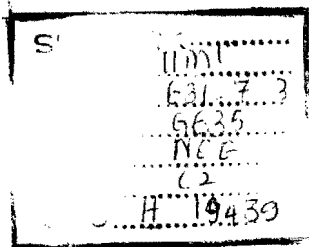


Status of Irrigation Management Transfer in India

**Water Users' Association in
Pillayarkulam Tank:
Farmers' Experience**



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Foreword

This booklet is one of the series of short narratives about farmers' efforts to create and manage water user associations. The purpose of the series is to provide other farmers in the state with succinct, readable, and interesting information about these efforts that might enable farmers to improve their access to the irrigation services. This study is being published in both Tamil and English. See the back cover for information about the other narratives in this series.

This narrative was written by B. Neelavalli under the guidance of IIMA and IIMI team members. He lived with the farmers described here from October, 1994 to April, 1995. While there, he interviewed and observed the farmers in order to document the water user association and irrigation management transfer process at this site. The information presented here reflects the ideas and opinions of the farmers themselves.

B. Neelavalli's effort was part of the study on Status of Irrigation management Transfer in India being carried out from 1993 to 1995 by the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, and the International Irrigation Management Institute, Colombo, with funding from the Ford Foundation. The study investigated and documented the policies and activities of agencies, non-governmental organizations, and others with regard to promoting irrigation management transfer from the government to farmers. The overall goal was to contribute to formulation of effective policies and programs with regard to irrigation management transfer in India. In addition to this series of short narratives, study results are reported in more traditional research reports and other forms.

The primary members of the IIMA/IIMI study team were Shashi Kolavalli, Amarlal Kalro, Gopal Naik, and S. Ramnarayan from IIMA, and Jeffrey D. Brewer, R. Sakthivadivel, and K.V. Raju from IIMI. Editing in Tamil was carried out by S. Subramanian and Dinakaran. The edited first draft was translated into English and reviewed by the study team, particularly by Gopal Naik and K.V. Raju.

The members of the study team, including B. Neelavalli, wish to thank the people of Village Amandurpatti, concerned government and non-governmental agencies who gave their hospitality and time to answer questions and explain how things work without expecting compensation. We sincerely hope that their experiences will be useful to others.

Jeffrey D. Brewer
IIMI

Gopal Naik
IIMA

Water Users' Association in Pillayarkulam Tank: Farmers' Experience

Tanks have been an important source of water in Tamil Nadu. However, most of these tanks are in a state of disrepair. One such tank under the PWD is the Pillayarkulam tank in Madurai district of Tamil Nadu. As the tank irrigates only 35 acres, PWD has not bothered much about this tank. A farmers' association has been set up with the help of PRADAN, a NGO to develop the tank. The tank is situated in Aamandurpatti village, 18 km from Madurai on the Madurai-Azhagarkoil road. The villagers have to walk around 2 km from Kallanthari to get to this village.

Tank History

The tank once belonged to the Gounder community. In 1856, the tank was handed over to the PWD. The water for the tank comes from the Periyar main canal through the 7 th branch canal which has been built with cement slabs. The branch canal benefits the Periyamandur, Kannimarkulam, Pillayarkulam, Sengulam, and Poovakudi canals.

Cement slabs have been used to construct the canal from the 7th branch canal to Kannimarkulam. Stones have been used from Kannimarkulam to Pillayarkulam. At several places these stones have been removed to irrigate the fields. There is a provision for water from the Periyar main canal to go to the fields directly without going via the branch canal. As the branch canal is in a state of disrepair, a mud canal is used for irrigation. The area irrigated by the canal is 35 acres. However, water while going through the mud canal collects in a pond and irrigates another 15 acres. A 15 km long canal was built by the panchayat some time ago. It is yet to be completed resulting in wastage of water.

Moreover, villagers in the last wing of the Periyamandur canal use the Pillayarkulam tank water for irrigation as they do not get enough water. There are two wells in the Pillayarkulam area.

Problems Faced in Irrigation

As stated earlier, the tank was not being maintained properly PWD used to take up repair work only if funds were available. Moreover, since the irrigated area was small, PWD did not take interest in the tank. The villagers too did not repair it as they did not have enough funds. It was full of wild plants which absorbed all the tank water. The sluice gate too required repairs, resulting in water wastage.

Encroachments by the villagers themselves had reduced the area of the tank from 7 to 3 acres. Since the Periyamandur villagers used the Pillayarkulam tank water in the head reaches of the distributary canal, the downstream areas in Pillayarkulam did not get enough water.

