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Selection of Development Agenda with the Community by the Generation of a Shared Understanding

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Abstract

This article attempts to address the problem of generating a common understanding of the multidimensional aspects of a community across its diverse social groups required for setting a development agenda, by carrying out a Participatory Action Research exercise in the tribal village Gawandwadi—population 293. The proposed process ensures involvement and empowerment of the local people and reduces the influence of the existing social stratification in the community—mainly gender based stratification is discussed in the article. It emphasizes four key components: (a) understanding the contextual community level decision making process, (b) participatory study of the multifarious quantitative aspects of a community, (c) identification of the differential qualitative aspects—such as needs, desires, and feelings—borne by multiple groups—based on gender, class, and caste—across the community, and (d) arriving at a shared appreciation of rationales for these differences. The process reduces possible conflicts incurred due to the lack of ownership of the development goal within the community.

Keywords: gender and decision making; development agenda; community based participatory research; empowerment; needs assessment; India

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1.0 Introduction

The development paradigm adopted by mainstream development practitioners post world war two is often associated with reductionist analytical assumptions, top down and centralized planning and action, and standardized universal methods to fix perceived universal problems (Chambers, 2007). Other than being beneficial in certain aspects—such as building of roads or running a huge network of public distribution system—, the methods, tools, and processes borne out of this paradigm

have not been able to address the problems of the global poor (Leech & Scoones, 2006). Therefore many development thinkers and practitioners sought to appreciate the process of development through decentralized planning and action through people's participation. The multifaceted concept of community development is becoming increasingly impressive in delivering solutions to community problems (Matarrita-Cascante & Brennan, 2012).

People's participation has become the central theme in the appreciation of community development in a number of participatory research projects. It mainly involves the approaches of community based participatory research and participatory action research (PAR) that seek to involve community members in the process of social change. Community based participatory research works on a research topic of importance to the community with the aim of combining knowledge and social action to improve community health and to reduce health disparities (Wallerstein & Duran, 2006; OFallon & Dearry, 2002). Many researchers have described PAR in different ways. Maguire (1987) described PAR as an alternative style of research that uses a three part process of social investigation, education and action to share in the creation of social knowledge with oppressed people. Barnsley and Ellis (1992) defined PAR as being a community directed process of collecting and analyzing information on an issue or situation for the purposes of taking action and making change. PAR is an approach to working with people that explores social phenomena and involves people in the planning, implementation, and dissemination of research outcomes (McIntyre, Chatzopoulos, Politi, & Roz, 2007). Baum, Macdougall, and Smith (2006) define PAR as a collective self-reflective inquiry undertaken by researchers and participants to improve the practices of participants. It encourages the poor and deprived to examine and analyze the reasons for their deprivation. PAR is committed to the suggestion of Freire (1970) that the key to social change is through dialogue and 'conscientization', wherein marginalized people engage in critical analysis and also organize action to improve their situation. Overall, PAR is a participatory research approach where the knowledge that is generated is intended to help to solve practical problems within a community and, ultimately, contribute to a fairer and more just society. Theory may be generated and refined and its general application explored through the cycles of the action research process.

Community development broadly comprises six stages, namely study of the community, goal setting, identification of solutions, planning, implementation of the solution, and its sustainable operation (Coalition, 2013; Cavaye, 2013). Although there are ample numbers of publications on PAR projects pertaining to people's participation in planning and action for a solution to realize a predefined idea of development, participatory and context specific goal setting has not yet been given much attention.

Goal setting by a community requires generation of a shared vision. It requires consultation of all sectors of a community to get wider support and broader implementation (Moss & Grunkemeyer, 2010). It balances and interconnects the social, environmental and economic interests of the community. Often, community members find the process of generating a shared vision frustrating and disillusioning due to their scant participation (Richards & Dalbey, 2006). Community wide meetings may tend to involve a diverse population that may impede wider participation by the choice of location, time, and required

commitment. As development ideas rarely come out from a shared vision of what a community needs, wants, and desires, they often end in conflict (Goldberg, 2005; Moss & Grunkemeyer, 2010). Growing complexity and diversity within a community has made the problem of common consensus even more difficult.

Many approaches to community level planning have involved visioning through an intensive community workshop (Green et al., 2001; King, 2009).

Some approaches have also proposed ways to involve diverse groups in the planning (National Charrette Institute, 2013; Moss & Grunkemeyer, 2010). Approaches that empower community members go a step further to involve a broader representation of residents to generate community change (Flora & Flora, 2008). Moss and Grunkemeyer (2010) proposed a strategy for vision-making for sustainable communities, that involves: inclusion of all sectors, long term planning, balancing among social, economic, and environmental goals, and multidimensional assessment. A community participation approach that involved the people right from identification of the problem has successfully reduced the pressing problem of alcoholism in 200 villages in Gadchiroli district, India (Bang & Bang, 1991).

These approaches or methods are based on an assumption that the community members share a similar understanding of the community, which in turn facilitates generation of a common vision followed by setting of goals. Gender roles in these participatory development processes are often ignored (Bennett, 2005). Many development practitioners lack a gender planning methodology as they do not recognize gender as an important planning issue (Moser, 1993). Participatory development planning activities usually engage gender issues to take into account only economic aspects, while those that involve empowerment and equality are ignored (Goetz, 1994; Cornwall, 2002; Tandon, 2002). Academic research has mainly focused on revealing the complexities of gender relations and corresponding divisions of labour in different socio-economic contexts. The research practices rarely attempted to devise certain methodological tools so as to imbibe gender awareness into the development practice (Moser, 1993).

