

Practitioner Input Form
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Input Record Number	006
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Organisation(s) Involved	DFID, Mott MacDonald, Department of Irrigation – Nepal, Development Pioneers/Users Centre - Nepal
Geographic Area	Nepal: June 2001 – June 2005 DFID Guidelines for Good Governance (R8023) Action research fieldwork has been completed and workshops with study findings were presented in Nepal in March 2004. Final data analysis and report writing in progress.
Dates	June 2001 – June 2005
Communities Involved	Irrigation water users in three irrigation projects: Sunsari Morang, Kamala Uttarbahini, Bijaypur.
Duties and Responsibilities/ Purpose of Project	An action research project to investigate ways to make irrigation management sustainable and effective for reducing poverty.
Context of Intervention	Rural irrigation schemes. Two schemes are located in rural areas of the Terai (Sunsari Morang and Kamala Uttarbahin). One scheme is in a peri-urban area in the mid hills near Pokhara (Bijaypur).

Practitioner Reflective Case Study

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<p>1) <i>What mechanisms were put into place to ensure access of water for the poor, and could they be categorized as financial, technological, social or institutional mechanisms?</i></p> <p>The mechanisms we used could be categorized as ‘social’, ‘institutional’ and ‘technical’. In our study we aimed to identify measures which can help water users to set up a local irrigation institution which is suitable for their requirements, resources and capabilities, and which will enable them to manage their irrigation system in a sustainable manner. We particularly wanted to ensure that these measures would benefit water user groups that are frequently excluded or overlooked, such as poor households, and women.</p> <p>Our action research programme used a combination of mechanisms, which aimed to engage all sections of the local community – particularly the poor, and women.</p> <p>The mechanisms which we used were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• PLA Studies (‘Diagnostic Learning/Action Plans (DL/AP)’): Through these studies we worked with water users to understand local issues surrounding irrigation management, and to identify their priorities for addressing those issues. Our procedures included social and resource mapping, and well-being ranking, to enable us to locate households from all wellbeing categories. We used this information when conducting focus group discussions, when publicizing our report back, and discussion meetings (to make sure that marginal and poor households, who were often left out, would be informed and invited), and when recruiting participants for our next activity, the Water Users ‘Schools’. <p>We found that this activity initiated a process of ‘empowerment training’ for all water users, including poor water users.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Water Users ‘Schools’ (WUS): Workshops to encourage and support water users to develop the skills, understanding and shared values needed to establish sustainable Water Users’ Associations. These informal schools provided a relaxed environment, where participants discussed a range of issues affecting their irrigation system, under the broad headings of irrigation operation and maintenance, institutional development, and agriculture. These discussions were facilitated by resource persons with a background in the subject matter which was being addressed. <p>Participants were selected so that all wellbeing categories, men and women, were involved. We used a two-tiered structure in our WUS, with the ‘major’ schools meeting once a week, for four hours, over the course of one irrigation season. There were approximately twenty-five participants in each ‘major’ WUS. Participants did not receive any ‘allowance’ or other payment, but refreshments were provided.</p>	

We also contacted a larger number of ‘minor’ schools to disseminate the subject matter and outcomes to the community. These were facilitated by ‘major’ school participants, were open to everyone in the community, and normally lasted for two hours per week.

The WUS provided practical irrigation and agriculture skills, as well as ‘empowerment’ training.

We used the wellbeing information gathered in the DL/AP to recruit participants to the WUS, and to monitor the participation in, and impact of, our interventions on all categories of water users.

2) *What were your experiences with implementation and outcomes in regards to these mechanisms?*

We found these to be very promising mechanisms. The measures which we took in the PRA studies and in the WUS to involve women, and participants from poor households definitely meant that representatives from these groups were involved in a way that they had not been before.

We did, however, find that it was a challenge to recruit and retain water users from poor households to the Water Users School. Our research programme included a pilot stage in spring 2003, when we conducted two ‘major’, and associated ‘minor’, WUS, one in each of two out of three of our study areas. We went on to run eight ‘major’ WUS, and twenty seven ‘minor’ WUS in all three study areas in monsoon 2003. When we initiated our pilot ‘schools’ we left the recruitment to the WUA officers and some local leaders. We found that despite our guidelines, some sub-categories of poor households and women were under-represented.

From this we learned to be more careful in working with the WUA and the local communities to ensure that poor households and women were informed about the WUS and given an opportunity to take part, by tailoring the ‘curriculum’ to specific needs of different sub-groups within the ‘poor’ category.

Having done so, we found that attendance by poor households tended to be low; although we did find that it was better at the shorter duration, more informal, and more local, ‘minor’ schools. This was for the understandable reason that poorer households, whose income is by definition low, are reluctant to allocate time to the school which they could be using for livelihood-related activities. It also required a very concerted effort to convince them that the ‘schools’ would be of interest to them, even if they were illiterate, and despite their lack of confidence in the value to them of participating in such meetings.

We compensated for this, to some extent, by designating one of the sessions specifically to address the issues of all stakeholders, and by making a special effort to invite representatives of poor households to attend this session. This effort was reasonably successful in increasing the attendance of these households. It also increased the willingness of participants from other wellbeing groups to consider the needs and interests of poor households.

We also increased the ‘spread’ of the WUS through a number of activities which

aimed to include the general public. These were competitions and performances, each attended by several hundred members of the general public from the irrigation command areas, where WUS participants presented 'lessons' from the WUS through drama, poetry, and song.

