

Overview of the Workshop

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SOME OF THE papers described experiences in the improvement of irrigation management through the **roles** played by social organizers whereas others related the experiences of poverty reduction by employing “catalysts” or “change **agents**.” Some papers described lessons worth learning while others sought solutions to their problems. Most of the papers dealt with the development of the capacity of farmers to improve their management capabilities. Suggestions **were** also made concerning the functional organization necessary to manage an irrigation system.

A summary table of the characteristics of the social-organizer programs in the different countries, **as** described at this workshop, is given at the end of this overview.

THE “SOCIAL ORGANIZER”

The countries represented in this workshop have different sociopolitical and management systems. Hence the names given to the “social organizers” **are** also different. They **are** known variously as “social organizer,” “community organizer,” “institution organizer,” “farmer irrigators organizer,” “**association** organizer,” “group organizer,” and “farmer social organizer.” The differences in names illustrate the attempt to adapt the social organizer’s role to the sociocultural and political context of the different countries. In view of the variety of experiences as indicated by the names given to the social organizers, several key questions emerge:

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- * What are the conditions which influence the potential usefulness of social-organizer programs?
- * Which interventions **are** culture specific, environment specific. **or** related **to** a particular political context?
- * How can flexibility in implementing programs using a social-learning approach be enabled and fostered?
- * How can the policy and bureaucratic conditions of implementation **be** made more conducive to success?

SOCIAL ORGANIZERS IN DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS

The social organizers are lodged in different institutional settings under different sociopolitical contexts. Some are attached to the governmental machinery or within the agency, as in Indonesia (Irrigation Inspectors). Sri Lanka (Agricultural Planning Team), the Philippines (Irrigation **Community Organization**), and the **Agricultural Development Bank of Nepal (Group Organizer)**. There are experiences of employment of social organizers by nongovernment organizations as well, as in Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Pakistan (Aga **Khan Rural** Support Programme). Fanners have **also** been employed as “social organizers” in north Thailand (fanner social organizer) and in the Philippines (farmer irrigator organizer). The variety of experiences reported **from** the countries which participated in the workshop, indicates **that** a blueprint approach to designing social-organizer programs is not likely to work. To achieve effective performance in social-organizer programs, the social-learning approach is **necessary** because irrigation systems differ **from** one another, from country to country, and even within a country.

TYPES OF SOCIAL ORGANIZERS

Two **types** of social organizers were identified in the course of discussions in the workshop. One type is the single purpose **social organizer who deal exclusively** with irrigation-related activities. The second type of social organizer is the multipurpose organizers such **as** the “group organizer” in Nepal. The effectiveness of the type of social organizer fielded **would** depend **on the** institutional and social environment. Hence, the choice of the type of social organizer should **be** evaluated within the relevant environmental contexts in which they work.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF SOCIAL ORGANIZERS

Several papers pointed out that it was the responsibility of the social organizer to 1) improve the capacity development of the farmers, 2) improve irrigation management through the promotion of farmers' active participation, and 3) smooth the relationship and communication between farmers and irrigation agencies. It was agreed that these **are** the major responsibilities of social organizers, but emphasis on each of the above differs from country to country.

QUALIFICATIONS OF SOCIAL ORGANIZERS

An issue raised in a number of papers is that of the qualifications **required** to serve **as** a social organizer. Different qualifications were required in different programs. Qualifications seem to be specific to the project activity, program objectives, and to the availability of manpower. Questions were also raised whether the social organizer should be drawn from the community he is to **serve** or whether one from outside the community would **be** more effective. The minimum conditions set by many of the papers were for social organizers to be proficient in the local dialect and to be sensitive to the local culture.

STATUS OF THE SOCIAL ORGANIZER

Should the social organizer **be** a member of the **permanent** staff of the organization, or should he or she be hired temporarily for the **specific task**, or are volunteers to be preferred? The papers did not indicate a single model to follow, but made clear the need to consider the various alternatives.

TRAINING SOCIAL ORGANIZERS

Upgrading the skills of the social organizers is recognized **as** necessary to increase their effectiveness. Four types of training programs were identified: 1) regular fixed training, 2) ongoing training in accordance with changing **tasks** and challenges (Indonesia and Nepal), 3) horizontal training programs, and **4)** vertical training programs. The choice of the specific mode

of training depends on the objectives of the social-organizer program. However, it was recognized that a standard type of training program would be inadequate to cope with the dynamic social and political context of irrigation systems.

EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL ORGANIZERS

The following were suggested as measures of effectiveness of social organizers: 1) the water users' association as an organization, 2) increased agricultural production, and 3) increased resource mobilization for operation and maintenance of the systems in which the social organizers work.