Marginalization of women from participatory projects of rural communities in semi periphery and periphery countries remains an issue due to hegemonic gender norms and lack of their voice in the process due to the paucity of the critical mass (Mayoux, 1995; Cornwall, 2002; Agarwal, 2001) and women's involvement is often limited to implementation (Guijt & Shah, 1998; Lind, 1997). Women's influence on decision making does not rest simply on getting them on to decision making committees, but on how and whether women represent women's interests, whether they raise their voices and, when they do, whether anyone listens to them (Cornwall, 2003)? Oftentimes, the cultural assumptions and practices determining women's and men's roles impede women's development (Young, 1993). The intrinsic motivation of women to participate in the decision making process gets diminished due to the social norms (Breuer & Asiedu, 2017).

Participation and the level of participation are determined by various factors including rules, norms, perceptions, and endowments, which can disadvantage women (Agarval, 2001; Mason & Smith, 2003). Women speak less, speak what is on their mind's less, and are listened to less than men. Something proactive needs to be done to equalize authority for women (Mendelberg & Karpowitz, 2016). Mainly, women's participation in the decision making process remains

consultative (Agarwal, 2001). If women are not involved in the decision making process, their distinctive priorities that form an important part of the people's development are not considered and these priorities may not shape the process (Mendelberg & Karpowitz, 2016).

Sustainable development is impossible without gender equality (Bayeh, 2016). Gender inequalities are extracting high economic costs and leading to social inequities and environmental degradation around the world (Stevens, 2010).

This article attempts to address the problem of the generation of a common understanding of multidimensional aspects of the community across its various social groups—mainly gender—required to generate a shared vision for setting a development agenda.

This central question was investigated by carrying out PAR in a tribal village Gawandwadi. A spiral model of action research proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) (see Figure 1) was used as a flexible structure to carry out the participatory action research. The model comprises self-contained cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This model offers an opportunity to visit a phenomenon at a higher level each time, thereby, facilitating the progress towards greater understanding. The PAR facilitated to incorporate, refine, and align the people's diverse knowledge, perceptions, and views required to generate a common understanding of the community.

Figure 1. A Spiral Model of Action Research.
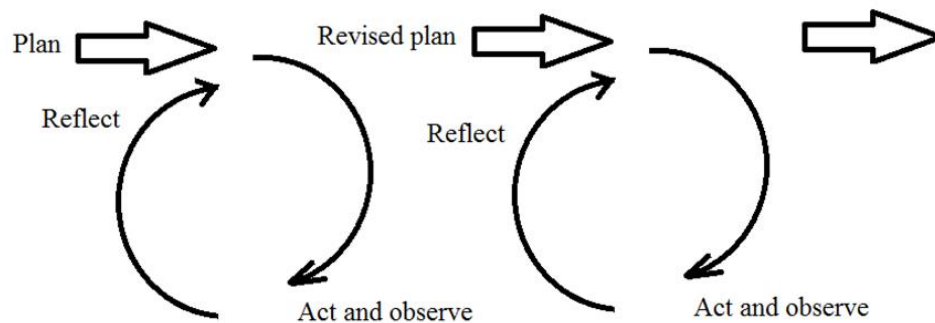
Source: Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988.

2.0 The Project Area

Gawandwadi is a tribal village, located in the Karjat Tribal block—120 km from Mumbai—of Raigad district in the state of Maharashtra in western India. There are around 300 people living in the village—293 people in August 2009. The major sources of livelihood for the people are a single crop, rain fed agriculture—mainly paddy and finger millet—, collection and selling/consumption of forest produce such as gums, fruits, vegetables, roots, and oil seeds, and agriculture labour in neighboring irrigated area.

3.0 Methods

Traditional ways to know the realities of a particular context that included large scale questionnaire surveys and structured interviews are liable to be imposing and top down with preset assumptions including various biases—spatial, project related, personal, seasonal, diplomatic, and professional—(Chambers, 2007). Therefore a set of participatory exercises were followed to commonly unobserved realities. Participatory methods serve the purpose of decentralization and empowerment that enable local people to exploit the diverse complexities of their own conditions, and to adapt to rapid change (Chambers, 1993). Most practitioners share the ideological perspective articulated in the literature of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) that facilitators need to appreciate people's own knowledge and ways of knowing (Chambers, 2008). Therefore the present study adopted approaches, techniques, and values of PRA that employs a set of activities to empower local people, enabling them to express and enhance their knowledge and take action.

However, a number of researchers have raised certain limitations of the participatory methods. PRA based participatory practices offer little scope to the facilitator for challenging aspects of the status quo that is highly inequitable for women. Focus on gender is not implicit in the methodology and practice of PRA (Cornwall, 1998 a, b; Guijt & Shah, 1998). In these participatory methods, local people are presumed to know best (Overs, Doezema, & Shivdas, 2002). Thus these methods may exacerbate exclusion and cement existing relations of inequality (Chambers, 1997; Parpart, 2000; Abdullah, Baker, Sulehan, Awang, & Liu, 2012). The present investigation sought to identify the social stratification within the community and include the voices of multiple interest groups in the process of decision making. Mainly, gender equality issues were incorporated in the process of the selection of the development agenda. Barriers of women's participation such as unavailability of time, social constraints about women's capabilities and roles, and the absence of critical mass (Agarwal, 1997) were taken into account. The participatory exercises constituted different levels of participation (see Table 1) by the participant villagers (Arnstein, 1969). The list of participatory exercises with corresponding levels of people's participation and the number of participants are given in table 2. The participatory exercises are elaborated below.

3.1 Traditional Process of Village Level Decision Making

This was identified in three group discussions held in different parts of the village.

