

Special Report:

PIU-MJAO/SNC-Lavalin's Basic Strategies and Activities in WUA Establishment

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The establishment and development of Water Users Associations (WUAs) is a major program being undertaken by PIU-MJAO through the SNC-Lavalin/Hydrosult Joint Venture consultants. According to the Project Appraisal Document (PAD), WUAs will be organized within the entire project command area of AILWMP which is about 52,000 ha involving around 77,000 farmers/water users.

The WUA program is handled by the Social Development Team (SDT) of SNC-Lavalin under the overall supervision of the Team Leader, Mr. Etienne Perraton. At present, SDT has ten experts/staffs headed by an international WUA Specialist. The other members is composed of a newly hired WUA Specialist (National key staff), six field staff (three each of Rural Sociologists and I&D Engineers), a Legal/Cooperative Expert and an Agro-Economics/Finance Expert. On the part of PIU-MJAO, the Manager of the Institutional Development Unit is actively involved in the program.

In order to ensure effective and efficient implementation of the WUA program, the following strategies are being or have to be adopted.

(a) inter-agency cooperation: the WUA Technical Working Group (WUA-WG)

In keeping up with the operational principles of integrated project implementation, a WUA Technical Working Group (WUA-TWG) was established during the inter-agency meeting held last 12 May 2007 which was chaired by Mr. Karim Shokri, PIU-MJAO Project Director. The objective of establishing the WUA-TWG is to promote cooperation and close collaboration among the various agencies involved in AILWMP's WUA program. The major functions of TWG are to share experiences and ideas; and to discuss and clarify plans and strategies, issues and concerns relating to the WUA program.

Representatives from the relevant government agencies and consultant's groups (CLO, PMSC, PIU-MJAO, PIU-MRWC/OMC/ODC, MGCE and SNC-Lavalin) comprise the membership of the Working Group. Mr. Ghasem Enayati, Manager of the Institutional Development Unit of PIU-MJAO, primarily chairs the meetings of the working group. Alternately, the meeting is chaired by Mr. Farjoudi of PMSC. Mr. Douglas Taylor and Mr. Billy Mejia, international experts from SNC-Lavalin, alternately serve as Secretary of the group by preparing the agenda, serving notice of meeting to the members, and preparing notes of the meetings. Mr. Ali Mirbolook, also from SNC-Lavalin, serves as the main translator during meetings.

The WUA-TWG holds regular meetings. As of this writing, 12 meetings have been held the most recent one of which was done on 7 November 2007.

(b) establishment of "nucleus" WUAs

Generally, the establishment of WUAs within the AILWMP area starts with the mobilization of farmers at the quaternary canal level to form the basic unit of the WUA which is referred to as Farmer Irrigators Group (FIG). An FIG covers an area of about 15-20 ha involving around 20-30 farmers. The FIGs getting water from a tertiary canal will be consolidated to form Water Users Group (WUG). Then, the WUGs from different but adjacent tertiary canals in a section of the project area with well-defined hydraulic boundaries will be consolidated to form the WUA at the secondary or primary canal level. Eventually, the WUAs will be consolidated into Federation at the main canal level and then, confederated at the project level.

At present, due to the very limited information particularly on on-farm irrigation facility design and tertiary canal alignments, the SDT concentrates its efforts on the mobilization of farmers to form into WUGs in the two sites used by Mahab Ghodss in establishing design scenarios for on-farm facilities (one each in C24 and C25). The third site is the proposed land consolidated area in Mollah Kola. Due to small size of the command area of each site, the activities undertaken in each of these sites are focused on the formation and consolidation of WUGs to form initially into a group that can be referred to as "nucleus" WUAs. These "nucleus" WUAs will then be expanded to cover other adjacent areas as the designs and layouts become available. The three sites are also being used for testing and refining the detailed processes and procedures in establishing WUAs in AILWMP.

(c) WUA-FMs: key work force in WUA establishment

At present, there are only 10 persons carrying out the WUA program. The need for more manpower resources is becoming a major concern as it would be a major constraint to implementing the program in the vast area covered by the project which is about 52,000 ha, if appropriate alternatives are not adopted. Thus, as it was contemplated in the WUA establishment strategy and action plan prepared by SNC-Lavalin, the WUA program could be carried out more extensively and effectively through the engagement of WUA Facilitators/Mobilizers (WUA-FMs).

The WUA-FMs are farmers nominated and selected by their co-farmers. The WUA-FMs will serve as the direct contacts of the SDT members particularly in the mobilization of farmers for meetings; assessment of existing irrigation facilities; validation of proposed alignments of canals and gathering agreements of farmers; validation of ownership of lands and land use; validation of land and other properties that would be used and/or damaged by the construction of facilities; and gathering of data and information necessary in formulating tailor-fit strategies for establishing WUAs in specific areas.

In the three initial "nucleus" WUA sites there are 72 WUA-FMs nominated and selected by the farmers in meetings initiated by the SDT members of SNC-Lavalin. In order that the WUA-FMs can perform the tasks expected of them, two batches of two-day orientation training were conducted. The training of the first batch of WUA-FMs was conducted last 8-9 September 2007 at the SDT office in Ghaemshahr, and the second batch was given training on 10-11 September 2007 at the Kia Kola ASC.

So far, the performance of the 72 WUA-FMs is very satisfactory. If this performance would be sustained, the implementation of the detailed processes and activities in establishing strong and viable WUAs in AILWMP can be facilitated significantly.

d) greater involvement of the ASCs

There are twelve (12) Agricultural Service Centers (ASCs) that are providing assistance to the farmers within the villages that are inside the command area of AILWMP. A recent inventory done by SDT revealed that there are 78 technical staffs in the 12 ASCs consisting of 48 regular staffs and 30 officers-in-charge (on military training undergoing apprenticeship in the ASCs).

At present, the assistance provided by the ASCs to the SDT members is limited to the mobilization of farmers for meetings. As mentioned in the previous section there is a need for more manpower in implementing the WUA program in the entire area of AILWMP especially in providing guidance and assistance to the WUA-FMs and to the farmer-leaders and WUA officers in the near future. In order to address this concern on shortage of manpower, it is contemplated that the 12 ASCs will have to be mobilized for greater involvement in program implementation, monitoring and evaluation in the areas/villages within the coverage of their respective ASCs.

Initial ideas to involve the ASCs have been forwarded to the WUA-TWG and followed up by discussions between the international WUA Specialist of SNC-Lavalin and the Manager of the Institutional Development Unit of PIU-MJAO.

In order to get the plan for greater ASC involvement materialized, Mr. Mejia of SNC-Lavalin and Mr. Enayati of PIU-MJAO are designing a training for enhancing the knowledge and developing the skills of the technical staffs of the 12 ASCs. The training is a three-day program which focuses on the detailed processes and activities in establishing WUAs, and the link between the technical/engineering and WUA establishment activities. The training will also include a workshop on the preparation of Work Plans by the participants/trainees. This particular training is expected to be implemented within this month or in early December.

Notes:

- 1. This is the first of a series of articles/reports about the activities on WUA establishment and development under AILWMP's Irrigation and Drainage Management Support Services (Component 2) being carried out by SNL-Lavalin International/Hydrosult Joint Venture of Canada. The author will be very happy to receive from the readers comments/suggestions to improve the processes and activities on WUA establishment and development in AILWMP.*
- 2. All the ideas and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author, and do not necessarily depict or represent the ideas or opinions of SNC-Lavalin.*