

Opening Active Communication between Agency and People's Irrigation Associations through the Farmer as Social Organizer in Jointly Managed Irrigation Systems

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INTRODUCTION

INVOLVING THE THREE parties of agency, farmers, and university in the irrigation-management process is complicated. Although still at an early stage in Thailand the slow diffusion and utilization of research knowledge is already evident. A critical review of previous development performance has led to the conclusion that farmers must be directly involved in planning and working in all stages of project development: not as clients, not as participants, but in the key role as social organizer to facilitate a joint-management practice.

Joint-management of an irrigation system requires active communication and information exchange in the decision-making process. Tripartite efforts have been directed at initiating time-saving direct communication and cost-reducing methods for all parties involved. From previous experience it is known that hiring and training field professionals as social organizers are very costly. Due to regional variation, implementation of a nationwide program would lead to mixed results. Where local people's organizations are already resourceful and functioning to sustain community-irrigation tasks, as in the northern Thai region, there is much opportunity for successful joint-management using farmers as social organizers.

This paper proposes a model in which farmers serve as social organizers in irrigation-management development of medium-scale reservoir systems, as demonstrated at the Mae On Basin Project. Experienced farmers with supplemental training have been working to facilitate interaction between local Peoples' Irrigation Associations and the Royal Irrigation Department in operation and maintenance.

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PROJECT BACKGROUND

During the past few years, the Royal Irrigation Department has **been** applying responsive minimum-intervention policies in northern irrigation development. It has **been** widely recognized that there are no new sources of water to be captured and thus no sites for new construction. **Only** rehabilitation and replacement schemes will be effective economic and technical undertakings. Most schemes carried out by the responsible agencies have **been** purely technical solutions unconcerned with involvement of the beneficiaries and the human element in management. These schemes critically require assistance to improve irrigation management such **as** can be **applied in a tripartite strategy. The Mae On Reservoir project is a medium-scale irrigation system** built by the Royal Irrigation Department during the last five years. The system has **been** in operation for three years. During the **design** stage the Royal Irrigation Department's approach was to reduce its direct intervention at the level of individual, existing people's irrigation systems. The scheme was designed to allow the people's irrigation systems to continue functioning **as** usual, with the reservoir providing increased storage capacity and reliability for wet-season cropping, **as** well as sufficient supply for people's irrigation systems areas which had never before **been** under dry-season cropping. The Mae On Reservoir has a storage capacity of **4.5** million cubic meters, enough to irrigate about 960 ha (6,000 rai) under 8 people's irrigation systems. The **Mae On** River previously fed water to 22 small people's irrigation systems, consisting of a head section of 10 people's irrigation systems and a tail section of **12** people's irrigation systems. Farmers in the **tail** area obtained additional water from several small **streams** and the people's irrigation systems at that time worked independently to serve their members.

The changes required in the Royal Irrigation Department management personnel, budget, and procedures to deal with this new approach were no less drastic **than** those for local communities and intersystem relationships. New management demands more intensive and **stricter control of** intersystem allocation or basin-level water sharing. operation has to be managed jointly by farmers and the Royal Irrigation Department to coordinate upstream and downstream water **use** and to sustain a certain volume of Mae On water on storage. Linking all parties into an effective management system is essential. **To accomplish this social scientists strongly recommend the use of social** organizers.

The linking of research and development efforts with irrigation-management innovation is a necessary step in northern Thailand. A research base is being established at Chiang Mai University under grant from the Ford Foundation. Social scientists are working in collaboration with the Royal Irrigation Department staff of the Operations and Maintenance Division of Regional Office I and with Peoples' Irrigation Associations to implement the joint-management model. Given the existence of active and experienced Peoples' Irrigation Associations using farmers as social organizers with supplemental training seems feasible. The question being asked in ongoing implementation is whether to use farmers as social organizers in joint-management systems, and if so, can this bring about the desired result, and under what circumstances?

