GOVERNMENTAL CO-OPERATION AND SUPPORTS NEEDED TO STRENGTHEN THE WATER USERS COOPERATIVES. (CASE STUDY: NORTHEASTERN I.R.IRAN)

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INTRODUCTION

Before the land reformation in Iran, the farmers could manage their own traditional system of dam construction and block water, agricultural water use, and network maintenance and fair water distribution. Due to water shortage during draught years, farmers used to learn how to optimize the usage of agricultural water. The farmers had their own traditional cooperatives such as "Boneh", "Sahra" etc (Safinejad, 1353). Good cooperation existed between farmers and the key persons of the rural societies .The government had no interference with the farmer's cooperatives. The interference of government started when land reformation began, before the Islamic Revolution.

The cooperatives formed before the Islamic revolution, were supposed to be a political program for land reformation. Farmers believed that the government forms the cooperatives for its own benefit. Water users associations formed in 1990-2000, were also unsuccessful because social and cultural issues as well as tribal and religious conditions were not considered in details or government support was not enough to strengthen the cooperatives. Among Water users cooperatives with a successful history we can refer to Pishro cooperative in Moghan irrigation network and Water users Union in Serakhs city.

A research done by Pourzand (Pourzand,Esfand 1383) Shows that Pishro WUC in Moghan received enough cooperation and good support from local government sectors. The close cooperation and co-ordination among local authorities in Moghan and their financial and technical support to Water Users Cooperative resulted in formation of a successful cooperative. Unfortunately this cooperative deteriorated due to conflict between cooperative managers and the members. It is supposed that the lack of pre-survey on social and cultural situation of the region might be a reason for deterioration . In a recent experiment in Serakhs (Amayesh consulting Co. – 1385), new established cooperatives could clean the water canals by free technical support received from local government sectors. These canals needed clearance since many years ago however, neither government nor individual land owners could manage to clear the canals. When Serakhs WUCs formed in 1385(2006), the cooperatives union could receive technical support and mechanical machinery from the local government and clean the irrigation

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canals so that they could increase water for agricultural irrigation. Both in Moghan and Serakhs experiments, the local managers of agriculture and water departments in the region, had the same belief and sympathy as the provincial authorities toward the new established cooperatives. The above examples show that with a good cooperation and close coordination of governmental sectors, the cooperatives will be strong and sustainable in the future.

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this paper is to describe the procedure of establishing the Water Users Cooperatives in north-eastern part of IRAN and explain the governmental support needed to keep these new born cooperatives of water users sustainable for the future.

THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

In natural disasters such as floods, earthquake, draught and also in an international problem such as global warming, the cooperation among nations or among societies of a country is the means of mitigation and reduction of suffer in any disaster. A good experiment in Iran was the Bam earthquake where at the moment of accident the people were present before the arrival of the governmental aid groups in the ruined region.

During recent years, the shortage of water is threatening Iran country. The shortage of water in Mashad and also the shortage of agricultural water in rural areas is a great problem. Government alone cannot afford the combat against draught. The constructed dams cannot provide enough water to compensate the shortage of irrigation water. It seems that without cooperation of farmers the problem could not be solved. To provide more water for irrigation we need people participation in optimization of water usage as well as a fair water distribution.

International experiments on the optimization of water usage shows that the people participation in irrigation management is a good solution (INCID-1998). The legal framework has been prepared for Participatory Irrigation Management in Iran and many rules have been adopted to support water users associations (the office of economic water, 1383 – Ministry of cooperation , 1376). According to IR of Iran Constitution, the cooperative system is one of the main bodies of our economic infrastructures. According to different approved texts in Iran, the previous four years development plans, people participation in economic development has been emphasized. According to the article No 107 of the 3rd Four-year Social and Economic Development plan of IRAN that re-approved in article 17 of the fourth development plan, the participation of people in irrigation management and the establishment of water users associations is a necessity for Iran development .

Following the rules and regulations, a water consultant in Mashad has started formation of Water Users Cooperatives (WUCs) with financial support of regional water companies and, here in this paper, the experiences of WUCs formation is represented.

METHOD:

A. Book review, Internet search and field study:

Persian and English sources and the experiments of other cases on PIM were studied. Famous web sites were visited including those related to irrigation management and cooperatives. Many country reports on participatory irrigation management (PIM) were reviewed through Internet.

