

Certificate Course on Participatory Irrigation Management (CCPIM)

Module 2- Status of Water User Associations (WUAs)

Topic 2.4: Factors of success of WUAs and future of WUAs

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Factors of success of WUAs and future of WUAs

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

1.0 Key factors for the success of WUAs

Some common characteristics found in successful WUAs are enumerated below:

1. Mechanism for mid- term evaluation and course correction
2. Willingness of farmers to work together.
3. No hidden objectives
4. Consensus on objectives
5. Adherence to self-imposed rules
6. Participation of women
7. Incentives built around IMT program, at least, for initial success.
8. Keen interest by top irrigation bureaucracy and genuine collaboration of field staff with the farmers
9. NGOs for motivating and handholding of farmers in their day-to-day work, registration process, documents maintenance etc. for the initial years.

10. Democratic functioning: written constitution, defined rights, safeguards to protect women, small, marginal farmers and weaker sections of the society
11. Regular meeting of general body and executive body
12. Legitimacy of WUA: MoU between WUA and Government, extent to which government consults WUAs and genuine demands of WUAs are addressed by the government.

Besides above characteristics, the following issues are also important to the success of WUAs:

1) Adequate mobilization of community for formation of WUAs:

If WUAs have to succeed in India, we need to analyze the factors affecting the willingness of the prime actors, namely, IDs/CADAs/ WRDs on one hand and the water users on the other hand to involve themselves. Most of the PIM acts have been framed without consultation with water users. The PIM Acts are focused on shifting all water management and system operation and maintenance responsibilities to water users without any compensation to their investment of time and effort. The PIM Acts envisage some sophisticated functions like water audit, water budgeting, water distribution and conflict resolution to WUAs which neither have been attempted by irrigation departments nor appropriate skills exist with the department. The responsibilities of office bearers of WUA call for their full time involvement. It also calls for time and cash contributions from the farmers to support an agenda in which the farmers do not perceive any gain or incentives for themselves. Unless the farmers are convinced that there is adequate compensation and incentives for their effort, formation of robust WUAs will not be possible.

2) Attitude of the irrigation/ CAD agency must be supportive.

The Irrigation Departments are construction-oriented, and their priorities lie in implementation of predetermined plans according to budget-allocations. Hence client-oriented PIM does not occupy a prominent place in their implementation plans. Moreover, their PIM initiatives are found more construction-centred than management-centred, resting mainly upon the technical interventions of physical rehabilitation and modernization package

for the canal system rather than the people and management systems that operate and maintain the physical infrastructure.

Under such situation, Irrigation Officials often complain about the farmers' irresponsible behaviour in tampering with canal structures and taking unauthorized withdrawals. On the other hand, farmers complain about poor system maintenance and inadequate operation of canals, non-availability of irrigation officials, their paternalistic attitude and their indifference to irrigation needs of the area.

3) Irrigation agency must be accountable to the water users.

It is obvious that the basic requirement for sustainability of WUAs is dependable access to water. Unreliable and inadequate availability of canal supplies negates the very purpose of group action. Since the Irrigation Departments are principal suppliers of water, the success and sustainability of WUAs largely depend upon their willingness and commitment to promote PIM. It leads to conclusion that (a) the ID need to be held accountable to WUAs/water users and (b) the IDs are best placed of all the actors to support WUA formation. However, the (a) and (b) roles are in conflict to some degree, the ID is hardly likely to set up the WUAs to be aggressive in chasing the ID to provide a quality service! On the other hand, the ID do understand water and have the staff on the ground to assist WUAs. If they are to help, as in Mexico and Turkey, they need a major change of mind set.

4) WUAs should be built using social capital that exists.

Just as social institutions, such as caste create inter-linkages among people, local organizations such as cooperatives, village panchayat or traditional caste panchayat and credit and mutual aid societies add to the stock of social capital. It has been observed in many PIM programs that the functioning of WUAs is more participatory and democratic where a culture of strong Self-Help Groups (SHGs) is already established. In the states where WUAs have been established at the outlet level (lowest part of a canal system), it will be good if SHGs are promoted for better results in WUA functioning.

5) Right kind of local leadership is required

Leaders provide focal points for organization and reduce transaction costs (Gulati et al, 2002). At initial stages particular leaders may be critical, both

for mobilizing support within and outside the group and modifying behaviour of members. Normally, it has been observed that during formation and initial stages of WUA, local contractors become continually active to capture WUAs agenda on repair and maintenance of the canal system.

