



Irrigation Advisory Services and Participatory Extension in Irrigation Management

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PAST AND PRESENT SITUATION OF
WATER USERS ORGANIZATIONS
A CASE STUDY OF ESTABLISHING LEGAL
ORGANIZATIONS
IN GHAZVIN IRRIGATION NETWORK

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**Past and present situation of water users organizations
a case study of establishing legal organizations
in Ghazvin irrigation network**

Iran enjoys a rich history with respect to participation, formation of water users groups and operation system to derive benefit from water resources. It can be said that in this country the utilization of surface water and groundwater is in vogue for ages remnants of which are evident even now. The system of operation of the water had also developed right in the beginning with accuracy and subtlety. In other words the management for water supply as well as the management of demand had been developed.

The formations of water users within the framework of “Bonehs”, “Harasehs”, “Katehs”, “Khish” and other similar organizations which are formed, besides providing the management of water also guide as a strongest social productive system in respect of other communal activities. By close examination of the subject matter, it is found that in the region of the country with water scarcity, these organizations had been more strong and stable and benefitted from comprehensive rules and regulations relating to water management. The traditional organizations of water users, until the end of era of system of landlords and peasants, carried out water management using traditional rules and regulations.

In the early part of the decade 1960 as the system of landlords and peasants was dissolved, the traditional organizations were also dislodged and gradually lost their status with regard to water regulation and their activities are eliminated from most of the places in the country, and its remnants are visible only in a few regions of the country. The vacume created caused several difficulties relating to agricultural produce and water management.

After the land reforms by the government in order to substitute or revive these organization, some organizations like rural cooperatives, farmers cooperatives and production cooperatives were planned for implementation but these did not achieve their aims. Therefore, the water management to assure and distribute water with a lot of capital on a vast area became responsibility of the government, and the water users have no responsibility for the management of distribution of water and maintenance of the facilities created by huge investment of the government. Of course in some parts of the country even after the land reforms the water use within the

traditional frame-work remains in vogue and practically the distribution of water and the maintenance of traditional facilities are being carried out by the water users organizations. Thus in some parts of the country this system more or less is still in use.

The performance of the governmental organizations with regard to water management during a few decades indicated that this strategy has not been successful. Extremely low irrigation efficiency in the modern networks (compared to the envisaged project targets), deterioration of the irrigation and drainage networks due to improper operation by the water users, lack of attention to repairs and maintenance, reduction in the production per unit area (compared with project targets), above all mismanagement in use of envisaged cropping pattern and the problem which are created over the years in irrigation and drainage networks. Recently, during the first and second development plans the government has paid more attention to participation by the water users.

In the year 1991 the Water and Agriculture department paying more attention to the participation of water users in operation and maintenance of irrigation networks.established operation and maintenance companies after concurrence of the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Energy and Planning and Budgeting Organization which was aimed to create interest of the water users in these companies. But this action did not at all proved useful as practically the farmers did not accept any role in the operation management. Perhaps the most important reason for non-formation of water users organizations was lack of clear and practical regulations in this regard. Even if the proper implementing agencies were created, there was yet need for strong regulations from which the implementing agencies could derive support.

By approving some legal explanations including the law or the subject of farmers participation for construction of irrigation network and the same law the government approved the regulations pertaining to optimal use of agricultural water, which is an attempt to provide legal backing to form farmers organizations. Generally, the establishment of water users organization are considered to be of two different forms:

Water Users Organization for the purpose of participation in the construction of irrigation projects and deriving benefit from those.

Water Users Organization for the purpose of participation in Operation and Maintenance of the networks which have been previously constructed by the government.

For the first type there is considerable incentive for the water users. Because there is more advantage from assured water supply, acquisition of support and government facilities for the constructed irrigation networks, the farmers are more inclined to form organizations and make investments with the natural consequence that they would accept responsibility of management of operation of the facilities created.

