

Self-Assessment of Performance by Irrigators' Associations

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ABSTRACT

THIS PAPER EXAMINES a *participatory* procedure of *self-assessment of irrigation system performance* by farmers in a River Irrigation System (RIS) in the Philippines. It is aimed at improving system performance through *strengthening Irrigators' Associations' (IA)* managerial capacity in planning and decision making in system operation and maintenance (O&M), improving communication processes and conflict resolution, etc. Leaders and members of IAs, using symbols, maps and simple records, assessed the performance of a) system O&M, b) organization and group dynamics, c) crop management, and d) financial management including fee collection. Evidence to date shows success in the self-assessment process specially a) in eliciting candid appraisals on system performance, b) in developing work plans and follow-up monitoring and evaluation, and c) as a self-correcting mechanism. It also motivates the farmers to act collectively on problems identified as they realize that the "problems" are within their "power" to resolve.

INTRODUCTION

Farmer's organizations or Irrigator's Associations (IAs) with their increasing responsibility in irrigation management need to adopt mechanisms for planning and performance assessment. To respond to this need, a participatory procedure of self-assessment of performance was introduced in some FMIS in the Philippines as an integral component of a large-scale pilot (research) intervention program implemented jointly by the National Irrigation Administration (NIA), Regional Universities in the Philippines and the International Irrigation Management Institute (IIMI). This paper describes and analyzes the self-assessment and self-correcting process adopted by the farmers.

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RATIONALE

IAs have been organized to operate and maintain the systems in cooperation with the NIA. In recent years, IAs have been assuming important system management responsibilities, particularly those under Type II and III contracts. Under Type II contracts, farmer organizations assume the system operations and irrigation service fee (ISF) collection functions. Systems operations include: 1) planning the O & M activities and undertaking the O & M from the turnout to the main farm and supplementary farm ditches; 2) planning, implementation and monitoring of the cropping calendar; 3) water allocation and distribution; 4) conflict management and; 5) maintaining linkage between the farmer-users and the NIA. Collection functions include: 1) planning effective collection strategies; 2) distribution of ISF bills and; 3) undertaking ISF collection. Meanwhile, under Type III contract, there is full turnover of the whole or part of the irrigation system to the farmers. Although the farmer leaders of IAs receive leadership training before their organizations assume these tasks, they have not successfully internalized mechanisms that strengthen their management capabilities to face the challenges presented by their new irrigation management responsibilities. As Bottral emphasizes, much of the poor performance (in irrigation systems) stems from fundamental weaknesses in the human process of planning and management, which no amount of investment in technological hardware is going to overcome on its own (Bottral in Uphoff 1986: XV).

Thus was conceived the self-assessment of performance by farmer members and farmer leaders. By adopting a self-correcting mechanism on a continuous basis, farmers' organizations (or IAs) can attain self-dependency and self-reliance. A participatory procedure of self-assessment of performance could be used by the farmers to measure and monitor (or evaluate) the performance of the IA as well as the irrigation system objectively, as the data utilized represent the points of view of the farmer members and the farmer leaders. The self-assessment mechanism, as described in the second part of this paper, can also serve as a tool for the farmer leader to effectively and systematically carry out his function as a manager.

The objectives of the self-assessment experiment included: 1) monitor and evaluate performance of irrigation systems in general and IAs in particular; 2) introduce a learning process to identify and characterize the types of strategies that could be used internally by farmers to catalyze collective action and thereby to improve system performance as an alternative to external catalyst/intervention; 3) strengthen the IAs' managerial capability by introducing a systematic process for planning and monitoring IA activities (both for operations and organizational) and; 4) promote self-reliance by encouraging and training the IAs in doing their own monitoring and evaluation (M & E) and self-correcting activities.

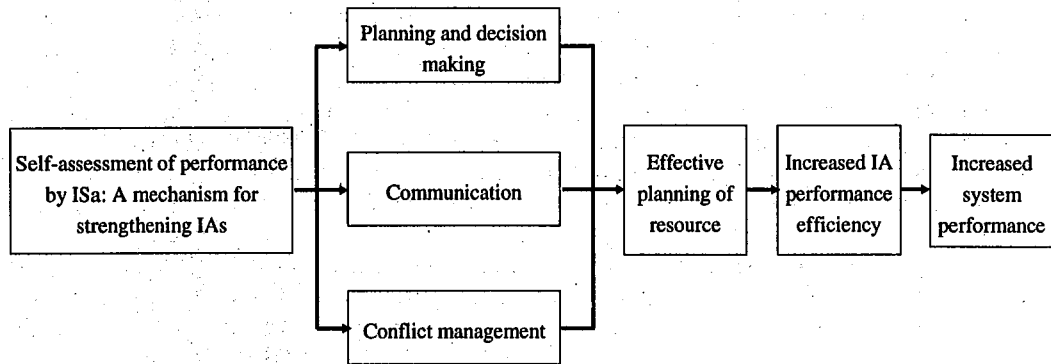
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGIES USED