In the Mae On project, the Royal Irrigation Department is experimenting with a new model of farmer-agency management **of** medium-scale reservoir system. The Royal Irrigation Department's post-construction plan includes four subprojects covering the following major tasks: 1) promotion of the formation of a federation of Peoples' Irrigation Associations, with a linkage between the Royal Irrigation Department and the federation, 2) the practice of joint planning and operation in water allocation, distribution, and scheduling for dry season cropping, 3) demonstration and

promotion of appropriate cropping patterns and water-delivery arrangements for **dry-season** cropping to improve water utilization, and **4)** facilitation of successful marketing of dry-season crops. Under this scheme, researchers of Chiang Mai University **are** responsible for providing reports and case studies analyzing the development process through each stage, and for serving **as** feedback to the implementors and policy makers of the Royal Irrigation Department. A nongovernment organization works with researchers to manage a series of training **sessions** and study tours for Peoples' Irrigation Associations and farmers.

The methods employed in **the** four major areas of work under this project **are: 1)** an inventory and information-exchange system, 2) policy and plan dialogue, 3) **networking** among Peoples' Irrigation Associations and leaders, and **4)** developing a federation type of organization at the basin level. **The** purpose of the first two methods is **to** create a **flow** of information and communication **between** the Royal Irrigation Department and the Peoples' Irrigation Associations. **The latter two contribute to the organizational development required for joint-management of the system.**

CHARACTERIZING JOINT-MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IN IRRIGATION

To sustain effective joint-management of a system **a certain set** of characteristics and operational principles must be established. In the Mae **On** Project the emphasis is **on:**

- * Joint-problem solving.
- * Maintaining **open.** active communication.
- * Establishing joint decision-making mechanisms and procedures which allow both parties **to** address their problems and express their opinions.
- * Active participation by **all parties** in all activities initiated either jointly or by a single party.
- * Sensitizing **each** party **to** the problems and limitations of the other.
- * Equitable sharing of benefits and opportunities **as well as** of responsibilities.
- * Maintaining appropriate attitudes towards one another.
- * Stimulating improvement of each party's capabilities.
- * Sharing the risks of actions **required** to achieve sustainability and efficiency.

WHY A FARMER SHOULD TAKE THE ROLE OF SOCIAL ORGANIZER

A number of reasons may be given in support of using farmer **social** organizers:

1. Farmers tend **to** perceive the Royal Irrigation Department professionals **as** outsiders or government men. A farmer **social** organizer, **on** the other hand, is perceived **as an** insider,

Summary of the major tasks required of each participating party.

Royal Irrigation Department	chiang Mai University	Peoples' Irrigation Associations
1. Developing and promoting formation of water users' groups for reservoir management	1. Documenting development activity/ process	1. Forming inter-Peoples' Irrigation Association cooperation and organization
2. Encouraging joint- planning and operation	2. Methodology development	2. Carrying out inventory
3. Developing operation and maintenance methods and procedures	3. Case studies	3. Doing sample survey and reporting
4. Practicing information utilization, exchange and direct communication through reporting and meetings	4. Developing training materials	4. Planning and participating in meetings, workshops, and study tours
5. Introducing private marketing sector to assist farmers required	5. Organizing meetings and training as Peoples'	5. Training other less-experienced Irrigation Associations

a coordinator whose authority is, or authorized responsibilities **are**, legitimized by local farmers through the well-accepted practice of community leadership.

- Given that the participatory approach is a national-policy guideline, employing professionals **as** social organizers in extensive implementation will create a heavy financial burden. Even temporary or short-term **use** of them will create high expectations and dependence **on** external assistance.
- Joint-management of an irrigation system and the tripartite development scheme **are**, complex and **need** a strategy to strengthen direct communication, rather than an **indirect** communication channel through an employed social organizer.
- In** institutionalizing organizer professionals, the agency has to deal with social-organizer succession or rotation and project sustainability. The movement of a farmer **social** organizer into and out of the catalyst position or responsibility can be arranged when **necessary**, by replacing one appropriately trained farmer with another, with minimal disturbance to the organization or program.

