

## IIMI'S EXPERIENCE IN MOROCCO IN STRENGTHENING NATIONAL CAPACITY

### I - IIMI'S CAPACITY - STRENGTHENING ACTIVITIES 1985 - 1992

Of the types of activities which have helped strengthening national capacities in the past, in the case of Morocco it is obvious that the two most effective ones have been collaborative research and what I named "assistance to national partners".

The most exemplary collaborative research is the on-going preliminary phase of the Tadla project. Three Moroccan researchers are developing their skills in their own organizations (ORMVAT and SEHA) under IIMI supervision and they are finding evidence for saving irrigation water through a new relations between farmers and ORMVAT which could have hardly been found through other arrangements.

Although the "assistance" activity of IIMI has been intentionally limited upto now, it may be "one of the most effective ways in which IIMI's mission can be fulfilled".

### II - RESULTS AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM PAST ACTIVITIES

First, it is important to remind that the huge majority of my time since I am in Morocco has been devoted to the strengthening of Moroccan national capacities about irrigation management. Although the past medium term plan anticipated this should have been only one of the two main components of the activities of the Institute in this country. This means that the experience gained by IIMI in Morocco about the strengthening of national capacities is rather important.

As everywhere else, this experience is a mixture of success and failures. I must recognize that it is likely that the ratio of failures over successes has been higher here than in many other field units. Other factors also played an important role in increasing of these difficulties than on their decrease.

Two major external factors were a initial mutual ignorance between IIMI and Moroccan irrigation and a loss of trust of Moroccan officials for IIMI after they discovered that the image of IIMI was brighter than reality.

The mutual ignorance resulted from the absence of experience of Moroccan officials about relations with independent research institutes (except a very limited one with ICARDA) and the difficulty of IIMI for imagining that what a country could have a different organization and different problems about irrigation than the ones of Asia and East Africa. Furthermore, the language barrier did not help overcoming these difficulties.

Although the very first relations between IIMI and Morocco (1985) were excellent, they also rapidly deteriorated when it appeared that IIMI was not able to sustainably do all what it promised to do. Just three examples to illustrate this statement : (i) IIMI was unable to fund the slightest research in Morocco on its core budget after the signature of the MOU, as it had promised to do it before the MOU was signed, (ii) IIMI was obliged to rapidly abandon its initial policy of

having a French version of all its major publications depriving almost all Moroccans access to an innovative source of information about irrigation management, (iii) IIMI did not have the wide range of high level expertise about irrigation management that it claimed to have.

The improvement of the relations with Moroccans required (i) lot of explanation about the specificity of IIMI and the original input that the institute could provide to Morocco and (ii) the maturation of an original organization for projects in order to better fit the needs and capacities of IIMI and Moroccan organizations than classical projects (these projects are based on partnerships in which IIMI is not dominant)

In Summary, the two main lessons which can be learnt from the seven years of relations between IIMI and Morocco are that IIMI must be (i) very flexible to adapt to local context and (ii) more modest about its own skill and capacity (we do not have the best experts in the world about irrigation management in developing countries). About the second point, I discovered that in Morocco it is much better to undervalue one's own capacities than to overvalue them and I am now convinced that our main comparative advantage is not our very high level of expertise by the originality of our mandate: IIMI is the only worldwide institute with international staff fully dedicated to the improvement of irrigation management in developing countries and, thus, it can provide original information and helps to national organizations devoted to irrigation management. Even though their expertise is higher than the one of IIMI in many disciplines directly related with irrigation management.

Last, I would like to stress the importance of developing a real ability to work in other languages than English to be able to strengthen national capacities in countries where English is not widely know, How can we strengthen the national capacities of a country if the headquarters of the Institute are unable to understand what has been produced by this country? How can we disseminate innovations to non-anglophobe countries if all our publications are only available in English?