

China – UK, WRDMAP Integrated Water Resources Management Document Series

Advisory Note 6.2/3: Village Level Planning for Water User Associations (WUAs)

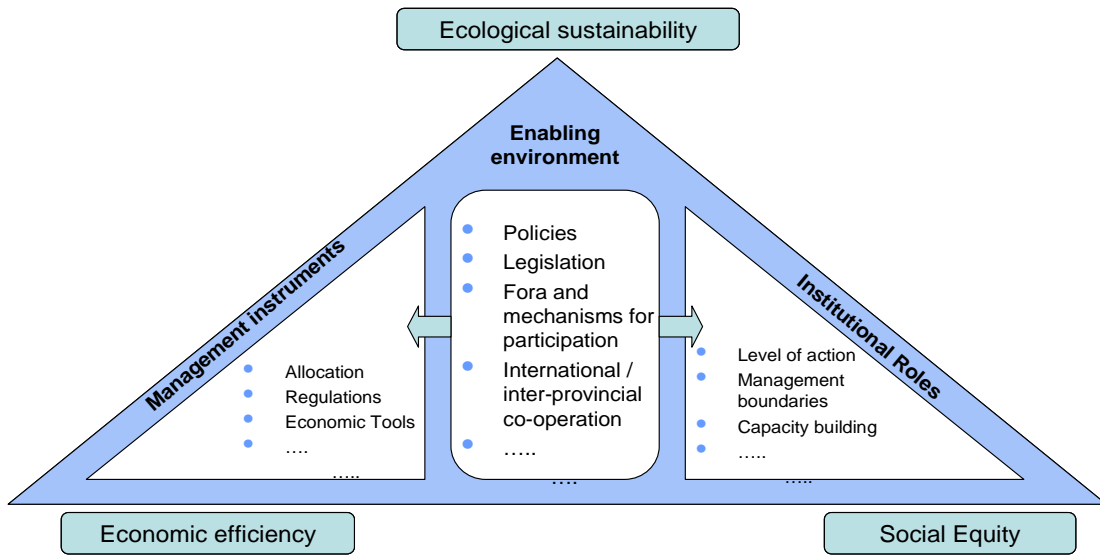
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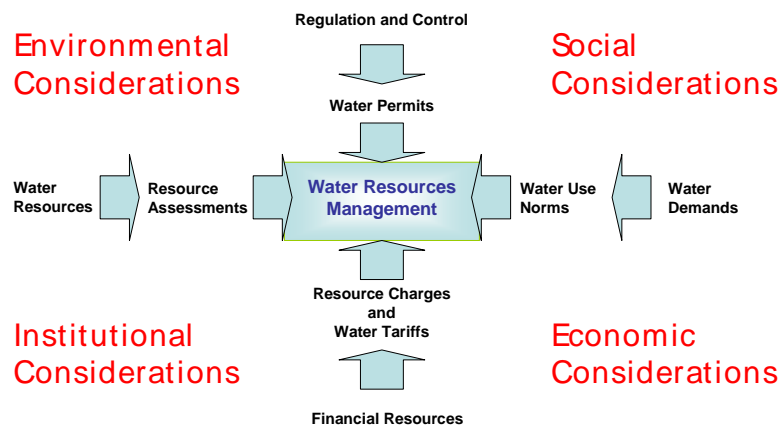
6.
Water
Saving
Society

Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM)

(Basics after Global Water Partnership)



Driving Elements of Integrated Water Resources Management



(Second figure after WRDMAP)

Summary: This document provides guidance to County and Township Governments, County Water Affairs Bureaus (WABs), Water Management Stations (WMSs) and other related organisations on how to involve villages and communities in the early stages of planning and setting up Water User Associations (WUAs).

The document discusses the importance of setting objectives for WUAs and includes suggested programmes for initial WUA learning visits and WUA planning visits and it is one of a number of supporting materials on water savings and water user associations (see bibliography).

This document has the following sections:

- Introduction
- Objectives of WUAs
- Guidance of initial participatory assessments (learning and planning visits)
- WUA learning visit
- WUA planning visit
- Conclusion

The Ministry of Water Resources have supported the Water Resources Demand Management Assistance Project (WRDMAP) to develop this series to support WRD/WAB at provincial, municipal and county levels in their efforts to achieve sustainable water use.