Several issues were raised regarding the relationship between the effectiveness of the social organizer and the legal status of the water users' association. While the institution of water users' associations is in the process of being legally recognized in many countries, this is not the case everywhere. How can social organizers strengthen the capacity of organized farmers in the absence of legal recognition of water users' associations? Is it a precondition for water users' associations to have legal status before starting a social-organizer program? The papers presented at the workshop suggested that the effectiveness of social organizers was related to the legal status of the water users' association.

FARMER TRAINING TO DEVELOP THEIR CAPACITY

It was recognized that there is a need for specific programs to strengthen farmers' capacity to manage the irrigation systems. It was also suggested that nontraditional ways of providing such training to farmers should be tried. participation in information collection, socialization of ideas, information sharing, and farmer-to-farmer training were activities identified as means of strengthening farmer-managerial capacity.

FARMER PARTICIPATION

One of the fundamental questions raised was the relation of social-organizer program objectives to the social, political, and bureaucratic conditions of the country. Implicit in this question is the rationale or the objectives behind the decision to adopt a participatory approach in irrigation development and management. Farmer participation may be viewed as a means to increasing

food production, to fostering long-term local self-reliance, or to reducing government intervention and investment in project construction, maintenance, management, or a combination of them.

The alternative chosen for implementing the social-organizer program may be a reflection of the bargaining power of the target farmer group relative to the rest of society or to the government. An issue of interest in this context is that of local participation in, and control of, construction funds. Another is the strength of the existing irrigation institution and how the use of social organizers in a participatory approach can avoid farmer dependence on government intervention.

These underlying objectives have implications for how local groups are organized, whether broad-based, multipurpose, or exclusively for system management. It was also observed that water users' organizations even while concerned only with irrigation, are often in fact multipurpose.

LEGAL RECOGNITION OF EXISTING INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Existing indigenous groups and organizations should be legally and formally recognized. Most programs work with indigenous organizations or informal groups and eventually establish formal groups, some of which obtain legal status and some do not. These organizations should evolve gradually and preferably informally, prior to establishment and should experience a learning process in developing capabilities. The social organizer can facilitate and perhaps accelerate this process to some degree.

IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES

What motivates an agency to initiate or to become involved in a social-organizer program? What political framework -- for example, the terms of the financial responsibilities, water rights, or the legal basis for water users' associations -- is conducive to or essential for enabling the supportive bureaucratic environment for this type of program? To what extent is top-level support necessary for irrigation bureaucracies to become socially sensitive and genuinely supportive of farmers' organizing efforts as happened in the Philippines?

Having a nongovernment organization employ the social organizer separately or supervise the social organizer within the technical agency, may be a more appropriate strategy to promote responsiveness to farmers and increased attention to social issues, than using only technically oriented staff. The social organizer may be part of a larger strategy aimed at bureaucratic reorientation and sensitization to local needs and perspectives. On the other hand, using existing agency staff as social organizers may also be a strategy of bureaucratic reorientation and long-term institutionalization of the social capabilities within the technical agencies.

IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL-ORGANIZER PROGRAMS

A social organizer should not be viewed narrowly as a position but more broadly as a set of tasks or roles. Many roles are filled by social organizers: catalyst, facilitator, mobilizer, mediator, motivator, link, enabler, adviser, trainer, and change agent are just a few which were mentioned. The roles common to most social-organizer programs are facilitator and catalyst of local interaction, i.e., promotion of communication or problem-solving within communities, and opening of access or serving as a link to engineers and outside resources. The tasks referred to most frequently are project identification, information collection, mobilization of farmers' ideas in design, and the motivation of farmers to carry out activities in construction and in the establishment of water users' associations. The social organizer seems to play a key role in catalyzing a process in which communication lines are kept open between all parties.

SOCIOTECHNICAL BRIDGING

One of the themes dealt with is the approaches taken to bridge the social and technical aspects. Is the social organizer a technical person trained in the specifics of group dynamics and social-science skills, or a social-science graduate trained to understand basic technical issues pertinent to the role? Though there are examples of effective coordination of the social and technical aspects of irrigation development, this subject requires careful consideration to strengthen the bridge between social and technical fields. At the administrative or the institutional level, the issue of linking the social and technical aspects can take many shapes depending on the implementor bias and complexity of the organizational relationship.

Many social-organizer programs have to deal with issues of decentralization and bureaucratic reorientation as part of the process of engendering greater acceptance of farmer participation. Each in its own way is exploring what can be done to influence the institutional environment in which social organizers work and in which irrigation systems are designed and built. Through dialogue and advocacy, working groups and seminars, most programs seek to open communication at a number of levels within the bureaucracy. Questions of top-down, bottom-up, and interactive processes are answered differently in different contexts depending upon the implementors, the leverage of each party, and the ultimate program objectives.