3.2 PRA Exercise

PRA was conducted in the village through five visits over a span of one month. Initially, six people in the village were introduced to the importance, tools, and methodology of PRA. These six in turn helped to conduct the PRA by mobilizing people to ensure a higher degree of people's participation in the activity. Meetings were carried out in the morning—usually from 9 AM to 10 AM—and in the afternoon when both the men and women were relatively free from their daily chores. Social stratification was captured by plotting the social map at the beginning. Other exercises included plotting resource maps, trend lines, seasonality, daily activity schedules, transect walks, and listings of problems faced by the villagers. Visual maps, temporal graphs, and tabulated data sheets generated during the activity were shared and

discussed with the people for their further refinement and triangulation. The maps and tables generated by capturing people's perceptions were further triangulated by showcasing them at a community center for more than two weeks followed by obtaining feedback from men and women in the village.

Table 1: *Different Levels of People's Participation by Community Members*

Citizen's control	Absolute control of people—community members—over the process of planning and execution of development initiatives
Delegated power	Dominance of control of community members over the process
Contract	Partial control of community members in the planning and execution of development initiatives. Facilitating agency has also a significant control in the process.
Placation	People may advise and carry out planning without any control over the process of its further utilization for the decision making of the development initiatives
Consultation	People may advise without any control over its further utilization for the decision making of the development initiatives
Informing	People are informed about various community level activities conducted by the facilitating agency
Therapy	Trying to change people to implement the agenda of facilitating agency
Manipulation	People are deceived by the facilitating agency who is only planning and implementing its own agenda

Adopted from Arnstein (1969).

3.3. Problem Ranking and Perception of Wellbeing

The PRA exercise enhanced mainly a shared quantitative understanding of community life. The differences in the needs and desires of community members across diverse groups of the community—a qualitative understanding—were elicited by carrying out the following set of exercises. A set of personal interviews of the people were taken. People were classified by considering gender, age group, and land ownership to arrive at the individual priorities of each sub group with respect to the identified problems and their perceptions of the concept of wellbeing. A survey was conducted among thirty seven men and women—11 male youths, 8 female youths, 10 male adults, and 8 female adults—in 20 households to find out their respective priorities of the shared problems. Similar to the personal interviews in the problem ranking exercise, a separate exercise was undertaken among 21 people in 10 households—5 male youths, 3 female youths, 6 female adults, and 7 male adults. It was observed that by and large all the interviewees shared similar ideas of wellbeing. Thereafter, these ideas of wellbeing were shared and discussed in a village level meeting to generate a shared perception of wellbeing.

It was observed that there are differences in the priorities of the problems among men and women. It was decided to further study the livelihood activities, earning and expenditure of the people, and trend lines of some important elements of village life to identify possible reasons for holding such different priorities.

Table 2: *Activity Wise Level of People's Participation and the Number of Participants (see Table 1)*

Sr. Number	Particulars of exercise	Level of people's participation	Number of participants
1	Documentation of the traditional process of decision making	Consultation	22 men (5 big land owners, three landless labourers, and 14 marginal farmers)
2	PRA: social map, resource map, trend lines, seasonality, daily activity schedule	Partnership	30–40 people participated, the population remained floating during the exercises (4–7 big land owners, 3–5 landless people, 26–31 marginal farmers) the list included 4–8 women
3	Transect walk	Partnership	8 men (1 big land owner, 2 landless people, and 5 marginal farmers)
4	Transect walk	Partnership	6 women (four young women—below 40) and two adults (age between 40 to 60))
5	Listing of problems	Delegated power	37 (11 male youths, 8 female youths, 10 male adults, and 8 female adults)
6	Problem ranking	Delegated power	37 (11 male youths, 8 female youths, 10 male adults, and 8 female adults)
7	Generation of a perception of wellbeing	Delegated power	21 (5 male youths, 3 female youths, 6 female adults, and 7 male adults)
8	Finding a utilization pattern of human work hours	Consultation	6 households (two big land owners, two marginal farmers, and two landless)
9	Health survey with women	Consultation	40 (22 women below 30 years of age, 12 women aged between 30 and 50, and 6 women above 50 years of age)
10	Economic survey	Consultation	11 households including men and women from each one (2 big land owners, 7 marginal farmers, and 2 landless)
11	Analysis of trend lines	Delegated power	28 men (4 big land owners, 19 marginal farmers, and 5 landless) and 18 women (12 young women and 6 adult women)
12	A village level meeting to set development agenda	Delegated power	37 men (4 big land owners, 28 marginal farmers, and 5 landless) and 19 women (13 young and 6 adult women)

3.4 Utilization Pattern of Energy and Human Work Hours to Carry Out Livelihood Activities

The villagers' livelihood activities were divided into four types including: rain fed agricultural activities; livestock raising; domestic activities—firewood collection, water fetching, cooking, fish/crab catching, plinth preparation, space heating[1] and cloth washing—; and employment and trade—forest collection, wage labour, forest cutting, carpentry, liquor making, sand collection, bamboo work, *moha* seeds collection, and brick making. Human hours and human energy values associated with these activities were estimated by carrying out a study with six households belonging to different combinations of family size and land holding. Trade activities were studied in two different group discussions. These involved a group of 8 women and a group of 10 men. Land holding data were gathered directly from government records. Per capita human work hours and energy utilization were calculated by considering the working population—age group between 10 to 65 years. A survey of forty women across various age groups was carried out to identify the health hazards associated with the labourious activities carried out by women. A rough age distribution of the forty women was as follows: 22 below 30 years of age, 12 between the ages of 30 and 50, and 6 above the age of 50.

