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Defining Equity at the River Basin Scale: Promoting Cooperation and Negotiation Between Government Agencies and Civil Society in India

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Ms. Roopali Phadke is a PhD candidate in the Department of Environmental Studies at UC Santa Cruz. Her dissertation research examines water development in Maharashtra, India. Specifically, this research addresses how isolated NGO success stories at participatory watershed development can be implemented by government agencies at the river basin scale. Her research interests include dams and displacement issues, water allocation in drought prone regions, participatory research techniques, and social reforms in the engineering sector.

ABSTRACT

Equitable water distribution can be defined by a spectrum of normative values and technological alternatives. This paper describes a movement for equitable watershed development in the Chikotra River Valley of Maharashtra, India. Currently under construction and negotiation, if successful the Chikotra case will be India's first example of equitable water distribution at the river basin scale.

The Chikotra movement, spear headed by NGOs, engineers and local farmers, operates under the banner "Some Water for All." Using public funds, the river basin development plan provides all 52 villages in the Chikotra basin with equal access to water. Through a combination of dams, percolation tanks, wells, and water conservation projects, every family in this river basin has been promised an assured supply of water for irrigation and domestic needs irrespective of land holdings. All water development will be managed through water cooperatives, with participatory resource mapping guiding ecological regeneration and sustainable agricultural development.

Using maps, slides, and video to discuss the Chikotra case, this presentation will address the challenges faced by both government and non-governmental actors in consolidating interests between upstream and downstream villages and in implementing inter and intra-community equity and participation. This paper also highlights the types of institutional changes that are necessary for better cooperation between government agencies and local stakeholders toward the goal of democracy, transparency and accountability in public water projects.