in development
assistance, was commenting on the cultural havoc wrought by a form of dependence that, over time, had built up between the local villagers and the financial resources provided by the district administration.

Once while watching villagers working on the construction of field bunds, a farmer approached and asked if Chandra and his NGO would also do some work on his fields. He wanted to be given the funds to hire some labourers to fix a number of the bunds that surrounded his fields. He was told by Chandra that all work had to be approved by the village watershed committee which controlled the money to be spent in the watershed. Chandra said that the man might be paid to do the work himself and that he should talk to his village watershed secretary. The farmer hesitated for a moment and then stated that, as he had already been waiting “two growing seasons” for the government to show up, he would continue to wait until they came and did it for him.

The idea of a loss of “work culture” was not an accusation of laziness leveled against the villagers by INDEV or given as the reason for their poverty. Rather, it seemed to be a term used to express INDEV’s dismay that the villagers, who were sought out by labour contractors for their hard work habits when they migrated to urban areas, seemed to be content to rely on the assistance given to them by the government while in their home village.14 INDEV workers maintained that this outlook taken by the villagers was understandable given the way in which the government had undertaken development assistance over the previous thirty years. In response to the economic and social poverty of the area, the government continually set up short-term work projects, handed out loans

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14 For a detailed anthropological examination of the use of seasonal migration by rural farmers to secure wage labour employment in the “informal economy” of urban centres see Jan Breman (1996).
which the villagers never repaid and started new development projects or “schemes”
which did not involve the villagers.

INDEV staff often contrasted their view of participatory development -- one that
focuses on the process of supporting local people to improve their lives -- to the one held
by many government workers. During a conversation between two government officials
discussing the concept of participation and its use within the recent watershed project in
Jhabua District, an INDEV worker and I overheard one of the officials comment that the
recent “decentralization” in power was a positive step as “before the administration was
the one being continually criticized for the work done or not done, now we have passed
this responsibility on to the village watershed committees.” This suggested more interest
in escaping blame for development failures than in acknowledging the value of
transforming development activities and transferring control to local inhabitants.

**Building Equality**

INDEV believed that in order to achieve meaningful participation, it was essential
to foster a relationship of equality between themselves and local farmers. INDEV felt that
equality was achieved through small and large gestures and actions.

Before I went out to the villages with INDEV, my attention was drawn to an
action, the full significance of which I would come to appreciate over time. Government
officials did not sit with the villagers on the ground in a circle, preferring instead to take
the *charpai*, or small bed like structure, offered to them as a guest. Not only do they take
the only seat, they seldom invite the villagers to sit with them on it. INDEV staff
explained the importance for them (and me) to always try to sit equally with the villagers.
As I would come to see and learn, this was a simple, yet conscious, action of sitting as
equals that the INDEV workers always tried to follow. This was their attempt to immediately foster a different sort of relationship between INDEV and villagers than the villagers shared with the government.

Clearly INDEV was explicitly recognizing that a power differential had existed in the past, and that it now wanted to begin to reverse these power relations. Obviously, a successful process of participatory development is not accomplished simply by sitting at the same level as people with whom one works. As I would come to understand, however, it was the strength of these small, yet meaningful actions that often held significant importance in building the type of relationship between NGO and villager that was necessary to nurture an emerging process of participation.

INDEV staff explained that nurturing respect and equality between villagers and between villagers and the NGO required more than sitting as equals. It meant listening to the farmers, taking their opinions seriously and recognizing that the farmers had knowledge, skills and capabilities. As will be examined in Chapters Four and Five, INDEV changed its plans, as well as government requirements and time schedules, because it took the views and concerns of the villagers seriously. INDEV staff explained to me that, on more than one occasion, the farmers had displayed their superior knowledge of the land, and had provided insights into the local dynamics that INDEV could never have produced.

Integrated Approach

INDEV felt very strongly that its development work should be integrated and holistic. By this it meant that there should be social, environmental and economic aspects of the program and that these should re-enforce and support each other.
In the past, isolated projects that concentrated only on specific areas were undertaken by government departments that had responsibility in that area. Little regard was paid to how this work could integrate with the work of other departments or how villagers felt the effects of many unrelated and, at times, contradictory projects. INDEV believed that it was crucial to undertake a more holistic approach and attempted to establish an awareness among the farmers that the new participatory watershed development project took all aspects of their lives into account. INDEV was always concerned with the need to stress the concept of an integrated watershed so that villagers would always make a connection between the wages being paid out for work and what the goals of that work were in the long term—a watershed that encompassed social, economic and environmental aspects that through time the villagers would come to plan and manage on their own.¹⁵

**Process Over Physical Outputs**

INDEV endeavoured to see its development work with the farmers not through the causal-eyes of effects and outcomes, but rather through the social dynamics of process and change. INDEV’s methods of operation and focus on social processes of confidence-building, trust and steady growth of community capabilities did not easily lend themselves to measurement by the district administration’s development evaluation forms and, until their methods were seen to be effective, led to conflict.

¹⁵ The utilization of wage labour as a short term economic benefit that served equally long term and integrated economic, social and environmental strategies was a major component of this watershed development project. All work to be done in the village micro-watersheds by villagers was to be done as wage labour. While what this work consisted of was decided on by the village watershed committee in discussion with the PIA assisting them, the maximum daily wage was pre-set by the government. Villagers worked for a set amount of rupees per day or its equivalent such as total area of earth or rocks moved or meters of trench dug.
Narain disagreed with the mandated government approach, especially when trying to foster a process of meaningful participation. He complained that the development work of the district administration was based on setting and attaining physical “targets” that did not reflect participation or lasting development efforts. Even worse, the targets took away from the process of participation and rushed the project into results before the villagers were able to fully participate. Narain felt that the over-emphasis on targets and time lines meant that participation was severely inhibited.

When Narain was asked by the collector to become involved in the project he had agreed, but came to an understanding with the collector that INDEV would not be subject to government-mandated biweekly targets for work in the village watersheds. The collector agreed because of Narain’s past development project successes in Jhabua District but with the changing of collectors, his initial agreement was not upheld and INDEV was required to use the government forms on a regular basis.

Narain felt that the process of learning how to solve local problems, and learning how to work together in the community, was more important and long lasting than the physical work that was undertaken. He told me that even if reaching targets was slow, if the farmers learned how to organize themselves and run a watershed program, then they could do much more work in the future. When Narain and the farmers complained that the increase in number and complexity of government forms took away from their work of involving the local people in the project, the district administration told them that just because it was a participatory project didn’t mean that “they [INDEV]and the farmers could decide to do things in a different way.” Narain felt the irony of a participatory
project that would not respond to the ideas and complaints of the local people and NGO involved in the project. As he expressed,

development becomes a preoccupation with reaching targets which have been set by government offices. PIAs then become really concerned with only doing the "surface" work that allows them to get back to their offices and claim these figures on their reports. Therefore groups get formed, bunds get dug to meet the ascribed targets, but there is no work done behind the scene that develops the local participation aspect. The villagers are told to do the work and spend the money in the project accounts because this allows them [PIAs] to show progress in their programs. Because of this they [PIAs] have no real incentive to foster local participation which takes patience and time to allow things to develop among the villagers. If you do this you will not be able to fill out the forms for the required targets to be met (Field notes, March 21, 1996).

When INDEV’s work concentrated on the social aspects of the participatory projects and not on physical constructions or group formations (things that could be counted), the staff were instructed to simply repeat the numbers used in previously completed proformas. It was felt by INDEV that the district administration looked for the filled in “boxes”, yet it would not take the time to analyze the quantitative relationship these numbers represented from week to week.

Ironically, the Guidelines spoke directly to INDEV’s desire to involve local people in assuming control of the development in their village watersheds. However, while INDEV felt that crucial consideration should be on how a social process of meaningful participation would lead to integrated goals, the district administration became more concerned with documenting participation as the technical achievement of material objectives. These different approaches led to the interactions between INDEV and the district administration becoming progressively strained.
Chapter Four:
The Practice of Participation I:
Building Trust and Community Organization

Tell me and I may forget
Show me and I may remember
Involve me and I will understand
(Chinese Proverb)

In chapter three I outlined the understanding of participation held by INDEV, the way that it viewed measurement of success and the vision it had for the watershed project it implemented in Jhabua district. This chapter, and chapter five, will look at how (and if) this vision was put into practice and how it was impacted by the demands and actions of two levels of government (national and district) and by the local farmers. It examines the differences between actions taken by INDEV and the wishes of the government and the local people and provides an analysis of the interactions between the different groups and how this impacted on the NGO’s stated intent of creating meaningful participation.¹

This chapter, and chapter five, will provide an analysis of INDEV’s work in three inter-related areas, as defined by the GOI in the Guidelines for Watershed Development document. These areas are:

1) community organization activities.

2) physical development work related to the ecological restoration of the land.

¹ I recognize that there are many views held by local people and even within the government. Although I discuss the desires of the local people, it is important to recognize that within this group of over 13,000 people, there were dissenting views. Another study, based on the local people instead of the NGO, and that had access to marginalized groups within the Adivasis (such as women), could be important to
3) training activities of local populations and village level organizations.

These three project components of the RGMWD were allocated 90% of program finances by the GOI. A fourth component, administration, accounted for the remaining overall expenditures (see Chapter Two; GOIa 1994:17). The government attempted to administratively define the work of PIAs in the RGMWD by establishing financial parameters within which the implementing agencies were expected to account for their development activities. While confining their work to these areas, PIAs were expected to achieve the program’s objective of the ecological restoration of local lands through a process undertaken by an “empowered and aware community”.

Perhaps even more important than what INDEV did, I will look at how it undertook these actions. Although the government only set three areas of work, as outlined above, INDEV set itself a fourth, and crucial area of work. Even before community organizing, physical treatment of the land and training could begin, INDEV recognized that it had to overcome the negative perceptions of development and outsiders that the Adivasi people held due to past experiences. This fourth area of work, building trust, was in fact the first activity undertaken by INDEV. This activity formed the foundation for the other three areas of work and continued throughout the entire project. Because the government didn’t recognize the essential nature of this activity, it did not allow time for this process. As a result, INDEV found itself trying to either rush the process or delay (or change) the activities and timelines set by the GOI and the local district administration.

understanding the complexities of how the villagers saw the development project, INDEV and the various levels of government.
Although this study only looks at the first two years of the project, before the long-term impact of the project would be known, an analysis of how effective the NGO’s work and methods of undertaking this work in order to achieve lasting local participation will be given. Building on the discussion in chapter three about issues of measuring the success of development programs, this chapter and the next examine and provide an analysis of when the work did (and did not) fulfil the NGO’s or the government’s (sometimes different) goals for successful participatory development.

First Steps: The Importance of Trust to Development

Relationships between uppers and lowers are sensitive to uppers’ behaviours and attitudes. They seek to be enabling, building trust and starting with the empowerment of lowers before joint analysis and negotiation (Chambers, 1997b; 229).

The relationship between the development professional and local people is one of the primary social relationships central to any development project. A process of participatory development that is truly meaningful and productive can only take place where this relationship is based on mutual respect and trust. If there is no trust in the development workers, the project will not receive the support and active participation of local people, and in the long-term will not be effective or sustainable. If the development worker does not trust that the local people are capable of intelligent input and action, then the project becomes paternalistic and perhaps misdirected. Trust is very difficult to achieve, however, when past experiences have shown that development and development workers can be harmful to local people, or not able to live up to grand promises.

Symbolic Interactionism holds that individuals approach most situations within their everyday lives using the understandings they have gained through past experiences.
It is with these understandings that individuals attempt to interpret the actions of others with whom they are presently involved. Through this process of interpretive interaction, past meanings are either re-confirmed or new meanings about the situation are socially produced through the interactions of those involved. These meanings then direct the actions taken by individuals in dealing with the situations with which they are presently faced.

Entrance of one individual or group into the social world of another is a difficult process at any time. The initial process of access can be made even more difficult for both groups by previous experiences of one or both of the groups. In pursuing participation as a social process, INDEV required the active input of Adivasi communities. In developing a good working relationship with local communities, INDEV initially had serious barriers to overcome. Development situations and contact with outside development agents had often brought social and economic hardship to the Adivasi communities along with some limited benefits. Embodied by dominant attitudes of government officials and their top-down methods of implementation, development situations were not understood by farmers as a process in which they could trust the intentions of those with whom they were dealing. They therefore regarded INDEV with mixed feelings and hesitation. INDEV’s task was to demonstrate to the farmers that they offered a new type of social interaction within development situations.

**Creating Trust Between INDEV and Villagers**

INDEV’s philosophy of empowering the villagers required a serious change in both the villagers’ understanding of development and their relationships with outsiders such as INDEV. Not only were the adivasis confronted with dealing with a new group of
outsiders, but a new approach and method of undertaking development as well. The idea of “participation” was still a very foreign concept to the local villagers. The farmers’ perceptions about development, whether it was participatory or not, had been formed based upon historical relationships coloured by deep feelings of mistrust of the government and other outsiders.

When INDEV workers started visiting the villages to discuss the new participatory watershed project, they were initially met with disinterest and questions as to whether INDEV would be simply another arm of the government that would show up once and then would never be seen or heard from again. Unfortunately the first activity undertaken with the villages did little to dispel this fear. Due to tight timelines set by the district government (in line with the GOI directives) for baseline research on the villages, little time was spent with local people during initial PRA exercises to explain the RGMWD program or to establish personal bonds that would lessen suspicion about INDEV and their intentions.\(^2\) INDEV was restricted to three days in each village to undertake participatory research activities (PRA). Because of this very limited first interaction with the communities, INDEV established subsequent personal contact with the farmers only through a slow and tentative process.

How did INDEV overcome these initial barriers to their development work and begin to establish the type of interactions they felt would allow their work to continue as

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\(^2\) INDEV and the other PIAs were required by the GOI to use PRA (participatory rural appraisal), a research technique that can be used to gather data and to facilitate discussion between local communities and development workers. PRA incorporates a series of exercises which are usually based on using visual aids such as pen and paper or drawings on the ground using local materials such as stones, sticks or kernels of corn to represent the relationships between the various objects being discussed. Working together, local community individuals and development workers begin to define the social, political, economic and environmental aspects of community life.
a form of meaningful participation? Too often these initial encounters in development situations with local communities are quickly overlooked by external agents in the rush to attain what is seen as the more concrete (and often quantifiable) work necessary for the demonstration of positive development activities. Development as a social process that stresses the need to strengthen, or as in the case with INDEV, create social relationships between external agents and local communities, is not often pursued as a primary objective of initial development activities.

During a discussion with Chandra, I mentioned that I had recently talked with a staff member from another NGO who had said that without offering immediate economic incentives to local villagers, they would never come to trust you and want to work with you. Chandra said that he agreed with this in some ways -- that there was always a need to provide some benefit for people or they will decide that the development work is not worth their effort. He did, however, disagree with the idea that local farmers will not come to trust you unless you offer them economic assistance. These are two different things he claimed. When I asked him to explain he commented that

I think you have to go [to the villages] so many times, and if your behaviour is good they will believe. It is not necessary to do entry point constructions and all. I know that if you are not giving many economic benefits to the villagers they seem to not trust on you, but I feel that in so many places [in INDEV's watershed] I have not given many economic benefits but still they are believing in me. It is our behaviour with them that makes the difference (Fieldsite Interview, November, 1996).³

³ Entry point constructions were development activities that were supposed to be undertaken as a first step within villages in the effort to encourage the participation of the villagers in the watershed program. These development activities were to be decided upon by the villagers in consultation with the PIA with whom they were involved. These activities could include such things as the building of small temples, replacing or cleaning of drinking water bore holes, fixing school buildings, or building bus shelters.
Overcoming Past Negative Development Experiences: Impacts on INDEV’s Work

During the second year of the project, after most of the villagers had become comfortable with the intentions of INDEV, I discussed this problem of access for external groups with the watershed secretary for the village of Kushalpura. Watching over a group of farmers from the village of Kushalpura as they carried out soil conservation work on the hillsides they shared with the neighbouring village of Samoi, I asked the watershed secretary why there seemed to be such initial hesitation among the farmers to take part in the participatory development work suggested by INDEV. The watershed secretary answered my question explaining that previously the “participation” of the farmers in development activities had meant certain things to them that differed substantially from what they had now come to expect from participatory development work with INDEV.

In the past, he explained, their participation in development activities represented one of three things. First, it represented an opportunity for government workers to once again take advantage of them through any of a number of forms of corruption or “rent seeking”. Second, it represented a situation in which they would be offered meaningless promises from government development workers who would then never be seen by the villagers again. Or finally, it represented to the farmers the possibility to have something done for them while having to contribute little themselves.

The farmers had therefore initially held a rather sceptical view of the social and economic benefits offered them if they participated in the development activities outlined by INDEV. INDEV ran into a litany of problems in their initial development work in the villages that were directly connected to the past treatment of Adivasi farmers by
government officials and workers. As I spent more time with INDEV in the villages I heard of and saw many examples of these negative experiences and the impact that they had on the work that INDEV tried to carry out.

The lack of trust in development, and in those offering to help the local villagers, led to reluctance to undertake certain activities suggested by the watershed program and INDEV. Farmers did not want to have CPTs (cow protection trenches) dug around common lands in the attempt to protect grass from grazing cattle. There was a rational reason for this reluctance. Digging trenches was a process often used by the Forest Service on the land under their control. Farmers feared that if CPT were dug around their lands, it would then be claimed by the Forest Service. In light of this, INDEV never constructed one CPT on the lands of farmers in their milli-watershed during the time that I was with them. INDEV asked the farmers how they would like to protect the new, water-retaining grass from wandering cows. Instead of the contentious CPTs, the farmers suggested hiring a villager to patrol the area in order to scare away any cows that wandered into the area. This person would also note those villagers who allowed their cows onto the common grass area and would pass this information to the watershed committee, which would then fine the offender. The flexibility and willingness to discuss a locally-developed solution helped to build trust, and showed that the farmers had a say in how the program was undertaken.

In the villages of Dhamni Nathu and Bucchadungri, villagers were initially reluctant to participate in INDEV’s plan to plant small trees on the long earthen mounds that the farmers used to separate one field from another. As the trees grow, their roots reach down and help to anchor these long mounds (or “bunds”) which break the
destructive force of the monsoon rains and the water runoff which careens through the fields carrying away the topsoil. In both villages, the farmers cited their hesitancy due to the fact that the Forest Service had planted rows of small tree seedlings through other farmers’ fields and had then declared them to be Forest Service land and therefore no longer available to the farmers for agricultural use. INDEV agreed that the farmers would not have to put trees in their own fields, and the farmers agreed that, although they were worried, they would plant trees in the hilly common areas. This process of negotiation and compromise helped to build trust between INDEV and the farmers, and once again showed that INDEV respected the views, experiences and fears of the farmers. This trust also allowed a dialogue on the issue of planting trees for soil conservation, and may, in the future, lead to the farmers planting on their own lands. One villager told INDEV, “this was the first time that any development worker has come and asked what our plans and thoughts are to help improve the village!”

At one point, INDEV tried to initiate a watershed membership fee throughout the milli-watershed. This fee was intended to encourage the villagers to take responsibility in their own development, and to help them take ownership over the program and what was done with the collected funds. Narain explained to me, “Money should not come from the outside, people should deposit from their own initiative first. First let them realize that they are building some input, then outsiders can contribute” (Fieldsite Interview, September 1996).