5. Farmers in the role of **social organizers** reflect less of a gap between the **social organizer's** and the water users' **needs**, attitudes, and values, while establishing direct communication with the Royal Irrigation Department.
6. The Royal Irrigation Department **has** had little incentive to invest in sociocultural and economic research and surveys for **use** in planning and operation. A simplified system of data collection requiring **minimum** data and needing little **training** for its **use can** be designed by researchers. Such a system may be **used** by farmers who are familiar with the situation in the field.
7. It is well-known that there **are** many qualified, **experienced** farmers who **can** be tapped into the system under a participatory model.

REVIEWING AN INFORMATION SYSTEM IN A PEOPLE'S IRRIGATION ASSOCIATION

Much research **on** traditional irrigation organizations in northern Thailand (Coward, Tanabe, Abha, Wanpen, Uraivan) has **confirmed** the innovative thinking, flexibility, and quick **learning** capability of **northern** farmers. Agricultural-development **records** also support this observation. In addition, systematic information collection, careful **historical recordkeeping** and reporting **as** an indigenous practice of Muang **Fai** organization people's Irrigation Association) have **been** reported (Uraivan **1983,1985,1987**). The Muang **Mai** Organization of Chomthong District in Chiang **Mai** has used an information system **as** a built-in mechanism and management tool for many **decades**. Having analyzed these information **bases** and methods of collection the author believes **that** the capability of these farmers should be utilized in the **present** scheme, and will be useful in encouraging diffusion of the **practice** to those People's Irrigation **Associations/Leaders** that **do** not now have them.

Farmer **Social** Organizers' Roles

The roles of the farmer **social** organizers in the ongoing project at Mae. **On** are carefully aimed at:

1. Stimulating the process of inter-Peoples' Irrigation Associations/ federation formation, and facilitating improvement of water **users'** problem-solving capabilities.
2. Assisting Peoples' Irrigation **Associations** to establish a system of information exchange, active communication with the Royal Irrigation Department, and finally at achieving a real farmer-agency management system.

3. Assisting the Peoples' Irrigation Association Leaders in conducting systematic **routine** data collection and recordkeeping for use in collaborative operation and maintenance with **the** Royal Irrigation Department, in a process which will be institutionalized **into** Peoples' Irrigation Association procedures.
4. Coordinating with the Royal Irrigation Department activities related to irrigation management and linkages with outside agencies.

Though a long list of qualifications is required, local leaders in typical villages meet many of the necessary aptitudes. Aside from literacy, many qualifications relate to interest and the ability to work well with people, and with both local and government officials. Motivation is critical **as** well, since the farmer social organizer must be willing **to** work on a semivoluntary basis with small compensation **and** modest expenses. The farmer social organizer is expected to work part-time and to carry out his responsibilities in harmony with his private farming. Some of **the** missing qualifications could be provided in short training sessions.

PROCEDURES

The following procedural steps to achieve this model have been experimented with for several years:

1. Identifying experienced, innovative Peoples' Irrigation Association Leaders and familiarizing them with information on this strategy and method.
2. Getting selected leaders to work on some format of recordkeeping and data collecting such as an inventory technique.
3. Arranging workshops to discuss and improve methods and procedures.
4. Circulating information to the Royal Irrigation Department channels and getting feedback.
5. Finalizing the data-collection form through joint efforts.
6. Organizing data on cropping for use in joint planning.
7. Encouraging efficient data collection and utilization through workshops on crop planning, proposal writing to agencies, etc.
8. Finalizing appropriate methods and setting the minimum standard data.

Methods used to carry out the above procedures were meetings, farmer-to-farmer **training**, and study tours.

LIMITATIONS OF THE FARMER SOCIAL-ORGANIZER MODEL

1. *Preconditions.* Opportunities for using farmer social organizers are contingent on an enabling environment with the presence of efficient local organizations and farmer leadership.
2. *Familiarity.* Where a system of information management does not yet exist local people lack interest and awareness of the usefulness of information. **An** attempt to install farmer social organizers into the management system may **be** possible, but is difficult in practice..
3. *Risks.* Establishing an informal structure is a risk for the project. **If** farmer social organizers have soft personalities and are not properly **trained**, they may be influenced by the local power structure and politics, in which poor farmers normally have little share.
4. *Beginnings.* The interest and willingness of the Royal Irrigation Department and farmers to work collaboratively have to **be** established at the outset, prior to actual joint activities. This is not a simple task.

