

# **Farmer Involvement in NIRP Rehabilitation: Some Preliminary Observations**

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FARMER PARTICIPATION in rehabilitation is a key issue under the National Irrigation Rehabilitation Project (NIRP), Sri Lanka. This paper analyses different aspects of farmer participation in rehabilitation such as farmer organization (FO) creation and preparation, farmer participation in planning and design, farmers contributing the mandatory 10 percent of the resources, construction contracting to FOs, and construction supervision by farmers or FOs. Other than these, some other issues like FOs' influence on the success of rehabilitation and effects of rehabilitation on the development of FOs' management abilities have been addressed.

Three medium schemes—Wennoru Wewa (WW) (tank, Kurunegala), Gampola Wela Raja Ela (GWRE), and Udugoda Bandara Ela (UBE) (anicut, Kandy)—and two minor schemes—Kobeigane Maha Wewa (KMW) (tank, Kurunegala) and Udawela Maha Ela (UME) (anicut, Kandy) were selected as the field sites. WW, GWRE, and KMW were under construction while UBE and UME had been prepared to undertake rehabilitation.

Strengths and weaknesses of FOs in participating in the rehabilitation process and the effectiveness of agency involvement have been identified and documented. Political issues, shortcomings of the agencies, financial loss of FOs from contracts due to low rates of estimates, presence of part-time farmers, agency's inability to honor major requests of farmers (such as desiltation of tanks), disputes among farmers, economic and political disparity (the poor versus the rich), seasonal tenancy, weak leadership, lack of benefits from FOs as perceived by the farmers, are some of the factors which contributed to weakening the FOs. Some of the issues are common to all schemes while some others are site specific.

It is very difficult to conclude at this stage on whether FOs would be able to successfully undertake O&M responsibilities of these schemes after rehabilitation. Major issues identified in this study would be studied in depth in the Phase II of the study. The following have been identified as key areas needing immediate attention:

- \* FOs' activities should be supervised more closely by senior officials.
- \* FOs should be formed well in advance to allow them adequate time to prepare for rehabilitation work.

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- \* FOs should be formed well in advance to allow them adequate time to prepare for rehabilitation work.
- \* Training programs should be conducted more effectively by including topics like financial management.
- \* Wherever possible, different FO models including community-based FOs instead of channel-based ones may be tried.
- \* Field officers should be encouraged to more positively support FOs.
- \* Progress should be continuously monitored to check achievements against targets. An appropriate feedback and monitoring mechanism should be institutionalized.
- \* Inter-agency cooperation needs to be further improved.
- \* There should be more effective supervision contracts awarded to contractors. FOs should be provided with technical assistance by the relevant agencies to enable them to successfully execute contracts.
- \* The present practice of awarding contracts to FOs on profit/loss basis should be reviewed and ways need to be found so that they do not incur any financial loss in this learning exercise.
- \* FOs need to be properly oriented before handing over of the rehabilitation scheme.
- \* FOs should be assisted to develop appropriate mechanisms for resource mobilization for operation and maintenance (O&M) of the schemes after turnover.