INDEV’s idea was that a membership fee would allow farmers to take part in the benefits that were to flow from the various economic initiatives started within the village watersheds (e.g. access to community loans). The membership fee, collected by the
watershed would be passed on to the Village Watershed Committee to be used in the
development work undertaken in their village micro-watersheds. At first this exercise met
with only limited success. The problem was that, in the past, many of the farmers had
been asked to contribute to a membership fee for services offered through local
government departments, but had never received these services. They were not given
refunds and never saw the government workers again. When INDEV showed that it was
interested in the farmers, and their views, and that it would continue working with the
villagers, trust was slowly built and the watershed started to gain members. The farmers
also saw that INDEV was fulfilling its promises by starting several initiatives.

In the village of Uberao, INDEV was initially faced with a situation in which the
farmers refused to start any work in their village. The Uberao farmers’ fear was that, as
with past experiences with government departments, INDEV would undertake a limited
amount of development work but would claim credit for work completed through past
programs. The work suggested by INDEV, the construction of bunds to break the
downward rush of water (and soil) during heavy rains, had been started by the
government’s Soil Conservation Department. The Uberao farmers worried that INDEV
would claim work undertaken by the farmers in a previous program, thus allowing
INDEV to pocket the funds saved from not having to pay farmers the wage labour to
undertake the work.

When the villagers suggested that INDEV might not have good intentions,
INDEV realized that their social interactions with the farmers in Uberao had been
severely lacking up to that point. Not only was the intention and structure of the
RGMWD still unclear to the farmers, but their trust of INDEV was also weak. Trying to
regroup, INDEV took the initiative and used the accusation as an entrance into a
discussion on how this participatory development project was to be planned and managed
by the farmers themselves. INDEV took the opportunity to stress that any financial
decisions to be made about work done on village lands was to be made initially with the
farmers’ involvement, and later solely by the farmers themselves, thereby making this
form of corruption impossible. A lively discussion eventually led to the farmers’
willingness to participate in a series of ongoing talks with INDEV that resulted in the
formation of a village watershed committee to organize and oversee the work that would
take place on village lands. Only through entering into a dialogue with the farmers that
lasted several weeks, and addressing their concerns did INDEV prove that it was not
going to use the farmers to gain wealth for itself.

Farmers such as those in the village of Uberao often displayed a strong reluctance
to improve portions of the land they held as part of a development program. This was due
to the propensity of the district administration (through any of its various departments) to
show up after development work had been completed on a farmer’s land (or in some
cases when the work was half-completed) to “charge” the farmers a financial fee for the
“improvements”. If the development work had been done on “encroached” revenue lands,
this fee was often more severe, resulting in the land being “reclaimed” as government
property, removing its use from the villagers’ control.

The risks of incurring fees, or simply the futility of investing large amounts of
time and resources into a field that could be lost due to its improved worth, were strong
reasons for the farmers to invest the minimum required to keep their lands productive.
Farmers were therefore extremely cautious to avoid the risks of entanglement in
development programs which brought them and their lands to the attention of the government.

As much of the development work overseen by INDEV was to first take place on what was officially classified as government revenue land and not on private lands (GOI 1994), INDEV initially ran into various forms of resistance that often slowed the more physical and environmental work in the watersheds. As the villagers came to trust in the intentions of INDEV however, this work on “encroached” lands was more readily pursued and seen by the villagers as an improvement that, while also having immediate economic or environmental benefits, could be seen as moving their claims towards ownership of the land into a more favourable position supported by the documents of INDEV. These positive influences, however, were slow to come. The staff of INDEV felt that it was completely understandable that the villagers would be very hesitant towards them, an organization that seemed to be assuming the same development responsibilities previously held by various government departments.

The Effectiveness of INDEV’s Trust-Building Activities

Although building trust and a respectful relationship with the villagers was not set as a specific activity by the government guidelines, and although INDEV never outlined specific steps to achieve trust, several key activities can be identified. These included listening to the suggestions of local people and engaging in two-way dialogue, spending a great deal of time in the villages, not creating high expectations and living up to the

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4 See Baviskar (1995:151-156) for a detailed look at the use of nevad land and its historical and bureaucratic “construction” through the administrative definition of land property rights.
modest and practical promises that were made, having open communication, even through conflicts, and continuing to work on the relationship throughout the project.

INDEV saw that the active, sustained and meaningful participation of the villagers would be impossible to facilitate without building trust. Their initial work with the villagers was not entirely successful. The "participatory" research activities (PRA) undertaken with the villages was not fully participatory, largely because the RGMWD program did not allow for enough time to build trust. Before spending significant time in the villages in order to prove their good intentions, the villagers were asked to share personal information -- information that could have been used against them. The villagers did not determine the questions to be asked, and were not involved in determining what would happen to their information after it was collected. INDEV saw that this process of "participatory" research was flawed, and complained to the district administration that the time allocated did not allow for significant village participation. INDEV, however, still carried out this research and did nothing to overcome the suspicions and mistrust of the villagers. An opportunity to start the project on a participatory note was lost. Perhaps at the early phase of the project INDEV did not want to disobey the GOI and district government's directives, but this compliance limited the initial progress of building trust and undertaking the goal of a participatory program.

Despite the difficult start, INDEV did turn its attention to establishing stronger ties of trust between its members and the farmers with whom they were working. As seen in the above examples, the growth of trust between INDEV and farmers was an important development activity upon which all future development actions depended. The success in the trust-building was reflected in the successes INDEV experienced in its
participatory development project. While trust helped to lead to success in the three
development activities I will explore below, the growth of a relationship of trust is more
than simply a method by which development activities can be more efficiently
undertaken. Only through this process can the type of rapport needed to foster meaningful
participation between development worker and local villager be established.

Evidence that a strong feeling of trust had been built between INDEV and the
villagers with whom it worked was plentiful. In the village of Dhamni Nathu the villagers
approached Chandra and asked him to read out to them what was written on a piece of paper they had received from the irrigation department of the local district administration. Listed on the piece of paper were the terms for the installation of a lift irrigation system for their village. In the past the villagers had been told that they would have to dig the trenches necessary for the instalment of this type of project for free, only finding out later that wages had actually been included in the overall cost of the project but kept by the government workers. This time, however, the villagers had brought the contract to INDEV to read to them. This was taken by INDEV and myself as a sign of the trust that the villagers were expressing for the INDEV staff members. Equally important was the evidence of a growing sense of the farmer's still tentative, yet emerging self-
empowerment as they attempted to limit through direct actions the absolute authority that government officials usually held over them.

In another case of trust successfully built, women in the village of Sassapura came
together to form a women's bank at the suggestion of INDEV. This in itself is not
exceptional, but as we sat with the women and men while Chandra, Ajit and Vishal
explained about what the women's banks could offer the villagers, many of the women
and men began to hand over money to the INDEV staff. When Chandra told them that they had not yet opened the account for them in a bank, the villagers stated that they trusted INDEV to take care of the money. By the time we left the village hours later, the women and men had given Chandra over 1000 rupees to deposit. To willingly give this huge sum of money to the staff of INDEV represented to both groups the strong sense of trust that now existed between them. These small but telling examples provided INDEV with the confirmation that they were seen by the villagers in a light different from that which the farmers normally focused on external groups.

Although trust and relationship-building was not seen as an important activity by the government, the district administration came to see INDEV’s activity in this realm as beneficial to the project. However, even when it did recognize the importance of trust to the project, it did not understand how this was maintained.

During a large meeting held by the district administration for the various PIAs involved in Jhabua district’s participatory watershed project, INDEV gave a presentation of the work that they had done. The central issue stressed by INDEV was the need to create a sense of trust between the PIA and the farmers with whom they were working. The collector was very impressed with the work of INDEV and commented to Narain that INDEV should approach him directly with any “schemes” (proposals for funding) for the farmers and that he would sanction them immediately. Narain, however, declined the offer, reminding the collector that he did not have the power to assure this support (these financial resources came from the state and went through the DRDA and the block development officer). Government finances were always so late in arriving, that Narain did not want to risk the trust that had been built up between INDEV and the farmers. If
INDEV, based on the assurances of the collector, began making promises to the farmers that could not be fulfilled (because the finances did not arrive), then INDEV would become just like the government—promising things that never materialized.

The RGMWD Program and Community Organization

In order to seek the views of the community, and to help its members develop skills, the communities had to become more than a collection of individuals. If the end goal of participatory development was to create a sustained positive change, then the role of an organized, relatively cohesive and capable group (or groups) of people was necessary. Both INDEV and the GOI saw community organizing as important to the work in the watersheds. However, the two differed significantly on how it should be done, in what time and what could be done with the groups after they were formed.

Government Guidelines for Community Organizing

Community organization was recognized by the GOI as an important process within the structure of the RGMWD program. This process of community organization was understood to directly impact all subsequent development work undertaken with local communities by a PIA within a milli-watershed. Community organization was therefore the initial process to be pursued by PIAs. A successful process of community organization, would therefore lead to a number of broader development goals. As outlined by the GOI, successful community organization would foster

1) Ensured participation of community in the programme
2) Utilization of indigenous knowledge and skills
3) Sustainability of the programme
4) Implementation of the program in less time and with lower cost (GOIb 1994:71).
These community organization activities were to consist of “organizing self-help and user groups, conducting Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercises, awareness camps, exposure visits and programmes on literacy, family welfare, social services, income-generating activities, and the giving of small contributions to self-help groups or other village institutions” (GOIa 1994:19).

The PRA work was seen as important to mapping social and environmental resources available to the villagers. Following the PRA work in the villages, but within “a week or ten days” there was to be a visit by members of the PIA for “follow-up action on community organization...” (GOIa 1994:25-26). During these follow-up sessions, individuals from the PIA were to begin to “explore the problems and opportunities of the watershed” in more depth, examining social, economic and environmental problems affecting each village micro-watershed area. Equally important was the process of education about the RGMWD program undertaken by the PIA with the intention of helping villagers to understand the overall objectives and benefits of the development work to be carried out.

The process of community organization was outlined within the Guidelines as the first component to be undertaken within villages involved in the watershed development program by PIAs. Emerging out of this initial PRA process, the GOI’s proposed process of community organization within the RGMWD program centred on three initial events to be undertaken by the PIA:

1) First, was the formation of self-help and natural resource user groups among the villagers of each village involved in the PIA milli-watershed.
2) Each of these small self-help and resource user groups, with the assistance of the PIA, were to complete individual Action Plans outlining the expected development activities.

3) Finally, the formation of the primary village level organizational structure, the Village Watershed Committees (VWC), would be formed in each village micro-watershed.

**Formation of Self-Help and Resource User Groups (GOI View)**

As outlined in the *Guidelines*, within the first three months the PIA was to help the villagers organize self-help and natural resource user groups. These groups were to consist of individuals from within each village and its micro-watershed area. Based on similarities of “problem or need-based requirements” these groups should be “...homogeneous having a common identity such as agricultural labourers, women, shepherds, scheduled castes/tribes, farmers or a common purpose/activity such as thrift and credit, dairying, rope-making/basket weaving.... The main activity of these self-help groups should be to pool their meagre resources through thrift and advance credit to their own needy members” (GOIa 1994:26).

The formation of these self-help and user groups was to be based on the social, economic and environmental information supplied by the local villagers during the PRA exercises. The overall objectives of the RGMWD were to reverse the environmental degradation taking place within the watershed areas, and through this reversal, attempt to

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5 Natural resource user groups were groups of farmers formed to take advantage of opportunities related to the use of natural resources. In INDEV’s milli-watershed these user groups often consisted of a single family or of the members of two or three families who shared access to common lands where grass could be grown or water sources shared equally.

Self-Help groups were similar small groups formed to concentrated on economic opportunities outside of agricultural activities. These groups often included individuals from separate families such as women who joined to make simple jewellery, men and women who collected fruits to be dried and sold at market, or a group of individuals joining in the distilling of oil from grasses to be sold to perfume makers.
improve the short and long term economic stability of local farmers. The formation of
small user and self-help groups were therefore seen by the GOI, and designated as such
by the RGMWD program, as being the units through which these interconnected
problems of environmental and economic degradation could be addressed. As outlined in
the Guidelines, each of these small groups was required to prepare "an Action plan with
time and cost estimates, design and execution procedures for each individual
work/activity to be taken up in the watershed. This action plan will also clearly define the
respective roles and responsibilities of the users and the manner in which the
work/activity should be executed" (GOIa 1994:31).

Formation of Watershed Committees and Preparation of the Watershed
Action Plans (GOI View)

The formation of self-help and resource user groups were also instrumental to the
formation of the overall Village Watershed Committee (VWC). As discussed earlier, this
committee was responsible for the day-to-day planning and management of all watershed
development activities. As outlined in the Guidelines, the constitution of the Watershed
Committee was to be assembled only through the nomination of individuals who were
members of the various resource user and self-help groups. After nominating these
individuals (one from each self-help and user group), the now newly formed Village
Watershed Committee would then nominate its Watershed Chairman from its committee
members. In the GOI's outlining of the RGMWD (in the Guidelines for Watershed
Development document), the formation of self-help and resource user groups as the first

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INDEV would often assist these groups in initial financial funding or suggest that the groups receive a loan from the village or women's banks.
activity within the larger process of community organization was, therefore, a crucial step in the overall operation of the project.

The preparation of an annual action-plan for the watershed activities to be undertaken within each micro-watershed was also seen as a process central to early community organization activities. As discussed above, the role of self-help and resource user groups was central to this process. The individual user group action plans were meant to be submitted to the Village Watershed Committee (VWC), which would prepare an integrated Watershed Development Plan in cooperation with the PIA that outlined the proposed activities to take place in the micro-watershed area.

These individual micro-watershed action plans were to generally follow "the objectives and results and success criteria given under [the] programme guidelines" in the Guidelines document. The submission of completed action plans to the DRDA was necessary before any funds would be released by the DRDA to the Village Watershed accounts and PIA development accounts. The Guidelines for the RGMWD program stipulated that the submission of the action plan for each milli-watershed under a PIA must be completed within 9 months of the beginning of the project time period.

Community Organization Work (INDEV's View)

INDEV's initial community organization work within their milli-watershed in the RGMWD program emerged as a process that was quite different from that outlined by the GOI in the Guidelines document. For INDEV, the process of community organization formed the core from which all other development activities would emerge. Without

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6 In addition to these individuals from the user and self-help groups, the Guidelines stipulate that two to three members from the Gram Panchayat were to be selected. Overall, the committee was also expected to
community organization, no sustainable efforts at community development through social, economic or environmental initiatives could hope to succeed. For the members of INDEV, the conceptual foundation of participation through organized communities would see local populations taking the primary role in decision-making, planning and management of development activities. In the minds of the INDEV staff, only through development activities undertaken through a participatory process (which required community organizing) could the combined objectives of the "sustained resource use through a empowered and aware community" within the RGMWD program be achieved.

Conflicts over Participatory Processes

Even in the first months of INDEV's involvement in the RGMWD program, however, its approach to participatory development as a social process saw it operating in a fashion contradictory to the participatory approach outlined by the GOI in the Guidelines.

Narain was pleased that the RGMWD included the process of community organization within its operational guidelines, but he felt that its timeline was very restrictive and not conducive to establishing a process of meaningful participation. Stressing that the "first year of any project should be devoted totally to community organization", Narain claimed that

you cannot achieve community organization, or participation, or motivation of the community by a time scale, only by how much time you spend honestly with the community.[In this way] you motivate the people....The government, [however], sets a time scale for you - by this time you finish PRA, by this time you start implementation, I do not agree with that, because it is different from village to village, community to community. (Field interview, October, 1996)

represent all sections and classes of the community and that 33% of the VWC should be women.
The PRA exercises INDEV undertook with farmers in their milli-watershed collected important data, but because of the haste there was substantial suspicion among the villagers of INDEV and its motives. This suspicion, ironically created by the government-set PRA time lines, proved to be a severely inhibiting barrier for INDEV and its attempts to undertake the initial process of community organization in the time period outlined by the GOI in the *Guidelines on Watershed Development* document.

Because it could not do a participatory and lasting job of community organizing within the government’s initial timelines, INDEV undertook a different path of community organization. First, it bypassed almost completely the formation of the self-help and user groups in the villages. Second, it concentrated on forming the Village Watershed Committee as the first organizational structure for the RGMWD program in each village. And third, INDEV staff compiled the Action plans themselves for each of the village micro-watersheds with limited input from the local communities.

These community organization actions undertaken by INDEV seem at first to be in direct opposition to the inclusive and participatory process outlined by the GOI in the RGMWD program guidelines. More importantly, however, these actions also seemed to be in direct opposition to the stated intentions of INDEV about the process of participation and their belief in the necessity of involving local people in the planning and management of the development activities which will directly affect them. To compose the individual village action plans on their own, INDEV engaged in a process that was not at all participatory. The NGO seemed to mimic the past government actions they so often criticized. Equally troubling was the process through which the formation of the
Village Watershed Committee was undertaken. INDEV had suggested that the villagers draw their committee members from the general population of the village, not from the self-help and natural resource user groups as directed by the Guidelines. This seemed to undermine the intentions of the GOI to involve those individuals, grouped by problem or need requirements, directly into the village watershed decision-making body. This inclusion of different groups was seen by the GOI as the empowering process that offered certain individuals and groups access to decision-making organizations previously out of their reach.

If we look at the actions of INDEV closely, however, taking into account the social context within which the INDEV staff found themselves when dealing with local communities, these actions do not seem as non-participatory as at first glance. In fact, I would argue, these actions taken by INDEV were a major factor in the creation of a strong community organization among the villagers that was not possible if the PIA followed the procedures set down by the GOI in the RGMWD Guidelines document.

INDEV saw itself faced with two problems. First was the pressure they were under from the DRDA to complete the various action plans associated with each of the villages within their milli-watershed. Without the submission of these action plans, no development work could proceed, as the financial resources necessary to undertake the development work would not be released by the DRDA. Secondly, the social context within which INDEV found itself with local communities was one constructed on the past interpretations that the villagers held of development situations involving external individuals or groups.
After their initial attempts at the formation of smaller user groups was met with hesitancy and disinterest by the villagers, INDEV switched tactics and instead formed the larger village watershed committees (VWC). This change of direction in implementation strategies had, I feel, a strong impact on the future participatory efforts of INDEV with the farmers.

INDEV recognized that the initial inaction of the farmers was not an unwillingness to participate in the program, but rather simply a process of risk aversion undertaken by the farmers towards a group of people they did not know. Given past experiences of farmers concerning the actions of government officials involved in development work, their reactions towards a group of individuals (INDEV) unknown to them did not seem unreasonable. In order to form the user groups, INDEV required personal details about the farmers. Readily providing information about one’s economic status, was not an action that the farmers would enter into easily with people they did not know or trust.

Narian felt that the formation of these user groups was important to both the environmental and economic objectives of the program as well as the overall village level organizational structure of the RGMWD program. While recognizing that this also seemed to be the intention of the GOI guidelines, Narain felt that forming these important groups in such a rushed manner severely crippled the positive impact that these groups could have on the planning and management of their village micro-watersheds. As Narain commented,

Such things never happen in the village, you cannot make the user group by just one visit. [In our own work] we were so pressured by the government, that you have to submit this projection for making the
groups. We had no option, we had only 3-4 days in each village, because in 14 villages we spent almost 60 days, and then prepared all plans in two months. We had no idea of the people, we just took down a few names and put these names into that [user group] on the paper (Fieldsite interview, October, 1996).