In case of the second type since the farmers had no responsibility in the beginning in respect to O&M of the irrigation network, they are less inclined to form organizations and participate in the operation and therefore to create the interest and concurrence of the water users to form organizations is a tedious and sensitive task which need be carried out gradually over a long period.

Case Study of establishing Water Users Groups in Ghazvin Irrigation Network

During the conference of managing directors of operation and maintenance companies from all over the country held in March 1993 which was also attended by high officials of the Ministry of Energy and Directors of Water Affairs the matter of establishing micro management units within the operation companies was raised and discussed. It was emphasized that as far as possible effort should be made to establish micro management units with participation of the water users in some parts of the jurisdiction of operation companies. These units should be responsible for operation and maintenance of their own portions of the network.

As a result of this conference Ghazvin Operation Company started taking actions from year 1994 in this regard to achieve the target for establishing at least one typical organization of farmers in Ghazvin Irrigation Network. However, before giving the steps taken for accomplishing the task it is pertinent to describe briefly the particulars of the Ghazvin Irrigation network to get acquainted with this network.

Ghazvin Irrigation network has been constructed over an area of approximately 70,000 hectare in the north and north-east part of Ghazvin plain. It has concrete lined primary, secondary, tertiary and quarternary canals. It receives water from Taleghan river which is diverted by a diversion dam and tunnel to Ghazvin plain and by another diversion dam enters into the network at Zayaran. Although the construction of this network is planned for utilizing the facility of Taleghan Storage Dam but the same has not yet been constructed and the network is operated by run off the river supplies of Taleghan river with less than the required quantity of water. In this manner about 140 million cubic meter of water enters the network annually. As per the cropping pattern 50% of the area is cultivated for cereals, a part remains fallow while some portion is cultivated with summer crops. Most of the available water is used in producing spring crop of cereals while the summer crops rely on the water of the deep wells existing in the network. As such the surface water is used in conjunction with ground water in this network. The most important peculiarity of the management in Ghazvin Irrigation network is system of cultivation planning for which complete coordination exists between water department and agriculture department. This peculiarity is the most important factor to bring about the formation of farmers organization.

The procedure for establishing an organization in the boundry of Canal L2 in the Ghazvin plain can be divided in two stages. The operation company carried out the first stage while during the second stage the consultants continued the task which resulted in formation of cooperatives and union of cooperatives. First of all, the stage I was started during the year 1994 which lasted upto the end of the same year. The initial actions taken during the first stage to establish organization within boundry of Canal L2 can be described as below;

Selection of pilot area

Fixing water off-taking point

Identification and selection of the influential and reliable persons from the water users and holding explanatory sessions with them

Holding meetings with water user groups

Holding final general meeting with water user groups, appointing founder members and preparation of minutes of the meeting for establishing the legal structure of the organization.

Selection of Pilot Area

In order to get organized it is necessary that the effort is made by starting work on a pilot area so that in case of success the other areas in the irrigation network automatically follow suit and also move in the same direction to develop organizations in straight forward manner. However, the selection of this pilot area carries a lot of importance because the selection area must have potential better than other areas in the network for achieving the target and should provide better chance for success which advantage should provide confidence to the implementing officer (Project Director).

This selection requires good recognition of the social and economic environments of the area, which is an essential element of technic of managing a network.

For selecting the pilot area the following criteria was kept in view;

The agriculture for the water users is not the second profession and as far as possible the agricultural production was the only and important activity for them. Only under this condition it is possible that the water users would commit to improve their prime job and feel compelled and motivated for getting organized. Besides, the involvement of some water users in other activities which are non-agricultural and not commensurate with need of the community would in the end be a negative factor for their cooperation. The farmers in area commanded by the Canal L2, on account of long background of agriculture, were professional farmers and met these required conditions.

More contact among the farmers for getting them organized has significant impact. Therefore, in selecting pilot area it was kept in view that as far as possible there was more communication among the water users of the area than other areas. Due to families of farmers living within the boundry of villages and not migrating to cities in this area, the selected area had better peculiarity in this regard.

