

Indonesia

Separate Women's Meetings a Key to Participation in Water Management

Java

In Indonesia, the increasing population and the use of irrigation on 70% of paddy fields in Java is expected to create water demand problems by 2020. The water carrying capacity of the island is being outstripped. In the early 1990s, the Cidurian Upgrading and Water Management Project in Tangerang conducted a pilot programme for the inclusion of women farmers in the planning of a project. It had become clear by then that women's lack of participation was hampering water management projects from achieving their true potential.

Indonesian women have traditionally played a critical role in rice cultivation. But female farmers have seldom been involved in all the stages of irrigation development. Surveys conducted by the Cidurian Upgrading and Water Management project in the early nineties showed that, in fact, women were actively involved in irrigation. It was they who monitored water conditions in the fields to check illegal intake and outlet of irrigation water. They controlled the buffaloes that damaged the canals. They used tertiary irrigation water for household purposes. Special efforts were therefore made to integrate them into the upgrading and water management programme of the Cidurian project.

A pilot project was carried out from January 1991 to April 1992 in two tertiary units to identify the best method of achieving this objective. This showed clearly that, in a traditional society like Indonesia's, in the absence of formal women's organisations in villages and social barriers prevent women from attending extension meetings. Special agricultural information strategies had to be devised to take into account the low educational level of these rural women. Separate meetings and four special training sessions for woman farmers were therefore organised. The aim was to provide the women with basic information on the programme, overcome their initial shyness, make an inventory of their interests regarding participation, prepare concrete plans, and identify potential leaders and representative for water users associations.

A later evaluation by a team of agricultural extension and community development experts noted that separate meetings helped the women develop confidence and reduced their shyness when they eventually attended joint meetings with men. As a result of the separate meetings, women were well represented at later consultations when mutual agreement with the men was reached about the division of labour and payments. This further increased the women's confidence and led to greater participation in water users associations.

By the end of the pilot project, it was not difficult to encourage women to become members of the boards of water user associations. In fact, rural women soon began occupying important posts, such as treasurer, assistant treasurer, and secretary of such boards. They took on responsibility for the administration of male and female water users, the collection and registration of irrigation service payments, and the establishment and maintenance of a communication and information network among the female members of their associations.

The ultimate result was a reduction in the number of illegal off-takes from the irrigation canals. But the project also triggered other women's self-help activities. In one village, they organised

female literacy classes. In two others, women's groups have been formed to start a collective saving scheme and dry field-crop cultivation on community-owned fields.

This case illustrates:

The utility of using a gender-sensitive participatory process in irrigation water management.
A simple strategy for increasing more viable irrigation water management processes.

Source: Unknown. If you the reader know the source of this case study, please do let us know.