INDEV was required to move so quickly between villages, that the amount of time spent with the villagers did not come anywhere near the time needed to interact meaningfully, breaking down barriers of mistrust and suspicion, while attempting to begin to establish the social relationships that would be so central to all future development activities. INDEV strongly felt that the only way to overcome this initial suspicion was to spend more time among the villagers explaining the program and the intentions of INDEV. Chandra, INDEV assistant project officer, commenting directly on the government’s proposed strategy for the formation of the user groups and the connected village watershed committees central to the village level organization for the watershed program stated that

you need to strengthen the whole institution of the village first, then you can introduce any program....without any preparation the whole thing will collapse”.... [The problem is] the government only talks of targets, how much of the targets are done, they forget there is a whole process. Community participation cannot be achieved overnight. It might take one year, two years, or it may even not be successful, but it must be done first. (Fieldsite Interview, September, 1996)

INDEV agreed that the user groups were central to the operation of the village watersheds. INDEV realized, however, that even if they did create these user groups, doing so in such a quick fashion would not be beneficial to the overall operation and long term sustainability of the watershed development work that would take place in all of the villages. Villagers unaware of the overall watershed program objectives and the possibilities available to them through their user groups would not benefit from the group
or be beneficial to the long-term social sustainability of the watershed project. As Narain stated, “if you form the user groups, then you have to train them to work as a user group. Otherwise it is just forming groups for the paper. First you start thinking of forming the groups and then you make the villagers aware of why the groups are there, and then only [should you] make the groups”.

INDEV, in its reluctance to form what it saw as user groups established simply to be accountable “on paper” to the district administration, put its energy into community organization but at the level of the Village Watershed Committees in each village.

Again, however, INDEV was in contradiction to the guidelines of the GOI. The Guidelines stipulated that the VWC should be made up solely of individuals nominated from self-help and natural resource user groups, as well as individuals from the gram panchayat. In INDEV’s case, with no real formation of self-help and resource user groups taking place, they suggested to the villagers that these members be selected from the watershed association (in essence the village population) with individual members being selected from each phalia in the village.

In the view of the government, the self-help and natural resource user groups were central to the achievement of the main objectives of the RGMWD, which were the improvement of the ecological base of the area and the enhancing of economic activities associated with the land. The formation of these smaller user groups first, and the inclusion of only members of these groups on the VWC, therefore made sense to government planners. These individuals would be the ones in the best position within the villages to produce the action plans and direct the actions of the various VWC towards
the objectives of the watershed program. What was missing, however, in the GOI’s guidelines was an understanding of the local situation. As Narain complained, this was a policy designed and formulated by people sitting in air-conditioned offices in Delhi who suffer from a conception of the villages as made up of communities that are fully formed and able to function with that 1950’s type of idea of community that was first tried in India long ago. The guidelines presume that this directing force already exists in the village community and that self-help and user groups will then just be an extension of this. (Fieldnotes, February 24, 1996).

INDEV, due to their own interactions with local communities, was well aware of the levels of mistrust and suspicion between the Adivasi farmers and external groups. In their opinion, forming user groups based on the use and ownership of land and economic resources as stipulated by the GOI, and within a restricted time period, was not a process of community organization that would lead to an empowering participation of the farmers. INDEV’s approach was to first concentrate on forming the VWCommittees. The formation of these committees was seen as less threatening to the farmers as it was an organizational structure that did not directly involve the material resources upon which individuals depended, such as their land. For INDEV, the village watershed committees represented the village body through which they could begin the lengthy process of community organization and awareness building around the issues associated with the RGMWD program and the participation of local farmers.

The major point of disagreement between INDEV and the district administration was the assumed need to force the “participation” of local farmers into a structure determined by external forces and the needs of the district administration for the short-term attainment of set objectives. With development seen as a social process, the need for
a comprehensive process of awareness raising among the villagers taking place within a context which was non-threatening for the villagers and not under stiff time constraints, was imperative for INDEV. The existence of the VWC, while providing the central village level organizational body for the future operation of the village micro-watersheds, also was the structure through which INDEV could begin the social process of gaining the trust of the farmers and in establishing the social relationships that would be central to all subsequent development work. Creating and strengthening this village level committee, which would carry so much responsibility, authority and financial power later in the project, became primary. This was important as at this early point in the project the farmers still had no conception of the power that would be associated with the village watershed committee and the financial resources that the committee members would come to control.

INDEV, however, while still believing that initial attempts at community organization among the villagers was the proper process, had put themselves in a position contrary to the desires of the local district administration which was strictly adhering to the framework outlined in the Guidelines. This lead directly, therefore, to the production by INDEV of the action plans on their own.

When questioned on the "participatory" nature of this action, INDEV agreed that completing the action plans without the input of villagers seemed very un-participatory. They noted, however, that the action plan was only for the first year and could be changed by the VWC at their discretion. What was more damaging to the participatory process, INDEV claimed, was the fact that there had not been more time allowed for the process of community organization and education about the RGMWD program to take
place initially with the villagers. In INDEV's view the participation of farmers in the compiling of the village micro-watershed action plans could only be empowering when pursued after those same individuals understood what was at stake and how they could use their strengths to overcome their weaknesses. Power is not simply transferred to previously marginalized people by quickly forming them into groups and expecting them to immediately respond to decision-making opportunities. Rather, INDEV, in line with the core philosophy of participation, understood this empowering process to be one shared between external agents and local communities that over time strengthens and develops the capacities of local people to analyze their situations and to then come forth with informed decisions. This was a process that INDEV felt was best undertaken through the main organizational structure of the village watershed committees.

INDEV's Work With Local Elites and the Village Watershed Committee Chairman (INDEV's Actions)

INDEV's goal in the RGMWD was to encourage an empowering process of participation among the local communities with whom it worked. Through this social process of raising the awareness among local people of their capabilities and strengths, all development actions stood more of a chance of being socially sustainable over time and equitable among community members. INDEV, in recognition of the local problems that existed due to poor past relations between external agents and local communities stepped outside of the GOI Guidelines for watershed development by forming the less threatening watershed committee before the self-help and user groups. This was a key organizational structure through which local people could plan and direct their future development.
INDEV was very aware of the potential of the watershed committee to become a powerful village-level structure through which large amounts of development funds would flow. INDEV, therefore, recognized the need to create empowering conditions that were also helpful to the Village Watershed Committee (and all farmers) in fostering new relations of power with external actors. These social actors included government officials, local politicians and other individuals, such as money lenders, who had a large and direct impact on the lives of the farmers.

Local control over development and the benefits which can accrue from it, are a constant concern within participatory approaches. This being said, power relations within a community can be just as diverse and disempowering as relations with individuals and groups outside. This often leaves external development agencies such as INDEV in a difficult position. Often local elites are the first to take part in new development activities offered to communities and can become valuable allies to external agents in the difficult beginning stages of a project. Local elites, however, are also usually better positioned both socially and economically to gain control and channel decisions and resources to themselves and away from those individuals and areas that are most in need of assistance.

INDEV readily admitted that they were often dealing with the local elites within the various villages within their milli-watershed. While recognizing the need to ensure that the development activities that would be undertaken through the RGMWD must reach even those who are most marginalized in the villages, this was often a process fraught with barriers. As Narain related to me, "it is very easy to say that you should
reach to the poorest of the poor, but that fellow can never come to you at first because he has been so deprived and the situation [in the village] is so that he is scared, he will never come forward right away” (Fieldsite Interview, October, 1996).

Narain claimed that local elites are often essential to getting any development activities started in the villages. It is the role of the PIA, however, to insure that this initial involvement of local elites does not become a process through which all development activities are co-opted by those with more power, locking out the less fortunate from also gaining benefits. As Narain explained:

In the beginning you have to take up with them [influential people]. And then, only when you are in the situation, you observe these people closely and you make your own observations - who are really the poorest, who are not coming forward, what other areas of the village have you not heard from, then you decide. In the beginning you cannot go into villages and try to locate the poorest - it is impossible. You need to stay for some time, go around, judge yourself the people in the area and try to find out [who is poor] and then bring them into the mainstream [of the village] (Fieldsite Interview, August 1997).

INDEV, while recognizing the importance of local elites in beginning their development work, attempted to ensure that the influence used by these more prosperous members of the community did not come to completely dominate watershed activities. Therefore the formation of each village watershed committee and the selection of its chairman was an important process for INDEV to monitor. A watershed committee and its chairman would be the locus of power through which all decisions and finances would flow in the village watershed project.

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7 See Subrata Mitra (1992) for an examination of the role of rural elites in development activities.
8 Watershed chairman was the title used within the Guidelines document to designate this position of authority.
The trip to the village of Ralegan Siddhi by the farmers in INDEV's milli-watershed allowed them to see what could be accomplished through the type of watershed planning proposed by INDEV. Many of the Jhabua farmers came away from this trip convinced that this type of watershed planning offered them real opportunities to improve their land, increase the availability of water, and expand their agricultural potential. The dramatic improvements that could be accomplished through the collective and continued actions of a group of people impressed them. In subsequent watershed meetings held in the farmers' villages in Jhabua district, the name of Ralegan was often brought up by both the farmers and by INDEV as an example of what was possible through participatory development activities.

During the tour through Ralegan, however, one Jhabua farmer from the village of Dhamni Chimna commented to the Ralegan farmer leading the tour, that Ralegan must be the political centre of the district. The Jhabua farmer expressed a commonly held belief that any results such as those in Ralegan, could only be achieved with the amount of financial support available to those who had strong political connections. The Jhabua farmer was told that initially all the work in Ralegan was done without any financial help from the government. Only later did the village begin to access the government schemes that were available to them for different social, economic and environmental programs. As the trip progressed through the village, the farmers saw that none of the work in Ralegan’s watershed was highly technical or involved any complicated machinery. By the

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9 Ralegan was a village in the state of Maharashtra that had successfully used the watershed approach to improve its social, economic and environmental status. This trip was suggested within the Guidelines as a place to which PIAs could take people involved in the RGMWD program to see what was possible through watershed planning and management. For a description and short discussion of this trip please see Appendix 3.
time we got ready to board the buses to return home to Jhabua, many of the farmers were commenting that they also could do what they had seen in Ralegan, that they did not need to rely on the government to do work in their villages.

The RGMWD program and its participatory foundation, offered the financial resources for the villagers to carry out the social, economic and ecological restoration they had seen in Ralegan without the need for strong political ties to local politicians or government officials. As evident in the comment from the Jhabua farmer, however, the perception that the type of substantial improvement seen in Ralegan could only be achieved through the use of strong local political connections and the access to extensive government funding that this affiliation offered was hard to overcome. For most farmers this perception was still an accurate portrayal of their village social reality in Jhabua district. The holding of political office by an individual in the Panchatyi Raj offered direct access to funds destined for various government schemes, or to the ability to have development work quickly authorized by the Gram Panchayat. While noticeable in many forms, the most visible result of this influence could be seen nightly in the number of phalias that received electricity because of the presence of the sarpanch’s home, while others remained in the dark. INDEV, therefore, went to great lengths to ensure that the farmers had not only the possibility to participate in the planning and management of this

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10 One of these “showpiece” watersheds sat at the edge of the town of Jhabua. This area was under the control of the Forest Service and was also an excellent example of what can be accomplished through the use of water harvesting structures. It had, however, not started as a participatory project, only becoming one after being administratively transferred at the start of the Rajiv Gandhi Participatory Watershed project. Various NGO workers claimed that the success of this project could be attributed to the large infusion and access to funds, as well as to the actions of the Forest Service (now the PIA) who continued to direct the work while maintaining a superficial level of participation with the local villagers that was in line with the guidelines for the project.
local development through the village watershed committee, but that the access to this local control of development activities was not limited by established power relations.

**Collectors View of Panchayati Raj and Watershed Committees.**

In an interview with the Jhabua District collector, Manoj Shrivastava, he expressed the view that the village watershed committees in the RGMWD program were "non-political" bodies that were a "parallel structure to the Panchayati Raj." While collector Shrivastava admitted that there was tension between the two village-level bodies, he felt that over time these problems would recede and that there would be more attempts at coordination between them. The Gram Panchayat, he assured me, "would continue to be the local representative of the government in the villages and would coordinate the programs and funds it controlled in tandem with the non-political watershed committees" who now undertook a major portion of the development work carried out in local villages (Fieldsite Interview, August, 1997).

These statements of collector Shrivastava are in line with the thinking outlined by the GOI which foresaw a process of close coordination between these two village-level organizational bodies taking place in the RGMWD program. This cooperation at the village level is described in the Guidelines as a process where, "... the Gram Panchayat shall be fully involved in the implementation of the programme specially (sic) community organization and training programmes and use its administrative authority

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11 Manoj Shrivastava was the individual who was collector in Jhabua District in 1997.
12 Even when I pressured the collector on this response, stating that I had already seen many incidences which would support the idea that villagers saw these two structures as competing organizations, he continued to claim that there would be no problems in the future. In a recent discussion (CIDA, June 2001) with George Mathew of the Institute of Social Sciences located in New Delhi, I inquired if this problem persisted within the Watershed Development Program. He replied that it was now one of the main concerns
and financial resources to support and encourage ...the operation and maintenance of the assets created and the common property resources....” (GOIa 1994:14).

INDEV attempted to ensure that the village watershed committees remained “non-political” and independent of the village level politics and the Gram Panchayat, but did so for reasons different from those expressed by the collector. INDEV was well aware of the local situation in Jhabua District. They had, therefore, no illusions as to the inevitability of watershed committees becoming politicized. The Panchayat Raj, had been in place for only a short time in Madhya Pradesh (this was in 1996-7), but accusations of corruption undertaken by local political leaders were common among villagers and development workers. With financial support for an assortment of social and economic activities now funneled through the local Gram Panchayat rather than through government departments, villagers were rapidly becoming aware of the large amounts of money involved in development related activities in the area. This awareness would only increase as farmers became increasingly involved in the RGMWD program and its advocating of direct access to funds for villagers through their village watershed committees.

The RGMWD offered access to a new and substantial amount of funds from the government. INDEV strongly felt that the position of village watershed committee chairman and its central position in the allocation of these funds to village development activities, was in danger of being seen as a springboard by some individuals to pursue or to entrench themselves in the political position of sarpanch. Equally troubling for INDEV, and in light of the current accusations of corruption leveled by villagers at some within the Watershed Development Program causing serious tensions between beneficiaries in many areas involved in the program.
of the local village-level political figures, was the danger of the watershed committee’s operations and funds being co-opted by individuals already entrenched within current political institutions. INDEV, therefore, attempted to limit the “politics” that took place in the operation of the village watershed and its considerable finances by attempting to influence villagers in their selection of watershed chairman away from current village sarpanchs. In this way INDEV hoped to provide at least some distance for the village watershed work from the wide-spread financial corruption that many villagers and INDEV complained was prevalent in the operation of the local Gram Panchayat and its development activities.

Local Elites and the Position of Watershed Chairman

Unlike many of the other PIAs in Jhabua District, INDEV therefore did not simply allow the local Panchayati Raj political leader (sarpanch) to immediately assume the position of watershed chairman. INDEV was concerned that, while each watershed committee reached any decision through a majority vote, the political power already held by the sarpanch put him or her in a dominant position in the relationships they shared with other committee members, a form of interaction that could directly influence their decisions. While the ultimate choice as to which individual would be selected for watershed chairman was left up to the villagers, INDEV often tried to influence the community to try to move away from simply allowing the current village level political leader to assume the role of watershed chairman. In effect, INDEV was attempting to make sure that the operation of the watershed would remain as independent as possible from the direct influence of the local Panchayati Raj and the individuals who held local political positions.
Before discussing the ramifications this action of INDEV’s had for a process of participatory development, a few examples I witnessed of how INDEV influenced the villagers selection of the watershed chairman are offered.

The local sarpanch for the village of Tandi was an extremely powerful man who many villagers claimed had increased his material wealth substantially since his successful election to the political post. With the beginning of the RGMWD, this sarpanch had expressed an interest in the position of chairman. During the watershed association meeting to pick the watershed chairman, both Narain and Chandra suggested to the sarpanch that his political work seemed to keep him very busy, and they therefore wondered if he would be able to handle all the extra work. While the sarpanch at first hesitated he then quickly agreed stating in front of the farmers present that he was very busy and that perhaps it would be best if another farmer took the position.

In a second case, in the village of Dhamni Chimna, the sarpanch put forth the name of his brother as the choice for the chairman. For INDEV this was a more difficult situation to address. Instead of directly disputing this appointment, INDEV suggested instead that the village select a woman as their watershed chairman. In this way the village could then be held up as an “ideal” of what could be possible in other village watersheds. Unfortunately, while the woman was initially selected, she later approached INDEV and asked to be removed from the position claiming she did not have the time to handle both this work and her other responsibilities. INDEV was quite sure that there had been pressure applied upon her. INDEV agreed, however, and in her absence from the committee meetings, another farmer was chosen.
While INDEV made sure that each village watershed committee contained members from the local level Gram Panchayat as required by the Guidelines (GOI 1994:16), only one out of the fourteen village watershed committees involved with INDEV had a watershed chairman who also held a high ranking political position. This was in the village of Bucchadungri where the watershed chairman was also the assistant sarpanch for the area in which his village was located.

Does this attempt by INDEV to influence villagers in their selection of village watershed committee chairmen in fact represent a process which interferes with the objective of fostering village autonomy? I would argue that INDEV’s attempt at influencing the decisions made by the villagers, in light of the local contexts, in fact increased the likelihood of these villages and their members achieving an empowering form of participation and autonomy. The current Panchayati Raj political system and its access to and control over resources and financial support destined for use within the villages is extensive. Each local sarpanch, therefore, is in a position to wield substantial power over those who live within his or her constituency. The ability of these individuals to extend this domination by also holding the position of watershed chairman was a very real threat.

The foundation for an empowering participatory approach does not mean that an external agent, such as INDEV, abdicates all responsibility for the direction in which a process of participatory development emerges. An empowering process of participation would not have been gained by local people making decisions alone. Fostering a form of empowering participation, which was the objective of PIAs involved in the RGMWD program, is a process through which local people break free of previous power relations
while recognizing their own strengths. INDEV's intervention, I would argue, and as I saw in later stages of the project, led to a fuller realization of autonomy and empowerment among the farmers who were now able to fashion new organizational structures at the village level that were not encumbered by past dominant structures. Placing the local control of the RGMWD program under those individuals currently in influential positions, would simply allow individuals such as the sarpanch to extend their dominance over others. This would not encourage or support an empowering process of participation that would allow people currently outside of the dominant power structure the opportunity to partake in local decision making and to share in the equitable distribution of benefits.

Local Power Structures and INDEV's Development Work

As noted in Chapter Two, the financial structure of the RGMWD program was such that it had no connection to traditional lines of authority through which the expenditure of development funds was controlled. Financial support for development activities covered in the watershed program came directly from the DRDA to the village watershed committee. Both the block development officer and the Panchayati Raj representative, who would normally control funds associated with various development programs, were now outside of the administrative financial structure of the RGMWD.13

This administrative financial structure, however, did not mean that the actions of a sarpanch could not directly affect what took place in the various micro-watersheds in

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13 This did not mean that there was no interaction in terms of development activities between villagers and these representatives. As explained in Chapter Two, there were many other development activities which fell under other different development funding arrangements for which the villagers were eligible. These development funds outside of the RGMWD program were overseen by the BDO and the representative from the panchayati raj.
INDEV's milli-watershed development work. The support of a sarpanch could be a valuable ally in the effort to undertake development work. In each of the villages in which INDEV worked, the support given them by the local sarpanch often ranged from supportive, through indifference, to outspoken criticism of the work of INDEV. While INDEV had consciously tried to encourage a separation between the structure of the watershed committee and the political office of the sarpanch, they did not attempt to discourage the two organizational structures from working together. In the village of Samoi this was an arrangement that worked well, with the sarpanch working closely with the village watershed committee and its chairman to try to combine their efforts to the best advantage of the village.

In the village of Tandi, the situation between INDEV and the sarpanch was of a different form. Claiming that INDEV was in his eyes “honest and helping the villagers” the sarpanch, while always friendly with the staff of INDEV, limited his assistance to agreeing not to disrupt their work or to demand a share of the financial resources available in the RGMWD program.