3.5 Study of Earning and Expenditure

Study of earning and expenditure was undertaken in 11 households belonging to different combinations of family size and land holding. A survey sheet was prepared with the help of the people to find estimates of expenditure and earning by a household. The expenditure was split into three parts: food expenses—rice, edible oil, spices, vegetables, pulses, fish, eggs, and meat—; expenses over addictive substances—liquor, tobacco, *gutkha*, and *vidi*—; and other expenses—medicines, clothes, soaps, electricity bill, phone bill, kerosene, tools, utensils, blankets, fertilizers, and transport. Total income was determined by finding the earnings through selling of agricultural produce—vegetables, *varai*, flowers, and paddy—; selling forest wood; selling forest produce—*moh* seeds and gum—; carrying out small local businesses—sand extraction, land broker work, bamboo work, and carpentry—; and working as a wage labour—farming, forest wood cutting, and road construction. This information was gathered on a seasonal basis to account for the seasonal variation of food habits and other activities. The gathered information was triangulated by matching the annual income of a household to its respective expenditure.

3.6 Analysis of Trend Lines

Trend lines of many key variables were identified in four different group discussions in the village: two among men and two among women in two different parts of the village.

3.7 Setting a Development Agenda

Finally the task of selecting the development agenda was achieved at a village level meeting after sharing the outcomes of the participatory exercises. Women's

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[1] Space heating is required during winter season to warm the house during night and early morning.

voice was raised by emphasizing and supporting their priorities that could be easily identified by the outcomes of the various studies mentioned above.

4.0 Outcomes of the Participatory Exercises Carried Out In the Village Gawandwadi

4.1 Traditional Process of Village Level Decision Making

Village level decision making usually involves planning for village level festivals and establishing the village level norms and practices. These meetings are attended by at least one adult male from every household and are presided over by a few adult men in the village. There is no women's involvement in village level decision making. Women may influence the decisions of the individual adult participants of the formal meetings by carrying out informal discussions either at home or in the streets of the village. Thus it was imperative in the present context to facilitate women's involvement in the formal participatory exercises.

4.2 PRA Exercise

A set of diagrams and charts prepared during the PRA exercise were depicted in the local—Marathi—language. For the convenience of readers, some of these are translated to English in the present article. Due to space constraints only a few diagrams or charts, and limited details that are within the scope of the article, are presented in this document. The contextual information shared and refined by the people is discussed below.

4.2.1 Social map. The social map reflects peoples' perceptions of the social dimensions of their reality including social stratification, demographics, social infrastructure, and housing. The social map of the village was generated by the villagers with the help of colored chalks on the ground in a common place used for public meetings. It was found that big land owners, skilled artisans, and those having secured the means for earning own more assets and amenities. The average family size in the village is 5.63 with nearly 63% of households being comprised of between 4 to 8 people. Percentages of men and women in the population are nearly equal and the adult (>18) population accounts for 71% of the total population. The level of education of the youth—18 to 25—is approximately seventh standard of the state board syllabus, while for older adult men—25-50—it is fifth standard of the state board syllabus. Only two men in the village have yet completed the secondary school certificate examination of the state board. The total village land is around 950 ha. Total cattle head is 212 with 4.07 cattle head per family, which is higher than the national average of 1.73 (National Sample Survey Organization, 2005).

The social map helped to identify social stratification in the village. Further participatory exercises tried to facilitate the participation of the people from different class and gender.

4.2.2 Resource map. The resource map of the village was drawn by the villagers as shown in Figure 2 in the same way as the social map. The map shows different natural resources and infrastructure in the village. The forest surrounding the village serves as a resource to collect cooking fuel; construction materials—many wood species—; and other forest produce—gum, medicinal plants, roots, vegetables, oil seeds, and fruits. The main water source is a small earthen dam

located around 200 meters from the residential area of the village. There is a small river at a distance of 1.5 km from the village residential place. The river and the reservoir also serve as breeding and raising grounds for fishes and crabs. The terrain is hilly and there are mainly three kinds of land: plain paddy fields, sloping fields, and forests. There is a tar road connecting the village to the nearby market place situated at a distance of 12 km.

*Figure 2.* Resource Map of Gawandwadi (August 2009).
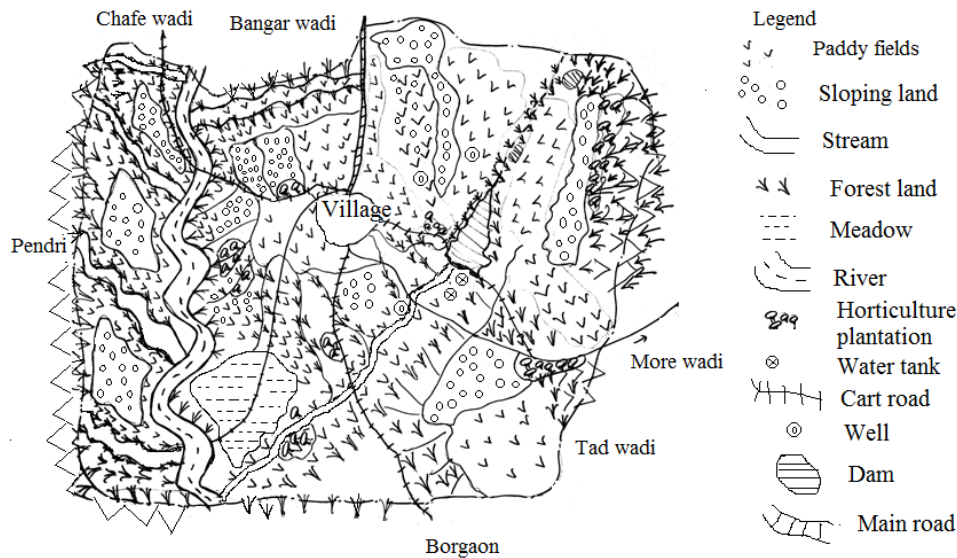
Source: Authors.