The promoter agency should be careful lest they may not overshadow the functioning of WUA.

Trusted leaders can provide the assurance that is necessary for people to be willing to cooperate. However organizations and collective action that depend on a particular individual may not be robust and sustainable over the long run as those that are institutionalized. A good system is one that may be formed by a dynamic and trusted local leader, but which is subsequently institutionalised with an elected WUA Committee which then elects the WUA Chairman from amongst the Committee.

6) Building people's institutions take time.

It is easier to form a WUA under the PIM Act and count it but its functioning as an institution which can assume independent responsibility of irrigation management depends on a slow, consistent capacity building and handholding process by the promoter agency. Depending on the enabling environment for farmers' participation, it may take 10 to 15 years before a WUA matures as an institution and can be considered to be self-sustaining. The PIM implementation plan should focus on supporting organizational functions of WUA during the initial years gradually shifting to water management functions.

There is widespread misconception regarding PIM among all ranks of government staff who think that their role ends with election and constitution of WUAs (and even during the process of formation, their role is limited to rehabilitation and deferred maintenance of canal only) and once a WUA is constituted, it is fully responsible for O&M and cost recovery and other water management functions from Day 1. The irrigation agency officials have to be sensitized that there is a continuing and supporting role of irrigation agency, even in cases where WUAs have achieved sovereignty over all aspects of irrigation management. Normally, WUA ownership implies that they are responsible for O&M, user representation and other functions

related with agricultural growth while irrigation agency and other line agencies continue to have facilitator and regulatory role.

7) Water management requires multidisciplinary approach.

Irrigation water management is a socio-technical process and requires multidisciplinary approach. Traditional IDs would be able to support WUAs only when water management divisions/PIM Cells are established and staff in disciplines such as rural sociology, agronomy, agriculture engineering, on-farm water management and use are available. As ID have professional irrigation managers in key positions such as Executive Engineers, there is no reason why agricultural engineers are not eligible to be inducted in such positions.

8) WUAs should focus on core activities.

The role of a WUA can be identified by its main functions:

- i) Water management is the core function
- ii) In order to operate the system effectively maintenance is required
- iii) In order to maintain the irrigation system funds are required
- iv) In order to set and organise the collection of funds (via an irrigation service fee) and to manage the irrigation system in the interests of the community, a community-based management entity is required (the WUA).

In many cases the capacity building and training of WUAs has focussed on the governance and financial aspects (roles and responsibilities of WUA executives and members, training for treasurers, etc.) rather than the core activity of water management. If a WUA is formed and meetings are held, but the water management does not improve then users will rightly question the purpose of the WUA.

2.0 Future of WUAs:

The core objective of establishing WUA, namely, using canal water efficiently and economically, saving canal water to extend more area under irrigation facility, ensure equitable distribution of water up to the tail end and maintain canal infrastructure will not attract the real participation of farmers unless these objectives are clearly linked with agriculture productivity and income generation

for the farmers. For this to happen, the WUAs need to have an entrepreneurial orientation and should extend their scope to backward and forward linkages of agriculture. The WUAs have to be a hub of rural development through proper mix of local labour, available resources and developmental schemes like MNREGA, National Horticulture Mission and various schemes in Agriculture Sector.

Experience and various studies have shown that the water user associations are, generally, acting as an extended arm of the department relying solely on the mercy of departmental support in terms of finance, day-to-day governance and irrigation and agriculture technology and there is dearth of appropriate local leadership to steer WUA towards entrepreneurial orientation and sustainability. The development of local water leaders and giving WUAs an entrepreneurial orientation is the key challenge today. There is a need to create enabling environment for local leadership which can orient a WUAs to an entrepreneurial institution which can take up the following activities:

1. To develop new markets/marketing strategies to satisfy the myriad needs of the farmers.
2. To discover new sources of water, either through conservation or through better management of irrigation water in the command.
3. An entrepreneurial orientation of WUA shall exhort them to establish and sustain comparative advantage in terms of supply, cost, and quality of water.
4. The WUAs can appropriately mix local labour and available resources including development schemes like NREGA, National Horticulture Mission, National Food Security Mission, PM Krishi Sinchai Yojana etc to create goods and services
5. To promote new technologies (IT, Communication, GIS, Remote Sensing etc.) to reduce cost and increase productivity of agriculture and create value added products for the farmers.
6. Create employment in agriculture sector which is suffering with under employment since long.

An entrepreneurial WUA shall also be instrumental in development of entrepreneurial qualities and attitudes among potential entrants to bring about significant changes in the rural areas.