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GENDER ISSUES AND IRRIGATION: SOME EXPERIENCES AND INITIATIVES

We were happy to receive quite a number of reactions to our request for information and experiences on gender-related questions in irrigation. The reactions prove there is a growing awareness that effective irrigation planning and management approaches need to take gender considerations into account. As a result, there is also a growing need for information on approaches, mechanisms and strategies to adequately recognize and address gender-related issues in the context of irrigation. A number of people wrote to us, requesting information, training materials and methodologies. Collecting and evaluating past and ongoing experiences constitute the initial steps in developing this information. We would therefore encourage you to keep in touch with us and to share with us, and others, your findings and experiences.

First attempts to improve the gender sensitiveness of irrigation-related activities have been made in Bangladesh, Indonesia, India, Tanzania and Burkina Faso. The experiences show that involving and accommodating both male and female stakeholders in irrigation systems require a somewhat different approach, first of all, because women water users' needs and interests are often not well-known or understood, and second, because women often face specific constraints and are more difficult to reach than men. Women often lack institutional support, and often have less secure access to and control of critical resources.

A participatory approach including communicating and interacting with both female and male farmers can help to identify and address women's and men's shared and conflicting interests and needs. This is emphasized in two sets of guidelines, one prepared by SAWA (a consultancy bureau) and the other by the Netherlands Embassy in India. These guidelines aim to assist irrigation planners and designers to recognize and address gender considerations in the planning, design and implementation of irrigation projects.

The need for research aimed at analyzing and understanding the various agricultural, irrigation

and management activities performed by women and men and the way in which these are interdependent were stressed by various respondents. Women need to be recognized and addressed in their capacities as producers and providers, and not just in their domestic roles. In many existing irrigation systems, isolated small-scale income-generating projects have resulted from the necessity to comply with donor requirements to pay attention to women's and/or gender issues. The experience has shown that by merely adding a women's component to existing or planned irrigation projects will often have a very limited impact, and may in itself aggravate gender inequalities in the targeted activities.

Some of the more interesting experiences and initiatives are summarized in greater detail below. If you would like to have more information, you could either contact us, or communicate directly with the authors.

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IN THIS ISSUE

Groundwater (Outcome of Asian Regional Workshop).....	8
Inventory.....	14
General Articles.....	17
Publications.....	22