4.2.3 Trend lines. Figure 3 shows the trends for the variation of a few important elements of the village over a few decades. Forest cover in the village has thinned over the past three decades due to excessive wood cutting to earn money. This has resulted in increased drudgery associated with the activity of firewood fetching. Earlier, the staple diet comprised of finger millet, rice, forest vegetables, roots and rabbits, fishes, and crabs. Due to excessive hunting and thinning of the forest, rabbits and other forest animals have either become extinct or their number has become very low. After the spread of hybrid rice varieties the proportion of finger millet and roots in the diet reduced. It was observed by the elders of the village population that the endurance and strength of the people has deteriorated due to the changed food habits. It has increased the problems of anemia[2] in the villagers as finger millet, which went missing from the diet, is rich in iron.

The village had a cultural tradition of performing dances—*gauri* dance, *dhamdi* dance, and *tali* dance—on several occasions across the year. These events contributed in upholding the social capital in the village. However, the popularity of this tradition reduced slowly until it became extinct after the advent of modern entertainment alternatives such as television sets and music systems in the village.

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[2] The elderly people observed that the present youth population had a lower stamina to carry arduous activities compared to what the elderly people possessed when they were in their youth. A local gynecologist Dr. Nilkantha Phadke argued that most of the present youth, especially the young women, suffer from anemia due to the changed diet.

Drudgery associated with water fetching was reduced after the construction of a dam in the year 1992. Villagers were trapped in a vicious cycle of borrowing money from money lenders—to finance expensive events such as weddings—and the consequent heavy repayments. Increased availability of wage labour work and intervention of hybrid varieties of rice helped the villagers to break this cycle.

Figure 3. Trend Line of a Set of Important Elements in Gawandwadi.
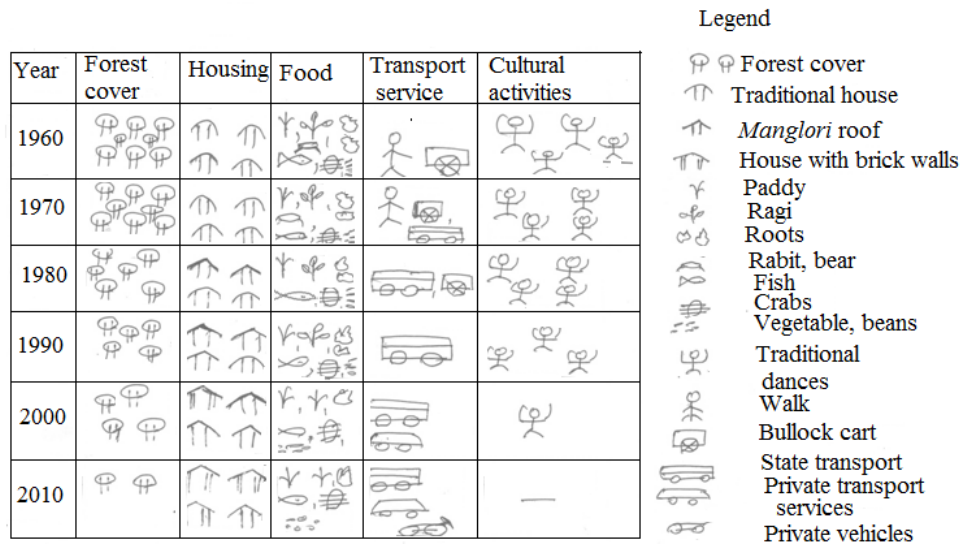
4.2.4 Seasonality. Many aspects of village life, such as livelihood activities and food habits, vary to respond to the seasonal variations of the local ecology. Health related problems are at their peak in the months of July and September. This is mainly due to contamination of the domestic water source and excessive agricultural workload. Crabs, fish, and vegetables grown in the forest are usually consumed with rice during monsoon. Whereas roots, dry fish, and vegetables bought from the local market are usually consumed during the rest of the year. There is a water source near the village in monsoon. For the remaining part of the year, women fetch drinking water from a well downstream of the village dam. Agricultural activities are mainly concentrated in the months of late summer and monsoon. Other activities such as wage labour work, carpentry, and firewood fetching are carried out during the months of winter and summer.

4.2.5 Daily activity schedule of women. Women carry out mainly domestic—water and firewood fetching, housekeeping, and cooking—and agricultural activities and these are evenly distributed over the year.

4.2.6 Daily activity schedule of men. The activities carried out by men usually include agricultural work, animal raising, artisanship, trading, and wage labour work. Men are engaged in these activities usually during the months of late summer and monsoon and are relatively free during the rest of the year. It was also revealed that the women are responsible for carrying out most of the livelihood activities.

4.2.7 Problem identification. Different problems experienced by the villagers were identified in four different group discussions—with adult men, adult female, young men, and young women—as listed in Table 3. Most of these identified problems

are inter-related. The village lacks secure earning sources due to the lack of relevant skills, distant market, lack of transport service from the village, and poor education. The nearest healthcare center is situated at a distance of 5 kilometers from the village. Private health Clinics are located at a distance of 12 km from the village. Due to the lack of proper transport services, people cannot avail themselves of health care services easily. Drudgery associated with the daily activities—especially in firewood fetching and water fetching—are the major reasons causing backache, neck ache, and mental stress. Open defecation due to the lack of toilets spreads diseases related to water contamination. Many people cannot afford to buy private vehicles due to unsecured income earning sources.