WUA Planning Visit, Gansu Province

1 Introduction

There is often some confusion at village level about the purpose of WUAs, and they are sometimes set up in ways which do not fully reflect local interests or needs. This document provides guidance to County and Township Governments, County WABs, WMSs and other related organisations on how to involve villages and communities in the early stages of planning and setting up WUAs, and how to motivate people to be active in WUAs.

Document ShuiNong [2005] No.502, issued by the Ministry of Water Resources, National Development & Reform Commission and Ministry of Civil Affairs *“Recommendations on Strengthening the Development of Farmer Water User Associations”*, states that WUAs should *“Firstly, carry out dissemination, mobilization and training activities extensively. Under the condition that farmers’ wishes be fully respected, the farmers shall be guided to set up farmer water user associations on a voluntary basis. Farmer water user associations shall be formed in accordance with the local conditions with full consideration of the local irrigation and drainage characteristics. Suitable ways of activities shall be selected according to the actual needs of the farmers”* [Article 4].

This document goes on to state *“The locations should be provided for water users to express their opinions and appeals. [They] must be listened to on issues such as major decisions that deeply concern the interest of water users, irrigation and drainage project planning, water distribution and allocation, water pricing, water charge collection, water works construction, management and maintenance, and so on.”*

This document sets out a procedure for involving villagers in planning WUAs and encouraging them to express their views. This is based on methods developed in detail overseas, and used on an experimental basis in Gansu. Two stages of participatory assessment are envisaged: learning and planning visits. These are described in detail in Sections 3 to 5, but first a brief overview to the objectives of WUAs is given in Section 2.

2 Objectives of WUAs

Before considering the details of the process for planning WUAs and involving villagers in them, it is necessary to review the objectives of WUAs to make sure that they are fully understood and agreed upon by the water administration, local government and the users. Gaining a consensus at the outset of the programme is important for ensuring that the WUAs are sustainable.

As indicated in ShuiNong [2005] No.502, the purpose of WUAs is to improve management:

“In recent years, many places have piloted and extended farmer water user participation in irrigation management, based on their past successful experience in reforming grass-root level masses water management organizations and the advanced water use management methods learned and drawn on from foreign countries. They have achieved notable success and gained through explorations a lot of good experience in raising the farmers’ awareness of democratic management, developing closer relationship between water suppliers and users, improving management and maintenance of the on-farm works and irrigation and drainage services, promoting water saving, achieving higher percentage of

water charge collection, relieving the farmers of unreasonable burdens, and reducing agricultural production costs, ensuring the increase of farmers’ incomes, and so on. Practice has proven that the push to develop and reform farmer water user associations are very well received by local governments, irrigation district management organizations and farmers. It represents the orientation of irrigation district management system reform for farmer water user associations to manage on-farm irrigation and drainage works. All relevant departments and irrigation district management organizations shall further improve their understanding, unify their thinking, take the initiative for reform more enthusiastically, and take pragmatic and effective measures to strengthen, actively foster and support the development of farmer water user associations.”

The key objective in establishing WUAs should be that they are set up for the benefit of the farmers. There are substantial benefits that can be brought to farmers if a WUA is set up to manage irrigation at a local level. Although this work may be done already by the village committee, the tasks are too numerous and time-consuming for the village leaders to undertake them all. A WUA can thus provide a valuable service in improving access to water for farmers. The main benefits include:

- Improved coordination and communications between water users and the water administration and other relevant government departments;
- Improved management of water;
- Support for the introduction of water saving techniques:

- Improved coordination with all agencies involved, eg agricultural extension
 - Improved farmer's knowledge, skills and understanding of government policies and programmes, rights and responsibilities, water management, water saving techniques
- Increased participation by water users, particularly from poor or marginal groups, in a wide range of activities - from day-to-day operation of the irrigation system through to decisions on water quotas and permits, which helps ensure equitable access to water.
- Simplification of the system for collecting water fees, making it more transparent, and ensuring that the relationship between payment of fees and service delivery is understood by the farmers.
- Sustainability of land and water resources for future needs.