Conceptual Framework

The self-assessment of performance by IAs is a participatory mechanism introduced to strengthen the farmer organizations' managerial capacity in planning and decision making, communication process and linkage formation, as well as in conflict management which in turn should result in effective planning of the organization's resources. All these should result in higher IA performance

efficiency and eventually higher system performance efficiency. The schematic flow of the expected effect of the self-assessment experiment is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework.



Methodologies Used

The self-assessment of IA performance is a component of a 13-month intervention program begun in December 1990 which called for organizing the farmers into smaller groups lower than the turnout service area (TSA) level. Grouping is based on water and task distribution primarily to increase membership participation in IA activities. Participating in the project are two relatively large IAs in the Barit River Irrigation System in Nabua, Camarines Sur, (about 400 km south of Manila), LAPSEFIA with 1,814 members and BRISDAFIA with 2,521 members. The present organizational structure of these IAs is a two-tiered type with the first tier representing the IA central-level officials and the second representing subgroup officials called turnout service area leaders. BRISDAFIA which has a type II management contract with the NIA has 1,160 hectares sub-divided into 57 turnout service areas (TSA) while LAPSEFIA has about 745 hectares spread over 44 TSAs. It has a type II contract with NIA but is now gearing toward a type III contract. Both IAs were organized by Farmer Irrigators' Organizers (FIOs).

The project team evolved two phases for the self-assessment schemes. The first is self-assessment of performance as a strategy for organizing farmers and catalyzing collective action and is *done by farmer members* within one TSA who are being organized into small groups referred to as supplementary turnout service area groups (STSAGs) or main farm ditch groups (MFDGs). This self-assessment phase is spearheaded by the STSAG or MFDG leader with the FIO and TSA leader acting as facilitator. During a one-day seminar-workshop, the farmers, making use of symbols and maps, assess the situation in their area on aspects of water delivery and distribution, maintenance, collection efficiency and relationships between members as well as between members and leaders. The symbols used by the farmers are shown in Annex 1. As the intervention plan aims to increase membership participation in IA activities by having each member become part of a task committee, this self-assessment scheme, if done regularly, i.e., at the start of every cropping season, should become the basis for developing work plans and group activities which in turn sustain members' active involvement in the IA.

The second phase is self-assessment as a strategy for measuring and monitoring performance and it introduces a questionnaire to be *processed by the leaders* of the Turnout Service Area Group (TSAG) who by virtue of the IA by-laws, automatically comprise the Board of Directors (BOD) of the IA, from among whom the central-level officials are chosen. On the same date every month the TSA leader answers the questionnaire to assess his performance in the following categories: 1) water management: adequacy, reliability and equity in distribution, water saving practices, adherence to rotation schedules, task distribution, communication, and conflict resolution; 2) maintenance: magnitude and quality at different levels, contribution of voluntary labor, group action, etc.; 3) crop management, cropping calendar, extension, credit, etc.; 4) planning, organization and group dynamics: interactions between farmers, between farmers and leaders and with the agency, attendance and participation in meetings, planning process; and 5) financial aspects and benefits: yield and income, collection of irrigation service fee, services rendered by the IA and NIA.

The questionnaire reflects at a glance the comparative performance of the IA in the above aspects on a monthly basis. Completion of the questionnaire may be planned to coincide with the monthly BOD meetings. It can even become part of the meeting agenda and the data can then be rapidly consolidated to reflect the situation of the IA. Such data may be used by the officials to assess the situation in their IA and the performance of each TSAG. Farmers, TSA leaders as well as the IA central-level officials may from time to time compare the results of the assessment done by farmers at the STSAG level and the assessment done by the TSA leader.

It would be noted that the areas to be assessed by the TSA leaders run parallel with the measures of IA performance developed by the project team which include: 1) collection efficiency, 2) application efficiency; 3) extent of irrigation related activities; 4) ratio of resolutions implemented to resolutions formulated; 5) regularity and amount of remittance to NIA; and 6) satisfaction of members with IA services.

A recent study (Lauraya and Sala 1990) established a significant and positive relationship between organizational climate existing in IAs and IA performance. Improving the organizational dimensions identified in the self-assessment questionnaire would directly improve IA performance. Parallel to these assessments, an independent assessment has been conducted by a team of researchers. This included participant observations and a comprehensive water flow measurement exercise.

RESULTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Self-Assessment of Performance as a Strategy for Organizing Farmers and Catalyzing Collective Action

The experiment showed that the participatory self-assessment was quite successful in eliciting candid appraisals of the existing situation in the STSAG or MFDG. In particular, the pictorial analysis of the existing condition of the supplementary canal or main farm ditch was a learning experience wherein the farmers realized that most of their irrigation problems were caused by the lack of discipline among themselves (for instance illegal turnouts, canals obstructed by vegetable plants grown by farmers, oversized canals due to bathing of farm animals, uncleaned canals due to dumping of garbage, etc.) or by the lack of "*pagbibigayan*" (give-and-take attitude) as in the case of inadequacy of irrigation water due to noncompliance with rotation schedules. The discovery

that these problems are within their power to resolve coupled with the farmer's natural desire to see immediate action contributed a lot in making this self-assessment scheme achieve results. The ultimate result of the self-assessment was the formulation of work plans and follow-up activities relative to the identified problems. These included scheduling of "rabus" (or voluntary work) to clean the canals, imposition of penalties against nonconforming farmers, creation of task committees and setting dates for regular group meetings. Table 1 presents some of the activities identified by the farmers after their self-assessment exercise. (Annex 2 shows the complete plan of a TSAG called RAMC 21). The subsequent self-assessments by the farmers may then be used as an in-house M & E mechanism to see the end results of the action plans formulated. The information resulting from the self-assessment should be utilized, otherwise as Pradhan and Yoder say, the "unit becomes defunct" (Pradhan and Yoder 1989).

Among other things, acceptability of the self-assessment scheme among farmers lies in the use of the symbols which overcome difficulties such as farmer's inferiority and nonparticipation due to illiteracy. Experience shows that it has been very useful in motivating farmers to collectively act on identified problems, if in the process, organizers and leaders have simultaneously with the self-assessment activity, emphasized to the members that they have "collective responsibility" for managing the system. Thus, the IA can use the self-assessment process to generate membership participation in carrying out the regular operation and maintenance concerns of the system.

Table 1. Farmer's action plan.

Name of turnout	Activity	Time frame	Persons responsible
RALAT - B3	meeting	April 28	leaders/members
RALAT - 34	meeting	April 28	leaders/members
RALAT - B5	rabus regular meeting	2nd Sunday of every month	leaders/members
RALAT D1-5	rabus	2nd wk. of June	leaders/members
RALAT C-X3	meeting rabus	May 20	leaders/members
RALAT D1 - 4	Organize task committees clean MFD	May 25	leaders/members
RALAT AX6	Organize task committees	May 13	leaders/members
RALAT - C6	rabus	June 10	leaders/members
RAMC - 14	canal lining	May 20	leaders/members
RALAT - C1	rabus	May 5	leaders/members
RAMC - 17	rabus improve communication	May 1991	members/leaders
RAMC - 18B	meeting to create task committees rabus	April 15	members/leaders
RAMC - 19A	clean ditches re-structure canal outlet	April 11	members/leaders
RAMC - 25	widening and cleaning of canal	May 6	members/leaders

Self-Assessment as a Strategy for Measuring and Monitoring IA Performance

The second phase of the self-assessment experiment was initially introduced in May, 1991. The succeeding graphs present the comparative results of the self-evaluation done for May and June, 1991. In general, there appears to be an increasing trend in the responses in almost all categories assessed. This may imply improvement in the performance of individual leaders, which when viewed entirely would reflect the overall performance of the IA.

The improvement could be attributed to the intervention activities introduced such as the reorganization of farmers into smaller groups, the self-assessment scheme undergone by members and the value-focused training experienced by the farmers. The fact that the farmer leaders revealed a relatively low assessment at the outset is an indication that an objective documentation of the situation in their areas of responsibility was desired. The validity of the succeeding assessment results could be checked by the self-assessment done by the farmers. Moreover, the TSA leaders are compelled to report to the monthly BOD meeting on the situation of their TSA based on the self-assessment responses. Thus, it would be difficult for the TSA leader to fabricate assessment results as the BOD can check these out. It would be advisable that officials of the IA validate the self-assessment results from time to time.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Both phases of the self-assessment scheme being introduced aim to improve IA performance through "homespun" improvements and active involvement at the farmer members' and IA leaders' level. Considering that the self-evaluation and corresponding action shall be made at the STSAG/MFDG and TSA leadership level, improvements may be small but comprehensive for the IA as a whole.