4.3 Problem Ranking and Perception of Wellbeing

The outcomes of the study are elaborated below.

4.3.1 Priorities of problems. These are listed in table 3. Average hierarchies for different groups were found by assigning a weight to each problem equal to the reciprocal of its rank assigned by an individual followed by a weighted average. This study reveals the people's perception that the drudgery in firewood fetching and water fetching and lack of adequate and secure earning sources are the major problems faced by the village. Presently, both the firewood fetching and water fetching activities are carried out by women; wherein they walk on sloping or undulated terrain carrying heavy loads—20–32 kg—on their head. These activities lead to considerable health related impacts.

Table 3: *Overall Problem Ranking*

Problems Faced	Young Men	Adult Men	Adult Women	Young Women
Drudgery in firewood fetching	2	3	1	1
Lack of secured and adequate income	1	2	3	7
Drudgery in water fetching	3	5	2	2
Lack of health care in village	8	1	4	4
Low level of education	4	6	8	9
Liquor addiction	6	4	7	6
Lack of toilets	9	7	5	3
Lack of transportation facilities	5	8	6	5
Sporadic electricity supply	7	9	9	8

4.3.2 Wellbeing. It comprises six perceptions: (a) there should be sufficient food throughout the year, (b) there should not be major health issues in a family, (c) there should be sufficient money required for living, but, at the same time, it should not be so abundant that one should succumb to addiction, (d) drudgery associated with different activities carried out by women should be reduced, (e) there should be no quarrel at home—it is often associated with liquor addiction, (f) there should be tranquility of mind.

It can be observed that many ideas of wellbeing and the identified problems are related to each other. Many problems—drudgery, unemployment, lack of toilets, sporadic supply of electricity, lack of transport facilities in the village, and distant health care facilities—are associated with infrastructure and livelihood generation. Higher priorities are given to problems involving arduous activities and livelihood generation. There are also differences in priorities of problems amongst the different groups based on age and gender. Women perceived a different reality than what the men did. The village level meetings usually obliterate this reality. Women's realities could not be included merely by their presence in the meetings, it was necessary for them to raise their voice. Therefore it was decided to further study the livelihood activities, earning and expenditure of the people, and trend lines of some important elements of the village life to identify possible reasons for holding such different priorities. Outcomes of the study are detailed in the following three subsections.

4.4 Utilization of Energy and Human Work Hours

Outcomes of the study are listed below.

4.4.1 Distribution of human work hours. Yearly cumulative distribution of human work hours to carry out different livelihood activities is shown in figure 4.

Figure 4. Monthly Distribution of per Capita Human Work Hours for Different Activities per Year.
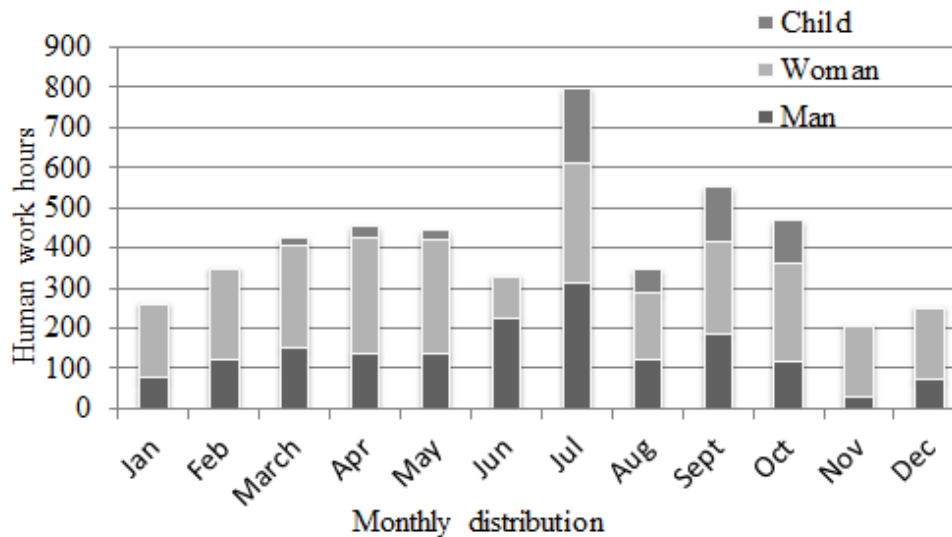
It can be seen that the month of July is the most demanding month of the year. Women's work hours are on the whole evenly distributed unlike men's work hours. Men's work hours are concentrated in monsoon and are less for the rest of the year. Contribution of men, women, and children for all activities is 37.9%, 58.9%, and 3.2% respectively. Domestic activities, which demand most of the human work hours (44.6%), are mainly carried out by women. Fire wood fetching and water fetching activities demand 13.4% and 7.3% of the total human work hours spent on all the livelihood activities carried out in the village for one year. The health survey revealed that most women face problems of backache, neck

ache, calf muscle ache, and fatigue due to the laborious activities of firewood fetching and water fetching.

4.4.2 Human energy utilization to carry out different activities. Using the average human energy demands for different livelihood activities (Date, 1989); the average per capita energy expenditure for each of these activities is listed in Table 4. It can be seen that water fetching and firewood fetching activities demand significant amount of human energy throughout the year. The utilization pattern of human work hours and human energy supported the women's priorities of their problems.

