

IDPAD

COMMON PROPERTY WATER RESOURCES

DEPENDENCE AND INSTITUTIONS
IN INDIA'S VILLAGES

ARABINDA MISHRA
NAYANATARA NAYAK
BUCHA CHATE
PRANAB MUKHOPADHYAY

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With a CD containing household-level
data for the study region



Common Property Water Resources

Dependence and Institutions in India's Villages

Authors

ARABINDA MISHRA
NAYANATARA NAYAK
RUCHA GHATE
PRANAB MUKHOPADHYAY



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Preface

Water in many parts of rural India has become a contentious resource, and village ponds, tanks, and wells, which traditionally have been treated as common property, are often the most adversely affected water resources. Population growth and increasing adoption of irrigation-based technology in agriculture are acting as the primary drivers, driving the burgeoning demand for water in India's villages. At the same time, government policies on rural development have altered the socio-economic dynamics of the villages, leading to the development of new institutional arrangements for managing local resources. Largely, these new institutions do not take into account the norms, conventions, and local custom that traditionally guided the usage of the commons.

While current policy interventions mark a shift from government ownership towards user control, the responsibility of supplying water in most cases still rests with the state. Further, the existing acts remain relatively vague on the question of actual property rights over water itself and usually refer to property rights over water infrastructure. In the ultimate analysis, the success of the policies and legislative acts depends on the way they are implemented. People's participation in commons management ultimately depends on mutual trust, awareness, general consensus, and commitment among all stakeholders.

This book, an outcome of a research study undertaken under the auspices of IDP AD (Indo-Dutch Programme on Alternatives in Development), touches upon the above-mentioned issues linked to CPWRs (common property water resources) but mainly focuses on the institutional aspect using a case study approach. In fact, the strength of the book lies in the unique set of case studies identified for the very first time.

These case studies are analysed at length and give interesting insights into the functioning of community institutions, traditional and otherwise. The study also makes a specific contribution to the understanding of private property–common property linkages in the irrigation sector and introduces the importance of rural water markets as an evolving institutional arrangement for allocation of the resource. Given the new policy thrust on the revival of rural water bodies through people’s participation, the book is a timely contribution in terms of its assessment of the functioning of community institutions in different social contexts.

The book is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 1 gives the background and research design of the study. Chapter 2 discusses the underlying concepts and seeks to put together a research framework based on a thematic review of the literature relevant to the Indian context. Chapter 3 brings out the empirical findings related to the contribution of CPWRs to rural quality of life. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 cover the institutional aspect, starting with the functioning of informal water markets in the villages (Chapter 4), then discussing the legal and policy framework at both the national and state levels (Chapter 5), and finally introducing a set of case studies on community management institutions. Chapter 7 concludes with supplementing observations from the stakeholder workshops and the field.

The book is designed in such a way that it appeals to a broad audience consisting of researchers, students, and development professionals. It comes with a CD containing the survey data for 1000 households belonging to the study region, which, it is hoped, will be appreciated by researchers. Students and instructors will find the dataset especially helpful in relating theory to practice. The case studies can be used by instructors as ready-made pedagogical material on the subject.

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We take this opportunity to thank all the individuals, households, public functionaries, NGOs, and institutes in selected states for giving necessary information during our

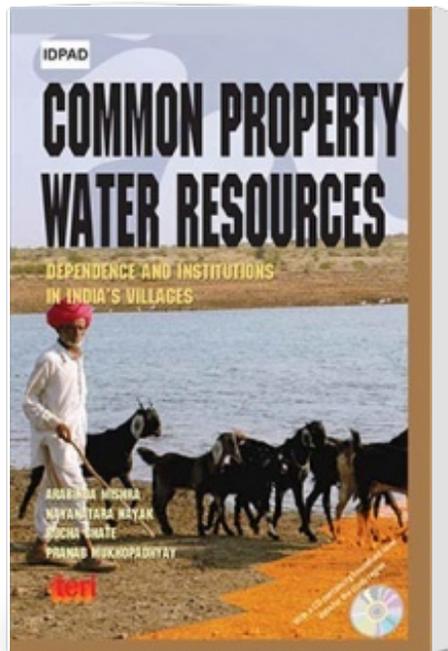
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field survey and stakeholder workshops. We thank all the government departments in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, and Rajasthan for giving relevant information for the study.

The feedback for the study was received from the eminent experts who participated in the review workshop organized at CMDR in February 2006. We thank all those who attended this workshop, shared their experiences, and provided decisive comments for facilitating smooth completion of the study.

We earnestly hope that the present study has made a modest beginning in understanding the extent of dependence of the rural poor on CPWRs (common property water resources) and presenting some lessons from the case studies on community water resource management.

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Author : Arabinda Mishra,
Nayanatara Nayak, Rucha
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