ADVANTAGES OF THE FARMER SOCIAL-ORGANIZER MODEL

1. *Participation.* Applying the farmer social-organizer model and assigning the catalytic role to farmers by itself increases the real participation of farmers and begins to create an environment conducive to local communities' involvement in development.
2. *Affordability.* The voluntary or semivoluntary structure of farmer social-organizer implementation is inexpensive and affordable even in an extensive program.
3. *Practical training.* Rapid, learning-by-doing job training is realistic, and can be arranged by the Royal Irrigation Department's Mobile Campaign Unit or local nongovernment organizations. Farmer-to-farmer training is also feasible.
4. *Sustainability.* Enlisting farmer social organizers for this role, helps to create a built-in, ongoing mechanism to facilitate management development.
5. *Self-reliance.* Farmer social organizers gradually impart to Peoples' Irrigation Associations and communities, the confidence and self-reliance to deal with external agents and agencies, with the changing environment in irrigation and other fields.
6. *Information exchange.* The farmer social-organizer model, if applied successfully, can reduce risks in government investment in irrigation by developing a system of farmer-agency information exchange and active communication for improved planning.
7. *Informality.* The farmer social-organizer model is generally recognized **as** having **a low** degree of formality. This informality eases communication, facilitates trust, and corrects the inadequacies of the formal system.

Summary Results of Small Group Discussions

DISCUSSIONS COVERED THE following issues:

1. Farmer participation.
2. Supporting policies to the farmer participation program.
3. Alternative approaches.
4. Social-organizer implementation.
5. Flexibility and sustainability.
6. Institutionalizing the social organizer into the system.

FARMER PARTICIPATION

Farmers' participation is defined here as a transferring of decision-making powers in system development and management to farmers. This participation consists of authority to **take** decisions and resource mobilization (e.g., ideas, money, manpower, and materials). The type of farmers' participation varies according to the type of irrigation-system management. There are three types of system management: agency-managed, farmer-managed, and jointly managed.

The objective of farmers' participation is to develop cooperation between the government and the farmers which will bring fruitful results for farmer-managed irrigation systems. Negative experience in the past with inappropriate participation shows that there is a need to review the approaches being taken to involve farmers in irrigation development. Research has shown evidence of a remarkably high-management potential in indigenous farmer-managed irrigation systems. Evidence from recent experiences in many areas indicates increasing farmer involvement and participation, in terms of achieving increased self-reliance and a sense of ownership. One approach being taken to enable farmer participation is through the use of social organizers.

Through the actions of social organizers in farmer-managed irrigation systems, the following benefits have been attained:

- * Cohesiveness among farmers.
- * Reduced social problems attributable to irrigation development
- * Improved equity in water distribution.
- * Greater certainty of water delivery.

- * Enhanced internal resource mobilization to sustain operation and maintenance through farmer participation.
- * Increased capital build-up and improved self-reliance.

Farmers' participation is influenced by government policy and bureaucratic procedures. The following issues should be addressed

- * Need for strong and continuous support of social-organizer role.
- * Need for consistency in implementing the policy.
- * Legal provisions recognizing farmer participation.
- * Reassessment of bureaucratic procedures consistent with farmer participation.
- * Conditions for promotion of government officials who promote farmer participation.
- * Developing the understanding of agency staff with regard to the social-organizer role.

In short, there is a need for bureaucratic reorientation which could be done through

- * Intensive dialogue in working groups held among agency staff, planners, research institutions, and farmers.
- * Providing incentives for government officials to promote farmer participation.
- * Developing appropriate bureaucratic procedures responsive to farmer participation.