Crop System

The Gounders big landlords, five farmers have given a total of 2.5 acres of land on lease for three years. The lessee who is given the original document of the land has to pay the land tax. There is no clause in the lease agreement to give a part of the harvest to the owner. If the leaser does not return the money, the lease will be automatically renewed for three more years. Nowadays, instead of giving away the land documents, the lessor gives in writing that the land has been given on lease. If he does not return the money at the end of the lease period, the lessee transfers the lease to another farmer.

The area irrigated by the Pillayarkulam tank is 35 acres. Rice is harvested twice in a year. Short duration varieties such as J 13 and ADD 36 are sown in the first season and medium duration varieties such as IR 20, Culture, and ADD 39 in the second. The yield is around 23 to 30 bags of rice per acre (1 bag = 65 kg).

Social and Economic Structure

The first settlers in this village were the Gounders. The Gounders earlier belonged to Kallanthari. They used to conduct a function in their village

in a temple and get the 'first (highest local, social honour) respects'. When this was denied to them, they left Kallanthari and settled in Aamandurpatti where they owned land. The Vallayars in the village are related to the Vallayars in Thoppulamkatti and hail from the Ponnamaravati area near Pudukkotai. The Gounders' houses are located in the middle of the village. The lower castes live in a secluded area and the Vallayars near the entrance to the village.

The village population is 526 of which 71 per cent are literate. Of the literate, 36 per cent have studied only till the primary level as there is only a primary school in the village. They have to go to Madurai or Chatirapatti for further studies. The Vallayars own a negligible portion of the land. Apart from agriculture, they also go for other jobs including working for daily wages in other fields. The lower castes own no land and entirely depend on daily wages. Twenty-five per cent of the farmers are small farmers, 9 per cent are medium, and 10 per cent large.

History of the Irrigation Association

The tanks under the panchayat and PWD were not being maintained properly for want of funds. Farmers were using well water for irrigation, and thus the ground water level began to fall. The government started the minor irrigation tank rehabilitation project with an aim to involve farmers in tank maintenance.

The responsibility of forming a farmers' body was given to PRADAN, an NGO. PRADAN decided to form farmers' bodies in the four tanks under PWD. PRADAN had already formed a similar body in Panchanthangipatti, some 6 km from Kallanthari and 8 km from Aamandurpatti.

According to the agreement entered into by the government with PRADAN, the tanks selected must meet the following conditions:

1. Most of the farmers must be small and medium.

2. The farmers have to contribute 25 per cent of the canal repairing expenses of repairing the tank.
3. The tank must not have been maintained for many years.
4. There will be no encroachments. If there are encroachments, they will have to be minimal.

PRADAN will select the tanks, form the association, help the farmers acquire the necessary technical skills for repairing the tanks and getting finance from the government. The government was to provide the funds, in selection of the tanks and make available the required documents.

How the Farmers' Body Came Into Being

A three-member PRADAN team which included a woman, was sent to Aamandurpatti. The team gathered details about the village and villagers. It called a meeting of the villagers and got to know of their problems. The farmers informed the team that a farmers' body had already been formed by PWD in the village and questioned the need for another. PRADAN had to do a lot to convince about the need for another body. An association was formed after eight such meetings. Mr Mookaiyah Gounder was elected the chairman. The vice-president, secretary, assistant secretary, and treasurer were elected according to the village head Mookaiyah's advice. The association was registered on March 6, 1992.

Finance

The membership fee is Rs 5. Apart from farmers getting water from the Pillayarkulam tank, some Periyamandur farmers having land under this tank command are also members of the association. The yearly subscription is Rs 50 per acre per season. The secretary collects this subscription and he also, convenes meetings. All day to day decisions will be taken by the president and the secretary.

The revenue collected from leasing out rights for fishing in the tank and collecting lotus leaves will be shared equally between the farmers and the association. The farmers have to pay 25 per cent of the cost of any repair project and the government pays 75 per cent. Those who utilize sand from the tank will have to pay a proportionate amount to the body.

The government routes its share of the finance through PRADAN. The amount collected from the farmers and the government will be deposited in a joint account which is operated by the chairman, treasurer, and secretary.

