STRENGTHENING NATIONAL CAPACITY IN NIGER

IIMI-NIGER

INTRODUCTION

IIMI-Niger began work in late 1991 under supervision of a single country representative. At this early stage it is difficult to measure any impact on strengthening national capacity. Presently, IIMI-Niger is building a national research team while rapidly assessing various aspects of irrigation system operation and functioning used by irrigation agencies and organizations in Niger.

This paper briefly describes the strategies of IIMI-Niger to strengthen national capacity in:

(i) the national irrigation management agency, Office National des Aménagements Hydro-agricoles (ONAHA) during a critical time of restructuring and reassessing its capacity to advise and provide services to the semi-autonomous irrigation cooperatives with which it works; and

(ii) other national research agencies, organizations or the national university that are either directly or indirectly involved in some form of irrigation related research [such as our national partners: Institut National de la Recherche Agonomique du Niger (INRAN); Génie Rural (GR); Faculté d'Agonomie, Université de Niamey].

CONTEXT

Niger is a vast African country (1,267,000 km^2) in the sub-Saharan and Saharan desert. Population estimates are low (cited as under 8 million) given the size of the country but only the South and Southwestern most area receive adequate rainfall to sustain rainfed agriculture.

Irrigation in Niger

The estimated irrigation potential of Niger is around 270,000 ha of which about 30% (81,000 ha) is under some form of irrigation. Only 4% of this potential is under full water control. There are currently: 7,524 ha producing rice by pumping water from the Niger River; 3,500 ha of multicropping (sorghum, cotton, wheat, onions) downstream from a dam located in the Ader Doutchi Maggia; 560 ha of small garden schemes pumping from groundwater sources in the region of Maradi; and 225 ha multicropping using groundwater or surface sources from Komadougou to Diffa.

Rice yields on the modern pumped rice schemes along the Niger River can reach an impressive average of 4.5 to 5 tons per hectare per season (ONAHA, 1989). Between 1987 and 1990, ONAHA rehabilitated 30% of the full water control schemes (3960 ha) thanks to major funding from several donors. As part of a long-term strategy to provide electricity and stabilize water flows along the Niger River, Niger hopes to construct the Kandaji hydroelectric dam.

Irrigation Agencies

Niger has one irrigation agency, ONAHA, a public establishment created in 1978 charged with both construction and public service responsibilities. The primary objectives of ONAHA are to build new irrigation schemes, rehabilitee older schemes and to train farmers how to better exploit and maintain existing irrigation investments. Initially ONAHA was responsible for managing all irrigation schemes throughout Niger. A National Irrigation Conference in 1982 promoted self-management by cooperatives and the role of ONAHA was subsequently redefined. ONAHA agents continue to provide technical training to the farmers and cooperatives. Now only a single ONAHA-paid perimeter director serves each scheme as a full-time technical advisor. For other services, ONAHA charges cooperatives directly for all maintenance and repairs it provides and a subsidized rate for training.

For the past several years ONAHA has faced increasing financial difficulties. Funding for new irrigation scheme construction has all but disappeared and for political and social reasons it can neither significantly reduce staff nor operating overhead. The traditional ONAHA donors insist on major restructuring and propose that ONAHA privatize the "Entreprise" or construction branch of ONAHA or close it down. In return the donors have pledged support for the service branch that provides training and maintenance services to the irrigation schemes.

Irrigation Institutions

Several major agricultural research institutions are active in Niger but none are involved in irrigation management research beyond irrigation for sustaining station research trials. INRAN, one of our national partners, conducts national agricultural research, often in collaboration with these other institutions and has a small functioning irrigation unit. Because INRAN is a national partner, IIMI-Niger plans to work with their irrigation unit to promote irrigation management research.

IIMI-NIGER PROGRAM

Institutional Linkages and Modalities

Presently, IIMI-Niger is the executing agency for a four-year, African Development Bank (AfDB) financed project to improve

the performance and reduce operating costs of pump-based irrigation schemes along the Niger River.

Memoranda of Agreement: IIMI signed a very favorable MOA with the Government of Niger (GON) to establish IIMI as a research institution in Niger with full diplomatic recognition and privileges. IIMI-Niger developed an agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture to provide the necessary institutional support. The GON and the AfDB signed a MOA for the project grant designating IIMI as the executing agency.

Coordinating Committee: The project Coordinating Committee consists of heads of the national partners, a representative from the Ministry of Finance and Planning and the Ministry of Agriculture (Department of Evaluation and Programming), and IIMI-Niger. The Director General of ONAHA is the Coordinating Committee president. The Coordinating Committee is the decision making body of the project. The president of the Coordinating Committee is the liaison between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Coordinating Committee and executing agency (IIMI-Niger). The Coordinating Committee helps decide project strategy and monitor progress toward meeting project goals. The Coordinating Committee meets three to four times annually.