SUPPORTING POLICIES TO THE FARMER-PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

Policy Objectives

1. To increase farmers' capabilities, self-reliance, and sense of ownership.
2. To promote farmer participation in developing and managing irrigation systems.
3. To support development of appropriate interventions by government agencies, nongovernment agencies, and the private sector which relate to objectives 1 and 2 above.

Suggested Supportive Policies

1. Legalization of water users' associations could make these groups more effective in system management. For example, they would have access to credit for improvement of the physical works. The legal basis of water users' institutions, also gives a legal basis to social-organizer activities. Local ownership should be supported by a legal framework in the following manner:

- a) Mandatory turnover of systems where feasible and in an appropriate time frame.
 - b) Community privatization of systems where feasible.
 - c) Legalized status of water users' institutions.
2. Government recognition and support of social-organizer roles and openness to cooperation both within and outside the bureaucratic structure.

Suggested Supportive Initiatives

To persuade decision makers of the value and feasibility of farmer participation, there **are** a number of methods which have proven useful. These include pilot projects, field trips, workshops and seminars, impact research with documentation and reports, the creation of working groups which include key agency personnel, and other activities depending on the particular environment.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

Any approach using social organizers must address the issue of how to harmonize the technical and social aspects of system development and management. Three alternative approaches have **been** identified **as** enabling social organizers to help facilitate this process:

1. Development within a single organization.
2. Tri-lateral coordination efforts comprising research institutions, the irrigation department, and farmers.
3. Involvement of universities, nongovernment organizations, and other **independent** organizations in the transitional period and, in the long run, letting the government (with the assistance of universities, nongovernment organizations or other independent organizations at the macro-level) and the private sector implement the approach.

SOCIAL-ORGANIZER IMPLEMENTATION

Determination of an appropriate form of social-organizer intervention requires assessment of specific national policy, organizational structures, program and project characteristics **as well as** community conditions.

Social-Organizer Roles, in Relation to Supportive Policy Objectives

- * Facilitating the formation and development of water users' associations.
- * Enabling farmers to acquire appropriate coordinative skills for dealing with line agencies involved in agricultural development.

The breadth of the social-organizer role and the varying emphasis among different programs in different contexts are reflected in the number of terms being used to describe the social organizer. These include institutional organizer, community organizer, irrigation-community organizer, field organizer, group organizer, and association organizer.

Social-Organizer Qualifications

The role of social organizer implies an innovative process, commitment, and the capability to work with farmers and concerned agency staff for the benefit of farmers. With this in mind a social organizer can be chosen from within the community and within the agency or elsewhere, depending on the particular type of work. To be qualified social organizers should have the following characteristics:

- * Know the dialects well as the culture, customs, and beliefs of the area in which they work; possess good communication ability and be self-motivated to carry out the social-organizer roles.
- * Any educational background is acceptable, but they should be open to a sociotechnical orientation and supplemental social or technical training.
- * Interested, committed, and willing to learn.
- * Physically fit.

Social-Organizer Recruitment Process

The recruitment process should serve to test social-organizer qualifications. Field exposure to test commitment and skills should be a part of this screening process. Representatives of all parties directly involved in social-organizer implementation, and especially the social-organizer supervisor, should be involved in the recruitment process. The goal is to have the social-organizer implementing agency directly recruit social organizers; however, this capacity may need to be developed within the agency as part of the social-organizer program, with another agency assisting during the early stages.

There are two main modes of recruitment: permanent and temporary (contractual, ad hoc) for a specific period.

Social-Organizer Training

Four kinds of training are appropriate for social organizers:

- * A series of task-oriented training sessions.
- * Training for a specific time with a fixed curriculum.
- * Horizontal training, i.e., bringing people of the same level together (agricultural extension, social organizer).
- * Vertical training, i.e., bringing people from different levels together.

Experience in several countries indicates that it is useful, besides an initial training, to also plan later periodic training sessions on the basis of issues and problems anticipated in each upcoming activity or phase.