In other villages, however, differences arose between INDEV and the local sarpanch that, for a time, became a serious barrier to INDEV's attempt at participatory development work with villagers. Often, because of the power inherent in the position of the sarpanch and the access to alternative funds and services it offered many of the villagers, a sarpanch who thought negatively of the work undertaken by INDEV could use their influence on others to stop development work from taking place in that village. This was the case in the village of Dhamni Chimna where INDEV undertook some of the first development work in its milli-watershed.
Trying to interest the villagers in the participatory watershed project, they first approached the sarpanch’s house. The sarpanch was warm to them and interested in what INDEV had to say but immediately asked them to put a lift irrigation system into place from the river up to his own property and fields. INDEV replied that they would do the technical status report for this, a task they undertook, but that the sarpanch would have to go to the gram panchayat (village level political structure) to get the funds for the construction and the equipment that was needed. INDEV explained that the RGMWD program did not have the funds to undertake large irrigation projects. Holding an influential Panchayati Raj position with considerable power over how and where local development funds are usually spent, the sarpanch was annoyed by this reply and ignored INDEV staff whenever they showed up in the village.

INDEV continued to visit the village, however, slowly moving through the different phalias attempting to speak with farmers until they came to a phalia where they met an older woman. After listening to and questioning INDEV, she agreed to start a bamboo nursery which INDEV would help fund and set up. The woman, who was to become an important women’s leader and speaker within INDEV’s milli-watershed, also agreed to start a women’s bank with a few of the other women in her phalia.¹⁴

Soon after this initial meeting and the setting up of the first women’s bank, a few of the INDEV workers were approached by women from a nearby phalia in the village. They had heard about the women’s bank and the plant nursery started with the help of INDEV and also wished to be involved with INDEV in whatever way they could. INDEV then set up a women’s bank in their phalia also. Soon, women from other phalias in the
village and, finally, even the sarpanch’s phalia, approached INDEV and asked to become involved.

As one could expect, this was not a process that endeared INDEV to the local sarpanch. It was an action, however, that followed INDEV’s philosophy of attempting to reach out to all of the members of the community, even if this meant not working within the established channels of the current political system at village level. The sarpanch at Dhamni Chimna caused considerable trouble for INDEV, attempting to influence the villagers to not take part in INDEV’s development activities. When the watershed chairman also seemed to become hesitant to undertake any development work in the village and the sarpanch began to publicly blame and complain to the collector that INDEV was partaking in corruption activities, INDEV stopped their work in the village.

As Narain explains,

I wrote a letter to the sarpanch in Dhamni Chimna. I told him that because of his behaviour we are stopping the work in the village. I then told Chandra [APO of INDEV] to look for the reaction. Chandra told me that at first he [sarpanch] was trying to support the whole thing [(allegations)] by sending women to the collector to complain. The collector told me then that there were complaints against INDEV. I knew this was going to happen, because the sarpanch will do what he can. But I decided to let the community decide, to let them pressure him, and it happened. Even his own brother quarreled with him because they have seen the total loss which has hit them in the money. Because of his attitudes - otherwise they would have had good wages [in the development work in their village] (Fieldsite Interview, August, 1997).

Subsequent to this letter, a group of women from the village of Dhamni Chimna came to INDEV’s office in Ranapur and asked INDEV to re-start their activities in the village. INDEV replied that they would come again but that the sarpanch had to write a letter to

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14 Women’s Banks and Village banks will be discussed below.
the District Collector withdrawing the accusations that had been made about INDEV. While the sarpanch never did write this letter, he did meet with me and Chandra at a later time and during this discussion agreed that the work undertaken by INDEV with the farmers was good for the village and that he would no longer attempt to have it stopped.

INDEV had no intention of replacing the sarpanch with themselves as the authoritative power over the farmers; or to break the control of the sarpanch such that they would have authority over him. Rather, their concern was the operation of the village watershed by the farmers from the village. In many ways this action by INDEV was part of a process by which the local farmers came to realize that they also had control over their futures.

**The Formation of Village Banks**

A central community organization strategy used by INDEV in their attempt to empower local communities through development activities was the formation of both Village and Women’s banks within each village micro-watershed. Within INDEV’s micro-watersheds the Village Banks became an important and successful element in the overall structure of INDEV’s development work with local farmers. Women’s Banks, while initially showing signs of being a successful component of INDEV’s development activities in the RGMWD program, had by the second year of the watershed program fallen well off early expectations due to implementation failures by INDEV staff. These specific problems and their indication for the general development work of INDEV will be discussed in depth in Chapter Five.
Village Banks as a Form of Community Organization

The Village Bank, initiated by INDEV, was not included in the government Guidelines document. The VWCommittees had control over two main financial accounts as set up in the RGMWD program (and explained in Chapter Two). The first was a “Watershed Projects Account” into which the DRDA released funds directed to development activities undertaken under the direction of the VWCommittee. The second account was called the “Watershed Development Fund”. This second account, which came to be known as the “maintenance account” by both farmers and development workers was a fund set up as a bank account which would collect “donations/contributions, recoveries of fines or fees for services rendered…” (GOIa 1994:30). The funds deposited in this account were to be used only in the “post-completion operation and maintenance of community works/activities such as community engineering works, maintenance of pasture lands, forests or fisheries ponds ....” (GOIa 1994:30). This “maintenance fund” was not to be used for supporting social initiatives and could only be accessed once government support had ceased at the end of the projected project time period of four years. This maintenance fund was to support the continuing operation of the village micro-watershed, providing funding for the extension and upkeep of the environmental restoration initiatives that had been started during the RGMWD program. The size of this maintenance fund would continue to grow during the life of the project due to the regular contributions made by individual farmers. This contribution process was carried out through the deduction of a certain percentage of the wages paid out to farmers by the VWC for their labour in development work assigned by the VWC. The amount that this percentage represented of an individual’s wage was
outlined in the GOI Guidelines to be at least five percent but more could be deducted on a decision taken by the VWCommittee.

INDEV made sure that these two main accounts were set up for use by the VWC. INDEV however, went a step further in their efforts to help the community organize itself and increase their capacity to achieve a degree of economic and social autonomy from previous restrictive relationships that they shared with external groups.

The creation of the “Village Bank” within each of the 14 villages within INDEV’s milli-watershed, came about due to a situation that arose early in the watershed project. Due to the success of this concept within INDEV’s milli-watershed, Collector Jhalani eventually issued a directive to all other PIAs involved in the RGMWD program in Jhabua District to also form Village Banks in their the milli-watersheds based on INDEV’s work.

The Jhabua District collector at this time (1995-96), Manoj Jhalani, was deeply committed to improving the literacy of villagers. In pursuit of this goal, Jhalani had begun a program within the district that provided literacy lessons to women and men between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five. Younger children currently in school were asked to volunteer to hold these literacy lessons for older individuals using supplies given to them by the local panchayat office. To help financially support this literacy program, which was outside of the RGMWD program and therefore unable to receive any direct financial support, Collector Jhalani wanted a further percentage (in addition to that

15 The overall literacy rate for males in Jhabua district is 14.2 percent and for females 8.6 percent. In Ranapur Block the rate is much lower with 91.1 percent of the population classified as illiterate (Jhosi, 1995:45,56; see also NCHSE 1993:80-81). In the 14 villages in Ranapur Block with which INDEV was involved in their development activities (total population of 13,325), 1010 males and 212 females for a total of 1222 people were classified as literate (INDEV Project Documents as per 1991 census).
deducted for the maintenance fund) to be deducted from wage labour payments given to farmers for their work in the village micro-watersheds. This deduction was to be then given to the local panchayat office to be directed towards the literacy program. INDEV agreed that this was a good idea and that they would encourage the farmers in this direction. INDEV disagreed, however, with the idea that these further deductions from the farmer’s wages should be directed towards the office of the panchayat.

Within INDEV’s milli-watershed, therefore, each village started their own Village Bank into which these deductions from the wage labour of the farmers would be deposited. As the VWC, in cooperation with INDEV, organized and directed work to be undertaken on village lands by the farmers, they also decided on the size of the deduction that would be subtracted from each of the farmer’s wages for the work that they did daily. This deduction would then be deposited within the Village Bank (an account in a local bank) which was to be used by the VWC for development activities related to the restoration of the land or, more importantly, to be loaned to villagers at drastically reduced rates of interest in comparison to that which farmers received from moneylenders. As more and more work was planned and undertaken by the VWC the funds within the Village Bank rapidly accumulated. This villager-supported Village Bank would come to be recognized by the farmers as one of the most important components of the entire watershed project as it offered many new opportunities to village members through loans for social and economic ventures.

In terms of INDEV’s perception of an empowering process of participatory development leading to village self-direction and autonomy, this approach became a critical component. The maintenance fund was a component through which the GOI
foresaw a method by which ecological restoration activities carried out through the RGMWD program would have some sustainability into the future. After the withdrawal of government funding at the end of the program, the VWC could draw on this fund to undertake repairs to the soil and water conservation structures that had been put into place. This upkeep would, in turn, sustain the ecological condition of the land leading to the sustainability of economic benefits resulting from these agricultural improvements.

The maintenance fund, however, would be in a position of gradual financial decline in the funds available to the VWC for further development activities. While the VWC’s would continue to deduct percentages from any wages paid out for labour through this fund, the fund would experience a rapid decline that could not be self-sustaining for long. This would then leave each VWCommittee, the micro-watersheds they were responsible for, and individual farmers dependent on these agricultural lands, with an uncertain future. In the effort to improve the chances of the programs economic benefits being sustainable over time, while also increasing the capacity of local villagers to effectively manage and plan for the future, INDEV encouraged the formation of the Village Banks.

The RGMWD program’s mandated maintenance fund provided the initial support needed for the sustainability of the physical improvements made to village lands through the program. There was, in essence, protection provided for the maintenance of the assets (physical improvements to government land) that had been improved through the program. This therefore met the more objective requirements of the program. I would argue that INDEV’s creation of the concept of Village Banks not only met this requirement, but also, due to the control and organization of the Village Bank invested
solely in the villagers themselves, was even more effective as a community organization strategy through which villagers engaged in an active process of social empowerment and the self-directed realization of economic autonomy previously denied them.

How does this take place? In many instances farmers expressed to me that in the past development projects represented an opportunity to collect wages that helped them in the short term. Hired simply for their labour, development work was associated by them only with the possibility of gaining short term economic benefits. Little attention, therefore, was paid to the aim of the development work. To the credit of the RGMWD program this problem was partially addressed by directly involving villagers in the planning for and control of the objectives of this development work. What INDEV’s concept of the Village Bank did was to make this involvement more empowering for villagers in two distinct ways.

First, the inter-connections between the planning of development activities, their participation in the undertaking of these development activities for short term economic gain, and the recognition that through their involvement they were taking an active part in increasing their future economic stability was made clearer. Working on the environmental rejuvenation of their lands not only improved the state of farmer’s agricultural livelihoods, but this work was now undertaken by farmers with the knowledge that through their contributions to a general fund, each was creating for themselves economic opportunities that had been previously unavailable to them. Development work became no longer simply short term wage labour, but rather a process intimately linked to both their short and long term economic well-being, a process of planning in which they were closely involved.
Secondly, the Village Fund contributed directly to the social autonomy of the villagers as it was completely under the control of the villagers. INDEV established this financial account so that neither they nor the district administration could access these funds. The use of these funds therefore was under the complete discretion of the farmers through their village watershed committee. INDEV felt that rather than enforce the decision of Collector Jhalani to deduct further percentages from the wage labour payments to villagers to be sent to the local panchayat, it would leave the decision to the villagers as to what to do with these funds. If the VWCommittee decided that they wished to transfer these further deductions to the local panchayat office, then that is what they could do. For INDEV the important point was that it was the villagers themselves making these decisions about the funds they controlled, it was not being done for them by outside groups. These development activities could be the more physical work of the construction of soil and water conservation structures, or it could be directed to activities such as loans for individual farmers. Both of these options helped to sustain the strength of the Village Bank. Through the continued deduction of a percentage from the wages the VWC paid to their fellow villagers to undertake development work, or even more importantly, by collecting the interest from the loans given to farmers within the village (in addition to the principle), the Village Bank would gradually and steadily increase its financial size and the opportunities for the farmers within the village. The realization by farmers of the potential for this Village Bank in allowing them to begin to move out from under their financial dependency on the government and freedom from the crushing interest rates of urban moneylenders, was not long in being enthusiastically voiced. Development activities within the RGMWD concentrating on improving the environmental condition
of their lands, was now seen by villagers as an ongoing process in which their active involvement increased their chances of a beneficial economic future.\(^{16}\)

**Effectiveness of INDEV's Community Organizing**

Were the community organizing techniques used by INDEV successful in achieving participation? I would argue that many of the community organizing activities undertaken by INDEV were successful in fostering an environment in which local villagers began to realize the alternatives that might exist for them. The process by which INDEV initially formed the village watershed committees was, I feel, more effective than the process outlined by the GOI. The formation of the village watershed committee, the key organization at the village-level for future development activities, was seen as initially less threatening to the farmers than the formation of user groups dependent on the economic status of farmers and their access to resources like land. This larger body allowed for people to participate in the committee without feeling threatened by what this participation meant for them and their families. The watershed committee therefore, provided the organizational structure through which INDEV could carry out further community organizing and training, including the formation of user and self-help groups.

Forming the village watershed committees in this manner did harbour the possibility that marginalized people of each village were being left out of the process. The GOI’s decision to place one individual from each self-help and user group within a village on the watershed committee would have been effective in reaching those marginalized groups within the village. Given the problem, however, of getting farmers

\(^{16}\) By July, 1997, these village banks in INDEV’s milli-watershed held a total combined savings of 188,319 rupees (approximately $7,500 Can).
to form these groups as their first activity, INDEV’s approach made sense. INDEV made sure that, as required in the Guidelines, women and panchayat members were represented in the watershed committee. INDEV also attempted to make the formation of the watershed committee as participatory as possible for all members of the community by having each phalia nominate one person was a successful process of inclusion.

The Village Banks offered an opportunity for villagers to access financial resources that allowed them more personal autonomy, freeing them from the need to rely on moneylenders for their survival. The Village Banks with their slowly increasing accounts also provided farmers with the financial resources to participate in new economic initiatives that they would have not have been able to pursue previously. INDEV, however, could be criticized for their slow response in providing farmers with the community organizing and training necessary to fully take advantage of this economic initiative. Farmers while aware of the growing funds available to them through loans, were not given enough guidance by INDEV as to how they might take advantage of this opportunity.

The importance of community organizing to the long-term sustainability of development initiatives is certain. However, as this study examines only the first two years of a four year participatory project, the achievement and success of this long-term sustainability is outside the scope of this work. There is, however, evidence that INDEV’s efforts at fostering a process of empowerment among the villagers was successful. Community organization is a social process, and as such, is difficult to evaluate, especially over the short term. INDEV therefore often measured their success in different, more qualitative ways.
One example of successful community organization work was demonstrated by the actions of over three hundred women from all fourteen villages involved in INDEV’s milli-watershed. These women were participating in a rally and march through the nearby town of Ranapur to protest the selling of liquor in their villages. These women had initially approached INDEV for help in organizing this rally and INDEV had supplied materials for the making of posters and banners calling for the banning of liquor and for newsletters advertising the rally within the villages. The women, however, and not INDEV, were the force behind the organization of the march. As the march made its way down the local road towards the nearby town, groups of women began to sing about what they were protesting and also about who they were. At first the women sang that they were a government group involved in a watershed project. Then one woman, however, said “no, we are not a government group, we are women from fourteen villages who organized this rally against drinking.” Immediately the song was changed to reflect this emergent new identity shared by the women. While the women still carried placards that told of individual villages, they now consciously created new meanings to be attached to their joint actions, thus representing more than individual women from separate villages. For INDEV this was evidence of the empowering social change that they hoped their community organizing work would encourage. The women were attempting to bring about a change in their everyday lives and were doing so by recognizing the strength they held collectively to confront dominant forces like the town liquor sellers, a task they would be unable to perform as individuals. It was such events that were not measurable by the district administration’s forms that demonstrated the kind of local success that INDEV had accomplished.
Chapter Five:
The Practice of Participation II:
Physical Development and Training

In power and influence, counting counts. Quantification brings credibility. But figures and tables can deceive, and numbers construct their own realities. What can be measured and manipulated statistically is then not only seen as real; it comes to be seen as the only or the whole reality. Robert Chambers (1997:42)

Physical Development Work in Ecological Restoration

Most of the development funds within the RGMWD (80 percent) were directed towards the improvement of the land base through a combined strategy of the construction of soil and water conservation structures and the reforestation of hillsides and common areas. These actions (as outlined in Chapter Two) were intended to halt and reverse the massive ecological degradation that was seriously damaging the agricultural base upon which most of the rural population depended for their livelihood. This component of the RGMWD was therefore a key element in the overall approach taken by the GOI to improve both the condition of and access to the natural resource base used by farmers in rural areas. With the majority of funds directed towards this component of the program, it was also the area in which any development activities fell under the most intensive scrutiny by the local administration.
The need for PIAs to measurably demonstrate success in this area become
paramount due to the perceived need of the district administration to be able to account
for its financial expenditures to higher levels of government. "Targets", or pre-set
objectives for development activities and the ability to document their attainment became
a central concern for the district administration and therefore, in turn, a pressing concern
for PIAs charged with achieving these targets in the field.

**The GOI’s View on Achieving Targets and Their Documentation**

The Jhabua District collector, Manoj Jhalani, stated that before the start of this
recent participatory watershed programme “each government department involved in
development work carried out their work with tunnel vision, so that the overall effect of
the development was very fractured.” He went on to describe how, in this type of
development, each “government department only undertakes the technical activities
necessary to reach its administratively set targets, in the process they isolate themselves
from the work of other departments.” I questioned the collector if he felt this form of
isolated development implementation had a negative impact on the everyday lives of
local villagers. Agreeing that it did, Jhalani claimed that “such a sectoral focus
continually favours the technical and hence more measurable indicators of development.
This process then often results in the social components of the projects not being
undertaken due to an implementation approach that lacks integration between government
departments.”

Collector Jhalani explained that targets were necessary to the project, not because
the farmers or NGOs needed them, but because many of the PIAs were government
bodies that needed targets in order to work. He noted that without targets “we cannot
achieve the work on the government end. If I do not give them [government workers] targets then they will not do the work.”

The GOI Guidelines provided the basis for this objective accounting of development activities by PIAs involved in the RGMWD. In many ways the Guidelines document was consistent with the rhetoric of the discourse of participation and its call for local control over development activities. Yet, this framework for action also defined the use of participation as an organizational structure responsible for achieving set objectives within certain periods of time. The Guidelines did stress the need to approach the process of participation in such a way that the involvement of local people would continue into the future after the PIAs and government support had withdrawn. However, as with projects designed within the conventional project cycle, these Guidelines also set certain social, physical and technical objectives to be accomplished within the four years allotted for continued project support from the government.

The Guidelines stated that

Although circumstances may greatly vary from project to project, it is important that a few measurable and quantifiable success criteria with the lowest common denominator are fixed for different categories of works/activities under the projects to evaluate their success or otherwise in terms of the stated purposes. The success criteria ... are minimal in number and performance standards. The State Governments may supplement these with more success criteria if found desirable or prescribe higher performance standards (GOIa 1994:7).

These “success criteria” were divided into two categories: “specific technical criteria” and “general criteria.” The former consisted of noting the “percentage of survival, existence and maintenance of assets” such as the physical construction of water harvesting
structures, the measurable “recharging of wells, prevention of soil runoff,” and the meeting of “employment generation targets” (GOIa 1994:7).

