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Working Group on the Role of Irrigation on Poverty Alleviation and Livelihoods

WG-POVERTY

Final Report

1) Introduction

Irrigation professionals have long understood that the purpose of irrigation is as much to do with rural development as increasing the production of food and fibre. In many instances this involves public investment justified because of the implicit benefit of irrigation in alleviating rural poverty. However, the focus is usually on farmers and their families, largely ignoring the needs of the poorest members of the community who are likely to be without land, skills and capital to be farmers themselves.

The development focus of irrigation remains primarily the alleviation of poverty of those who are or will be farmers, but with more investment going into the modernisation of existing systems, rather than new systems, irrigation professionals need to give more attention to the way irrigation systems can alleviate poverty and enhance livelihoods amongst those who are not the primary beneficiaries. Indeed the role of irrigation in alleviating poverty can be very greatly enhanced by reaching out to those who gain incidental benefit from use of the irrigation infrastructure.

2) Formation of the Task Force

The idea of establishing the ICID Task Force (TF) on the “Role of Irrigation in Poverty Alleviation and Livelihoods” (TF-POVERTY) originated from the International Workshop on the “Role of Irrigation in Poverty Alleviation and Livelihoods” held on the sidelines of the 58th IEC meeting at Sacramento, USA in October 2007. The purpose of the TF was to contribute to Topic 2.3 “Water and agriculture for ending poverty and hunger”, coordinated by ICID for the World Water Forum held in Istanbul, March 2009. The duration of the TF was for two years and was to conclude its activities at the 60th IEC by drawing lessons from the process of knowledge sharing and from WWF5 itself.

3) Lahore 2008

Being the Coordinator for Topic 2.3 “Water for Food for Ending Poverty and Hunger” of the 5th World Water Forum, ICID organized two meetings, the first at Montpellier (France) in September 2008 and the second at New Delhi (India) on 10 October 2008, to which the TF made its contribution through its Chairman, VPH Alain Vidal.

The subsequent meeting held at the time of 59th IEC in Lahore on 14 October 2008 proposed that the Task Force be converted into a regular Working Group (WG-POVERTY). This proposal was accepted by PCTA and approved by the IEC, with the tenure of the new workbody finishing in 2014.

4) Workshops

New Delhi 2009

The first meeting of the Working Group was held at the time of 60th IEC meeting at New Delhi in 2009.

Despite the absence of several members and all the Permanent Observers of the former Task Force, the meeting was well attended and was able to explore future options through a workshop held during time frame of the meeting. PH Peter Lee acted as Chairman of the workshop.

It was noted that the new working group was successor not only to the former task force, but also WG-SOCIO that had been in existence for some years prior to the formation of TF-POVERTY. The workshop proposed that ICID should be concerned with:

- Improvements in livelihoods as well as productivity
- Services to the poor, not just farmers
- Different manifestations of poverty and their definition
- Affordability of food, not just its cost
- Wider access to services and opportunities for participation in the value chain
- Participatory approaches that listen to the poor and are open to ideas (aka accountability)
- Extension of agricultural water management to nominally rainfed areas and general “landcare”
- Multiple use of farm storage, not just of public systems (eg for aquaculture)
- Greater awareness of health impacts and the actions needed
- Need for guidelines, case studies and country actions.

In looking beyond the purpose of the original task force (regarding input to WWF-5), the meeting agreed to continue with the objectives of the task force, namely:

- Synthesize specific knowledge and experience from the irrigation sector, to design pro-poor actions in a wider understanding of irrigation along the whole rainfed-irrigated continuum (aka agriculture water management).
- Look for technical solutions that work within a clearly defined socio-economic context, so that they can be mobilized in a case specific approach.
- Emphasize multiple-use (mus) of irrigation systems as a specific approach to alleviate poverty in this context

To these objectives, the meeting proposed adding:

- Increasing opportunities for greater and more open participation by the poor, in the development of systems and in the value chain
- Building accountability mechanisms that give longer term support and commitment to poverty alleviation initiatives

- Guidelines supported by case studies on how to enhance the poverty alleviation and livelihood improvement impacts of new and existing projects.

These objectives represented a significant broadening on ICID's view on the role of irrigation in alleviating poverty, which needed to be explained and explored in subsequent workshops.

Yogyakarta, 2010

This workshop held in the timeframe of the meeting at the time of the 61st IEC in Yogyakarta included significant inputs on:

1. Role of Irrigation Development in Poverty Alleviation in India by R C Jha, presented by A K Bajaj, Chairman CWC, India
2. Definitions of Poverty by Alex Bolding and Linden Vincent, presented by Prof Linden Vincent, University of Wageningen, Netherlands
3. Multiple Uses of Farm Storages by Andre Roux, South Africa
4. Employment Opportunities for the Landless Poor by Peter Lee, PH ICID, England
5. Improving Resilience for the Poor, A. Vidal, D. Mpairwe, D. Peden, M. Quintero, T.P. Tuong, presented by VPH Alain Vidal, CGIAR Challenge Program on Water and Food

Presentation 1 held the traditional view that irrigation itself could be the primary agent of poverty alleviation.

Presentation 2 described how traditional views of poverty (absolute and relative) had been broadened to become context specific, recognizing new challenges to the poor from urbanization, demand for bio-fuels, fragile eco-systems and weaker governance leading to a need for a new pro-poor approach of capacity building – action research – intervention.

Presentation 3 showed how farm reservoirs offer an extension of the multiple use of canal infrastructure to storage infrastructure, especially for agri-tourism and aquaculture.

Presentation 4 questioned the prejudice against larger farming units and showed examples of more people employed in better, more secure conditions in such units, than in independent small units. It argued that opportunities for unit consolidation need to be part of long term planning and that irrigation systems need to be adaptable.

