

Status of Irrigation Institutions and Support Services in Ethiopia

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Abstract

Ethiopia is investing good amount of scarce resources on irrigation development. But the performance of many of the irrigation schemes is often far from satisfactory with disappointing results of public investments. In this study, the type and performance of irrigation institutions and availability of support services were investigated taking three large and nine small scale irrigation schemes from different parts of the country.

It was noted that at the macro-scale, the mandates the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Ministry of Water Resources in irrigation development were not clearly articulated and scrupulously tended. The set up of irrigation institutions from Federal to Woreda level is frequently changing ensuing institutional memory lapse, duplication of efforts, and lack of accountability. The roles of Water Bureaus and the Agriculture and Rural Development Bureaus with respect to irrigation development are not clearly defined to date. Irrigation extension service was observed as an unsatisfactory and the training of farmers in irrigated crop production was wanting.

Only the agro-industrial state schemes - sugarcane and cotton farms - are relatively well managed with little or no institutional and support service problems. Many of modern small scale irrigation schemes (86%) are nominally managed by Water User Association (WUA) with well crafted bylaws. However, many of them lack the authority to enforce them. The use of local courts to fine offenders was noted to be ineffective. Compared to formal institutions like water user association, traditional institutions were found to be better efficient for their penalty sanction mechanisms are stronger.

Beneficiaries lack skills and institutions to manage common property resources; consequently, irrigation infrastructure quickly falls into a state of disrepair. Substantial numbers of the beneficiaries don't feel that they own/control the water. In the perception of the many irrigators, maintenance of the headwork and main canal are the responsibility of the 'government'. But government organizations are more focused on the development of new schemes. Maintenance was observed to be the most serious problem (74%) that caused underperformance of many schemes. The main cause was attributed to lack of fund (37%) and poor organization and planning.

Water shortage ensued water theft and unauthorized canal breaching are said to be the major (78.1%) sources of conflict and water shortage in the irrigation schemes under investigation.

Marketing problem caused by absence of communal planning, contractual farming, transport access and staggered production system targeted for market was cited as the disincentive to expand irrigated crop production. Supply of seed, pesticide and insecticide is also identified to be the major challenges in diversifying production. The availability of support service in terms of inputs (seeds, fertilizer, herbicides, fuel, farms implements) was noted to be below satisfactory. The Bureaus of Agriculture are said to be the major provider of support services (35%). The service from research institution was reported as minimal. Service Cooperatives organized by the Cooperatives Promotion Agency have started to deliver fertilizer in their cooperative shops recently.

In conclusion, irrigation water management institution is to be established and empowered with appropriate statutes. It is to be provided with extension and support services. The beneficiaries should be consulted in the

planning and they should be accountable for
the public investment.