Under “general criteria” a “performance appraisal” was to be made in terms of a “percentage of achievements in works programme, community organization and training.” The criteria for this evaluation was predominately based on achieving a percentage of participation among those farmers involved in the watershed project, as well as the attainment of more physical aspects of the development work. As an example, the successful “performance” by a PIA was by the achievement of “around 80% of the watershed area ... covered with treatment or development activities.” This achievement was to show that “80% of the number of project activities/works are implemented through user groups” and “completed within time and cost estimates.” There was to be the adoption by roughly fifty percent of the members of user groups of “80% of the technologies for crop management/afforestation/animal husbandry and horticulture”, with “80% of the completed works or common property resources ... taken over for operations and maintenance by the user groups or community/Panchayat” (GOIa 1994:7-8).

Other requirements were to have at least fifty percent of the “...villagers who are directly or indirectly dependent on the watershed ... enrolled as members of at least one self help group,” with separate groups organized for “women, scheduled castes/tribes, agricultural labour [sic], shepherds.” These self-help groups must “transact business with around 50% of the resources generated from amongst the members” and have “timely recoveries of around 80% of the outstandings.” Likewise at least fifty percent of the families must be involved in one user group, with “80% of the watershed development works/activities ... carried out through the concerned user groups.”
As can be seen in these examples, the process of participation, as outlined by the *Guidelines*, predominately consisted of achieving the necessary percentages of involvement of local people in the meeting of further percentages based on the reaching of targets concerned with more physical elements of the project (see GOIa 1994:18). Participation became an element that was expected to emerge (or to be accomplished with the support of the PIA) within a set period and used to accomplish further set (and most often physical) development objectives.

The district administration took these broad *Guideline* directives and fashioned a pro-forma which listed over seventy categories it decided would be used as indicators to track the development progress of PIAs in their village micro-watershed work. The pro-forma categories used by the district administration in its attempt to document the development activities of the PIAs, and hence the development activity of Jhabua District, closely followed the outlined “success criteria” for development actions found in the *Guidelines*.

PIAs in the RGMWD were then instructed to fill in these monthly pro-formas, or forms and reports, accounting for their progress in the village micro-watersheds. Every few weeks INDEV, like all of the PIAs, had to stop their work in the villages and focus their energies on filling in these extensive reporting forms. Each PIA was required to fill in category boxes which tracked numerous elements defined by the government in their attempt to document the work that was being undertaken by PIAs.

PIAs were required to account for financial figures which monitored the growth of deposits in the Village Development Fund and the Village or *Gram Kosh* Banks, as well as the number of women’s banks that had been formed in each village and the financial
contributions made by members. The PIAs were required to list the number of people or
groups that “benefited” from involvement in other government development schemes
designed to help women and children (such as the *Anganwadi*, *Poriyawadi* and *DWCRA*
programs),¹ or the involvement of people or groups in “energy conservation” and “bio-
gas stove” initiatives. Other examples of categories consisted of documenting the number
of herbal gardens started in villages, the number of volunteers recruited to teach literacy
classes and the number of children attending school within the village watersheds.

Each PIA was further required to indicate the development achievements they had
accomplished over time. In this system of comparative classification, the PIA was to list
three numbers for comparison. The first number was to indicate what had been achieved
up to the current point in time. The second number what had been achieved this month,
and the final number indicating the total amount achieved to date. In this way a linear
accounting of a PIAs documented accomplishments over time could be established.

Equally predominant in this mechanical accounting of development work by
PIAs, was the need for them to document the amount of funds that had been spent on
training sessions, community organization, and on the water conservation “treatment” of
community and private lands. These categories were further broken down so that not only
were financial expenditures represented, but also the number of water and soil
conservation structures built using these funds. The financial guidelines for this
watershed project allowed a fixed cost of 4000 rupees per hectare for the “treatment” of

¹ These were programs where young children were taught by volunteers, often older teenagers with some
education. These programs were also partially supported by the government which provided funds for the
providing of a midday meal for children and, if necessary, their mothers. DWCRA stands for
“development of women and children in rural areas”.

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land with soil and water conservation measures. Therefore, within the district administration’s pro-forma, calculations had to be made by the PIA relating the expenditure of finances to the amount of water and soil conservation measures that had been undertaken. This resulted in PIAs producing a further figure to be entered under a category heading which documented in hectares the “area” of government and private land that could be claimed by the PIA as being “treated” with soil and water conservation measures. Every month these numbers were tabulated by the PIAs and copied into these tables. These forms were then taken by INDEV to a general meeting for the PIAs at the collector’s office where the overall direction of the project was discussed, new directives or emphases laid out by the collector or sub-collector, and all pro-formas collected.

**INDEV’s Participatory Approach to Achieving Objective Targets**

INDEV’s focus on pursuing participation as a continually emerging social process through which local people gained the capacity and confidence to plan and manage their own development activities, was central to their development work. This approach was not forgotten by INDEV staff members while undertaking the physical objectives of their watershed development work. The development activity of improving the ecological condition of land and water resources was an important action for local farmers. Recognizing both the opportunity for wage labour and the chance to have their agricultural lands improved, local farmers, after overcoming their initial suspicions of INDEV, were anxious to have the development work start in their villages. INDEV, however, attempted to blend both the need for the achievement of these physical works, with an approach that continued to be participatory and empowering for those local farmers involved. INDEV believed both would produce benefits to the environment -- in
both the short and long term. For INDEV this was the way to encourage the emergence of
a process of development which would achieve the RGMWD program’s objective of
environmentally and socially sustainable development activities.

INDEV, however, often found that within the RGMWD program these twin
objectives of the physical treatment of the land and the empowering social development
of local people were at odds. The undertaking of a process of development which
encouraged the continued growth of confidence and autonomy among local communities
while meeting the accountability needs of the district administration was a constant
balancing act for the staff of INDEV. This balancing of priorities and the impact it had on
the development activities of INDEV was demonstrated to me on many occasions but
was made especially clear on one visit to the work being done by the farmers of
Budhasala.

Narain, Chandra, Vishal, Himanshu and I arrived at the site where a large number
of people from the village of Budhasala were repairing a series of earthen bunds (long
earthen mounds) located in a small catchment area at the base of a series of small hills.
The area was filled with activity as hundreds of people were working digging and moving
earth to repair previously constructed “bunds” as well as making new ones. The work was
being overseen by both the watershed chairman and the watershed secretary and was
progressing in an organized and productive fashion with a good portion already
completed even though it was still early in the day.

I could sense, however, from the actions of Chandra and Vishal that something
was amiss, that there was some kind of a problem of which I was not yet aware. As I
followed Chandra and Narain and some of the farmers around the work site, I could see
that there were some bunds that were very large in size and positioned on flat ground. As I would find out, these were “paddy bunds” used more to trap and contain water than to simply break its downward and destructive flow from the hillsides. When INDEV and the farmers had met previously to discuss and plan the work to be done in this area, this particular type of bund construction had not been suggested by the farmers. This particular piece of land where we now stood sat below a large catchment area that opened up to a wide semi-circular ring of hills that funneled water directly into the small area in which the villagers were now working. By the extent of the damage that had been already caused to the land, deep gouges in the hillsides and gaping holes in the previous bunds in the area, this runoff seemed to be quite severe and Chandra had worried at the time that the hills above should have been worked on first and “treated” with contour trenching and gully plugs to try to begin to slow the water-runoff higher up.

As Narain, Chandra, Himanshu and I continued to walk with the farmers throughout the fields, a discussion began to emerge about the work underway. Chandra, who was responsible for coordinating the work with the villagers in the absence of Narain, came to me and almost under his breath told me that “this is not good.” It seems that even though the villagers had initially discussed the work to be done with him and Vishal, they had then elaborated on their own plan, extending it into other areas and constructing different forms of conservation structures. When I observed to Chandra that the structures that these farmers were constructing in the fields looked the same as those I had seen built in other places, he commented that the bunds “were well constructed for the purpose that they were intended for, but some of them are paddy bunds and this does
not fit into the technical watershed plan for the treatment of the area that we [INDEV] thought was necessary.”

Chandra was clearly upset and worried that he would be held accountable for this perceived technical problem in the eyes of Narain. I questioned why he should be worried if INDEV’s goal as a PIA was to encourage the local farmers to plan and manage their own development actions using the knowledge that they had about the area. Surely the fact that the farmers had planned and carried out this work seemed to be a success for INDEV. Chandra, wandered off shaking his head, only to return quickly and repeat that it was a really “big problem.” “What should take precedence, the technical aspects of the development demanded by the government, or the wishes of the villagers?”

This raised a powerful paradox in the work of NGOs like INDEV intent on supporting participatory development. Chandra was an extremely devoted and hard worker and his own understanding of the process of participation within development was one that was growing over time. In this case, I could see that his focus was on the more technical aspects of the work. Equally strong in his dilemma was his sense that if this technical work was wrong then he had failed in his development job.

These concerns about the technical versus social aspects of development were also discussed in the field with the farmers by Narain and Chandra at the time of the positioning of the earthen dams. The watershed chairman assured Narain that if he felt that the work was unsuitable they would stop the construction. Narain, however, told them that they should continue doing what they believed to be the right way to improve the land, that it was their decision.
When I questioned Narain about whether the structures were in fact “technically wrong,” he replied that while their purpose and position might be faulted, the construction was excellent and appropriate—even if it did not always match the watershed plan that INDEV had planned for the area. He went on to explain to me that he had stressed to the farmers that they must take responsibility for monitoring the work themselves. The Village Watershed Committee of Budhasala knew that a limited number of rupees were allotted for the work to each hectare of land, and Narain emphasized that it was up to the VWC to ensure that the funds were utilized effectively. It was up to the committee members and the individual farmers involved, therefore, to understand that the work was not simply a form of wage labour, but that it represented a finite source of money which they controlled and could use to improve their land. INDEV was forcing them into planning for the future and into taking responsibility for decisions. In other words, the enterprise was more than just participation in development as daily wage labourers. Narain noted that wage labour ...will not go on forever and the improvements to the fields and the water table must be made to truly make this development sustainable in the long term. Wage labour will keep the villagers dependent on money coming from the government, even if it is improving the land. They must come to the realization that their best interest is to take an interest in their land first, that the making of a wage is secondary to this.

Narain admitted that by having the farmers assume control over their own decisions, it was expected that there would be times like the present situation when the technical aspects of the work as assessed through the standards of the government, may seem to suffer slightly. Narain, however, felt that this was a necessary and important compromise. As he explained, “if in the beginning you say something [to stop them], they
will think that we are trying to impose upon them and they will always look bad at you.”
Worse, he explained, they would feel that they had made a wrong decision, and needed to
look outside for answers. For the INDEV staff, the confidence gained by the farmers
coming to a recognition of their own abilities to plan, manage and control their own
development activities far outweighed any manageable loss of technical efficiency. After
this situation, Narain instructed Chandra and Vishal to handle similar situations so that
the technical elements of the development work were never privileged over “social or
confidence building” aspects of the development work. INDEV still readily offered their
opinions and suggestions for the work, but this was always in the form of a dialogue with
the farmers that, even if resulting in a heated discussion, was undertaken with the
understanding that the final decision and plan of action must be decided upon by the
villagers.

**Targets and Accountability: The Search for a Balance**

To INDEV, a watershed and its interwoven social and physical environments
were never static and unchanging. Therefore, they always approached their development
work as an emerging social process that constantly evolved over time through their
interactions with the farmers. This approach was not technically in opposition to that
formulated in the *Guidelines* document which stated that the “present Guidelines while
outlining the broad contours of various implementation strategies of the watershed
development projects, provide sufficient operational flexibility at the state, district and
project levels to enable them to respond to differing situations and aspirations of the
village communities and user groups” (GOIa 1994:4). As INDEV saw it, the *Guidelines*
were to be used by project implementing agents (PIAs) as a flexible set of parameters
within which to develop the most efficient way of reaching social, economic and ecological sustainability for the village watersheds. Rather than force people, their activities, and the finances attributed to the project into a pre-set bureaucratic plan, the project needed to evolve in tandem with the needs, perspectives and self-directed actions of the local people.

In contrast to this adjustable approach, however, many government workers approached the Guidelines as a manual of set directives. This strict interpretation of the Guidelines by government groups was seen during a training session organized by INDEV for a group of district government workers. Part of this training session included a visit to one of INDEV’s village micro-watersheds. Before arrival at the village micro-watershed, Narain explained to the visiting government workers that they may see physical structures built by the farmers that were not technically perfect in their construction and that this would be open for discussion. Narain, however, emphasized the holistic nature of what had been successfully achieved within the first two years. He told the government workers to focus on the fact that villagers were controlling their own development activities.

Despite this caveat, the government workers did not believe that the social progress outweighed the technical progress, and that in the long run, this would achieve sustained physical development. Upon arrival at the village micro-watershed site, government workers and the INDEV staff began to walk through the village lands that had been treated with various water and soil conservation structures. Immediately
government officials questioned INDEV about the water conservation structures that did not meet the technical standards professed by the government officials. Questions were also levelled about the financial operations of the village micro-watersheds: were the watershed secretaries doing all the accounting for the micro-watersheds and filling out all the forms asked for by the government and stipulated in the guidelines? Throughout the session in the village watershed there was little discussion between farmers and government workers except when the farmers were asked to confirm or deny some activity or procedure the Guidelines had set out and if the farmers had followed this faithfully. Little time was spent in discussion with the farmers, or with INDEV, about the obvious positive social elements of the work in the villages' micro-watershed.

This is not intended to give the impression that the technical work done by the farmers and INDEV was substandard, or that they saw it as unimportant. In fact, most of the work was excellent, but INDEV believed that involving the farmers was equal in importance to the technical aspects of the work. The INDEV staff noted that where government departments are the PIAs, the technical work is usually of a very high standard. This was due to the fact that when technical work is undertaken, the government workers are intimately involved in its construction and supervision while villagers participate only as labourers. Therefore while the technical aspects are excellent, the project suffers from a lack of meaningful involvement by local villagers. INDEV, on the other hand, reverses this operation. The villagers still provide the labour, but also direct the planning, implementation and management of the watershed. Through this

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2 What Narain was implying was that these structures may not be “technically” perfect if one used the values and specifications utilized by the government to evaluate the skill and technical construction of soil.
process the chances of future sustainability are much greater because of the holistic knowledge and sustained involvement of the farmers.

INDEV also stressed an appreciation for the learning curve with any new activity. They emphasized a process of development that allowed the farmers to plan and then reflect on what they had accomplished. While INDEV attempted to minimize what might be seen as the “technical” failure of the physical work, this was always done through a discussion with the farmers—not by ordering them to do specific things.

The staff of INDEV were dismayed and irritated by the reactions of the government workers who visited the village watershed activities. They noted, however, that the concentration by government workers on the technical aspects of development work is understandable given the history of government development practices. As Chandra commented “it is the technical [aspects] that the government worker knows well and therefore focuses on. From the completion of this technical work is shown the knowledge that they control [hold] and from this knowledge is exercised their authority.” This approach to development activities tended to reinforce an attitude among the farmers that any development work is something that they wait to be told (and paid) to do. For INDEV, this did not represent an empowering process of participation.

Evaluating Participation

Development practitioners like those from the GOI visiting INDEV’s milli-watershed are now faced with undertaking both their development activities and the evaluation of those activities in new ways. In the face of changing development concepts bound tightly to the renewed interest in the role of culture in sustainable forms of and water conservation structures.
development, current measures of success of development activities have been forced to shift focus beyond purely economic and material indicators. As Partridge cautions, however, this has raised many new problems. "Including culture in evaluation ...is not a matter of reducing cultural factors to a checklist. Nor is it one of synthesizing complex issues into easily digestible summary statements that result in incomplete measures. Sociocultural analysis with any practical value at all is grounded in complex systems that must be understood as such" (1995:207). Perhaps key to this process is the realization that it is much more difficult to see the effect of culture on development than it is to see the effect of development on culture (Groenfeldt 1986). It is easier to see how local cultures can be destroyed by certain forms of development than to see how involving local people and ways of knowing can help positive development.

Optimally, participatory development is a social process where the mobilization of local knowledge is encouraged and supported and the nature of change is decided by those who will be affected by it most. This, as we have seen, is different in many ways from conventional approaches to development where both the problems and solutions have been defined by external experts (Escobar, 1995; Ferguson, 1990). Local individuals and groups in this more conventional view of development are mobilized only to meet fixed and often physical objectives of the project.

The RGMWD program, in recognition of past GOI development program failures along these same lines, had been conceptually designed by GOI officials to include the active input from local people. The GOI's Guidelines for Watershed Development laid out the framework that stressed the need for the emergence of a form of participation that respected local cultures and would empower local people to define and manage the
development in their villages in a sustainable form. This view of participation as an end in itself, however, was in many ways compromised by the very framework by which the program was trying to provide for social, economic and environmental sustainability.

INDEV, like all PIAs involved in the participatory watershed project in Jhabua District, was directed by the Guidelines to “interact with the village community ... to understand their perspectives, perceptions and priorities” (GOIa 1994:25) in the effort to help local people improve their ability to plan and manage the development activities taking place on their lands. The Guidelines, however, as described above, also set forth “success criteria” for what was expected by the government from this development activity and that these results should be “measurable and quantifiable.” As the Guidelines stated, there must be “...a set of norms or criteria which are measurable and quantifiable to assess whether the end result [of the development work] has successfully achieved the purposes or not” (GOIa 1994:5).

In setting out what indicators should be used as the basis for this evaluation, the GOI in the Guidelines document used many of the conventional forms of evaluation for measuring success in terms of reaching social, physical and financial targets. Participation, while generally referred to within the Guidelines as a development process that was to encourage the meaningful involvement and emerging self-reliance of local farmers, was made “measurable and quantifiable” (GOIa 1994:5) based on a “performance appraisal in terms of percentage of achievements in works programme, community organization and training” (GOIa 1994:7). Because PIAs were required to achieve these targets, the process of participation was reduced to a series of measurable outputs.
By defining the “success criteria” in quantitative terms, the GOI left the door open for an interpretive definition of participation by the state and district administrations. This interpretation allowed the government bodies to organize and manage participation in a way that was consistent with current top-down government methods of implementation. Participation, following these conventional approaches, was understood by the district administration as the organizational strategy through which the attainment of set physical or objective targets were to be achieved. The ability to reach these targets then represented the achievement of participatory development.

The pro-formas became the central mechanism for an “objective” accounting for participatory development actions. Within the watershed project, the success of a PIA was measured by the district administration through the amount of participation the PIA could achieve and document through the use of the pro-formas. The usefulness of statistics to document successful participation was even doubted by those most concerned with their production. A government official working within one of the PIAs claimed that it was known as a time for “greeting, eating and cheating”. This criticism reflected the general cynicism about the integrity of the numbers that were claimed on the pro-formas by the various PIAs. The PIAs understood that failure to come up with positive numbers would be taken by the district administration as not performing participatory development successfully. However, with minimal field visits by the administration officials to monitor the work of the PIAs, the opportunity and pressure for PIAs to claim success by simply submitting enhanced numbers was high.

Similar to that described by Chambers as a process of “normal professionalism”, the production of this form of documentation allowed the district administration to
recognize participation through a structural framework with which it was already
familiar. In the process of this definition, the district assured that its construction of the
knowledge about participatory development, what it represented and how PIAs were to
undertake it, was the only permissible one.

The definition of what represented participation was dominated by the
district administration through their control of financial resources and the administrative
authority to restrict the activity of PIAs from certain actions, (and therefore the
VWCommittees with whom the PIAs worked), while rewarding other actions in the
attempt to successfully reach the quantitatively defined objectives outlined in the
Guidelines. This form of documentation, however, reversed the emphasis for PIAs from
establishing an open-ended and empowering process of meaningful participation as an
end in itself, to a strategy where local participation became a means for achieving various
pre-set targets demanded by the government.