For the scheme to work effectively, however, it would need members and leaders who are sensitive and able to perceive the problem and its effects on the performance of the STSAG/MFDG/TSA. Lastly, and most important, it would need members and leaders who perceive that the IA is crucial to their success as farmers in order for them to care enough to do something about improving its performance for the betterment of service delivery.

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Annex 1

Symbols used in Farmer-Member Self-Assessment Activity

- 
– Area has adequate amount of water
- 
– Area has excess amount of water
- 
– Area had deficient amount of water
- 
– Canal is clean
- 
– Canal is unmaintained/ grassy canal
- 
– Structure is obstructed or defective
- 
– Structures are functional
- 
– Structures need rip-rapping
- 
– Proposed structures
- 
– Leaders and members have good relationship
- 
– Leaders and members do not have good relationship
- 
– Collection efficiency

100%

50%

25%

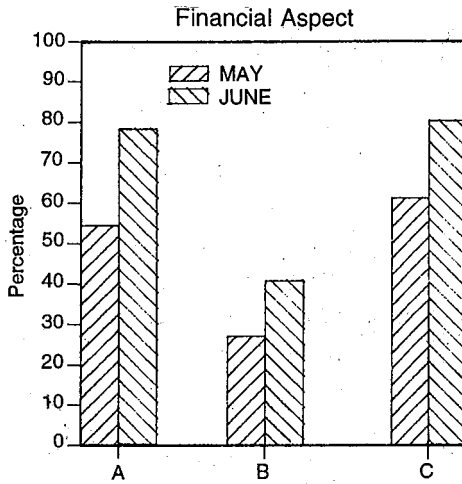
Annex 2

RAMC-21 Action Plan

Activities	Group/persons responsible	Date to be implemented
1. Consolidation/reorientation of members	Core groups/Committee groups I&II	1 week
2. Bayanihan/rabus	Group II (service committee, lead committee)	18 July 1991
3. Rabus	Group I (service committee, lead committee)	18 July 1991
4. Review and finalization of TSA policies (re: penalties for absent members and those who defy TSA rules and regulations)	Education and training committees and STSAG/MFDG leaders	5 August 1991
5. Monthly TSA meeting	MFDG leaders/education training committee	3rd Saturday of July
6. Organizational meeting for Group III	TSAL/FIO	Within July

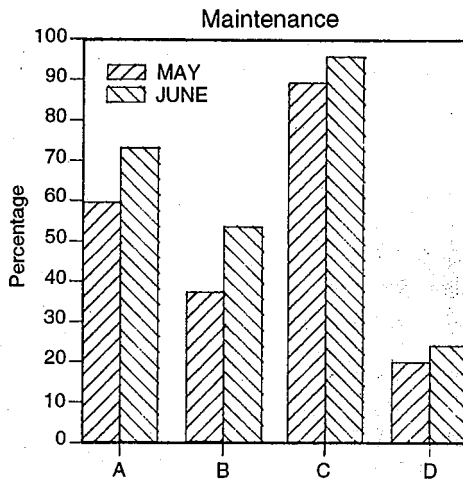
Annex 3

Comparative Results of Self-Assessment, May to June



Legend:

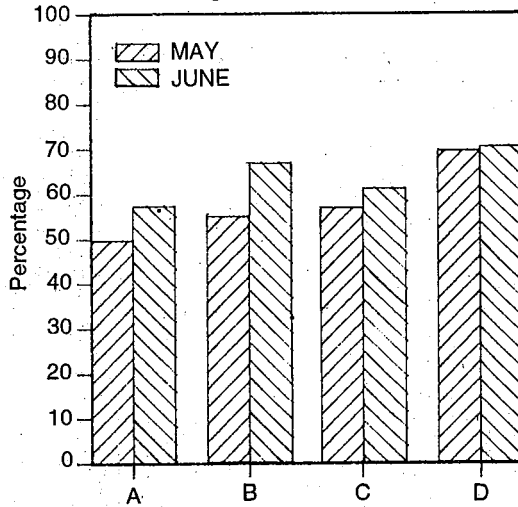
- A - Affordability to pay ISF: farmers in TSA who can afford to pay
- B - Timeliness of payment: farmers who pay ISF on time
- C - Willingness to pay: farmers willing to pay ISF



Legend:

- A - Turnout maintenance: MFDs kept clean
- B - Rabus (voluntary work): farmers who participate
- C - Rabus: farmers who participate and perform well
- D - Preventive maintenance: farmers who give notice when there is a possible damage in structure or when repairs are needed

