

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN SPWD AND SAKTI

March-December 1994

Background Information

The project is located in Rampachodavaram in East Godavari district. The project area is characterised by undulating topography traversed by numerous perennial rivers and streams. The average annual rainfall ranges from 1100 to 1300 mm and it is bimodal in character, although the bulk of it is received during the south-west monsoon. The soils are mostly red and lateritic which are highly erodible.

Agriculture in the area is carried out mostly (97%) under rainfed, dryland conditions. Shifting cultivation is practised on the hill slopes which have been denuded of vegetation cover.

SAKTI

Search for Action and Knowledge of Tribal Initiative (SAKTI) is a voluntary agency based at Rampachodavaram working in the tribal areas of East Godavari district. It was founded in 1985 by Dr. P. Sivaramakrishna to identify and resolve the problems and primary needs of tribal people.

During the last eight years SAKTI has been involved in practically all aspects of tribal life including agitation for closure of liquor shops in the area, against taking over of tribal lands by non-tribals; against exploitation of tribal women and against excessive and illegal exploitation of forests.

Apart from this SAKTI has organised women's thrift schemes, literacy and health programmes. It has also taken up village development works such as making arrangements for drinking water, construction of diversion channels for irrigation, helping people to get subsidy for construction of their houses. It has also initiated marketing programmes for non timber forestry produce to help people get better prices.

SAKTI's struggle for the betterment of tribals made them fight against the over and unjust exploitation of natural resources such as forest, land and water. It brought them to the question of evolution of appropriate method and technology for sustainable use of local resources.

The reservoir proposed to be built by the Government at Bhupatipalem, has a command area comprising 33 villages. There are a large number of tanks that are in various stages of disrepair and degradation. During the last year SAKTI has been

carrying out a socio-technical survey of the tanks situated in the command area. There is potential for optimising the available water for higher land productivity.

In the proposed area of work in Rampachodavaram, the scope for exploitation of ground water is limited as indicated by interpretation of satellite imagery. Greater emphasis therefore has to be given to the harvest and use of surface water.

The long term objective is to demonstrate a sustainable management system for land and water in a high rainfall area.

This objective would have to be met through a series of short term steps. The strategy for 1994 consists of two-fold intervention. One, at village Ootla and the other covering 33 villages.

A. I. Intervention in village Ootla

In Ootla, which is one of the 33 villages in the command of the proposed Bhupatipalem reservoir, there are two tanks that need renovation. The problem is of siltation in these tanks and in the channels that contribute water to these tanks.

The intervention that is proposed is threefold, (i) firstly to reduce the soil erosion in the catchment (ii) to carry out minor repairs on the existing wasteweirs and lastly (iii) to enhance the irrigation potential by installing a lift irrigation scheme. It is envisaged that the desiltation work in the tank and channels would be undertaken wholly by the community.

* In order to reduce soil erosion in the catchment area, plantation work and physical works would have to be undertaken. Since the number of plants involved, about 2000, is too small to warrant setting up a nursery, the plants would be acquired either from the Forest Department or a private nursery. The species would be determined by the user communities.

* Four or five soil traps would be built in the catchment area. It would be constructed with brushwood and locally found stones. As long as conditions leading to soil erosion - such as podu cultivation and absence of vegetative cover - continues, these soil traps would silt up very soon. They are meant as short term measures to reduce siltation of the tanks.

* Some families practice podu cultivation in the forest area in the catchment of the tanks. The area is about 14 acres. The communities using these forests would be persuaded to form a VSS. Using the precedence in West Bengal of permitting intercropping in areas under JFM, a special dispensation would be sought to be introduced within the JFM Order passed by the Government, for forest areas where podu cultivation is being practiced. These families would be persuaded to adopt cropping techniques

that is ecologically sustainable and acceptable to them.

* A lift irrigation scheme would optimise the water available from the perennial stream flowing through the village lands. This is expected to irrigate about 15 acres of land.

In view of the other interventions planned to revive the tank management system, the location of the lift irrigation has been so chosen as to meet equity consideration within the community.

* Minor repair works would be carried out in the two tanks in the village.

[I. Intervention in 32 villages

The objective here is to understand the social dynamics and technical factors in the area and use the lessons of Ootla village intervention in this for better future planning.

* A better understanding of various dimensions of tank management will be attempted before making any intervention. A pre-project appraisal of the tank systems would be undertaken, jointly with the village communities. Resource mapping will be done along with discussions on resource utilisation with the community in the form of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) exercises in order to develop common understanding of the problems with the community. This would pave the way for appropriate interventions.

* Some minor repair works would be taken up in a few tanks in case need for it arises as a result of the PRA exercises.

* Since the area contains a number of perennial streams, lift irrigation schemes (in combination with tanks) are appropriate for more effective utilisation of water. One lift irrigation would be taken up at a suitable point to be decided mutually by SPWD and SAKTI.

Intervention in Podu Cultivation

The objective is to demonstrate an ecologically and socially sustainable alternative to the traditional podu cultivation practised extensively in the forest areas of the district.

Podu cultivation is normally undertaken in forest lands and besides being ecologically unsustainable, does not have legal sanction. The communities using the forest lands will be persuaded to form VSS under the JFM Order of the Government. For the areas where podu cultivation has been practiced, a special dispensation will be sought within the Government Order permitting intercropping. The precedence of such special treatment allowed in West Bengal would be

of relevance here.

This would be undertaken in one village in East Godavari district. In view of the risks that will be undertaken by the podu cultivators in adopting an alternative technology and their limited capacity to do so, assistance for labour input would be given, in addition to the labour contribution given by them. A budget allocation is being made on the understanding that the actual costs are worked out after comprehensive dialogues with the concerned community.