At best this represents an inadequate appraisal of the impact of participatory
processes on development activities. At worst, if this form of evaluation is used to
structure the process by which development activities are undertaken, it can completely
undermine participatory efforts by development practioners.

**Effectiveness of INDEV's Participatory Physical Development Activities**

While INDEV was concerned with the physical and technical objectives of the
project and the environmental benefits that could accrue from this work, it was much
more concerned with implementing and building participation as a social process through
which the local farmers could organize themselves for sustainable development actions.
INDEV claimed not to have any “technical experts” like the district administration and its
various departments. Instead, it was proposed that INDEV was a team that would concentrate on the process of "organizational building" within the local villages. It was believed that the farmers in the area had substantial knowledge as to what development activities would be best or need to be done to their village lands.

When their activities are compared to the goals for meaningful participation set by themselves and the GOI, INDEV was very successful in the work it undertook in physical development. Narain clearly privileged building the decision making and confidence levels of local people over achieving perfect but unperticipatory technical work.

When judged by a technical measure only, INDEV still accomplished a great deal; the majority of the work undertaken in its watershed was technically correct. The difference between INDEV and the government workers' was the balance of emphasis placed on physical versus social goals. Even if there are some gaps in the physical work of the NGO at present, in the long term, INDEV will accomplish more physical improvements than a PIA that was not concerned with building the capacity of the local people to learn how to do this work and why it is important. The villages working with INDEV have a much better chance of continuing to treat the land and to repair treatments they themselves had planned and made than those who had no involvement in the process.

An outside measure of INDEV's success came towards the end of my time with the NGO. The watershed that INDEV implemented was becoming known as a success with many other PIAs and villagers traveling to Jhabua to visit INDEV and to see the positive participatory and technical work that it had facilitated.
Training

Beyond organizing groups of people in the villages, it was important that the villagers received training in how these groups operated and how they should make the decisions and policies that ran the groups. Formal training for these groups was often sidelined for the more demonstrable goal of simply forming the groups. Training, however, was seen by both INDEV and the GOI as a key activity in the watershed program. INDEV understood that without training, people would become dependent on the NGO and would never be able to sustain the work of the groups that were formed. Of all their activities, training was INDEV’s most problematic. The small NGO only had two community organizers for all 14 villages. It was the job of these community organizers to undertake training with the village banks, self help groups and other community groups. Because the pay was so low, the work so difficult and the area so isolated, one of these community organizers quit. INDEV was not able to find another community organizer to replace him. The one remaining community organizer was politically well-connected in the area and when it became clear that he was not undertaking training, INDEV did not immediately replace him. This left a very big gap in the training work that was so essential to the participatory goals of the project.

Measuring Development in Jhabua District: Women’s Banks

Women’s Banks were not originally part of the watershed development project framework as outlined in the Ministry for Rural Development Guidelines document. At the suggestion of Narain, however, women’s micro credit banks were added to the framework of the watershed project by the administration in Jhabua District and all PIAs were encouraged to support their set-up in the villages.
Women's banks have become an important aspect of development assistance as a form of micro-credit available to women who do not usually have this access. Limiting their membership only to women, these banks build their financial capital through the steady deposits of women who have joined together. Withdrawals can be made by the members of each bank, but only with the approval of the other members who agree on a repayment time period and the amount of interest that will be charged for the loan.\(^3\)

The district administration focused its documentation of the completion of various objectives within the RGMWD program through the monthly completion of pro-formas by PIAs. These pro-formas produced by PIAs documented their work within the participatory watershed project by reducing that work to a compilation of numbers representing what had been accomplished by them between the last submitted proforma and the present one.

An example of this process can be seen in the documentation of the women's banks or *Baira Ni Kuldi* as it had been called within the Jhabua District RGMWD program. Each pro-forma allowed for the documentation of the women’s banks within each village to be classified under a series of headings. These headings called for the number of women’s bank already formed within individual villages previous to the current accounting, how many banks had been formed this month, and finally, what the total number of banks were in each village. This information was supplemented by

\(^3\) For more information on the inception and growth of women’s micro-credit banks see Bornstein 1996; Yunus 1997; Aardenburg 1996. There has also been recent criticism leveled at the use of women’s banks in development projects as it has been found that they often put women in a position of danger due to the pressure from male family members to join these banks and to take out loans for male family members while leaving the women responsible for the repayment of the loan. A recent study carried out by Aimar Rahman for IDRC on the Grameen Bank found that of 120 female borrowers, seventy percent were subjected to increasing male abuse and were exploited as “middle men” in borrowing practices.
additional categories that asked for the total money deposited up until the last submitted
pro-forma for women's banks within each village, the amount of money deposited by
women this month in each village, and finally, the total amount of money deposited
within each women's bank in individual villages.

There is no doubt that this form of quantitative assessment is needed and useful in
providing a generalized picture of the formation of women's banks throughout the
villages within a PIA's milli-watershed. Using this form of accounting however, carries
with it inherent problems for a process of participatory development. First, does this
accounting process produce a reliable assessment of how empowering a process such as
women's banks really represents? And secondly, what possible dangers does this form of
quantitative accounting pose for the undertaking of participatory processes by PIAs
challenged to meet these administrative accounting procedures? These questions can be
discussed in terms of INDEV's work and the failures they experienced due to problems
associated with the form of accountability relied upon by the Jhabua District
administration to follow and evaluate the work of the PIAs involved in the RGMWD
program.

**INDEV's Work With Women's Banks**

One of INDEV's original community organizers was a man named Ajit. From an
affluent merchant family living in the town of Ranapur close to INDEV's milli-watershed
area and its fourteen villages, Ajit was very familiar with the immediate area. In Ranapur
his family operated a prosperous store and was also involved in lending money to local
farmers. It seemed that Ajit was well liked by the villagers involved in INDEV's milli-
watershed. Fluent in the local dialect and extremely well spoken, he seemed to be able to
captivate the farmers when he spoke with them about the watershed and outlined the role that they would play in its operation. Ajit was adept at organizing groups, whether women’s banks, informational watershed meetings that INDEV held occasionally for the farmers, or large information rallies for all the villages in the milli-watershed.

Unfortunately, as the other staff members of INDEV found out, he was not skilled at following up these initial large meetings with sustained smaller, focused gatherings of farmers to advance the planning for development activities.

While INDEV’s overall success in some villages such as Samoi, Kushalpura, Dhamni Nahtu, Sassapura and Bucchadungri was excellent, they had much less progress in other villages. Much of this failure can be directly related to Ajit and the lack of a sustained community-organizing process and training program in these villages during the first year of the project. In some of the villages only a small minority of the farmers initially participated in the development activities that INDEV initiated. While Ajit participated in many of the introductory meetings with the farmers of the various villages, he seemed to continue this contact only with those individuals in villages that seemed eager to participate in the watershed project. It soon became apparent that in these villages Ajit had been able to quickly form the women’s banks. Their formation became his central concern. In many of the more reluctant villages, where it was took more time to convince the farmers that INDEV was not a government agency or where the villagers lacked the confidence or were reluctant to come to decisions about development activities, Ajit’s contact with the farmers rapidly fell off after the initial approach.

While Ajit was very good at inspiring the farmers with initial discussions about the social and economic possibilities offered by the participatory watershed project, he
ultimately saw his development work in much the same light as the district administration. For Ajit “targets” were important. In line with the accountability structure that the district administration had set up through the pro-formas, the more groups Ajit formed, and the more people involved in those groups, the more successful he considered his work to be. After I had expressed an interest in the formation and operation of the women’s banks, Ajit would approach me daily and let me know the status of the women’s banks. The information he gave me usually consisted of the number of banks, the number of women involved, and the amount of money that had been deposited. I often questioned him about his discussions with the women about the future use of the banks, or I asked whether any of the women had decided to take out loans. Ajit’s answer was always that he was still building the membership of the bank and thus its operation of giving out loans had not started.

At first I accepted this as reasonable, but after many months I began to doubt if the banks were accomplishing much beyond their initial formation and regular contributions. Due to Ajit’s work, INDEV was able to claim the formation of many women’s banks, some of them with quite a large number of contributors. As per the pro-formas, and in the eyes of the district administration, INDEV was seen as very successful in this initiative. This, in turn, was a direct reflection on the work of Ajit. In discussion with the village women, I discovered that there was often a lack of any real knowledge about the bank’s operation among the women involved or what the procedures were for applying for loans.4

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4 I undertook these discussions with the women after having been involved with the project for almost one year. The project at this point had been underway for almost 20 months. Many of the women’s banks had
Even those women who were aware of the basic operation of the banks, were often uncertain about the possibilities that existed for them through the use of the funds that they accumulated in their banks. Many of the women simply saw the women’s banks as a place to have funds out of immediate reach of the men in their families and to be saved for cases such as sickness in the family or for other family emergencies. The idea of “loans” was still unclear to many of the women who often believed that they could simply take their money back when it was needed; a potentially serious and conflict-raising action in terms of relations with the other women (and their families) involved in the women’s bank. Only in a few villages had the women’s banks begun to issue loans to women on repayment conditions set by the members within the bank.

When I told Narain and Chandra that there was a real lack of knowledge among the women about the operation of the banks, they quickly acknowledged that they also had seen this problem arise in other areas of their work. The poor community organizing work in some of the village watersheds had become increasing clear to them both. Ajit made no attempt to take a social process approach to development within his work. In the case of the women’s banks, Ajit spent almost no time with the women in assisting them with their ability to work together as a group, to plan and determine their needs, and to use the funds available to them. He concentrated only on the initial formation of the group of women as a bank and the regular contribution or deposits of money by them. This was an accounting that could be duly recorded within the monthly pro-formas

been in operation for quite some time, some for as long as 10 months. INDEV had initially found the formation of these banks to be relatively easy due in large part to a concurrent offer from the district collector to match any amount over 1500 rps that was deposited by the women in their banks.
documenting what at first glance seems to be a highly successful implementation process for the formation of women's banks in the villages.

These problems continued to build with Ajit finally leaving the employment of INDEV. For INDEV this only complicated the situation as now the staff of INDEV had been reduced to basically Chandra, Vishal, Prakash, and Narain. With Narain often out of town and Prakash staying in the office to do accounting work, increasingly the undertaking of all aspects connected to the watershed program fell to Chandra. In many of these villages, therefore women's banks were left to function on their own. INDEV was now seriously falling behind in the focus on the social processes so intrinsic to the current operation and future sustainability of the participatory project. Even in their absence, however, some of the villagers took the initiative and attempted to build on what INDEV had earlier started with them.

One example of this arose during a visit by the state secretary for rural development to INDEV's milli-watershed. A meeting was called with INDEV, the state secretary, the watershed committees, and the women's banks. The members of one women's bank arrived for the meeting with money the women members had collected for the months that they had been without Ajit to help them deposit it in the bank in town. This money was usually deposited for the women by Ajit. When he left INDEV, he also left the women without the knowledge of how to deposit these funds on their own. Rather than stop the bank, the women simply collected the money among themselves in an effort to keep the bank going. INDEV was impressed with the fact that the women had kept up with the deposits of the money. This only re-confirmed, however, that there was also a serious lack of training and the squandering of a real opportunity by INDEV to assist
these women in meaningful ways. INDEV was failing to support the very process of empowerment that they had hoped to kindle in these women when the banks were started, a process that was readily recognized by the women in their membership in the women’s bank and their continued financial contributions.

Narain and Chandra at this point in the project were becoming increasingly concerned that INDEV was failing to support the type of social process work necessary to see the emergence of sustainable social, economic and environmental activity within the watershed. INDEV was coming under increasing pressure to start the more physical aspects of the watershed development from both the district administration and the farmers in those villages where farmers had shown an interest in being involved. For the district administration this was understood to represent the most important aspect of the development program in that it brought about an ecological improvement to the land. For INDEV, however, most of their watershed activities to this point had been focused on building participation in the program. Now, with the formation of the watershed committees completed, some of the more involved villages had started planning and organizing the soil and water conservation work in their village watersheds to provide this economic benefit to the farmers. For the farmers, therefore, this work offered daily wage labour that was badly needed.

While this more physical work represented a form of economic benefit for local villagers, INDEV was worried that they could lose much of their initial success in the village micro-watersheds due to their lack of continued training and community organization activities among the villagers. In some of the villages where INDEV had initially established a good relationship with the farmers, there was a growing disinterest
in the watershed program due to the lack of continuing contact with members of INDEV. Accusations were beginning to be leveled by the farmers at INDEV claiming that INDEV was now acting in similar ways to that of previous government officials. Narain acknowledged this growing problem which he attributed directly to the actions of Ajit.

There was a good effort from the watershed development team, Chandra, Vishal, Prakash, but our problem was that our lack of training in areas almost destroyed the whole thing because it was his [Ajit] duty to support the community and we lacked this. We could only start work in the month of March/April (1996), it was too late, it should have started in December, and then the others had to take over this community organization work. That was our weakest point, otherwise we could have completed 50 percent of our work in the first year, but we only had a real team of two persons (Fieldsite Interview, November, 1997).

Completing the first year of the project INDEV attempted to consolidate their gains and minimize the damage to their earlier successful community organizing by limiting their work to a few of the more involved village micro-watersheds (Samoi, Kushalpura, Bucchadungri, and Sassapura) in the hopes that success shown in these villages would help to encourage those other village micro-watersheds where INDEV’s presence and therefore the interest of the farmers had rapidly declined. Narain explained that he had told Chandra to attempt to create a demonstrative effect in these few villages as "what he [Chandra] was trying to do was spread the work out in so many places, and was still therefore behind in these late months. I told him that his work was diluted, you will not be able to complete the work in all these places. You will not have anything to show. So I told him to stop work in all the villages except those where the community organization was good."

In retrospect this strategy worked well with INDEV achieving successful soil and water conservation work in these villages. By the middle of the following year INDEV
had managed to hire a new community organizer who restarted the process of community organizing in those villages where INDEV's presence had dramatically declined. While re-establishing the trust necessary to work closely with these communities was again a long process, INDEV was able to take these villagers to the micro-watersheds that they had concentrated upon to let them see with their own eyes and speak with the farmers there as to the successful work that the farmers had undertaken.

Equally encouraging was that INDEV was also able to hire two additional women community organizers whose sole work was to concentrate on training and organizing the women participating in the women's banks to take advantage of the opportunities that the banks offered. Soon, the women's banks became not only an empowering source of financial help for the women, but also a venue through which the village women and the INDEV staff members could meet regularly and discuss other issues.⁵

Informal Training and Its Importance to the Process of Capacity Building

Although faltering, sometimes badly, in their attempts at formal modes of training, INDEV was also continually involved in an informal process of training with the farmers. While not recognized as such by the district administration due to its unmeasureable nature, this form of informal capacity building was critical to heightening the farmers' recognition of the knowledge and skills they possessed and to strengthening their ability to use these assets with confidence in development activities. A focus on these informal activities is therefore important.

⁵ By July, 1997 INDEV's milliwatershed had 25 women's banks in operation with a total savings of 254,005 rupees (approximately $10,000 Can).
Shortly after beginning my work with INDEV, I found myself weaving through potholes on the road leading to a rally organized by INDEV for the farmers taking part in the RGMWD program. Part of the informal training to develop the confidence and skills to participate in the watershed activities was nurturing a sense of equality, both among the farmers and between farmers and outsiders like the INDEV staff. The rally I attended took place in the courtyard of a small school in the village of Tandi. As I entered the courtyard I saw that on the low walls surrounding the school, INDEV had positioned posters that attempted to express, without the use of words, different development messages like the need for clean water or the planting of trees. Across the back of the courtyard where the wall ended, the INDEV workers mounted a wall of blankets on which they had pinned up large pieces of paper with various examples of the PRA exercises carried out by INDEV over the past few months with the villagers.

As villagers entered the schoolyard they were given a folder by a INDEV worker which contained pamphlets about various development concepts as well as a pen and paper. The farmer was then asked for their name by the INDEV worker who noted it down and then asked them to either sign or leave an imprint of their thumb beside it. As person after person signed in this manner the extent of illiteracy in the villages became obvious.

Initially only the men stopped to sign and collect their folder. As I watched, Chandra, Ajit and Vishal started to call the women back to the table to sign in and receive their folders. Obviously the women were not accustomed to receiving things equally with the men, especially when dealing with representatives of authority. After some initial confusion, however, the women started to re-approach the desk to pick up their folders
and sign in. I noticed that the villagers did not receive the pen, pad and pamphlets based on their being able to read or write. Rather, it was an expression of inclusiveness and equality between men with women, literate or not, that was being made visible by INDEV, both in terms of their own relationship to the villagers, as well as what they hoped would take place between the villagers in the watershed program.

After the rally some of the farmers went home, but many stayed to join with Narain, Chandra, Ajit, Sanjay and Vishal to form small discussion groups. Sitting in circles on the tarps INDEV had spread on the ground, these groups of men and women continued to discuss the finer details of the development work to come, asking and answering questions back and forth between themselves. INDEV, at first glance, often seemed to be lecturing the farmers when discussing these different aspects of development. These discussions, however, were not as paternalistic as they seemed. The INDEV workers held no misconceptions as to the extensive knowledge possessed by the farmers related to their own social, economic and environmental situations. Many of the villagers had had soil and water conservation structures on their fields for years, often constructed through past government programs, and understood clearly the objectives of this conservation strategy. What INDEV was trying to encourage, was the idea that farmers had knowledge and could work together to analyze a problem themselves. They tried to help the farmers to see that local people had important opinions, ideas and perspectives that INDEV wanted to listen to and discuss with them.

The emerging relationships between INDEV and the farmers involved a process of continual negotiation over the type of social interaction that was to take place between them. Initially some of the farmers found it difficult to come forth with development
plans that incorporated a long-term vision for their village lands, often asking INDEV to make these decisions for them. INDEV, never expected farmers to come to these development decisions solely on their own and always offered to discuss with the farmers the options open to them. INDEV would refuse, however, and often repeatedly, to start any development work in the village unless the farmers worked with INDEV to devise a plan of what they would like to see take place. This process would sometimes stretch into weeks before the farmers within a certain village could come to an agreement amongst themselves and then approach INDEV with their suggestions for development activities.

In one situation INDEV was approached by a group of villagers who asked for 2000 rupees to fix the sluice gate in a stop dam broken by the monsoon waters. When asked when this damage had occurred, villagers reported that it had been broken for eight years. Apparently as the government had built the dam the villagers expected the dam to be repaired by the government or an NGO. Now with INDEV working locally, they wanted the funds to hire labourers to fill in the sluice gate with earth to stop the water run-off. INDEV refused to pay and suggested that the villagers should attempt to do the work themselves with support from INDEV. The villagers asked repeatedly for the funds, but each time were refused by INDEV with the same advice that they should first attempt the work themselves. Finally the villagers did attempt to fill in the sluice gate. While they were unsuccessful due to the heavy rains of the monsoon season, they promised INDEV that they would try again in the dry season before returning to INDEV for further help.
Effectiveness of INDEV’s Training Program

Although there were several factors to explain the situation, INDEV did not carry out its formal training program in a way that supported the goals for participatory development. While some technical training was undertaken by INDEV’s technical advisor, the important work of organizational training for women’s banks and other community groups was severely lacking. No training was offered in the crucial areas of policy development, running meetings, communicating with members, conducting research, reporting to NGO and government officials. This left many groups unsure of what they should be doing, or how to do it. A serious gap was left in the attempt to empower the local villagers with knowledge, confidence and skills that would last beyond the project’s completion.