Table 4: *Average Human Energy Expenditure for Different Livelihood Activities per Year*

Sr.No.	Activities	Annual per Capita Energy expenditure (Gcal/year)	Percentage of Energy Expenditure (%)
1	Animal rearing	15.9	6.43
2	Agriculture	68.0	26.50
3	Water fetching	44.1	17.80
4	Firewood fetching	42.9	9.67
5	Cooking	14.6	8.24
6	Cloth washing and plinth	9.9	4.03
7	Fishing	3.1	1.25
8	Other activities	64.5	26.04

4.5 Study of Earnings and Expenditure

The income and expenditure of the eleven households is listed in Table 5. It can be seen that the families having high liquor consumption have to bear higher annual expenses. The annual expenditure and also the income for an average family of six are around sixty thousand rupees; there are merely three saving accounts in the village so almost all income is spent. The average income generated through selling agricultural produce, forest wood, and skilled and labour work is around 25%, 10%, and 65% respectively. It varies with the land holding, skill, and family size.

4.6 Analysis of the Trend Lines

Trend lines of many key variables identified by the people—a few of them are shown in table 6—were discussed to study the causes and consequences of the trends. The village has witnessed positive changes regarding food security, awareness in terms of their basic rights, education—mainly among women—, infrastructure, and economic earning over the last two decades. However, major livelihood assets such as forest cover, cattle population, and agricultural soil—due to the reduction in organic carbon—have deteriorated.

Table 5: *Annual Economic Income and Expenditure of Eleven Families in Gawandwadi (2011)*

Sr. Number	Land holding	Family Size	Food expenses (thousand)	Expenses In addiction (thousand)	Other expenses (thousand)	Total expense (thousand)	Total income (thousand)	Per capita income (thousand)
1	large land	14	62.4	21.84	85.5	169.74	174	12.43
2	large land	4	18.2	9	14.8	42	41	10.25
3	marginal	5	20.68	0.3	32.88	53.76	52	10.40
4	marginal	8	62.47	11.5	40.28	114.25	110	13.75
5	marginal	10	30.75	3.54	34.49	68.78	74.5	7.45
6	marginal	15	38.07	37.18	43.84	119.1	114	7.60
7	marginal	4	39.43	1.68	22.27	63.38	63	15.75
8	marginal	7	35.86	12.71	19.28	67.85	67	11.17
9	marginal	5	32.3	0.9	19	52.2	51.5	10.30
10	landless	2	17.4	18	20	55.4	52	26.00
11	landless	6	27.62	24	18.3	70	72	12.00

Table 6: *Estimated List of Values of Various Important Elements Perceived by the People*

Criteria	1972	1982	1987	1992	2000	2005	2010
Daily firewood fetching hours	1.5	1.5	1.5	2	3	4	5
Daily domestic water fetching hours	6	6	6	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
Number of days a year spent on hunting	50	50	50	30	15	5	5
Cattle count per household	22	20	15	11	8	5	3
Wedding expense (rupees)	4000	4000	11000	17000	45000	80000	120000
Average daily work hours of a woman in summer	10.5	10.5	10.25	8.75	7.5	7.5	8
Average daily work hours of a man in summer	7.25	7.25	6	5	4.75	4	4

Forest cover has become sparse over the last three decades. It has increased the firewood fetching drudgery by increasing the distance of the forested area from the village residence and reducing the firewood availability in the forest.

Average expenditure of families has increased due to the desire to spend more money on wedding functions—the total wedding expenses have increased due to the demise of a long held tradition, namely the community owned wedding—and other amenities, such as *pukka* house, television sets, and vehicles and increased expense on agriculture to buy seeds and chemical fertilizers. The increased spending on living pushed the villagers to sell their assets and contributed to the reduction in the cattle population, and thereby, reduction in soil fertility and village owned forest cover.

A key finding is that the work hours for men folk—to carry out the yearlong livelihood activities—have reduced over the past two decades due to the reduction in hunting, gathering of forest produce, charcoal making, and intensive agricultural practices, whereas, women's work hours have not changed significantly—due to the increased load of firewood fetching even after reduction in the daily water fetching hours.

The following section elaborates a process of arriving at a shared appreciation of the reasons for the differences of needs and desires across the different groups of the community followed by the selection of a development agenda.

4.7 An Exercise to Build a Shared Understanding of the Differences and Selection of a Development Agenda

An exercise of sharing the outcomes of the participatory exercises followed by a discussion on its analysis in a village level meeting generated the following shared understanding by men and women.

A trend of thinning of the forest cover revealed that the firewood would become scarcer and therefore the drudgery associated with firewood fetching would worsen. Distribution of human energy and human work hours to carry out livelihood activities and the increased occurrence of anemia due to the changed diet supported the priorities of the problems identified by the women that mainly focused on the drudgery involved in firewood and water fetching.

For most of the men, unemployment or in a broader sense, generation of livelihoods was the most pressing problem due to the increasing desire to buy amenities and to spend heavily on wedding ceremonies, which was further exacerbated by rising inflation. This has compelled them to sell their cattle and wood from the forest to earn extra money and has exerted pressure on the sustainability of the local livelihood assets including forest and cattle population. This process has further increased livelihood insecurity.

The increasing demand in the work hours for women to accomplish the domestic activities as compared to the relatively diminished role of men in carrying out livelihood activities led to an understanding of the different perceptions held by men and women regarding the priorities of the problems facing them.

Sharing and discussion of the analysis based on the information generated through the participatory exercises helped to refine the perceptions of the local context for the facilitators as well as the local people. Finally, the following three problems were selected, which were found to be of prime importance to the people:

- addressing the problem of drudgery associated with firewood fetching activity;

- addressing the problem of drudgery associated with the water fetching activity, and;

- livelihood generation.