B. Execution of the project:

Execution started with visiting the farms, the dams and the irrigation and drainage systems. Other implementation procedures were as follows:

Individuals and groups were met and the need and the benefit of water users associations were discussed with farmers. Many public meetings with farmers and water users were arranged in the mosques or schools of the villages and the project was explained to farmers in detail. The advantages of associations and information of rules and procedures to organize a legal association of water users was described to them. Four full-day seminars with the subject of water use optimization organized in the public meetings which approximately 250 farmers and key persons of the villages and the city authorities participated in each seminar. Invited professors of the universities and the authorities of the agriculture and water management presented lectures on the transfer of water management to farmers in easy language in all these informative seminars. In another meeting with participation of all water users the consultant lecturers explained the different kind of rural associations and asked the farmers to choose their favorite association. The water users preferred the cooperative system because they believed that more facilities are provided to farmers in the cooperation system. They brought reasons of the Constitution and the articles in 3rd and 4the economical and social development plan, which mentioned support to rural cooperatives (Mohajerani and Asgari – 1384). They also mentioned the importance of cooperatives due to existence of a Ministry for it.

A guideline was prepared to be followed by the water users for legal registration of the WUCs.

In 2005-2006, 17 Water Users Cooperatives (WUCs) established in the down stream of the new constructed dams in the North and Razavi Provinces of Khorassan and approximately 13 other cooperatives are on process to be established. The duties approved for WUCs are as described below:

(A) Collection of irrigation fees and return it to the regional water companies. (B) Participation in operation and maintenance of the network (C) Participation in distribution of water among water users based on the document of water right. (D) The members of WUCs will make their maximum efforts to optimize the use of agricultural water in irrigation. (E) WUCs will provide technical training to members for the maximum yield production with minimum use of water per hectare. (F) The cooperative managers will do their best effort to commercialize the cooperative activity by developing small and productive rural industry projects to bring benefit and welfare to water users.

The following table shows the specification of established WUCs at the down stream of constructed dams in the North-Khorassan and Razavi provinces in the northeastern part of Iran.

Table (1) New established WUCs in down stream of Shirindareh dam, 2006 (Bojnord)

Items	Cooperative	Registration No.	Members	Water allocated (million cu.m)	No. Villages
1	Mohamadabad	2058	576	8.8	One
2	Sephid-dasht	2063	317	4.7	Three
3	Imamazadeh Ashraf	2057	186	3.7	Three
4	khoramdasht	2071	229	4.6	One
5	Chuplytapeh-takhtemish	2061	143	3.6	Two
6	Imamzadeh Ghasem	2060	229	5.6	Two
7	Shirindasht Khorasan Shomali.	2081	159	4.5	Three
8	Kashkabad-Burbur	2080	152	1.47	Two
Total			1991	36.97	17

Table (2) New established WUCs in Serakhs, Farooj -Shirvan , and Esferayen 1385

Items	Cooperative name	Registrion No.	No. of members	Dam or Irrigation Basin	No of villages	Water Allocation (Million Cu. M)
1	Etehad	342	309	Doosti	4	4.7
2	Etefagh	343	879	Doosti	5	15.5
3	Yavaran		1164	Doosti	7	18.0
4	Sangar	341	186	Doosti	3	2.22
5	Nowruz	344	395	Doosti	5	5.9
6	Vahdat	348	331	Doosti	5	3.9
7	Nazarghah	477	400	Bidwas (Esferayen)	9	10.0
8	Ab-baran		100	Bidwas	5	6.0
9	Hosseinabad (Under ground W.Users)	641	143	Farooj Irrigation Basin	1	
10	Behyoos (On Process)		Approx.200	Farooj I.B.	1	
11	Mafranghah (on process)		Approx.100	Farooj I.B.	3	
Total			4207		48	

THE MAIN QUESTION

Through a hard and continuing efforts the consultant could organize approximately 17 water users cooperatives and 13 others on process, but the main question was not answered. Can these newborn cooperatives remain alive and continue their duties without governmental support? Our experience shows that different institutional support from governmental and private sectors should be provided to WUCs (at least for 4 years). Of course the independency of the cooperatives should not be overlooked by the direct governmental subsidies.