Although Narain did eventually find a new community organizer, those groups who most needed support were left alone for a period of time. By focusing on the strongest villages, INDEV was able to show success as required by the government pro-formas. This consolidation of effort did however cause damage to the villages that had been originally approached and then put on hold.

Because my study focused on the early part of the project cycle, it is possible that more training is now being accomplished by INDEV. The emphasis on filling pro-formas and completing physical targets as well as staffing problems made it difficult to focus attention on the meaningful social process of training. Nevertheless, INDEV could have placed a real emphasis on replacing the missing and ineffectual community organizers.

*Narain and Chandra even offered to come and help move the soil needed to stop the flow of water.*
Narain himself could have come to Jhabua more often to help with the community organizing until replacements were found.

In the area of informal training, INDEV was much more successful. In terms of building confidence and a sense of equality and ability in the farmers, the informal training was very beneficial to the goals of participation. The social process that involved empowering farmers with the realization that the decision making process was in their hands, was slowly encouraged by INDEV. By not doing work for people, but offering to help, as in the example cited above, INDEV built the enthusiasm and self-initiative of the villagers and attempted to break the dependency that had built up over the years.
Chapter Six:
Conclusion

As participation becomes more central to the development process and as NGOs are increasingly involved in undertaking this form of development, the need to understand how these two elements contribute to current development situations is important. This study of the work undertaken by a small Indian NGO in a participatory watershed development project in central India, has examined the barriers to and support for a process of participatory development.

By examining the understanding of participation held by the NGO, villagers and government officials, and how participation was enacted, this study has demonstrated the challenges to undertaking this alternative form of development. It has also examined the importance of social processes to participatory development, and how certain forms of measurement can impede participation.

The recent ascension of the discourse of participation to a position that challenges dominant development discourses, has been considered by many as a positive movement towards viable alternative approaches. In the face of continued failures to achieve sustainable social and economic development, the approach of participatory development has emerged as the new hope for beneficial actions.

What has been intriguing about the continually expanding use of the alternative concept of participation in development approaches, is that it inherently calls for the re-structuring of current relationships shared between external authority groups responsible
for providing development assistance and those who are the recipients of this aid. The equalization of power relations between those in need and those giving aid is central to the empowering philosophy which underlies the concept of participation. At the core of this philosophy of empowerment is the encouragement and support given by external groups to previously marginalized people as they gain the confidence to use and build their knowledge and skills to plan and manage their own development activities.

Participatory development undertaken as an empowering process is therefore a social process shared between external experts and local farmers. It is a social process that creates an environment within which outsiders do not simply carry out development actions for local groups, but rather help marginalized people to reflect and analyze the social and material constraints with which they are faced and to question and challenge these barriers. Meaningful participatory development, therefore, is not only a means to economic self-reliance, but is also a process central to individual and community social empowerment by overcoming unequal relationships of power.

An empowering process of participation is not carried out in isolation by marginalized people. Power relations are equalized, but participatory development for marginalized groups is a process through which they gain this social and economic autonomy by working in partnership with external groups. The sharing of knowledges, skills and resources within an enabling environment in which each group listens, respects and trusts the other is paramount.

With the increasing presence of participatory approaches in development has come the expanded role for nongovernmental organizations (NGO). For many development agencies, NGOs are the organizations that offer the best opportunity to
assist local communities in their efforts to achieve social autonomy and economic self-reliance. Seen to be less encumbered by bureaucratization and hierarchical management structures, NGOs are often believed to be more willing to engage directly with local communities than governments and large multi-lateral development organizations.\(^1\)

However, while participatory development and the use of NGOs seem to offer an enticing alternative to the continuing lack of success from conventional econocentric development approaches, new problems have arisen. As the approach of participatory development becomes more readily accepted by mainstream development organizations and governments, participation as a development process has come under increasing influence from conventional development approaches. The potential for the rhetoric of participation to outshine the realities of its application in practical situations is all too possible. Does the process of participation still fulfill its earlier promise of re-writing the rules by which rural development activities are to be undertaken and by which poor people relate to the more powerful?

In the effort to understand some of these potential and practical problems in the application of the principles of a participatory approach to development, this study examined the work of INDEV, a small Indian NGO engaged in a Government of India sponsored watershed development project in Jhabua District, India. INDEV’s philosophy was to undertake an approach of participatory development with local Adivasi farmers that would foster a process of empowerment increasing the farmers’ social autonomy while improving their economic self-reliance through better access to resources.

\(^1\) As stated in Chapter Three, I make this statement with the knowledge that there is a diverse range and size of NGOs operating at the local, national and international levels. Equally important to note, is that as NGOs increasingly become central to development activities, many have had to deal with equally increasing size
Development in Jhabua district was not a new concept to either the district administration assigned to undertake these actions or to the Adivasi populations who have been the beneficiaries of this assistance. In many rural areas like Jhabua district, development assistance, and the government officials and workers who undertake the implementation of programs and projects, represent to local people the most tangible evidence of the actions of a distant, central government and its authoritative rule.

In Jhabua district, the nature of the social interactions shared between government workers and local farmers had not been of equals. This uneven relationship came to define the form of development activity expected by both parties. This resulted in a social context in which all planning and decisions about development were made externally. The interactions between Adivasi villagers and external actors such as government officials within development situations was therefore predominately shaped by these past interactions. In essence, the character of these relationships and the meanings each group attached to the activity of development were socially constructed through their interactions with each other.

Undertaken as a social process, participation is dependent on these intersubjectively accomplished meanings which form the foundation for joint actions between local people and external agents. For INDEV, a process of meaningful participatory development relied on the character of social interactions that emerged between themselves and local farmers, and between themselves and government development officials. It was within these interactions that meanings were socially

[Note: The text continues here, but the screenshot only captures up to this point.]

which often limits their ability to directly operate at the local level. Many larger NGOs have overcome this restriction by channelling their alternative development efforts through NGOs which are locally based.
constructed and used to guide development actions directed at the social and physical transformation of those areas involved in the RGMWD program in Jhabua district.

An understanding of the character of these development interactions, and the meanings attached to them by the actors involved, are important to understand the barriers and supports for a process of participatory development as experienced by a NGO such as INDEV.

**What Barriers Exist for a Process of Meaningful Participatory Practice by an NGO?**

Historically, the Government of India has attached great importance to development within its nation-building policies. Consequently, vast financial and material resources have been directed towards development work undertaken by government departments throughout India. In the effort to manage and effectively guide these resources, the Government of India has amassed a large centralized bureaucratic structure through which these development activities are administered down to the local level. The dominance of this management strategy, and its reliance on econocentric principles, is still held onto tenaciously by those who have traditionally depended on these approaches to guide their development work.

India, however, like many other countries, is heeding the increasing call for “participation” in development projects. District administrations, like that in Jhabua district, are therefore faced with the need to show greater flexibility and responsiveness to local people, an approach that government officials are finding difficult. The Indian government’s growing dependence, at least conceptually, on participatory processes and NGOs as more effective development implementing agents, has not, however, resulted in
an equal deconstruction of the hierarchical structure which effectively concentrates
authority and power over development activities with the government.

District administrations operate within a hierarchical administrative structure that
functions from the top down and with a responsibility only to higher levels of
government authority. This has allowed local farmers little input into discussions about
development activities taking place in their communities. This conventional approach,
consistent with the practice of “normal professionalism” within development, can
severely disrupt the process of participatory development, negating the real possibilities
for qualitative change in power relationships.

Conflicts Over Measurement of Development Activities and the Use of
Targets

Rather than granting primacy to the social aspects of participation ensuring the
sustainability of development activities, the district administration focused on the
reaching of “targets” as the objective representation of the achievement of participatory
development. This allowed the district administration to fit the concept of “participation”
within a management strategy that had never previously allowed for the self-directed
development actions of local communities. Faced with the subjective and social nature of
this collaborative participatory process, it attempted to normalize participation through a
process of classification. This strategy of statistical classification gave the process of
participation the structure it lacked, freeing the concept of its subjective nature for the
district administration.

The use of a statistical representation of participatory development was not
simply a by-product constructed by the district administration, rather it was a referent to
the type of institutional organization and management processes historically used by the
district. Accustomed to objectively envisioning induced change through development actions as a linear connection between problem and solution, the administration planned development actions as the application of technical solutions. This resulted in an institutional structure unable to cope with the idea of induced change through development activities as an ongoing and responsive social process continually adjusting to the local context.

This institutionalised bureaucratic structure, however, has proven remarkably adept at co-opting the discursive rhetoric of participation even as it subsumes the concept within existing development approaches. While acknowledging the need for a "participatory approach" based on local input, the district administration limited the parameters of that input. Through this politics of control exercised by the district administration, it advanced its institutional interests and agenda of attempting to retain authority over development actions. The district administration thus established both its control over the construction of development knowledge about participation and how that knowledge was to be applied. Even while using the rhetoric of a promised decentralisation of power, the administration continued to govern the development process. The district administration was once again the "expert" or "development professional" through which development meanings, in this case about the process of participation, was produced.

Local Communities and their Interaction With External Agents

INDEV's work in the first formative years of the RGMWD were critical as they worked with communities to establish the foundation for lasting forms of social, economic and environmental development. INDEV realized that for participatory
development to be effective it had to be used as a social process that first addressed the unequal relationships prevalent in conventional development approaches used in Jhabua district. Without this change in social relations, no form of meaningful development could take place.

INDEV's position, therefore, became one of continual mediation between themselves, the directives of the district administration and the desires of local people. Each actor brought different narratives and experiences of past development activities to their interpretation of participatory development. This meant that INDEV struggled to implement the participatory project in the face of an administration that was extremely reluctant to relinquish control and local farmers who saw non-participation as the best way of avoiding risks to their survival given the past development experiences that they had had with the government.

The Support for a Process of Meaningful Participation

Using participation as a social process meant that INDEV did not privilege the production of physical, measurable objectives within the participatory development work it undertook with the farmers. Even when the development project moved into the more active phase of physical work, INDEV continued to focus on the social aspects of a participatory process over the objective achievement of material targets. As discussed in Chapters Four and Five, INDEV understood that if participation was to represent a process of meaningful empowerment, it must emphasize often unmeasurable aspects such as trust and confidence building among local villagers. Without the establishment of a level of trust between them and the Adivasi farmers and between the Adivasi farmers and
the development process of participation, any future development activities would not be successfully sustainable.

The ability of INDEV to encourage this type of empowering process among local communities was demonstrated to me by an event which took place in Budhasala. During a temporary respite from the heavy rains of the summer, the INDEV workers and I had started working our way through the villages assessing how the various recently completed soil and water conservation structures had held up. At the end of the day we gathered in front of INDEV’s office before heading home. Even though it was late in the day, the sun briefly broke through the overcast and I could feel the heat begin to rise, my shirt instantly shrinking to my body as can only happen during those breathless periods between monsoon rains. As we waited, Chandra, the assistant project officer, returned to our group after talking to some villagers from one of the micro-watersheds farther down the road. “The villagers in Budhasala chased Ajit and his photographer out of the village,” Chandra told us, “they had gone to take pictures of the break in the pond after the last hard rain, but the villagers told them to leave. They said that they had built the pond themselves, it was their responsibility and therefore they would fix it at no charge to the government. They said he shouldn’t make trouble for them or INDEV.”

I was quite intrigued by the latest turn of events in Budhasala. Before the start of the RGMWD program, the construction of a pond had to be authorized and decisions made by various district government departments before the actual construction could begin. Recently this policy had been stopped in Jhabua district. The collector saw no

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2 Ponds, such as the one built in the village of Jalapur, are constructed by placing a large earthen dam at the open end of a natural depression between hillocks. Runoff from the monsoon rains collects in these ponds and is used for irrigation purposes or as a water source for the villager’s livestock during the long dry
need to involve the district’s administrative staff in this technical assistance as he believed that the villagers knew best where these ponds should be put. Chandra told me that if the construction of this pond in Budhasala had been undertaken by the irrigation department it would have cost about eight lakh (800,000) rupees. Instead, it cost less than one lakh and the villagers were paid for their labour directly from their own village micro-watershed project fund. When the construction of this pond had begun, officials from the local Irrigation Department had arrived to challenge the villagers of Budhasala, stating that the pond would fail without their input. The villagers took on this challenge and many individuals took part in the pond’s construction.

When Chandra first heard that the Budhasala pond had been breached, it did not worry him unduly as he knew that damage often happens and that it was repairable. What did concern him and the other workers from INDEV, however, were the rumors that were circulating about INDEV and its development work in the villages. Over the previous two months newspaper articles had been appearing in the local papers claiming the mishandling of funds through the mismanagement of the participatory development project by INDEV. These articles were written by Ajit, (once an INDEV community organizer) attempted to show INDEV in a bad light. Instead of supporting the success of the participatory development project, Ajit had started to concentrate on calling attention to any problem, such as the failure of the pond, that he could attempt to attribute to project mismanagement by INDEV.

season. This particular pond that had been damaged by the rains had been planned and financed by the village watershed committee in Jalapur and built solely by the members of the village.
The INDEV staff was worried that even though the allegations were false, the discussion about INDEV, the quality of their work and the work of the villagers, would undermine the good working relationship that now existed within the micro-watersheds. Initially, the village of Budhasala had been one of the more reluctant villages to become involved in the participatory watershed development project offered them by INDEV. Suspicious of the intentions of INDEV, seeing them in the light of past government development schemes that often resulted in their being taken advantage of, the farmers had been slow to warm to the idea of a self-directed and self-managed development program on their village lands. But now, over two years later, they actively demonstrated through their actions and words directed towards Ajit emerging notions of ownership, self-reliance and empowerment. In their building and claiming ownership and responsibility for the pond, they were clearly defining their participation as having agency, rather than the simple mobilization for the plans of others. This was an obvious change that had been brought about through INDEV’s focus on participation as an empowering social process, rather than participation used by external actors as a technique for controlling development activities.

While most villagers have no desire to move completely out from under the financial umbrella of continuing government support, they do express the need for this relationship to be based within some form of local village autonomy that moves away from the control and dependency of previous dealings with the district level government. As demonstrated in the words and actions of the Budhasala villagers, new relations of power were emerging. Through their interactions with other social actors (INDEV, government workers, the journalist), the farmers expressed these notions of growing self-
reliance and social empowerment. In a seemingly quick social altercation, the farmers had consciously declared their autonomy from INDEV and the beginning of a break from a position of dependency on the government. The villagers directly challenged the government workers' claim that they did not have the knowledge to build the pond. New relations of power emerged as the farmers asserted their agency with the government workers and then later with the journalist over the construction of the pond.

The Need For Flexibility

INDEV, however, did not ignore the need for material “outputs” in their development work. Improving the economic lives of the farmers was an important aspect of the participatory project, as was the environmental restoration of both private agricultural and common lands. However, INDEV’s focus on participation as a social process ensured that how this development work was undertaken and not what was produced, became the critical marker of meaningful progress. While physical activities improved the condition of the agricultural land, INDEV continually stressed the process through which the local farmers increased their ability to control how this development work was planned and sustainably managed.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the process of community organization is not easily undertaken within a restricted time period. While it is understandable that the GOI was attempting to provide general guidelines for use throughout India for the undertaking of the watershed development program, the lack of flexibility for PIAs to respond to local social and economic conditions undermines the process of participation. As the RGMWD program progressed, INDEV complained about the increasingly complicated nature of the administrative structure and timelines through which the GOI and the district
administration attempted to organize the operation of the program. Narain commented that

flexibility should be given. The guidelines started with the fact that it [the RGMWD program] should give total freedom to the village people for planning and implementation. If you go reading the whole thing [the guidelines], you read that you have to do this thing, and then this thing. So many components, so many rules and regulations, what are all these things. It is a contradiction in itself, it is to be a participatory program organized by the local people (Field site interview, April 1996).

A need for flexibility within project guidelines to allow implementing agents to adequately assess and then plan in relation to local social, political and economic contexts is important. As discussed earlier, INDEV’s participatory work was often undermined by the lack of flexibility in project timelines and the need to reach pre-set targets. If participatory projects are to be truly participatory in nature with marginalized communities assuming control over planning and management of development activities, then the imposition of complicated regulations and procedures for communities to follow is counter-productive.

Lessons Learned From the Study of an NGO and Participatory Processes

Participatory development is a viable alternative to conventional development approaches. Its implementation by NGOs such as INDEV, however, can be directly impacted by the relationships it shares with overseeing administrative bodies. INDEV, and the participatory processes it was attempting to use with local farmers, were subjected to external controls from the local district administration that ultimately subverted many of the more positive characteristics possible through a participatory approach.
For participatory development to truly be an empowering process of development which results in sustainable social and economic benefits for marginalized populations, then new ways to value and evaluate its effectiveness are necessary. Through the examination of INDEV's work we have seen that conventional forms of development evaluation can undermine the social processes which are central to the implementation of participatory processes.

New understandings of accountability must be established if participatory development is to become useful within conventional approaches to development. The district administration's need to be accountable for the development activities under their supervision is understandable. The argument is not that anyone undertaking a participatory process with marginalized groups should not have to be accountable for their actions and financial expenditures. Rather, the argument is that these lines of accountability have to be refashioned to adequately represent and encourage the use of a process of participation which incorporates an appreciation of its underlying philosophy of empowerment and social autonomy.

As seen in Jhabua district the district administration used a form of statistical representation to monitor, evaluate and account for development actions taking place within the RGMWD. These numbers were then used to demonstrate to higher levels of government the success of the participatory development program. The pressure on PIAs from the district administration to produce these measurable activities was therefore constant. The danger in this approach was seen in the work of INDEV and its failure to adequately respond to the lack of effective community organizing by one of its staff members. The staff member's preoccupation with the attainment of measurable
development activities directly undermined the social process which INDEV expressed as critical to its successful implementation of a participatory approach with local communities.

Lines of accountability, therefore, must be changed so that being responsible for your development actions upward to higher levels of authority represents the ability to demonstrate that those people who are beneficiaries of these actions see them in a positive light. Accountability must be present, but it must extend in both upward and downward directions to adequately evaluate the success of a participatory approach. New forms of participatory evaluation are therefore necessary. This process would incorporate local people into both the planning of objectives of the project, as well as the monitoring and evaluation of whether or not those objectives have been reached. INDEV, while often mentioning the benefits of this sort of participatory evaluation system failed to make any real attempt to ensure that this form of accountability was in place in their work.

Increasingly local NGOs like INDEV have become the nexus between communities finding new voice and economic control and dominant civil administrative systems struggling to reassert themselves in the face of the devolution of their power. This is a continually contested space where the administrative need to represent development as a linear progression of causal actions meets the attempts of NGOs to support a development where cause is bound up in holistic circles of process that connect individuals and groups within their social, economic and environmental worlds.

Participatory development offers real opportunities for improving how development activities are undertaken. However, a fuller understanding of the barriers it
faces is necessary if it is to reach its full potential as an empowering process of
development. If we argue that there is a culture of development, then the real task is to
find ways in which to understand how this complex social world emerges and evolves
through shifting forms of organization. The ability to recognize, examine and evaluate
social processes as the important component of development allows us to move our
research outside the current discourses of development, discourses still often fashioned
on principles of economics and quantitative measurement.

The opportunity does exist to expand the critique of development and its
interaction with local cultures by exploring the nature of qualitative social change, its
relationship to alternative modes of development like participation, and to producing
evaluation markers that refuse to be counted in old ways. The ethics of this role is a
positive one as it joins with local voices to fashion and define an approach to
development more of participation than of mobilization.

