

Farmer-Agency meetings in Sri Lanka

From the late 1970's jurisdiction over "minor" irrigation systems (MIS) (with command areas under 80 ha) has been entrusted to the Department of Agrarian Services (DAS) under the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Research. Generally speaking, all MISs are farmer managed, functioning under the periodic supervision of a Cultivation Officer (CO) who is the village level officer of DAS.

During the past 10 years, a great many FMISs in Sri Lanka have been rehabilitated or improved under several types of externally funded projects, including the World Bank-financed Village Irrigation Rehabilitation Project (VIRP), the ADB/IFAD Anuradhapura Dry-zone Agricultural Project (ADZAP) and Integrated Rural Development Projects (IRDP) funded by various donors. The selection of systems for rehabilitation/improvement is done by the DAS through consultation with beneficiary farmers. These consultations take the form of meetings.

Preliminary meetings

The selection of a minor scheme by DAS is usually initiated by a request from the beneficiary farmers. The CO organizes a preliminary meeting with farmers with district level officers from DAS participating. The preliminary meeting provides an opportunity for farmers and officers to discuss the present condition of the system and 2) specific improvements desired. The preparation of technical report is discussed and the participation of the farmers in specific tasks (e.g, channel clearing) worked out. Farmers are told at this juncture that if the suggested improvements are within the limits of accepted pro-rata costs, they would be informed of a final ratification meeting where the approval for implementation is officially given.

Ratification Meeting

After the preliminary meeting the local DAS technical officer surveys the system with the help of the farmers and prepares detailed cost-estimates for the different components of the scheme. When this process is completed, the DAS office calls a ratification meeting for the confirmation of the estimates and to plan the implementation schedule. The steps taken at this meeting are as follows:

- Confirmation of the estimates for different items,
- Addition of any other items proposed by farmers,
- Finalization of an implementation schedule,
- Appointment of a six member construction committee to monitoring construction work,
- Determination of farmers' responsibilities (e.g., canal clearing, earth work, and post-project water management)

Formal ratification is a pre-requisite to official approval for a scheme to go ahead. The two farmers' meetings (preliminary meeting and the ratification meeting) are currently the major means of organizing beneficiary participation in the process of planning and implementation of FMIS assistance. These meetings also create a basis for sustained management of the system by farmers, after the physical improvements are implemented.

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