SUMMARY OF SOCIAL-ORGANIZER PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS (I)

Country	Main Implementors	Status of Implementors	Other agencies	Main type of Irrigation	Social-organizer terms	Focus of organizing	Social-organizer status	Major social-organizer roles
The Philippines	National Irrigation Administration* (1970s)	Government organization; regular	Ateneo de Manila University	Communal systems <1000 ha;	Irrigation community organizer; irrigator; organizer worker	System development and management; indigenous organizer	Full-time; existing government organization staff	Catalyst Facilitator Consultant
Indonesia	Directorate of Irrigation (1987)	Government organization and nongovernment organization; regular	Institute for Social. Economic Research, Education, and Information and [IM]	Turnover of existing small systems; <150 ha	Institutional organizer	System repair and management; indigenous organizer	Full-time existing government organization staff	Information collector Mediator Adviser
	Directorate of Irrigation (1986)	Government organization and non-government organization; pilot	Institute for Social. Economic Research, Education, and Information	Communal repair or improvement	Community organizer	System development; indigenous organizer	Full-time; new hire; nongovernment organization project	Stimulator Enabler Facilitator
	Bina Swadaya (1984)	Nongovernment organization; government organization; pilot	Local Government Public Works Service	Pumping	Social organizer	System development and management; self-reliance groups	Full-time new hire; government organization staff	Motivator Link Enabler

* Also testing the use of farmers as social organizers in three National Irrigation Systems.

SUMMARY OF SOCIAL-ORGANIZER PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS (II)

Country	Main implementors	Status of implementors	Other agencies	Main type of irrigation	Social-organizer terms	Focus of organizing	Social-organizer status	Major social-organizer roles
Sri Lanka	Department of Agrarian Services (1988)	Government organization; pilot and regular	University and research institutes	Modernization: rehabilitation of tanks	Agricultural Planning Team	System development and management; indigenous groups	Part-time; existing government organization staff	Interdisciplinary Adviser Link Facilitator
	District Integrated Rural Development Programs**	Government organization based on pilot project	Department of Agrarian Services; Irrigation Department	Rehabilitation: improvement of tanks	Social mobilizer	Broad-based; indigenous groups	Full-time; local hire	Mobilizer Catalyst
India***	Public Works Department; Agricultural Engineering Department (1988)	Government organization- and non-government organization; pilot project	Anna University Association for Sarva Seva Farms; nongovernment organization	Rehabilitation modernization of tanks	Institution organizer; technical assistant	System development and management; indigenous organizer	Full-time; pilot project hire	Facilitator Mobilizer Mediator

** Proposed, not yet implemented.

*** Although the participant could not attend the workshop, information from the paper is included here.

SUMMARY OF SOCIAL-ORGANIZER PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS (III)

Country	Main implementors	Status of implementors	Other agencies	Main type of irrigation	Social-organizer term	Focus of organizing	Social-organizer	Major social-organizer roles
Thailand	Royal Irrigation Department; People's Irrigation Assistant (1985)	Government organization and private People's Irrigation Associations; pilot project	Chiang Mai University; basin development	Small systems linkage in farmer-social organizer	Farmer-social organizer; existing Peoples' Irrigation Associations	Joint-irrigation management; indigenous organizations; Peoples' Irrigation Association	Part-time; local; semivolunteer	Link Mobilizer Enabler
	Royal Irrigation Department (1985)	Government organization; pilot becoming regular	Khon Kaen University	New small weirs and reservoirs	Community organizer	System development and management; indigenous groups	Full-time; new, temporary; government organization staff	Enabler Mobilizer Facilitator
Bangladesh	Proshika (1976)	Nongovernment organization; regular	International funding	Pumping of deep or shallow tube wells	Field organizer	Broad-based; landless and margin peasants	Full-time; existing nongovernment organization staff	Empowerment Facilitator Mobilizer
Pakistan	Aga Khan Rural Support (1983)	Non-government organization; regular	International funding	Delivery channels	Social organizer	Broad-based; village organizer	Full-time; existing nongovernment organization staff	Motivator Facilitator Liaison

SUMMARY OF SOCIAL-ORGANIZER PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS (IV)

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Country	Main implementors	Status of implementors	Other agencies	Main type of irrigation	Social-organizer term	Focus of organizing	Social-organizer status	Major social-organizer roles
Nepal	Agricultural Development Bank of Nepal	Semi-government; regular	CARE/Nepal; Department of Irrigation	Minor irrigation, gravity, tube wells	Group organizer	System development; farmer groups	Full-time; semigovernment	Project identifier Motivator Monitor
	System Management Division (1987)	Nongovernment organization; government organization; pilot	Department of Irrigation	Medium-scale irrigation	Association organizer	Irrigation management; water users' groups	Full-time; new, temporary nongovernment organization hire	Mediator Mobilizer Facilitator

Notes: Lao PDR