While expressed in a different way, the essence of this thought was described to
me by an old farmer from the village of Samoi. Approaching ninety years of age, yet with
extremely bright eyes he told me how eighty years ago the land around the village had
been thick with forest, but was now mostly gone. He explains how with the passing of
forty years, the earlier presence of the royal Raj was replaced by the growing presence of
a people's government, but just as the Raj had done, the new government often used his
position as *tadvi* to organize the community for meetings and for work. I asked him if
now, another forty years later, his responsibilities were still the same. He smiled and,
gesturing at the two other men sitting with us, told me that now he could rest, as his
responsibilities were shared. "Now it is different," he explained. "The committee meets
and we all make a decision as to what we want to happen in the village. *We decide now,*” he emphasized, looking straight at me. As the other two men nodded in agreement, I glanced down the hill and saw the wind approaching as the brown grasses bent to its passing. As no one picked up the thread of conversation, we sat and waited, patiently, for its momentary coolness to arrive.
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Stiefel, Matthias and Marshall Wolfe  

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Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt  

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Uphoff, Norman  


Urla, Jacqueline  
Wade, Robert

Wallerstein, Immanuel

Wolf, Eric

Wood, Geof

Wood, John R.

Wright, Susan

Yunus, Muhammad
APPENDIX 1
INDEV’S Micro-Watersheds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Micro-watershed</th>
<th>Villages Included</th>
<th>Geographical Area (hectares)</th>
<th>Population Scheduled Tribe</th>
<th>Population Scheduled Caste</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dhamni Nathu</td>
<td>278.24</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dhamni Chimna</td>
<td>213.53</td>
<td>558</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dhamni Kuka</td>
<td>50.72</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Uberao</td>
<td>395.77</td>
<td>1128</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dhamni Nana</td>
<td>132.03</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Matasula</td>
<td>883.95</td>
<td>2317</td>
<td>71</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tandi</td>
<td>194.74</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Budhashala</td>
<td>473.99</td>
<td>1094</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dabtalai</td>
<td>407.91</td>
<td>1112</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wagwa</td>
<td>279.47</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Samoi</td>
<td>1257.72</td>
<td>2533</td>
<td>112</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Kushalpura</td>
<td>610.45</td>
<td>1305</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Buchadungri</td>
<td>320.92</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sassapura</td>
<td>307.78</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>5805.22</td>
<td>13325</td>
<td>272</td>
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APPENDIX 2

“A Walk Through Jhabua”

Looking down at Jhabua from the ridge-line, the two largest structures easily visible within town, the radio and television tower to the North and the old palace near the centre of town, represent the span of time during which Jhabua has remained a central location of authority and local power. The palace, once representing local authority, is now diminished with age and filled with various business offices as it sits alongside one of a series of the town’s water reservoirs that had been built many years earlier. Still filling with water each year, this reservoir forms a small lake used by women to wash clothes, by children to swim and splash in its shallows and as a place to simply sit near the small temples which dot its shores. Filled to overflowing by the rains in the summer, a strip of muddy ground emerges around the reservoir, at first hesitantly, and then with ever-increasing speed as the beginning of the dry season forces the water to surrender the land it had won during the monsoon. Gradually, as the dry season sets in, the reservoir shrinks to a large pond half its former size as the water becomes thick with green algae blooms and water lilies. Fishers move along the widening shore or paddle slowly in boats shaped like cups as they cast their nets in the attempt to catch the small fish stranded in the shallowing waters.

When I leave the ridge-line and walk back into town, I join the small road that turns from a gravel trail to a paved road at the bottom of the hill. Following the road into town I first pass by the bright orange, southwest facing Hanuman temple. Overlooking the technical college in the distance on the outskirts of Jhabua, the temple always seems
to catch the slightest breezes for those who sit on the wide concrete platform that surrounds it. Next I pass the primary school where small children line the fence and repeatedly call out good morning to me in English punctuated by laughter. Leaving their amusement behind, I continue down the road passing many side lanes which branch off between rows of small connected houses. If I look to the end of these lanes on my right, I can see the mosque with its outside loudspeakers through which the daily calls to prayer are sung and heard throughout Jhabua. Continuing on down the street I come to a square where a number of roads venture off in various directions. If I turn right I quickly come to the shore of the reservoir lake. Following this road, which bends with the lake’s shoreline, I would cross a bridge that joins the larger lake to its smaller cousin and would arrive at the local college and lakeside government rest house. If, instead, I continue straight through the square, passing the police station and then bending left as the road forks, I come to Jhabua’s main commercial street with its assortment of stalls and businesses selling everything from gold and silver jewelry, to metal suitcases, plastic and aluminum pots, photocopies, haircuts, music tapes, clothing, electronic goods and packaged food stuffs.

As I near the central bus stand, and if it is a Sunday, I know that added to the regular noise and diesel fumes will be the vibrancy and congestion of the weekly market or haat. Once a week farmers and merchants stream into Jhabua to find a place between the regular shops and vegetable stalls where they spread out whatever they are selling, from huge mounds of bright red chili peppers, purple onions and green eggplant, to metal cow bells, stone grinding pestles and thick sandals made from old tires. As I make my way through the streets, narrowed even more by these recent additions, I find myself
competing for the open spaces with men selling bananas from three-wheeled trolleys and
cows nonchalantly wandering the streets yet always ready to snatch unwatched
vegetables from stalls. I dodge groups of people moving down the road or gathered in
front of the tea stalls. There are Hindu women in iridescent red, purple and dark green
saris and Adivasi women and young girls clustered together, draped in vibrantly coloured
shawls of deep blues, dark reds and vibrant greens. Adivasi men in shorts, shirts and
brilliant yellow, pink or red cloth wrapped into turbans around their heads, young Hindu
men in western style clothing and older Hindu men in more traditional dress cluster in
separate groups as they smoke and talk. As I make my way through the market stalls I
pass by a man selling musical flutes which he has stuck on the small pegs of a larger
central stick so that they fan outward like an inverted Christmas tree that he is holding by
its top point. I move past goats pegged under a tree and chickens captive under
overturned baskets, each a small bit of the surplus that many families bring to the weekly
haat to earn extra money.

As I move past the bus stand and out of the area where the haat takes place I
come to a junction in the road which takes me out of town to the north. Instead I turn up
the road that houses the Forestry Department offices, appropriately domed by the
branches of large trees that provide a restful shade broken only occasionally by shafts of
sunlight that have leaked through the cooling green canopy. Farther up this same road,
which rings Jhabua, is the complex where expensive houses are made available only to
workers of the government gas company. Then in quick succession come the District
Collector’s house, the District Rural Development Administration office (DRDA), and
finally the courthouse and main government office building. The DRDA and Collector’s
office are the places with which I will become most familiar. Though I will only visit these buildings in person a few times during my stay in Jhabua, each structure becomes the physical representation of the embodiment of power and authority in the district. It is from these buildings that the numerous development directives and instructions from the district administration flow out to the development agencies in the field. I would often hear these buildings referred to by both NGO workers and villagers almost as if they were distinct persons.

Finally, I arrive back in the small residential district where my house is located. While I would come to know most of these places well over time, at first they seemed as strange to me as I must have seemed to the inhabitants who watched me pass from their storefronts, house balconies and office windows.
APPENDIX 3

“Ralegan”

Shortly after beginning my research work, I joined INDEV and approximately 150 villagers, both men and women, involved in the Jhabua watershed development project, to travel to a neighboring state to visit a very successful watershed project. Like many of the villagers I would be amazed by what could be accomplished in a relatively short time through the use of watershed planning techniques that incorporated social, economic and environmental aspects into a holistic approach to development. This broad reaching change was initiated in 1975 by the work of one man, Anna Hazare. The village of Ralegan Siddhi, Maharashtra, had previously been like so many other villages in India—consumed by poverty and environmental decay—but now, 23 years later, this village was a place of social calm, economic prosperity and environmental rejuvenation. Anna Hazare on his retirement from the Indian army had returned to his village and dedicated himself to improving the welfare of the village and its inhabitants. Ralegan Siddhi had slid into a state of social, economic and environmental decay. With barely one acre of irrigated land per family and the remaining land in the village rain-fed (but with no water harvesting structures in place), the agricultural production of the village lands was not substantial enough to support the villagers living there. Many family members were forced to migrate to urban centers to seek employment and to use local moneylenders for loans to survive. Alcoholism became a endemic problem in the village and exacerbated conflicts over land and resources. Political affiliations and caste restrictions had almost completely negated any kind of cooperative strategy among the villagers (Lokur 1995: 3-4). The social fabric of the village, as well as the environmental condition of the land, had
been extensively damaged by the time that Anna Hazare returned home to his village in the late 1970s.

As the staff of INDEV gathered in the early evening on the day we were to leave for Ralegan, Narain told me that he was arranging to bring the Jhabua watershed committees on this trip because, as he stated to me, there was “much greater worth in people actually seeing something that has worked with their own eyes and to hearing how it was done with their own ears rather than having those same people sit in a classroom to look at slides or listen to a lecture on the benefits of micro watersheds.” This trip was actually mandated in the Guidelines for Watershed Development as a place that villagers should be taken to see as an example of what was possible if these types of watershed methods were tried in a small village area. Narain thought that this trip to Ralegan offered an unique opportunity for the farmers from Jhabua to see the possible benefits that could accrue from this type of watershed work. He also expressed worry, however, about the disturbance these visits would create in the village of Ralegan and how it might interfere with the ability of the Ralegan farmers to continue their own development work.

Crammed and tired after travelling for two days from Jhabua District, we finally arrived late at night in Ralegan and were immediately directed to a series of guest houses in which to spend the night that the village provided for visitors. Early the next morning I was awakened by the shouts of children doing what sounded like calisthenics. I opened up the door of the small guest house to be greeted by the sight of young children running around the courtyard sweeping the paths, picking up garbage, even clipping the grass! Apparently, as I would find out later, these were children from outside the village who were boarding at the school located in the village. Following the children who had
finished their chores around to the back of a nearby building, I waited my turn to wash at the water tap. As I stood there I looked around at all the trees that surrounded the building. While the darkness last night had stopped me from seeing all the trees surrounding the area, I was now struck by the greenness that was in such contrast to the arid brown landscape that we had been traveling through for the last two days. Everywhere I looked there were trees. I could tell from the uniform spacing that these trees had been planted, yet some of them were quite large and therefore must have been planted quite a while ago. As each of the children finished washing they moved across to a small rise covered in trees that behind the nearest building. Not visible at first, but now rapidly filling with children, were low concrete benches and tables that sat shaded from the heat of the sun between evenly spaced horizontal rows of trees. Shaped like a small amphitheater, I could not have imagined a better classroom to inspire and foster environmental awareness in children.

Ralegan Siddhi, because of the success of its watershed management, hosts many visits from other interested groups and has a standard tour for them. Led by a Ralegan farmer, the tour discusses the village’s use of solar power, biogas use from public latrines, and the inception of the concept of donated labour (shramdari) given by village members to projects like the school set up to educate their children and now also taking in boarders from outside the village.

On the completion of his army service Anna Hazare initiated a series of actions on his return to Ralegan in an attempt to repair the social fabric of the village and overcome the barriers to community cooperation that had been constructed over time. Believing in the strong influence of religion in Indian life, he began to repair the village temple that
had been allowed to fall into disrepair. Using his own funds he started work on the renovations and was soon attracting the youth and other members of the village who also donated time or funds to his unselfish cause. Next, he and the youths attacked the problem of alcoholism and shut down the liquor dens in the village through persuasion, or if needed, by force. Over time other initiatives were introduced. Group marriages were held which drastically cutting wedding expenses and the often crippling loans taken out to pay for them. Education was made available for all the children in the village and the designation of “untouchable” was removed from all social interactions between villagers. Family planning measures were introduced and a focus on improving the health of the villagers through proper sanitation methods was begun in the village. Finally there was the fight against corruption and the establishment of a Gram Sabha (village decision making body) that was open, transparent and inclusive (Lokur 1995). However, even with the focus on social rehabilitation in the village, it was still necessary to tackle the many problems that were associated with the lack of irrigated land and an agricultural production that was insufficient to support the village members.

Anna Hazare and the villagers of Ralegan confronted these problems through a concentration on the environmental rejuvenation of the village lands through a program of watershed planning and management strategies. We were next taken to view the areas where the Ralegan farmers had their fields and common lands. The village lands of Ralegan had been divided into three micro-watersheds of roughly 500 hectares each. The watershed area was managed by fifty five farmers. As we arrived in the small valley that made up a large section of the watershed, I was struck again by the contrast between the valley floor which was green with crop growth, and the surrounding low brown hills.
We descended from the buses and gathered around the Ralegan farmer leading the tour, who explained the many physical elements of the watershed's management. He started his discussion with a story of how the farmers in Ralegan had planted grass on the hill to cause the rain water to seep back into the ground instead of running down the hillsides and causing destructive soil erosion. We were asked to think of hills without grass as being like a head without hair. If you put a drop of water on a bald head it will quickly run off. If the hill has grass, however, then it is like a head with hair and the water will be soaked up by the hair and given to the scalp slowly, just as the grasses on a hill will stop the water from running off and being lost to the soil. Instantly understanding the concept and admiring the simplicity of the way in which the scene had been set, I found myself laughing with everyone else as I looked around at the surrounding hills.

The rest of the tour introduced us to the world of watershed management—check dams, field bunds, gabion structures, percolation tanks, gully plugs, contour trenching, all elements of a coordinated plan to maximize the retention of water and the reduction of soil loss through water erosion. We walked across a huge bund (earthen dam) that crossed the valley floor and was made to stop the flow of water down the valley. This bund was topped by many planted trees whose branches spread out over the deep wells that sat interspersed on the down slope side of the bund benefiting from the water that was held up by the bund and that percolated down into the water table to be accessed through the wells. One of those wells was used as the irrigation source for the planting of a field that sat at the top of one of the hills surrounding the valley. Climbing the hill I noticed all the contour trenches, long shallow pits which ran horizontally along the contour of the hill. Each trench had been dug so that the earth from it was piled on the
downside of the trench forming a small wall. The spacing between the horizontal trenches depended on the steepness of the hill, the distance decreasing as the angle of the slope increased. Each trench was part of a grid that covered the hillside used to catch the soil and water runoff during heavy rains.

When we reached the top of the hill we were met by a huge field of corn surrounded by a low field bund. The Ralegan farmer explained how the water was pumped up from the wells on the valley floor to irrigate the field and that any water, whether from irrigation or from rain, was prevented from flowing back down the hillside by the field bund that surrounded the hill. Instead, the water was allowed to percolate down through the soil and into the sub-surface flow of water back to the valley floor to collect, once again, in the wells for future use. At this point many of the Jhabua farmers began to ask questions and discuss among themselves what they saw as they walked through the corn field. Most of the Jhabua villagers expressed their surprise that all this water and irrigation was done without the use of large ponds or a river which were the main irrigation sources in their own villages. Many observed that they should attempt to use such low cost structures and ideas in a similar way on their lands. One Jhabua farmer commented; “before, we thought the government would do it [make dams], but we should do this, there is no need for big dams. We can do this for our village.”

After returning to the buses we briefly visited the restored temple where Anna Hazare had begun his attempt to revitalize the social and economic life of his village and then drove on to a location where he himself addressed us. His talk ranged over the many elements that had brought success to Ralegan such as the anti-drinking campaign, the use of shramdan (voluntary labour), the restriction on the felling of trees and the need to
plant grasses to stop soil erosion or the issues around family planning. He kept returning, however, to the need to focus on social processes such as cooperation, participation and trust among village members to attain the self-reliance that would let them break their dependence on government support.

Later, as Anna Hazare neared the end of this talk, four jeeps pulled up to the low platform where we were sitting and a group of men alighted and sat with us. As Anna Hazare drew his discussion to a close by telling us to never focus on the “I” and the “my” in our relations with others, but to always try to accomplish things by starting with your own actions as an example, all the government workers quickly jumped back into their Town and Country jeeps and left the area. Apparently these people were government workers, officials and politicians also from Madhya Pradesh, who had been told that they should visit this place by the government to see what had been accomplished in this watershed. Narain doubted, however, that they had even taken the time to view the watershed works and had simply shown up so that they could “check it off their list” as having carried out the visit. In a relatively short time with INDEV and the farmers, I was becoming aware of the view held towards the government and its involvement in local development. Veiled with mistrust and constant suspicion by the farmers, and as disinterested, ineffectual and possibly corrupt by INDEV, local government representatives were held by both groups as being largely responsible for the mismanagement and lack of results in the development activities that took place in Jhabua district.

Encouraged by what they had seen in Ralegan, many of the farmers expressed hope that this new participatory watershed development project would offer them the
chance to establish a new process of development that was not entirely dependent on the
wishes or control of government officials. For most of the farmers and as for myself, the
initial impressions of what could be accomplished using an integrated participatory
watershed approach for development planning was based on what we saw at Ralegan.
The trip was immensely successful with the Jhabua District farmers often discussing the
social and environmental rejuvenation that had taken place in Ralegan Siddhi. In many of
the subsequent village watershed committee meetings, both farmers and INDEV workers
used examples of what they had seen and heard in Ralegan as they explained to others
why their villages should try to accomplish similar things. Having shared in seeing what
was possible, the first tentative steps of the participatory watershed project slowly
emerged as INDEV and the farmers began to work together to bring about new forms of
social, economic and environmental change to their village micro-watersheds.
# List of Acronyms and Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APO</td>
<td>Assistant Project Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bund</td>
<td>Low earthen wall designed to slow force of water and decease water induced soil erosion. Is used around fields or across fields.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charpai</td>
<td>Bed-like structure used for sleeping or on which to sit.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chai</td>
<td>Milk tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check Dam</td>
<td>Small dam made of interconnecting rocks. Each dam is positioned within a gully to reduce the force of water in the attempt to limit the destructive soil erosion caused by this water runoff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIDA</td>
<td>Canadian International Development Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collector</td>
<td>Member of the IAS (Indian Administrative Service). The individual holding this administrative position is the senior representative of government control in the district.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contour Trenching</td>
<td>Shallow trench which follow the contour of the hillside. These trenches are roughly one foot deep with the spacing between trenches increased as the slope becomes less steep. The trench is dug to limit soil erosion due to water runoff by forcing water back into the ground instead of continuing down the hillside.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPT</td>
<td>Cow Protection Trench. Trench is dug around the boudrry of the forest to prevent cows from entering the forest and feeding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRDA</td>
<td>District Rural Development Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOI</td>
<td>Government of India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gully Plug</td>
<td>Small structure of rocks piled in gullies caused by water runoff on steep hillsides. Used to reduce the forceful flow of water and limit soil erosion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Haat</td>
<td>Weekly market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDEV</td>
<td>Indian Development (NGO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moutou</td>
<td>Strong winter winds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nahla</td>
<td>Small river</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevad</td>
<td>Land which is used by villagers for agriculture or other purposes, but to which they do not hold legal title. Can also be called “encroached” or “captured” land.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Nongovernmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pakka</td>
<td>Cement house</td>
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<tr>
<td>Panchayat</td>
<td>Traditional village council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<td>------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Panchayati Raj</td>
<td>Village-level elected government.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phalia</td>
<td>A small cluster of houses and land within a single village boundary. There can be numerous phalyas associated with and within a village.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIA</td>
<td>Project Implementing Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRA</td>
<td>Participatory Rural Appraisal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proforma</td>
<td>District administration form to be filled in by project implementing agents documenting development activities undertaken or completed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RGMWD</td>
<td>Rajiv Gandhi Mission on Watershed Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarpanch</td>
<td>Elected local representative at the village level of the Panchayati Raj.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shramdan</td>
<td>Donated labour (work done for no payment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tadvi</td>
<td>Village elder who holds limited local level authority within the village as well some religious responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VWC</td>
<td>Village Watershed Committee</td>
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<td>WS</td>
<td>Watershed Secretary</td>
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