Participatory Irrigation Management and the Factors that Influence the Success of Farmer Water User Communities: A Case Study in Cambodia

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2010
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A dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Applied Science in Environmental Management

at

Massey University, New Zealand

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2010
Abstract

The Participatory Irrigation Management approach was introduced into Cambodia in 2000, which was called the Participatory Irrigation Management and Development (PIMD). The goal of PIMD is to establish Farmer Water User Communities (FWUCs) to take over the management of irrigation schemes in their district in order to improve the performance of irrigation schemes and farmers’ livelihoods. The implementation of FWUCs has resulted in both failure and success. Several studies have identified factors that influence the failure of FWUCs, but little research has focused on their success. By employing a single embedded case study approach, this research selected the most successful scheme in Cambodia to identify factors that influenced the success of the FWUC in irrigation management. The findings of this research could provide concrete assistance to the government, donors, and non-governmental organisations in improving the performance of less successful FWUCs in Cambodia.

The result of this research showed that the success of the O-treing FWUC was influenced by five internal and two external factors. The internal factors were: 1) the level of local participation, 2) the governance and management of the scheme, 3) the value of the benefits that flow from the irrigation scheme, 4) the quality of the irrigation infrastructure, and 5) the characteristics of the farmer members within the scheme. The external factors were: 1) the level of external support provided to the scheme, and 2) market access.

The success of the FWUC required farmer participation and this participation was enhanced when farmers obtained benefits from it. This research also found that access to markets was critical to make the benefits that flowed from the irrigation scheme more profitable to farmers, leading to farmer participation. Similarly, it was also important to make sure that the irrigation infrastructure was of a high quality to ensure the delivery of an adequate and timely supply of water to farmers so that they could grow crops that provided them with the benefits. This required external support from the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology, NGOs, and local authorities to help rehabilitate the scheme. External support was also critical for enhancing the governance and management of the scheme through assistance with the formation process, provision of financial resources, capacity building, rule enforcement, and conflict resolution. The governance and management of the scheme, in particular the leadership capacity of the FWUC was another critical factor because it ensured the maintenance and development of the irrigation infrastructure, the timely and adequate supply of water to farmers, farmers’ trust and respect for leaders, and farmer participation. Finally, the success of the FWUC could not be viewed independently from farmer characteristics within the scheme. Farmers tended to participate in irrigation management when they had a history of self-organisation, when they were relatively homogenous, and when they were dependent upon farming for their livelihoods.

This research suggests that the successful implementation of FWUCs requires a focus on the seven factors and the interactions that occur between these factors. Irrigation stakeholders such as the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology, donors, NGOs, local authorities, local leaders, and farmers should work together to enhance these factors in order to ensure the success of FWUCs.
Acknowledgements

I would like to start by thanking the New Zealand Government for the scholarship that enabled me to continue my study at Massey University. I acknowledge the relentless support of all the staff at the International Student Support Office – in particular, Olive and Sylvia.

I am very grateful to my supervisors for their patience and the invaluable advice that has guided me throughout my research. I must thank Dr. Terry Kelly for his persistent guidance and encouragement to me. I would also like to specially thank Dr. David Gray for his contribution to this study’s analysis and his critical comments on my writing. I thank you both for giving me a new insight into qualitative research methods. It has been a rewarding experience that I am grateful to bring home after two years in New Zealand.

A debt is owed to the lecturers, staff, and post grad students in the Institute of Natural Resources, and to my friends and all Cambodians in Palmerston North. I am very thankful to Assoc. Prof. John Holland for his support during my study in New Zealand. I would like to thank Janet Reid for kindly spending time drawing conclusion with me on my last day. I would also like to voice my appreciation to Denise Stewart for all other ways she helped, and to postgraduate students and friends at Massey University for their assistance they provided to me. I never forget Stewart Hay, his wife Debbie, and their kids for always serving as my relatives in New Zealand. Ngaire and her husband Polin were always friendly and helped sort out my accommodation.

My special thanks also go to Mr. Phim Svay and his family for offering me a stay at their place during my fieldwork. I would like to thank the staff at the Ministry and Department of Water Resources and Meteorology, and the District and Commune authorities for their cooperation in providing good information for this research. I am also thankful to Mr. Chandara Ouk for giving me a ride during my fieldwork. There are not enough ways to say thanks to all the village chiefs and villagers in Chung Rouk and Prey Gniet Communes, Kong Pisei District, Kampong Speu Province for their warm welcome during my visit.
In addition, my gratitude goes to my colleagues at the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI). I gratefully thank Mr. Sedara Kim and his wife, Boraksmeye, for their encouragement and guidance in my study. I would also like to thank Mr. Keosothea Nou for his mentoring over the phone and Susan Watkins for proofreading my last chapter. I thank all the researchers at CDRI for providing comments during my seminar.

A final big dept is owed to my parents, grandparents, aunt (in Wellington), brothers, sisters, brother-in-laws, and sister-in-laws for their ongoing spiritual support. I may never have come this far without their persistent encouragement and belief in me.
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### Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBNRM</td>
<td>Community-Based Natural Resource Management</td>
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<td>CPRs</td>
<td>Common Pool Resources</td>
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<td>DoWRAM</td>
<td>Department of Water Resources and Meteorology</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organisation</td>
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<td>FWUC</td>
<td>Farmer Water User Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMT</td>
<td>Irrigation Management Transfer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISFs</td>
<td>Irrigation Service Fees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoWRAM</td>
<td>Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIM</td>
<td>Participatory Irrigation Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIMD</td>
<td>Participatory Irrigation Management and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RGC</td>
<td>Royal Government of Cambodia</td>
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<tr>
<td>TWGAW</td>
<td>Technical Working Group on Agriculture and Water</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>WB</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
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<td>WFP</td>
<td>World Food Programme</td>
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