

Certificate Course on Participatory Irrigation Management (CCPIM)

Module 2- Status of Water User Associations (WUAs)

Topic 2.1- Status of Water User Associations in India

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Status of Water User Associations in India

Topics of module 2

- 2.1 Status of Water User Associations in India
- 2.2 Constraints, Issues and Challenges for WUAs
- 2.3 Good practices adopted by successful WUAs and WRD
- 2.4 Factors of success of WUAs and future of WUAs

1. Introduction

During 1980s it was growingly realized that the massive investments made in large irrigation schemes in India were not providing satisfactory returns. Several problems related to maintenance of the canal systems, equitable distribution of water and disciplined water withdrawals led to poor water use efficiency, between 30-40% on major and medium irrigation schemes. Various studies and

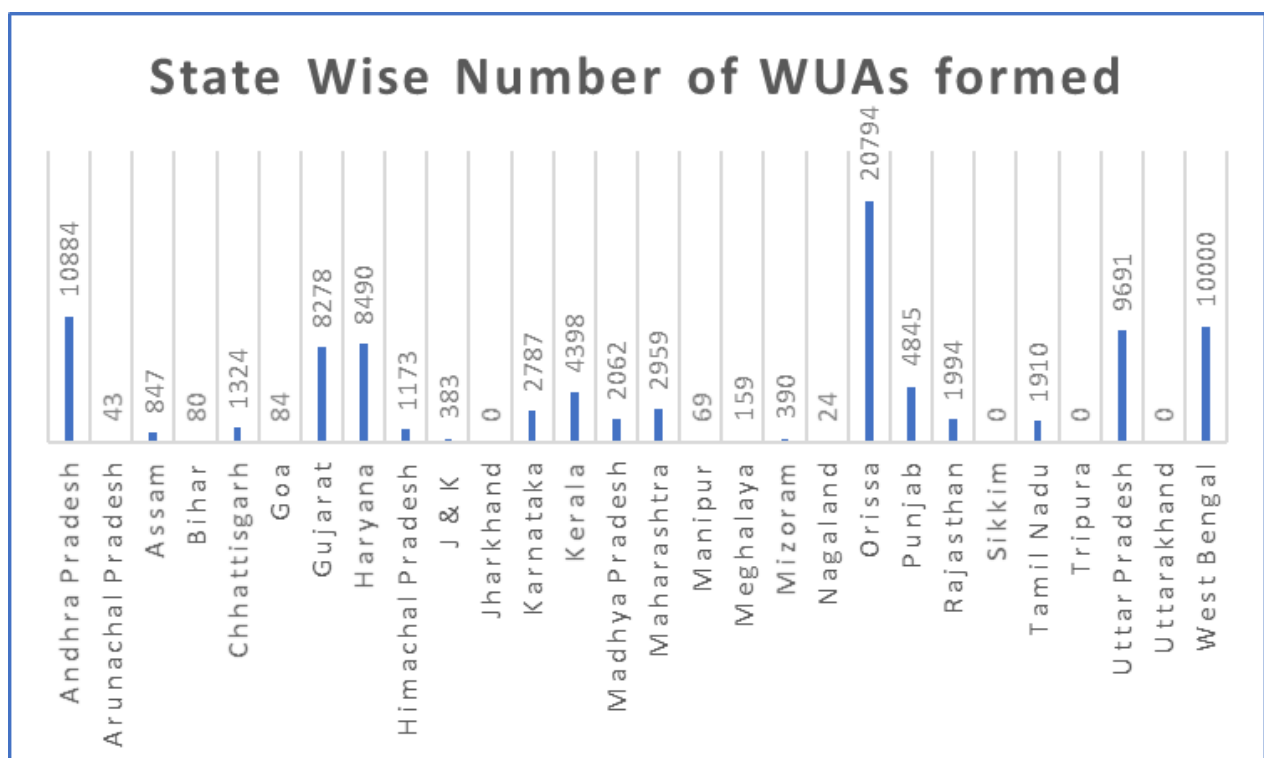
Para 7.5 of NWP 2012 says that 'Water Users Associations (WUAs) should be given statutory powers to collect and retain a portion of water charges, manage the volumetric quantum of water allotted to them and maintain the distribution system in their jurisdiction. WUAs should be given the freedom to fix rates subject to floor rates determined by water regulatory authorities (WRAs).'

reports on irrigation sector , The National Water Policy (NWP) as well as the state water policies have almost reached a consensus that the involvement of farmers is necessary to improve the water use efficiency and the performance of irrigation systems. The farmers’ participation in irrigation management is ensured through constitution and development of the Water User Associations (WUAs). Involving the farmers in irrigation management through WUAs is popularly known as participatory irrigation management (PIM).

2. Status of Water User Associations in India

The Government of India took up the initiative of setting up WUAs through the programme of Command Area Development (CAD) in several States in 1985. Later, the National Planning Commission (now Niti Ayog) set up a Special Working Group on PIM to review and suggest the strategies for supporting WUAs for the 9th Five Year Plan (1997-2002). WUAs have also been actively promoted through State Water and Land Management Institutes (WALMIs), the World Bank Assisted Water Resources Consolidation / Restructuring Projects, and by the Indian Network on Participatory Irrigation Management (IndiaNPIM). Some Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) like Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM), Samaj Parivartan Kendra in

Graph 1- State wise Number of WUAs



Maharashtra, and the Development Support Centre (DSC) in Gujarat have contributed significantly to form and strengthen the WUAs. Currently, out of the total 28 States, some 24 States of India have adopted the PIM approach partly or fully by forming Water User Associations (WUAs) by enacting specific PIM Acts or amending existing irrigation acts. The leading States are Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Gujarat, Karnataka, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh.

According to the latest estimates, around 94000 of Water Users' Associations (WUAs) have been formed in India covering an area of 17.84 million ha (Graph 1). These figures are not important as a large number of WUAs have been established on paper to complete the targets without any organizational and capacity building efforts to make them functional.

That is why, the success of WUAs in handling irrigation management has been mixed. Wherever WUAs have been formed based on principles of organizing on water management and principles of change management with participatory procedures for example, WUAs supported by Development Support Centre (DSC) in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, WUAs in Waghad Irrigation Scheme supported by Samaj Parivartan Kendra in Maharashtra and Tank User Groups supported by Dhan Foundation in Karnataka, the results are encouraging.

Picture 1: Participation in action



But wherever the PIM is implemented in top-down fixed target mode, it has failed to take off. In a nutshell, the poor performance of WUAs in India is not because the idea is wrong, but because the people implementing it (often engineers) have either not understood the process and rationale of forming the WUAs or they feel uncomfortable in supporting the WUAs due to its inherent conditions of transparency and accountability.