Finances for activities: The AfDB is financing the current four year project grant. Financial resources are available for organizations committed to work in Sahelian West Africa, and donors (other than the AfDB) have expressed an interest in funding IIMI's activities. One proposal grant included IIMI-Niger this year although funding has not yet been secured.

Activities

(More background information can be found in the original AfDB project document).

Due to a delay in receiving operating funds (funds arrived late October 1991) and the subsequent lag in start up of project activities, the project began field work by late December - early January. The project staff moved quickly to develop a workable field research methodology and performed rapid diagnostic analyses on all three project research sites - Saga, Tillakaina and Kourani Baria. This approach helped the project team identify major management and system constraints and will help orient project research activities. The focus of these activities will be to identify management and system interventions that will enhance the performance and reduce operating costs of these irrigation schemes in particular and in the irrigation sector in general.

Other Activities

Training and Professional Development

(Again good background information exists in the original project document).

There are a multitude of different training and professional development activities planned by the project. Target groups are the project experts and technicians, perimeter directors, cooperative leaders, farmers and leaders of women's groups. The training will consist of field studies, training sessions, specialized workshops and seminars, and field trips within Niger or to neighboring countries of the West African sub-region.

All training will center primarily on improving irrigation management and performance. Technical and organizational aspects of the operation and maintenance of irrigation systems will be addressed.. The project will seek to develop and strengthen individual skills in administration and management by introducing appropriate management practices and techniques.

To promote the exchange of experiences the project will periodically organize trips for farmer groups and its project staff. To date both the Niger project and the Burkina project have was host to exchange staff study tours. This proved an excellent opportunity to present ongoing activities and exchange ideas. IIMI-Niger is planning several farmer study tours soon.

As part of the short-term training program, the project sent two staff members on a two-month technical training course in neighboring Burkina Faso and to France. The purpose of this training was to acquire further technical skills necessary to assess the performance of irrigated agriculture.

Two specialization grants are available to send two young engineers to the inter-regional technical school in Burkina Faso (EIER) to undertake further training one year. They may choose to do their subsequent field work with the project. The Coordinating Committee will select soon among candidates for this year's training cycle.

IIMI-Niger is presently hosting many students researching various irrigation related topics with the assistance of the project personnel. Most research topics emanated from areas highlighted during the rapid diagnostic-analysis phase.

PLANS TO STRENGTHEN NATIONAL CAPACITY

Strengthening Management of Irrigation Systems

IIMI-Niger has not been operational long enough to measure results of strengthening national capacity to manage irrigation systems. Once field research results are analyzed and improvements or innovations introduced, IIMI-Niger can begin to monitor any changes in the management of irrigation systems.

As discussed earlier, IIMI-Niger arrived in Niger at a time of tremendous economic and political instability. The GON must (mostly at the insistence of donors) reduce public spending and therefore the emphasis on privatization and restructuring. The irrigation sub-sector is not large in Niger, thus if IIMI-Niger

can introduce improvements or innovations that ease the severity of restructuring measures, credibility and appreciation should follow.

Strengthening National Capacity of Research Institutions

IIMI-Niger will seek greater collaboration with INRAN and other research institutions operating in Niger. One Nigerien M.Sc. student studying at the University of Purdue (Indiana,USA), will do his field research under the supervision of the project in January, 1993. Opportunities will be pursued to invite other students from the Faculty of Agronomy and INRAN to undertake relevant research with the project.

INITIAL ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Analysis

Strengthening National Capacity for Irrigation Management

A major constraint to improving irrigation management in Niger is that agencies and farmers alike have become accustomed to GON intervention and public (or donor) subsidies to offset the true costs of irrigation development and operation. Funds are increasingly scarce, the GON is "disengaging" from many of its past support roles, and donors are less inclined to provide funds for subsidies.

Farmers are expected to assume a greater management role in the organization, management, operation and maintenance of their irrigation systems. They are also increasingly expected to pay actual costs of services rendered by ONAHA. If ONAHA is to survive as an irrigation agency, it must improve the quality of the services delivered and strive to control costs.

Strengthening National Capacity of Research Institutions

There is little or no existing capacity for irrigation management research within existing institutions in Niger. INRAN has a small irrigation unit, but it has limited field research activities and funding. ONAHA has a research-development branch with a vacant researcher position (currently studying in France).

IIMI-Niger's own experience is that other than one half-time researcher assigned to the project, the public servants occupying the other project positions have little or no research experience. More disturbing is that they continue to operate under public service regulations and can be spontaneously reassigned to other government branches or projects. The project has already lost three project staff members to this process and is seeking agreement from the Ministry of Agriculture and national partners to limit this practice in the future.

Conclusion

Again, it is much too early to point to any significant success IIMI-Niger has had in strengthening national capacity although collaboration is good with it's national partners. As IIMI-Niger builds credibility with farmers, cooperatives and it's national partners through sound irrigation management interventions and improvements, it will be in a better position to measure positive impacts.