3 Guidance for Initial Participatory Assessments

The purpose of these participatory assessments is not to collect a mass of data – it is not a research project. The objective is to engage with all categories of local stakeholders and develop, with them, an initial action plan for establishing the WUA. Sufficient information should be collected for this purpose, but more detailed information-gathering should wait until later. Too much questioning at this stage often leads to mistrust of motives, and the information is often inaccurate or misinterpreted by the team. The village

should be involved as much as possible in the analysis and use of any data

Remember also that it is not just a group of outside experts assessing the village; experts should also work with local officials who are already involved such as Water Management Stations and with village leaders. These people should be involved in the assessments and discussions.

The assessment should be done by a multi-disciplinary team (ideally including irrigation, agriculture and social/institutional development specialists); they should be familiar with participatory techniques, knowledgeable of the local area, and should enjoy working with local people as part of a team. It is often useful if a member of the WMS is a member of the team, and also if at least one member is a woman. The team should plan their activities carefully in advance, agree who is going to do what and how they will share information – they should not all work together but should concentrate on different aspects. It can be seen from the programme below that different activities will need to be undertaken at the same time by the various members of the team.

The assessment described here has been designed as a set of two short visits to the village. This is very brief, but is sufficient at this stage. More detailed visits can be planned later. It is important to make sure at the outset that communities are aware of the limitations of the project, and that they do not have unrealistic expectations. The methods outlined here are described further in a set of guidelines for assessments of irrigation projects prepared under a DFID-funded research programme in China and Nepal (Equity Irrigation and Poverty, Mott MacDonald, 2006). Some other useful participatory

techniques are also described in the Poor Rural Communities Development Project Participation Manual (DFID/World Bank, 2005), including joint village/field walk (observing irrigation issues), developing resources maps, semi-structured interviews, group discussions, problem tree analysis, stakeholder analysis and producing seasonal calendars. The latter is available from DFID in both Chinese and English.

WUAs are participatory organisations, and even these initial visits need to be planned with that in mind. Four stages of participation are often distinguished (DFID/World Bank, 2005):

1. **Information gathering:** information is collected from communities to be analysed and used by outsiders
2. **Consultation:** communities are asked for their opinions, but the decisions are made by outsiders
3. **Collaboration:** joint decision-making with communities
4. **Empowerment of local communities:** communities take the lead in local decision-making

If the level of participation is no more than information gathering or consultation, WUAs are unlikely to be effective or sustainable. As a minimum, the assessments described below should aim to ensure that decisions are made jointly with communities.

4 WUA Learning Visit

4.1 Overview

The purpose of this visit is to explain how WUAs are useful for farmers, gain a basic understanding of the situation and requirements, and to foster their

interest in participating in the WUA development programme.

By the end of the day the willingness of the village to participate should be confirmed, and this should be on the basis of understanding what the programme is all about; and there should be agreement for the next (planning) visit which will involve more detailed discussions with a range of local stakeholders and lead to an action plan. The action plan should reflect the interests of the villagers, and the resulting design of the WUA should take this into account.

4.2 Programme

The programme should be designed by the assessment team, but would typically comprise:

Introductions (15 mins)

Explain the WUA programme to village (15 mins)

Explain project to a group of 15-20 comprising village leaders, some production group leaders, some other farmers' representatives, a schoolteacher of the village if possible, including preferably at least 5-10 women. Key points:

- Objectives of project:
 - to stimulate a water saving society at village level
 - to help farmers improve their livelihoods with less water
 - ensure that their livelihoods are sustainable – to plan for the future
- Timescale of programme: this should be typically 2 years
- Activities of WUA programme: advice, capacity building in WMS

and village in measures to reduce water use, improve water management, involving community in management (through WUA)

Ask village leader to give brief background to village (15 mins)

Explain purpose of visit (15 mins), which is to:

- Ensure common understanding of objectives
- Establish relations between the village and the programme team
- Involve the village in the programme from the beginning, so that they can express their views in a way that will be reflected in WUA implementation
- Gain initial understanding of water management issues and socio-economic situation

Break up into small groups for 60 mins to:

