

# Certificate Course on Participatory Irrigation Management (CCPIM)

## Module 2- Status of Water User Associations (WUAs)

### Topic-2.2 Constraints, Issues and Challenges for WUAs

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#### 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 & WRD.
- 2.4 Factors of success of WUAs and future of WUAs

### 1. Constraints, Issues and Challenges for WUAs

#### 1.1 PIM Acts should be farmer friendly, simple, and practical.

The PIM Acts and Rules in each state are 'one size fits for all' type - rigid, lengthy, cumbersome, procedure ridden and cut-off from the ground realities. The acts seem to work as constraints instead of enablers of implementation.

All acts are based on the premise that office bearers of a WUA will be keen to provide voluntary services and notifying every farmer as a member in the command area of WUA will act as a binding force.

PIM Acts should be farmer friendly, simple, and practical. The issues of resource generation, accountability on departmental support, engagement of NGOs for handholding/capacity building of WUAs, women participation, election and

canal offences procedures should be relooked in the light of implementation experience gathered from the field.

### 1.2 Need to adopt a step-by-step approach for large systems.

The State PIM Acts elaborate in detail how higher level WUA organizations at the distributary and up-to project/scheme level should be formed. Experience from other countries, such as Mexico and Turkey, have shown that it is important to get the lower order WUAs functioning correctly before moving above the outlet or minor canal. Once the WUAs are able to manage, operate and maintain their systems within the outlet or minor command, they will be interested, and able, to start getting involved in the management of the higher order canals. The best example of this is Gujarat where the act provides for WUAs at minor level canal only. But once the minor level WUAs began functioning well and stabilized, the informal WUAs at distributary level have been set up by the farmers without waiting for amendment in the Act. Conversely, Madhya Pradesh started with formation of WUAs at minor, distributary, and project level in one go but had to backtrack to WUA at minor canal level only.

### 1.3 The WUAs shall have to extend their scope to integrated water management.

Right now, WUAs are focused on repair and maintenance of canals, canal water distribution amongst farmers, irrigation recording and revenue collection. Environmental problems like waterlogging, salinity, unsustainable ground water extraction and contamination of soil in the canal command area are major issues in irrigated agriculture which are crucial for agriculture productivity. Since surface water (canal water) and ground water (wells, tube-wells) are integrated and complementary sources, the WUAs need to focus on management of canal water and ground water in their jurisdiction.

PIM Acts in all the states provide for role of WUA in ground water management also. The Maharashtra PIM Act even allows WUAs to levy water charges on use of ground water and recycled water (Para 27(3) of the Act). But the WUAs are entirely focused on canal water management leaving the ground water management as an individual responsibility. It is necessary for WUAs to focus on

all water resources in the command and should extend their role in integrated irrigation water management for their sustainability.

*Picture 1 : Construction of reservoirs near canal in Maharashtra*



#### 1.4 WUAs must be sustainable without subsidies.

PIM Acts promulgated by the states, in general, do not allow WUAs to set irrigation water charges but have a provision of a fixed percentage of plough back of collected water charges to WUAs. When the irrigation water fees are minimal and irrigation is provided free in many states, the share of the water fees for the WUAs remain inadequate. Currently, WUAs formed under CADP are provided with management subsidy at a rate of Rs 1000/ ha, but WUAs in non-CADP area do not get this subsidy. WUAs are also given funds for operation and maintenance of the system by the State Governments. If these subsidies are withdrawn, the WUAs will not be financially viable. It is better if WUAs set and collect their own irrigation fees to cover actual expenditure on water management activities and administrative charges in a transparent manner for sustainability of WUAs.

#### 1.5 Training is required at all levels

Participatory Irrigation Management is an approach which encourages the users' involvement in the decision-making as well as implementation of irrigation water conveyance, delivery, distribution, utilization, and the drainage from outlet / minor canal level up to the Project Level. The integration of decision, implementation, and joint management by irrigation agency and the

farmers is a new concept for both. Such a change demands special skills and attitudes in both the agency and the farmers in regard to the new roles and responsibilities. It implies that a lot of training and capacity building efforts are required to enable the farmers and officials to form and sustain WUAs.

State WALMIs, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), NGOs, agriculture universities, National Water Academy, IndiaNPIM and other training institutes should have a network to pool training resources and generate training resources through training of trainers (ToT) as the challenge of training and capacity building is huge in comparison to resources available in the States.

The major problem with the training of farmers arises from largely class room trainings being imparted by WALMIs, KVKs and other training institutes. New and innovative training methods like Farmer Field Schools (FFS) which are conducted at the farmers' fields and are based on 'learning by doing' are much more effective. Similarly, the 'exposure visits' to successful projects during the training have been found quite effective than mere class-room training which has extremely limited impact on the participants. Chhattisgarh Irrigation Development Project (CIDP) and Uttar Pradesh Water Sector Restructuring Project are good examples where the training based on the concept of 'learning by doing' and through Farmer Field School (FFS) and Farmer Water School (FWS) has been attempted to strengthen the WUAs.

*Picture 2 : Farmer Water Schools (Uttar Pradesh): 'Leaning by Doing.'*



### 1.6 Government agencies need to be reoriented

WUA requires interaction and support from many government agencies like Water Resources Department (WRD), CADA, Department of Agriculture (DoA), Department of Horticulture (DoH), Ground Water Department, and Rural Development Department etc. These agencies work in isolation and often at cross-purposes. The Department of Agriculture promotes crop varieties and crop practices while WRDs are suppliers of irrigation water. Both the departments rarely interact with each other on crop varieties and crop practices that are to be promoted based on available water. Across the states, the presence of agriculture and other agencies to support WUAs is negligible. Though the provision of co-opting an ex-officio member from agriculture department in the management committee of WUAs exists in some State PIM Acts, yet the support of agriculture department is not visible in the field.

It is suggested that WRD / agency responsible for promoting WUA should constitute multi-disciplinary PIM cells in each irrigation division, on the pattern of Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, which should provide single window support to WUAs on training and capacity building requirements and act as an interface between WUA and various farmer friendly schemes of other line agencies/departments so that WUAs develop as a credible and efficient institution for the water users.

### 1.7 Effective Monitoring of WUAs at each level

Monitoring is an effective tool to guide the WUAs on right track for sustainability. The PIM Acts of each state have provisions for monitoring of WUAs by the WRD at each level but WRD are mostly reluctant or short of time/skill to do it in a proper manner. Mostly it is a crude exercise in controlling / restraining WUAs. Many important activities like quality, relevance and timing of training deliveries, routing of water charges to WUA and audit compliances etc. are not focused on monitoring which may result in misappropriation of WUA funds and weak WUAs. Therefore, it is necessary to establish regular monitoring mechanism through dedicated PIM Cells created for this special purpose.