Changes After Formation of the Association

Maintenance of the Tank

After the association was formed, the tank was repaired, resulting in increase in the retaining capacity of the tank. Wild plants were removed and the water flow improved. A door was fixed to the sluice, putting an end to water leakage. As the villagers have access to more water, the average yield has gone upto 30 bags from earlier 23 bags. The lower caste villagers now get employment even during the lean season because of the tank repair work. Misunderstandings among farmers have reduced because of increased availability of water. There has been no change in the cropping pattern.

Irrigation

The villagers themselves regulate irrigation after the formation of the association. Farmers come to know of the water release day through newspapers. The first season is from July or August to October and the second from November to February. The second season is called *Kodai*. Water is let out through sluices in the tank at the same time. There is a constant flow of water in the tank. Farmers do not have a fixed time for irrigation. Farmers nearer the tank irrigate land first followed by the others. But they do not follow any rotation.

From December 23, 1994 to February 17, 1995 rotation supply was followed in the Vaigai dam: rotation was followed here too. Water was released for four days followed by a gap of three days. There were seven rotations like this. But Pillayarkulam tank got water only four times. This was because the tank received water only when there was enough water in the main canal. As there was not enough water during the last three rotations, the Pillayarkulam tank was deprived of water.

Other Activities of the Association

The lease rights for fishing and lotus leaves were with the village panchayat before the association was formed. After the formation of the association, the rights were given to the association because the association was headed by the former panchayat chief.

The first auction after the formation of the association was held in June 1992. The rights for fishing and collecting lotus leaves were leased out for Rs 2,000. Fifty per cent of this amount went to the panchayat the rest was deposited in a bank and used for mainenance. The association gave a crop loan to its members in 1995.

A meeting of the associations formed by PRADAN was held in Madurai on January 27 in which government officials, PRADAN and PWD took part. The secretary of the Pillayarkulam association also participated in the meeting. He requested the district collector to remove the encroachments in the tank. Hearing this, one encroacher protested later to the secretary and threatened that he would occupy the secretary's land if his encroachments were removed. This scared the secretary who did not take any further steps to remove the encroachment.

Present Position

The association has requested the government for a common well which can increase the yield. PRADAN feels that the villagers are educated and pragmatic and capable of continuing the work even if PRADAN leaves the scene.

List of case studies published in local languages under Irrigation Management Transfer Project

Case Studies conducted in Gujarat and published in Gujarati

1. Water Users' Association in Anklav Subminor, Mahi Kadana Project: Farmers' Experience
2. Water Users' Association in Right Bank Canal of Pingot Medium Irrigation Project: Farmers' Experience
3. Water Users' Association in Left Bank Canal of Baldeva Medium Irrigation Project: Farmers' Experience
4. Water Users' Association in Bhestan Minor (Mohini), Ukai Kakrapar Project: Farmers' Experience
5. Water Users' Association in Bhima Lift Irrigation Scheme: Farmers' Experience

Case Studies conducted in Maharashtra and published in Marathi

1. Water Users' Association in Phulewadi Lift Irrigation Scheme: Farmers' Experience
2. Water Users' Association in Kadoli Lift Irrigation Scheme: Farmers' Experience
3. Water Users' Association in Minor 7, Mula Project: Farmers' Experience
4. Water Users' Association in Parunde Minor Irrigation Project: Farmers' Experience
5. Water Users' Association in Hadshi Minor Irrigation Project: Farmers' Experience
6. Water Users' Association in Minor 17, 18, 18A, 19 and Distributary 1, Waghad Project: Farmers' Experience
7. Water Users' Association in Minor 10, Bhima Project: Farmers' Experience

Case Studies conducted in Tamil Nadu and published in Tamil

1. Water Users' Association in XIth Branch Canal, Periyar Vaigai Project: Farmers' Experience

2. Water Users' Association in Kedar Tank: Farmers' Experience
3. Water Users' Association in Dusi Mamandur Tank: Farmers' Experience
4. Water Users' Association in 28L and 29R Outlets of Mettupalayam distributary in Lower Bhavani Project: Farmers' Experience
5. Water Users' Association in Malayadipalayam Distributary of Parambikulam Aliyar Project: Farmers' Experience
6. Water Users' Association in A9 Mahilanchery Channel (Saliperi), Cauvery-Valappar Project: Farmers' Experience
7. Water Users' Association in Panchanthangipatti Tank: Farmers' Experience
8. Water Users' Association in Pillayarkulam Tank: Farmers' Experience
9. Water Users' Association in Vagaikulam Tank, North Kodaimelalagian Channel, Tambraparani Project: Farmers' Experience

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