

Strengthening Water Users' Associations in Indonesia

The Government of Indonesia is pursuing a number of activities to strengthen farmer water management capabilities. One of the programs involves developing viable water users' associations (WUAs) in both government-assisted systems and farmer-managed systems. Through the collaboration of an inter-ministerial team, university researchers, and LP3ES (an Indonesian NGO which served as a facilitator), a field study was conducted to learn more about existing WUAs in four provinces. Funding for the twenty-month study was provided by the Ford Foundation.

The study's overall findings and recommendations were presented at a national seminar held in Cipayung, West Java, 10-13 February 1988. The study's recommendations address three major topics: (1) the territorial jurisdiction of WUAs; (2) physical construction and the status of irrigation systems; and (3) legal aspects, WUA organization, and finances of WUAs.

Territorial Jurisdiction of WUAs

Some WUAs are based on tertiary blocks of large systems, while others are based on the hydrologic boundaries of the whole irrigation system. The study recommends that WUAs be based on hydrologic units, with a single WUA for systems less than 500 ha. Systems over 500 ha should be managed by a federation of WUAs based on tertiary blocks or groups of tertiary blocks drawing water from the same main or secondary canal.

Situations, where more than one WUA manages an irrigation system under 500 ha. should be eliminated by the creation of a WUA federation which will eventually become a unitary WUA. Organization of WUAs on

village administrative boundaries is generally preferable for coordinating irrigation activities with other village-sponsored activities. The study also recommends that WUA federations be established to handle intersystem water management issues, even though the government still reserves the right to manage water at the rivercourse level.

The Role of WUAs in Construction

Three patterns of construction are used. The first is construction planned by the government and carried out by contractors. This approach places greater emphasis on technical considerations and tends to ignore social aspects of water management. Farmers develop little sense of ownership in the newly constructed facilities because they have not participated in planning, design, or construction. Farmer-managed systems developed in this way become "government" systems. Farmers have a tendency to adopt a "wait-and-see" approach to maintenance of the physical facilities, in hope of government assistance.

The second pattern is construction carried out by the farmers themselves with technical and financial assistance from the government. This approach holds out the possibility of developing facilities with high technical standards which also meet the needs of the irrigators. Systems assisted in this way remain under the management control of the farmers and do not change their status to government irrigation systems. One drawback to this approach is that it requires considerable time and a mechanism for handling the more complex administrative procedures.

The third approach is where farmers do all the planning, design, and execution of the construction. Under this approach the farmers in all ways own the system and assume responsibility for its maintenance. This approach considerably lightens the financial burden on the government. However, the financial and technical burden on farmers is increased.

Considering the advantages and disadvantages of these three approaches, the study recommends that irrigation development of systems under 500 ha should follow the second pattern, with construction the primary responsibility of the farmers themselves, although the government should provide technical and financial assistance. In this connection, the government has a 15 year schedule for turning over all its systems under 500 ha to WUAs. Before turnover, rehabilitation will be undertaken in selected systems. The study concludes that this second pattern of construction is the most appropriate one for rehabilitation under the turnover program.

Legal and Financial Aspects

Few of the existing WUAs have been legally sanctioned in accordance with current regulations. In practice the procedures for officially recognizing WUAs do not always follow official guidelines and regulations. Even for WUAs which have been officially sanctioned, it is not clear if they are legal entities which are able to receive government assets (for example, structures built with government funds), to give or receive credit, or to enter into contractual arrangements with third parties. The study recommends that WUAs need to be made legal entities and that a mechanism for realizing that needs to be developed.

In addition to strengthening the legal position of WUAs, the study also recommends that gubernatorial instructions in each province are needed to

help strengthen WUAs. Another way in which the WUAs can be strengthened is by turning over to them the physical assets of the system. Under the turnover program mentioned above, until WUAs can be made legal bodies, only "use rights", but not true ownership of government-built facilities can be transferred.

The study also recommends that WUAs now under the control of other village-based bodies, be set up as administratively independent organizations. Support and guidance for the WUAs should be provided by the level of government appropriate for the territorial scope of each WUA. For systems located entirely within one village, this would be the office of the village headman, while for systems covering more than one regency, the office of the provincial governor would provide the support.

Follow up

The findings and recommendations presented above represent the results of a first phase of activities designed to strengthen WUAs. As a next step, efforts are being made to turn these recommendations into official policy and effective implementation.

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