

# When Multiple Conflicts Overlap

## Haribad Project in Madhya Pradesh

*The Haribad minor irrigation project in Madhya Pradesh is to be built on the boundary of the two villages of Haribad and Sakad on the Kundi river. The project will largely benefit Haribad, while the tribal people of Sakad will lose their land. This is a brief account of the multiple conflicts that have arisen.*

**REHMAT, SHRIPAD DHARMADHIKARY**

Haribad and Sakad are adjoining villages in Thikri taluka of Badwani district in western Madhya Pradesh. The proposed Haribad minor irrigation project is to be built on the boundary of the two villages on the Kundi river that runs through them. The project was cleared in 1977 and the estimated cost then was Rs 43 lakh, which has now gone up to Rs 1.66 crore. Sakad is upstream of the dam and will bear the full burden of submergence but will not receive direct irrigation, while downstream Haribad will be served by canals and also benefit from the recharging of groundwater.

About 27.5 ha of private land and 2.5 ha government land in Sakad will be submerged; local paths will go under water and cut off access to grazing land; there is a fear that the lower phalia (hamlet) will also be affected. Of the 35 families that are affected, many are small farmers who will lose all their lands. There are conflicting reports on the area and villages that will benefit. One version is that a 2 km long canal will irrigate 107 ha land in Haribad and Surana, another that only Haribad will benefit and a third version that several villages will gain from the dam.

The land is undulating, with large flat open areas in between. Average annual rainfall is about 650 mm and there is limited irrigation, mainly by groundwater and direct lift from the nallahs. Sakad is a tribal village, 98.4 per cent of its 1,273 population are tribals. Haribad has 799 non-tribals, 633 tribals and 428 scheduled castes in a population of 1,860, but the

non-tribals are socially and politically dominant. Water has been an increasingly serious problem in the area, especially in recent years; irrigation is minimal, and while the situation is marginally better in Sakad, Haribad suffers from drinking water scarcity as well.

### Haribad Wants the Dam; Sakad Does Not

The people of Haribad want the dam. They see it as the solution to their serious water problem and insist that several downstream villages will also benefit. The people of Sakad oppose the dam since they will not only lose much of their irrigated land but also access to resources. They will not directly gain anything and even indirect gains through recharge are minimal. Moreover, only the tribal families stand to lose land and this is a major element in the conflict. They propose that the dam be shifted further downstream; to help store more water and benefit a wider area. This way non-tribal lands will share submergence, and though their own lands will not be saved, since they are at the tail end of a large reservoir, they will manage one crop in the drawdown land. While Haribad has no issues with this alternative, government surveys show that it is far too costly and not feasible. So the clash goes on: Sakad claims that Haribad is using its considerable resources and political clout to force the project through. Haribad claims that the tribals of Sakad are using their special representation as a tribal reserved constituency to thwart the project. The key people and institutions are listed in the table.

**Table: Key Institutions and People**

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Mangilal Chauhan, Rajiv Gandhi Mission, Haribad.
Dinesh Chand Debda, Haribad
Govindbhai Vaskale, Sakad
Madiyabhai Vaskale, Sakad
Asharam Vaskale, Sakad
Irrigation Department, District Badwani

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### Chronology of Events

1977-78: Project announced during visit of then chief minister to Haribad  
 1981: First tubewell in Haribad  
 1997: Administrative clearance to project accorded on December 5  
 1999: Demand for the project escalates as water resources are strained  
 2003: Haribad villagers resort to 'chakka-jam' (road blocks) for the project  
 2003: Haribad villagers pledge parts of their land to give to those losing land  
 2003: Gram sabha votes for project to go ahead

### Old Animosities Add On

Some old animosity also underlies the conflict and may be linked to the issue of unregulated use of water resources. The first tubewell was dug in Haribad in 1981 when water was available at a depth of about 40 m. Since then about 200 irrigation tubewells and 50 borewells for drinking water have been dug in Haribad. Only one of the borewells for drinking water is now working, while the water level has dropped to 200 m and more. Clearly, this intensive exploitation is responsible for the serious water situation. In the summer, even the lone borewell stops yielding water and the village has to get water by tankers, spending Rs 1 lakh for the effort when most farmers are heavily in debt. The situation has worsened since 1999 and has resulted in Haribad villagers organising chakka-jam to push for the project.

### An Innovative Measure: Is It or Is It Not?

The people of Haribad have also proposed an innovative measure – they claim that many beneficiary families have pledged portions of their land to the project command to create an 80 ha land pool from which land can be given to those in Sakad who stand to lose their land. They claim that a list with details of names and land pledged was drawn up at a village meeting in the presence of

the tehsildar and handed over to him in April 2003. This has caught the attention of the local media. Surprisingly, none of the displaced people were called for this meeting. Also Sakad villagers are surprised by this development and deny knowledge of any such scheme. If it was a serious proposal they would have been informed.

As Sakad falls in a scheduled area, permission from the gram sabha is essential for land acquisition. In 2003, the gram sabha was called and approved the project, significantly, through a secret ballot. The displaced people, primarily from one 'phalia' (hamlet) of Sakad, say that wealthy individuals in Haribad, manipulated the gram sabha: the displaced phalia was informed only at the last moment; and other phalias were bribed to vote for the project. The displaced phalia boycotted the meeting and later protested to the collector, who has reportedly declared the gram sabha void.

Many of the displaced families who earlier opposed the project and wanted it shifted downstream now appear to support the project, provided they are given proper compensation. They too had not heard of the offer of land by the beneficiaries and were highly sceptical about the whole idea. They say that the drought in the last few years has forced them to accept the dam. However, the change of heart may also be partly due to the severe divisions that have come up in the village after the recent panchayat elections.

### **Scope for Dialogue**

Clearly, the people have paid a heavy price due to this conflict; water resources have not been developed, agricultural production has gone down and consequently people are sustaining. The conflict is responsible for preventing other water harvesting projects. The cost in terms of the social discord cannot be quantified, but is also significant.

There are good chances that the dispute can be resolved through dialogue. However, it will have to be initiated by someone who commands the respect and trust of both the parties. The project should be open to modification: not just in size and location, but also compensation. The pledge of land by the people of Haribad and Surana seems to be a good starting point for a dialogue.

If the conflict is still not resolved, the

project can yet be replaced by a comprehensive watershed management programme and water harvesting/recharging scheme for which the terrain and rainfall offer vast scope. However, all

that is in the future; today the deadlock remains. **EPW**

Email: shripad@narmada.org,  
rehmat@narmada.org