5.0 Discussion

The initial group discussions in the village helped to identify the existing decision making structure in the community. It revealed the contextual sociocultural practices that deny the role of women in the community level decisions. The capacity development exercises—PRA, group discussions, focused studies, and village level meetings—to study multifarious aspects of the community life helped the people to refine and align their knowledge. For example, many trend lines are arrived at by facilitating healthy discussions among the people, wherein, although some of them shared quite different values, perceptions, or intuitions regarding a particular element of village life, finally all of them arrived at a common consensus. Such a common understanding of community life helped the people to

reduce their differences of perception about quantitative understanding of sociocultural, economical, and ecological aspects of the community. People could arrive at perceived needs and desires that varied across different groups—based on gender and age—within the community. Further investigations followed by a village level meeting where the outcomes of the quantitative and qualitative study were discussed led to a shared appreciation of their differential perceptions about the qualitative aspects such as their needs and desires. This created a base to generate a shared vision to build a common development agenda.

At the community level, the process enabled the people to actively participate in deciding the development agenda of the community unlike the state policies and schemes that are usually top down and imposing. An attempt was made to empower the community members by refining and aligning their perceptions about the multidimensional aspects of their own life. This followed certain aspects of Amartya Sen's capability approach pertaining to people's empowerment (Sen, 1989).

The overall exercise revealed that there are distinct ways in which women and men experience poverty. Conventional approaches to poverty assessment often obliterate important gender dimensions (Jackson, 1996; Kabeer, 1997). The present gender aware process enabled women to increase their confidence to be more assertive in community level decision making. The outcomes of various studies gave voice to women in the decision making process without which their participation could have been counterproductive, in the sense that it could have been used to legitimize a decision which is taken by the male members.

Sociocultural practices of the present context—that deny the role of women in the village level decision making—were challenged by (a) studying women's priorities and highlighting them in the village level meetings, (b) facilitating women's presence in the village level meeting and enabling them to raise their voice in the meetings and supporting it by the studied data. Thus the process tried to change the status quo in the existing structure. It tried to follow the process of conscientization (Freire, 1970) of women.

The process had to overcome certain homeostatic forces in the village. The existing power structure present in the village resisted the process in the beginning. An early representative of a local volunteer organization in the village, who also owned a big chunk of land, initially resisted the process. In the beginning, the villagers would listen to him for most of the village level decisions. However, in the participatory practices followed in the village, the facilitators sought the active participation of every participant villager. Therefore, this person and a few of his colleagues tried to derail the process initially. The facilitator and a few other adult men and youngsters in the village kept on inviting him and his colleagues to the meetings by giving him due respect for his earlier contribution. The resistance did not last long and within three months, he and his colleagues started participating in the process. Also, the people did not believe in the benefits of the process initially. However, after a few meetings they found that the process was interesting and yielding them a new knowledge about their own life. They also observed that everyone could get a chance to share their knowledge and opinions during the exercises. Eventually the people started participating in large numbers.

Women's participation remained limited throughout the process. It was difficult to enable women to attend the community level meetings due to the traditional

assumptions initially. The percentage of women's participation of the total number of people attending the meeting increased from the initial level of 5%, to 35% towards the end. The people's choice of methods remained limited throughout the process. The participatory methods were chosen mainly by the facilitator with the help of a study of the literature and people's reflection.

Such participatory exercises raise expectations among the community members. Participatory action research exercise contributes to people as well as academia. Thus it is imperative to follow the implementation of the chosen development agenda with the community. The present action research project was followed by addressing the problems along with the people in the next two and a half years. A retrofitting device for the existing cookstove was developed (Honkalaskar, Sohoni, & Bhandarkar, 2013). The device itself is locally manufactured and low cost and more importantly does not change the existing cooking practice. This intervention reduced the drudgery in firewood fetching by around 22% along with reduction in indoor air pollution. A water supply scheme in the village was planned and implemented to address the problem of drudgery involved in water fetching (Honkalaskar, Sohoni, & Bhandarkar, 2014). Two livelihood generation alternatives, namely, second crop cultivation and aquaculture development were explored in the village that yielded partial success.

The present process would work in villages that are similar to Gawandwadi, where, the caste and class structures are not vivid. The per capita income is less than $ 1 per day in all the households in Gawandwadi and the people all belong to the same tribe. The class and caste structures are not as vivid in this village as they are in many non-tribal villages in India. The process needs to incorporate a few more exercises, interactions, and investigations to address the dominance of the caste and class difference that exist in the non-tribal communities.

6.0 Conclusion

This article proposes four key imperative guidelines for the generation of a common understanding of the multidimensional aspects of a community across its diverse social groups required for setting a development agenda. Investigation of the existing community level cultural and social beliefs and practices reveals the existing structure of the community level decision making practice. A participatory study of the qualitative aspects of the community—sociocultural, ecological, and economical—develops a shared understanding of the community life. In addition, a participatory study for eliciting the differences and commonalities of various qualitative aspects of development, such as people's needs, desires, feelings, and views, across the diverse groups—such as groups based on gender, age, class, and caste—within the community reveals the causes of possible conflicts. Further, a participatory process identifying the reasons for the differences reduces conflicts and creates a healthy environment to build a shared vision in order to select a shared development goal.

The study also revealed that men and women perceive reality differently, which is reflected in the differing priorities they give their problems. The mere presence of women in community level meetings may not serve the intended purpose of their involvement which is to ensure gender aware decision making. Therefore it is required to facilitate women's involvement by raising their voice with the help of a number of studies of the existing context pertaining to the gender related problems.

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