For establishing rganization it will be seen that getting benefit from influential and reliable persons (experienced old people) is very important. It was possible to attribute this property to the selected area.

Fixing water off-taking point

The important considerations which are necessary for organization of water users includes fixing of delivery point of water and its identification. Because this point later on becomes point of contact between the farmers and the company (governmental). Therefore, after technical investigations this point at the entrance of water into canal L2 has been established and a small chamber with control gates has been provided there.

Identification and establishing contact with representative and reliable persons among the water users

After selection of the location and identification of the water delivery point, the first step to establish contact with water users was identification of local elders, influential and reliable persons. An honest interaction with these persons and acquaintance with operation problems can help in getting them organized for improvement and finally to promote quality of water distribution. These actions were the factors which create confidence and satisfaction in these people for implementing the task and it is obvious that the aforementioned persons creates favourable conditions to make other water users interested and agreeable to form organizations. As the interest, confidence and satisfaction of the local elders are achieved, the important outcome was that they support by providing contact with water users of positive and negative attitudes. Further these persons help by giving useful and practicable suggestions to guide and to make progress due to their experience and knowledge of social environments after they are informed about the objectives of the project.

Holding of meeting with Water User Groups

After holding several meetings individually and or collectively with influential persons of the area, the implementing staff more or less found out about social background of the area for establishing organization. At this stage the discussions were made directly with water users. It is obvious that discussions were held with those who were known to be more inclined to accept the program of organization. After holding several sessions in the villages because adequately convinced and therefore the conditions became ripe for the next stage.

Holding of Final General Meeting with Water User Groups and appointment of Founder Members and preparation of Minutes of Meeting to create Legal structure of the organization

At last a meeting was held on Feb 1995 in the central mosque which was attended most of the invited water users, and after raising different points and getting explanations eventually founder members from elders of the area were legally elected and all the participants signed the minutes of the meeting. Thus they became responsible to operate the subject canal within framework of legal organization (stock company, co-operative, society etc.) covering an area of 5000 hectare.

The continuity of organization work for water users of Canal L2 was halted by middle of year 1995. At that stage only written confirmation of leaders of farmers of the aforementioned canal within the framework of the minutes of meeting of the founder members was achieved. This stage can be considered the first step towards formation of farmers organization on Canal L2 that was completed through Operation Company of Irrigation Network of Ghazvin Plain. However, the Dam and Irrigation Canal Operation Department in the headquarter of Ministry of Energy appointed the consultants in 1995 to study the possibility of establishing organization in the Ghazvin Irrigation network which was completed by autumn of year 1995, and the phase II of this study was commissioned towards the first months

of year 1997. Accordingly the Consultant was made responsible to take further action for launching farmers organization in the entire Ghazvin Plain Irrigation Network on the basis of conclusions of the earlier studies. At this stage, as per the Consultant's Agreement, initially only Canal L2 where the ground had been prepared previously by the Operation Company, was to be taken up. Therefore, the work was completed with close co-operation of the Ghazvin Network Operation Company by using work previously carried out. During this stage the villagers in the area covered by Canal L2 were contacted again and they were motivated to establish the co-operative. While carrying out review of the ground conditions to find co-operation available among the villagers for formation of water user organization, the Consultant reached the conclusion that there was no possibility of achieving

the target of creating any organization due to impediments (such as condition for establishing production co-operative under the consolidation law which is not acceptable to the farmers). At last, the Consultant recommended formation of co-operatives for providing water distribution services to the farmers instead of production & rural co-operatives. Accordingly, the farmers practically elected the board of directors of these co-operatives which were registered for each village. As a result of persuasion of the Consultant by Feb 1999 eleven co-operatives for villages in the area were registered. Finally, on June 1999 these co-operatives consisting of eleven co-operation registered as a union. Thus, practically this area of 5000 hectare was covered by a one united organization of farmers. At the end, it may be mentioned that the process of establishing eleven co-operatives was very long and the above submission only explains this process briefly.