3) *What criteria were used to measure success and failure?*

In relation to the aim of improving irrigation services for poor households:

- Level of participation of people from poor households in PRA activities and WUS
- Adoption of irrigation management practices that improve access to irrigation by people from poor households.
- Representation and influence of poor households in the Water Users Association

4) *What factors do you see as crucial in the implementation of pro-poor water interventions in connection with the specific characteristics of your experience?*

We have identified six elements of 'Software Development' for Sustainable Irrigation Institutions. These are relevant not only to specifically 'pro-poor' interventions, but to supporting irrigation institutions generally:

- **Tailor to Local Conditions**
 - Adopt a frame work – not a straightjacket (avoid standardized solutions)
 - Multi-disciplinary team – bring a range of perspectives
 - The slate isn't empty – recognize the need to work with what is there
 - Adapt the timetable – go at a sensible pace without being a slave to targets

- **The Livelihoods Framework can be a useful structure for analyzing the place of irrigation in the livelihoods of the poor**

- **Work with Water Users (we used PLA methods)**
 - Diagnose the current situation
 - Develop an action plan
 - Implement the action plan

- **Invest in Social and Human Capital (we used the Water Users Schools)**
 - See learning as mutual and to be shared (avoid conventional hierarchical training attitudes and methods)
 - Be aware of how people learn, both individually and collectively (use 'adult learning' methods, group work, visualization, cater to the needs and interests of adults who may be illiterate)
 - Keep an open mind (don't use a rigid curriculum, with a fixed lecture content. Respond to the ideas and interests of the participants and the community).
 - Learn by doing (maximize the use of practical activities)
 - Encourage reflection and innovation

- Maintain flexibility and openness
- Learn from unforeseen events and incidents
- **Provide Continuing Support for Institutions (follow-up after the WUS)**
 - Technical backstopping
 - Training
 - Financial implications (allocation of budget for continuing support)
- **A Supportive Policy and Legal Environment**
 - Clarity and consistency of legislation
 - WUA powers and enforcement authority enable it to carry out its duties
 - Adaptability to local needs and circumstances
 - Supportive institutional priorities and incentives (e.g. for government agencies responsible for irrigation services)

Practitioner Input – Part II

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<p>9) <i>Following your experience, what have you or your organisation done to incorporate your experience into future endeavours?</i></p> <p>We have ensured that those working on other irrigation management projects within the firm are aware of the findings, and have made copies of reports available to field staff on these projects.</p> <p>We have also promoted the findings outside the organization (by presentation at international conferences and at project workshops, to which we have invited key representatives of donor organizations). It is particularly important to ensure that the findings of this research experience are known to those planning future projects, so that our methods can be imported into, or allowed for, in project design. Unless this is done, our teams find themselves constrained by terms of reference and unable to take full advantage of our knowledge and experience.</p> <p>We have organized a follow-up project to build on the findings of this study, ‘Equity, Irrigation and Poverty’. We hope through this follow-on study to make the finding of ‘Guidelines for Good Governance’ (GGG) more practicable able to be implemented, and convincing to people who have not been directly involved in GGG.</p> <p>10) <i>Do you or your organisation have a system to identify or test mechanisms of access? If so, please describe and provide the system’s strengths and weaknesses.</i></p> <p>We do not have any specific system.</p> <p>11) <i>Which kind of research do you think is most effective in revealing the impact of water mechanisms on the poor?</i></p> <p>We have found it extremely difficult to study this issue; access of the poor to irrigation water tends to get omitted either accidentally or systematically in feasibility studies for irrigation projects. The failure to address this issue in an earlier irrigation rehabilitation project in Nepal, which had profound implications for the performance and sustainability of that project, was one of the main drivers for initiating this research project. We have found the methods described in Part 1) very effective, but we are in the process of reviewing them now, and will make recommendations for further improvements in our final report.</p> <p>12) <i>Based on your experience, what research would most benefit practitioners and be most useful in order to secure pro-poor interventions and why?</i></p> <p>Too much of the research to date has been closely linked with a particular type of intervention (e.g. irrigation management transfer) and has been undertaken by people closely linked to the development of an associated implementation</p>	

strategy. As a consequence, it has often lacked impartiality.

There has also been a tendency to draw simplistic general conclusions from limited observations and case studies.

Conversely, some research has been presented in a complicated way that makes it difficult for practitioners to use. Whilst recognizing the complexity of issues around access of the poor to water, these are unlikely to be addressed on large-scale irrigation, unless the problems can be presented in a simple way.

I would like to see research firmly rooted in an understanding of the practical problems of access to irrigation water, presented in a way that is not too specific to a particular case study, or studies, so that its findings are applicable elsewhere.

13) *Can you refer us to any other literature/case study material that is relevant to this research?*

There is a fairly extensive literature related to irrigation and poverty, some of which we have reviewed in our project reports, but we have found little that focuses specifically on the access of poor people to water on irrigation schemes, or of methods to improve their access. I can send further information, but three papers come to mind as being particularly relevant:

Hussain I & Biltonen E (2001) *Irrigation Against Rural Poverty, Proceedings of National Workshops IWMI Sri Lanka*, (and subsequent papers arising from this study).

Lipton M, Litchfield J and Faures J. M. (2003) *The Effects of Irrigation on Poverty: A Framework for Analysis*, *Water Policy* 5 Nr. 5 pp. 413-427. (although note that this is based on a very small and specialised sample of projects).

Smith L (2004). *Contribution of Irrigation to Poverty Reduction, International Journal of Water Resources Development* Vol 20, n 2, pp. 243-257.