Presentation 5 argued that food production communities and ecosystems should be able to cope with local and global changes (climate, economy, demography, migrations...) and become more resilient. This might be achieved through improved water productivity (more food with less water) together with empowerment, equity, market access, health and ecosystem services.

Also discussions in the regional conference in Yogyakarta had identified an additional concern to be added to the mandate, namely:

- The effect of urbanization on smallholders in peri-urban areas and on drawing population from rural to urban areas.

Tehran, 2011

The workshop held within the timeframe of the meeting at the time of the 62nd IEC in Tehran was truncated by having to share its time slot with a kick-off meeting of the WG-MDGs, but heard presentations on:

1. Ebenaezer Irrigation Scheme: Case Study, South Africa by M J Gabriel and A S Roux
2. The Role of Irrigation in Agriculture Development and Poverty Alleviation on Rural Community of Iran by Dr E Farhani

Adelaide, 2012

The workshop held at the time of the 63rd IEC in Adelaide concluded that:

1. Whilst virtually all government-funded irrigation had the aim of alleviating poverty, the poor had shown that they were capable of extracting more value by multiple use of the formal systems in ways that may not have been anticipated or even permitted, for by example, using canal banks as routes to market, drawing water for gardens, livestock, brick making and domestic water use. This indicated that irrigation professionals could do more to listen to the needs of the poor and facilitate multiple uses of systems for the benefit not only for farmers, but the landless poor as well. However, it was noted that:
 - a. multiple use is not just by the poor, and thus multiple use for alleviating poverty needs to be targeted (Chinese Taipei)
 - b. conflict may arise over additional uses of water (South Africa), but since the volumes used by the poor are usually a fraction of the irrigation supply this is not the problem that can arise with additional uses of treated urban supplies; in irrigation, multiple use is more about use of the system than the water.
2. Although irrigation systems had done much to improve the quality of life in the areas they served, more needed to be done to:
 - a. take a holistic view of the rural development objective of improving livelihoods

- b. develop capabilities of those new to farming, particularly women (eg in South Africa)
 - c. to allow easily managed flood and gravity irrigation technologies which can be easily managed by those new to farming (also South Africa)
- 3. The poor as a group that once recognised, can have “voice and citizenship” to negotiate more attention to their needs (Netherlands) and that:
 - a. irrigation professionals need to recognize and communicate with such groups (Japan).

This workshop proposed that the Working Group might prepare a short position paper on the role of irrigation in alleviating poverty, incorporating these points and the concepts explained at the 2010 and 2011 workshops. The Chairman proposed an outline and asked for contributions on the sections shown in Appendix I, with short examples to be given as boxes in Section 3).

Mardin, 2013

The workshop held at the time of the 64th IEC in Mardin, Turkey received presentations on:

1. The Role of Women in Irrigated Agriculture, Case Study in South Africa by Mary Jean Gabriel & Nomvuso Mjadu
2. Poverty Alleviation through Irrigation in Western Canada by VP Laurie Tollefson
3. Role of Irrigation Development in Poverty Alleviation for upland fields in Nan-Satsu District, Southern Kyushu, Japan by Dr Yohei Sato

However, no progress had been made with the content of the proposed position paper, and a considerable amount of work was needed to fit information from the case studies into a 25 page report.

Gwangju, 2014

Since the Working Group had reached the end of its tenure, it was decided to forego the preparation of a position paper and focus simply on summarizing the findings of the Working Group in this Final Report.

It is proposed that the best outcome would be for the group to provide support to ICID as a member of the Design Group (DG) for Topic 2.1 Water for Food at WWF7 (April 2015), where ICID will lead a session on Modernization of Irrigation Schemes. There is an opportunity here for ICID to advocate pro-poor interventions as a part of the modernization process.

The current framework and implementation roadmap (IR) was discussed and the following actions proposed for implementation under the umbrella of TF-WWF7:

With this action programme proposed, Working Group completed its activities.

Appendix I

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Definitions of Poverty
 - a) Appreciating the Context
 - i) Absolute vs Relative Poverty
 - ii) Farmers and the Rural Poor in General
 - iii) Relevance of Eco-systems
 - iv) Rural-Urban Interactions
 - v) National and Regional Context
 - b) Understanding the Vulnerabilities
 - i) Access to Water and Land
 - ii) Climate and Climate Variability
 - iii) Labour and Finance
 - iv) Markets
 - v) Competition for Resources
 - vi) Living with the Seasons
- 3) Opportunities for the Poor through Irrigation (with examples)
 - a) Broadening Access to Resources
 - i) Multiple Use of Systems
 - ii) Pro-poor Design of Irrigation
 - iii) Integration with Other Rural Livelihoods
 - iv) Exploiting the Gaps
 - b) Improving Resilience
 - i) Working with Eco-systems
 - ii) Designing for Sustainability
 - c) Increasing Livelihoods through Participation
 - i) Farmer Operations
 - ii) Farm and System Employment Opportunities
 - iii) Value Chain Participation
 - iv) Producer Cooperation and Out-growing
- 4) Continuing Challenges for the Poor
 - a) Eco-system Stress
 - b) Population Shifts and Education
 - c) Market Competition
 - d) Land Fragmentation
 - e) Intensive vs Extensive Systems
 - f) Unsympathetic Design and Operation of Systems
 - g) Climate Changes
- 5) Pro-poor Interventions (with examples)
 - a) Enabling “Voice and Citizenship” by the Poor
 - b) Bottom-up Design and Management
 - c) Broadening Investment
 - d) Increasing Resilience
 - e) Encouraging Serendipity
- 6) Conclusions