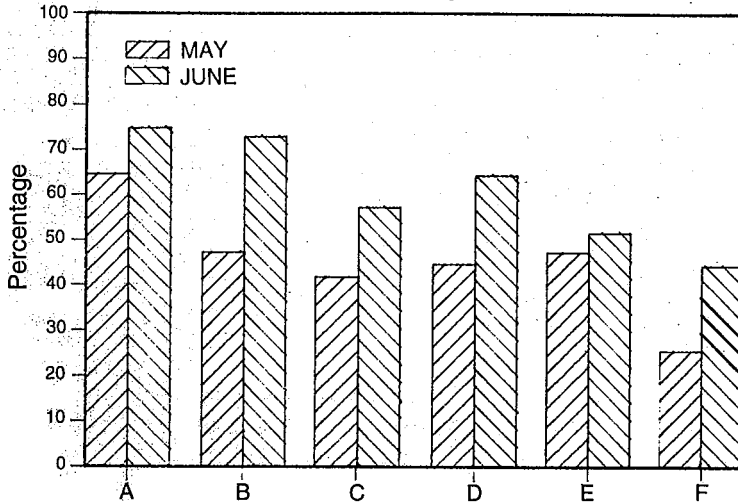
Planning and Group Dynamics



Legend:

- A - Attendance in meetings: farmers in TSA who attend meetings
- B - Participation in meetings: farmers who participated in meetings
- C - Upward linkage: problems brought to the IA or BOD
- D - Downward linkage: IA or BOD decisions disseminated to farmers

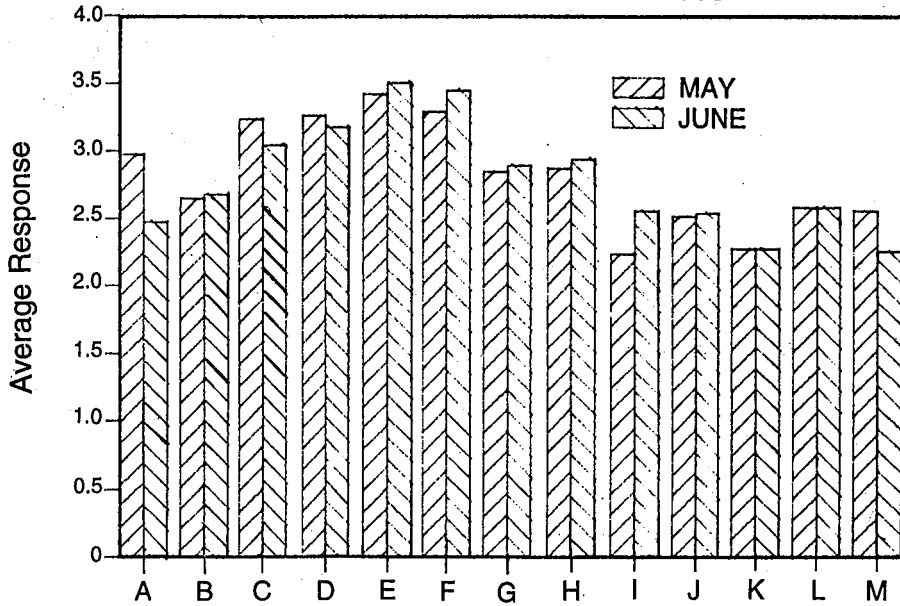
Water Management



Legend:

- A - Water distribution: farm holdings with sufficient water
- B - Communication: farmers informed when they will be given water
- C - Water saving: farmers who close gates when farm has sufficient water
- D - Rotation: farmers who help in rotation when there is lack of water
- E - Conflict management: conflicts resolved in one month
- F - Task distribution: farmers in the TSA given specific tasks

Assessment of NIA Services



Legend:

- | | |
|--|--|
| A - Relations with NIA officials | H - Participation of WMTs in IA activities |
| B - Familiarity of TSA members with IDO | I - Participation of DTs in IA activities |
| C - Familiarity of TSA members with IDO | J - Participation of IDO in IA activities |
| D - Familiarity of TSA members with WMTs | K - Timeliness in cropping calendar |
| E - Familiarity of TSA members with DTs | L - Cleanliness and repairs of structures |
| F - Familiarity of TSA members with FIOs | M - Incentives for early payment |
| G - Participation of FIOs in IA activities | N - Timely resolution of NIA-IA problems |

Notes: For A and B.1 - not good, 4 - very good
 For C to F.1 - not familiar, 4 - very familiar
 For G to J.1 - no participation, 4 - full participation
 For K to N.1 - not satisfied, 4 - very satisfied