

FMIS

Farmer Managed Irrigation Systems Newsletter

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† Irrigation and Gender

Why are irrigation systems so often managed by men? Part of the reason is that irrigation agencies assume that women are not involved in day-to-day irrigation management and so exclude them from extension and training activities. Water user associations often have no women members, do not require women to work on maintenance, and may actually prohibit women from working on construction projects.

A workshop on "Gender Issues in Rural Development in the Philippines" held in Manila, Philippines, June 9-10, 1987 was sponsored by the Institute of Philippine Culture (IPC) to consider the plight of women in rural development and to develop practical recommendations.

The workshop was organized by three researchers at the IPC, Jeanne Illo, Salve Borlagdan and Cynthia Veneracion, who have respectively supervised development work within the National Irrigation Administration, the Bureau of Forest Development and the Ministry of Agriculture. Attending the workshop were about 30 representatives from these three government agencies.

Much of the workshop time was spent in small groups to examine each agency's field level activities in terms of women's involvement. The irrigation group comprising representatives of the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) and staff of the IPC presented a number of recommendations for the ongoing Communal Irrigation Program:

>> *Talk to women at the very beginning of project development.* When a communal irrigation project is initiated, the first contact the community has with the NIA is in the feasibility stage when an agro-economic survey and a profile are carried out. The data gatherers generally obtain lists of potential

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beneficiaries from local officials. These lists contain the names of household heads, introducing a male bias since a household head is automatically considered to be the man unless the man has died or is absent. With this list in hand, the data gatherers then seek out these "household heads" for interviews, which results in the interviews being focused on the men.

The bias toward interviewing household heads limits women's contributions in formulating the initial concept of the project, and signals to the community that the NIA program is primarily focused on men. The NIA participants recommended that data gatherers be explicitly instructed to try to interview husband and wife jointly.

>> *Joint membership for husbands and wives in irrigators' associations.* The concept of official membership in the irrigators' association has an important influence on who participates. Normally only those who hold official membership in the association can join working committees, become officers, vote in meetings and participate in training courses or workshops.

In most irrigators' associations a household is represented by only one member--the "household head", generally considered to be the man. This limits the active participation of women, although there were many cases cited where women have become officers, including president, of the association. These active women are most often those without a man in their household. When husbands are present, it is usually the man who becomes the member. Yet the women who have a man in their households also represent an important talent pool that could be more effectively tapped if these women could become members of the association.

The NIA group recommended that community organizers be trained to discuss with the farmers the possibility

of having "joint membership" in the irrigators' association. A household could be given one vote, but the membership be jointly held by the husband and the wife, thus allowing the women equal access to active participation in the association. Since each association draws up its own by-laws, the decision on whether or not to adopt such a suggestion would ultimately be in the hands of the community. (cont. on p. 3)

The *Farmer-Managed Irrigation Systems (FMIS) Newsletter* is published by the International Irrigation Management Institute on behalf of the FMIS Network. Its purpose is to provide a link among staff of planning and implementing agencies and researchers concerned with understanding and assisting the farmer-managed irrigation sector. The objectives of the FMIS network are both to disseminate existing knowledge and experience, and to foster the development of new approaches for improving and sustaining the economic and social benefits of irrigation systems whose management lies outside the jurisdiction of government agencies.

The *Newsletter* is published quarterly and provides a forum for Network members to communicate with one another. Please send announcements, comments, ideas, questions, news items or brief articles to:

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>> *Training for community organizers.* Even if women were provided more explicit membership in the association, men would tend to take a larger role in association affairs. Community organizers need to actively encourage women's participation in committees, general and sectoral meetings, running for office in the association and attending training activities. The group recommended that this concept should be incorporated into the organizers' training.

>> *Official backing for women's participation.* A series of five manuals that guide the implementation of the participatory approach on communal irrigation systems is currently being revised for dissemination to all regional and provincial NIA offices organizers as well as to other NIA staff and international visitors. The recommendations for greater women's participation would be incorporated into these manuals and would also be discussed in training courses and workshops with community organizers and engineers.

>> *Access to employment.* The national government has a policy that women's names are not to appear on payrolls for government construction projects. But the group also noted that there are instances where women want to participate in construction--particularly in some tribal areas of the Philippines, where there are strong traditions of women's involvement in construction. It was recommended that NIA officials raise this issue at high level interagency meetings. In the meantime construction contracting methods can be used which do not involve the listing of individual names and hence can allow women to participate if they so desire.

- based on a report of the workshop written by Francis Korten, The Ford Foundation, Jl Taman Kebon Sirih 1/4, Jakarta, Indonesia.

Editor's Note...

The articles in this issue point to the wide array of basic development issues embedded within the farmer-managed irrigation sector. **Irrigation and Gender** brings out the issue of implicit gender roles that are introduced unwittingly as part of outside assistance to FMIS. In many parts of the world, the status of women in rural communities is actually higher than in the more "modern" urban-oriented society where government policies are formulated.

The importance of building upon existing community values, and indigenous irrigation knowledge is a theme which is fundamental to the objectives of the FMIS Network. Sustainable development requires a good grounding in what is already existing; the long-term benefits of carefully tailored assistance programs range from social harmony within the community to higher agricultural productivity.

Large-Scale FMIS in Morocco have operated through complex indigenous organizations which are now being incorporated, along with the physical canal networks, into larger agency-managed systems. Building upon the existing organizations rather than introducing an entirely new management arrangement, and connecting the existing canal structure to a new water supply, rather than constructing new tertiary channels, may be "least-cost" solutions which also have the highest long-term potential for sustained productivity. The best mix between old and new is a topic for research that needs to become standard procedure in FMIS assistance.

In Morocco, a great deal of basic research has been conducted over the past two decades on organizational aspects of FMIS (though much more needs to be done on the technical side). **Bhutan Irrigation** is much less