Supervision of Social Organizers

The following types of supervision are required:

- * Regular visits to social organizers.
- * Guidance.
- * Explanation of expected role of the social organizer.
- * Mediator for social organizer passing information to higher levels.
- * Assessment of training needs.
- * Monitoring and evaluation.

The bodies responsible for supervision on a permanent or transitional basis are:

- * Institution (nongovernment organization) itself
- * Research group.
- * Advisory group.
- * Concerned agency.

Supervision and evaluation of the social organizer should maintain the accountability of social organizers to the local community.

Social-Organizer Incentives and Motivation

Incentives include both financial remuneration (such as wages, per diem, and logistical support) and nonfinancial benefits such as recognition, acceptance, security, and involvement in the process of project decision making. The types of incentives or motivation may be looked at in

terms of the social organizer's organizational affiliation or location, as shown in the following table.

Social organizer incentives and motivation.

Location	Type of	
	Motivation	Incentives
Nongovernment agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Self-motivated/self-reliant through training * Flexible of non-government agencies (organization) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Sufficient financial remuneration * Recognition of their roles
Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Through training • Study tours * Decision making authority * strong, clearly defined policy with regard to social organizer role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Job security * Career development and promotion, including financial remuneration
Farmers (within community)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Recognition of the role of the social organizer * More authority/influence * Self-motivated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Financial remuneration * Continuous support from other farmers and government agency * Recognition from agency

Criteria for Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Social Organizer

Social-organizer effectiveness should be evaluated, in the short-run, according to the extent to which assigned work or **tasks** are accomplished and the **social** organizer's presence in the field as well as, in both the long- and short-run, the extent to which farmers are able to manage their own system or to carry out responsibilities during all stages of project development. The **criteria** for measuring the effectiveness of a social organizer are summarized in the following table.

Criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of the social organizer.

Stages of irrigation development	Criteria
Preconstruction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to create awareness of implementing-agency procedures regarding project implementation. 2. Ability to get farmers' input in information gathered and decision making in design. 3. Stimulate farmers' consensus for resource mobilization (i.e., materials, manpower). 4. Ability to identify and develop farmers' leaders and working committees for project implementation. 5. Ability to interface the technical and institutional aspects smoothly.
Construction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ability to stimulate farmers to implement, (their) consensus reached (in any obligations). 2. Ability to interface the technical and institutional aspects smoothly. 3. Ability to encourage farmers to participate in construction activities.
Post-construction operation and maintenance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Effectiveness of water users' associations in operation and maintenance and resource mobilization for operation and maintenance on their own.

FLEXIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

There is a need for flexibility in implementation of the program which can assure the sustainability of the role of the social organizer. The sustainability of water users' association's performance in management and maintenance requires monitoring after pullout of the social organizer, within a certain time frame.

INSTITUTIONALIZING THE SOCIAL ORGANIZER INTO THE SYSTEM (BUREAUCRACY)

Institutionalization requires that social and technical aspects be harmonized. This may be accomplished by developing capacities for structural information, and human-resource management within the agency or by strengthening the linkages between agencies. This may require some bureaucratic reorientation and in **both** cases, the key is the coordinating **body**. Therefore, appropriate mechanisms must be generated to provide **regular support and facilitate coordination** to the farmer-participation program during and after implementation.

Recognition and support of the role of the social organizer by the implementing agency are needed to legitimize the social organizer in strengthening system management.

SUGGESTED WORKSHOP FOLLOW-UP

1. Continue exchange of ideas through the Farmer-Managed Irrigation Systems Network and Newsletter.
2. IIMI should identify the relevant needs and concerns regarding social-organizer approaches and provide guidelines **for** reviewing individual social-organizer **programs**.
3. Participants should review and assess their own situations to develop clear strategies for each program to convince decision makers to **work** for supportive policy and procedures,
4. Potential components of such a strategy besides those noted in the preceding **summary** may include:
 - a) A workshop on operation and maintenance with both technical **and** social or institutional personnel.
 - b) Workshop on a national level as well as on an international level to address institutional/technical interface issues and develop mechanisms for effectively integrating these aspects in irrigation development.