- Prepare resource map of the village as a whole, showing location and distribution of wells, roads, production groups;
- Prepare resource map for one of the production groups, showing location of wells (in use and abandoned), channels (lined and earth), location of fields, (ensure all sources of water for crops, livestock, domestic uses are all included). [could prepare maps for more than one group, if sufficient participants]
- Prepare crop/farming activities calendar and trend lines
- Discuss socio-economic situation – crop areas, income ranges, migration



Resource map developed during a WUA learning visit, Gansu Province

General discussion (45 mins)

- Using maps discuss:
 - areas where water level changes have led to wells being abandoned
 - responsibilities (WMS, village or WUA to be established, production group, individual) for operation and maintenance of wells and channels
 - water savings technology introduced
- Using calendar discuss:
 - crops which use least water, reasons they are grown/not grown
 - different irrigation techniques (flood, furrow, plastic sheets, drip, greenhouse etc)
 - relative importance of crops and livestock
- Using trend lines; discuss
 - changes in resource availability
 - future trends and impact on livelihoods

Conclusion with the village (15 mins)

- Thank you
- Summary of initial observations

- Confirm interest of the village in the WUA development programme
- Next steps (eg. investigations of crops/irrigation techniques, improvements to well monitoring, provision of advice from elsewhere, organisation of visits to other WUAs/training)
- Any questions

--Break for lunch--

Field visit (2.5 hrs)

Select one production group for which a map has been prepared (preferably one which is irrigating at the time of the visit) and visit with small group of people from that area to observe:

- selected wells and channels (earth and lined)
- irrigation methods

During field visit, discuss topics from morning discussion in more detail, with reference to this production group.

Other members of the assessment team should undertake household interviews with a small number of households to gain further insight into the diversity of opinions, to ensure that they understand the programme, and to encourage them to become involved actively. These should be with people who were not in the initial meetings, and would typically be from poorer members of the community. Women should be involved in these interviews and at least one interview should be solely with women.

Conclusion

Summarise to the village leader what has been learnt in the visit, and outline the next stages in the development plan. It is important that this visit is seen as the first step in a programme to help the village, and not just an isolated visit by

outsiders. If conducted well, such a visit can play an important role in making the subsequent WUA effective and sustainable.

4.3 Report on learning visit

Prepare a brief report on visit, presenting observations and discussions under the following suggested headings. Include a list of participants, and incorporate copies of maps and charts. Ensure that all relevant data gathered is reported.

- Introduction and general description of irrigation district as a whole and the village(s) visited
- Socio-economic data: population; total and irrigated areas; income (max / min / average and proportions for each group from agriculture / livestock / other); migration and employment off farm/out of village; conflicts related to water
- Water resources: sources of water – for irrigation, domestic, livestock; depth to water table; amount of water used for each crop type (actual and norms);
- Water management: responsibilities for operating wells/canals; monitoring discharges, depths; maintaining channels
- Physical data: number of wells in use and abandoned, length of channel (lined / earth)
- Agricultural data: crops, livestock, orchards, grassland, other
- Institutional data: date WUA formed; structure (including representation); leadership; meetings; activities (operation, maintenance, fee collection and

management, conflict resolution, etc)

A copy of this report should be given to the village for their information and use.

5 WUA Planning Visit

5.1 Overview

This visit should follow on quickly from the learning visit and should aim to develop a plan of action for setting up and supporting a WUA in the village, to meet the situation described and the needs identified in the learning visit. A suggested programme is outlined below.

5.2 Programme

Introductions (5 mins)

Explain programme again to village (10 mins)

Explain to the same or a similar group of 15-20 comprising village/WUA leader, some production group leaders, some other farmers, schoolteacher if possible; preferably about 5-10 women. Key points, as before.

- Programme Objectives:
 - to stimulate a water saving society at village level
 - to help farmers improve their livelihoods with less water
 - ensure that their livelihoods are sustainable – to plan for the future
- Programme Timescale: 2 years, initially
- Programme Activities: advice, capacity building in WMD/WMS and WUA/village in measures to reduce water use, improve water management, involving the

community in management (through WUA)

Ask the village leader to give his views following the previous visit, and to ask any questions (15 mins)

Explain purpose of this visit (15 mins), which is to:

- Describe specific activities of the project to the village, and resources available for:
 - capacity building of the WUA
 - trials of various methods to save water
 - encouraging greater local understanding and involvement in water management
- Develop an action plan
- Identify training needs