Some governmental supports could be provided to WUCs:

(1) Provincial support needed on matters beyond the capacity of WUCs. (2) Guidance and training as legal and office works, cooperative laws and regulations, public relations, accounting, computer and etc. (3) Technical support including: maintenance and repairing the canals, clearance of the canals and streams, technical inspections, technical advice on irrigation matters, technical and financial support on extreme natural disasters such as flood, when the land or irrigation canals are damaged or any repairing beyond the cooperative capacity. (4) Insurance programs to protect WUCs against unpredicted damages to network or their usual practices. (5)Extra funds could be allocated for continuation of guidance after the registration of WUCs. (6)Adequate guidelines and printed sources should be provided by consulting Co. for cooperatives in such a way that cooperative managers refer to manuals and technical references instead of asking questions. (7) Public seminars and informative sessions should be continued by consulting Co. (8) Fund and assistance of international related bodies who support cooperatives should be obtained for improvement activities of WUCs. (9) To provide incentives to sustain cooperatives, procedures should be developed to create income for WUCs. (10) In some cases, personnel of governmental water companies are not willing to transfer their authority of management to farmers, it is necessary that higher authorities discuss the matter to their personnel and convince them that government policy has been changed and they should give responsibility to cooperatives. (11) A formal formation of cooperatives will result in early disappearing of cooperatives. Government and his high authorities should pay serious attention to WUCs and pay great respect to authorized water users cooperatives. (12) Monitoring and evaluation of WUCs should be continued by consulting Co. and water companies. (13) Any advantages or interests should be given to WUCs in fair terms. (14) National authorities co-ordination should be continued by the Ministry of Power and Ministry of Jihad Agriculture. (15) WUCs should be strengthened by reengineering the networks and also providing them with incentive and support to repair the network when it is necessary. (16) To participate WUCs in basin management and dam construction. (17) Social recognition of WUCs by introducing them officially to governmental sectors involving in farmer cooperative business. (18) Legal recognition of WUCs by national, provincial and local government and private authorities. (19) Strong support is needed from judicial authorities. (20) Improvement of co-ordination among different governmental sectors involved in agriculture or water management is necessary. (21)Financial support for specialized training of consultant personnel through internal or international resources is necessary. (22) Women communities formation and giving responsibility of irrigation management to them is a necessity. Women can help and cooperate with men

in WUCs to optimize the irrigation water usage. (23) A collection of laws, regulations and any kind of Legal statements with the subject of assistance and support to WUCs should be prepared in easy language in one volume and be offered to WUCs free of charge. The texts should be updated and given legal references to each item before editing and being published.

CONCLUSION

The new established Water Users cooperatives cannot survive and be sustainable unless the support of the governmental sectors is provided, without interfering their independency. There are different methods to support the new WUCs. The laws and regulations let the authorities and governmental related sectors support the newborn water users cooperatives. The author believes that without government and private sector assistance, the new established WUCs cannot survive for a long time.

SUMMARY

Study the rich history of IRAN traditional irrigation system including Qantas, surface or spring water, will reveal the fact that traditional water management was one of best and strongest irrigation system for agricultural water users. The traditional water managers had their own definite and stable regulations and the landlords and peasants both followed the rules. The farmers used to distribute and use the water in a specialized cooperative methods that guaranteed the just and optimized water usage. During a short period of approximately 40 to 60 years, the governmental organizations took the performance of water distribution and networks maintenance, but the performance was not successful. During the period of governmental water management, the real water users were indifferent towards the proper use of water and the network maintenance. The government mismanagement resulted in deterioration of irrigation system and agricultural products. Fortunately according to the third and the fourth Iran Economic Development Plan, the strategies have been changed. The new rules and regulations such as Article 107 of the third Iran Development Plan (IDP) that re-approved in Article 17 of the fourth Development Plan, the strategy for rural development is “participation of farmers in irrigation management”. The transfer of water management from government to farmers is one of the government policy on irrigation, water usage and network maintenance. To implement the government policy on irrigation , the regional water companies of the North and Razavi Khorassan Provinces in the north-eastern part of Iran developed projects for establishment of cooperatives of agricultural water users in the down stream of three new constructed dams called: Doosti, Shirindareh and Bidwas, all located in the north-eastern part of IRAN. The farmers preferred Cooperative systems as an association of water users after several meetings and discussion among potential villages leaders and members of the Islamic council of the villages. Since 2005, 17 water users cooperatives (WUCs) have been established and 13 more cooperatives are in the process of formation are on process in the region.

The question remains after the cooperative establishment, is the fact that these new born cooperatives will not be able to continue their activities without further financial, legal and governmental supports. The author believes that without further support of governmental departments such as: insurance Co. , Legal institutions, justice courts,

rural police, Jihad Agricultural Ministry and Cooperative Ministry, the life of these new established water users cooperatives can not survive.

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