General discussion on needs of WUA and community (60 mins)

- Problem tree analysis
- Awareness of WUA amongst other members of the community
- Awareness of water saving techniques in the community
- WUA capacity building – constitution/functions, representation (to every category of households and women), administrative procedures, etc
- Water management – water use monitoring (inflows and outflows to WUA and production groups), water distribution.
- Training and support in irrigation techniques
- Training and support in crop choice

Form working group in the village for WUA establishment and programme implementation (30 mins)

- Socio-economic profile of village – identify main local stakeholder groups (using a simplified, rapid wealth ranking)
- Discuss / decide what ratio should be for the representatives of each group, and how they should be elected by each group of households
- Form women's groups if considered appropriate or have the quota of at least 30% within the representatives
- Identify key individuals in community with specific experience – eg innovative farmers, and try to properly play their roles, if they are not elected as the representatives or WUA executive members
- Work out the plan for WUA election and organization

Prepare plan of action to address needs of WUA and community (related to this project) (30 mins)

Conclusion with WUA (15 mins)

- Thank you
- Summary of meeting
- Next steps : outline the programme
- Any questions

--Break for lunch--

Field visit (2.5 hrs)

Visit to be decided in relation to issues discussed earlier, with more detailed discussion with members of a single production group

Other members of the assessment team should undertake interviews with a small number of households to gain further insight into the diversity of opinions, to ensure that they understand the programme, and to encourage them to become involved actively. These should be with people who were not in the initial meetings, and would typically be from poorer members of the community. At least one interview should be with women.

Conclusion (15 mins)

At the conclusion of the visit, the project team should outline the next steps, indicating when any training or other activities are planned. If these future activities are dependent on decisions by others, or approval by others, indicate when these are likely to be received. It is important that the village know what is going to happen next.

6 Conclusion

This document describes a participatory process for engaging with communities at an early stage of a WUA development programme. This is needed to ensure that the programme is designed in a way which meets local needs, rather than being imposed from the top-down. This process should create a free environment for discussing the issues so that both the Government and the farmers understand each others perspectives and design the WUAs to suit common objectives.

Such a programme requires significant effort by Government staff working at village level. Sufficient time and resources should be allocated for this, but this should be justified by the sustainability of the resulting WUAs. This programme will need to be planned and managed by the WMD and will need to cover the entire irrigation district.

Document Reference Sheet

Glossary:

WUA Water User Association

Bibliography:

Circular On Issuing the Guideline on Implementing the Institutional Reform on Management of Small Scale Rural Water Projects, Document ShuiNong [2003] No. 603, issued by MWR.

Circular Concerning the Issuance of “Guiding Recommendations on Strengthening the Fostering, Development, Registration, and Administration of Rural Specialized Economic Associations”, Circular 148 (10-2003) issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA).

Equity, Irrigation and Poverty - Guidelines for Sustainable Water Management, Summary Report. Produced for DFID Knowledge and Research Services Contract R8338 by Mott MacDonald, December 2006.

Recommendations On Strengthening the Development of Farmer Water User Associations, Document ShuiNong [2005] No.502, issued by the Ministry of Water Resources, National Development & Reform Commission and Ministry of Civil Affairs.

Poor Rural Communities Development Project Participation (PRCDP) Manual, DFID/World Bank, 2005.

Related materials from the MWR IWRM Document Series:

Advisory Note 6.1/1	Role of WUAs in Water Saving in Groundwater
Advisory Note 6.1/2	Farmers Guide to Groundwater WUAs
Advisory Note 6.2/1	Administrative Steps for Developing Strong WUAs
Advisory Note 6.2/2	WUA Institutional Document Guides
Advisory Note 6.2/3	Village Level Planning of WUAs
Advisory Note 6.2/4	Promoting and Training WUAs
Thematic Paper 6.3/2	Assessing the Impact of IWRM on Women’s Status and Conditions

Where to find more information on IWRM – recommended websites:

Ministry of Water Resources: www.mwr.gov.cn

Global Water Partnership: www.gwpforum.org

WRDMAP Project Website: www.wrdmap.com

China – UK, WRDMAP

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WRDMAP Project Website: www.wrdmap.com

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