

SECTION - III

**AN OVERVIEW OF EXPERIENCE
AND LESSONS**

CHAPTER VII

AN OVERVIEW OF PIM IN INDIA

7.1 The previous chapters have given an analysis of broad spectrum of experience of PIM covering different types of projects and associations in India. Where do these lead us? Are there any common threads among the several experiments studied? Can we generalise something and cull out some lessons for the future? The experiences and experiments should throw some feasible approaches for the future. It is time to look into these questions on the basis of material already provided in the previous chapters. This is what is proposed to be done in this and subsequent chapters.

7.2 Spread of PIM in India

7.2.1 PIM, in a sense, is new to India having been introduced and promoted in the light of its claimed success in other countries like Philippines & Srilanka. International donor agencies like the Ford Foundation and USAID have taken a good deal of interest in its propagation in India. And yet the concept is not entirely new. It was in some sense a part of the traditional Indian system of irrigation management as reflected in the Phad system of Maharashtra and Kudimaramath system of Tamilnadu which still survived in Tamilnadu. PIM had taken the form of a registered society in North Kodal Melazhian as early as in 1959, long before it happened elsewhere. It was, therefore, not surprising that the spread of PIM had been easier, relatively faster and more widespread in these two states. A large number of WUAs had also been formed in these two states.

7.2.2 It was in mid-eighties when the need for introducing PIM on the lines of similar measures introduced in some foreign countries came to be realised in India. It was hoped that such a measure would go a long way in removing the deficiencies of the government regulated irrigation system. The initial success of the Mohini Water Cooperative Society in Gujarat, established in 1978 raised expectations. The leadership role in this respect was assumed by the CAD wing of the Ministry of Water Resources, Government of India. Some NGOs and external donors also took keen interest in formation of WUAs in certain parts of the country. As a result, several WUAs came to be established during the past few years specially in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamilnadu and Bihar. A list of such WUAs as could be obtained for this study has been given in Annexure to Chapter II. Statewise picture has been depicted in chapter II.

- 7.2.3 What emerged from the study was that the experiments in farmers' participation in irrigation management in India were still very few by the end of 1998. There were several major states like Assam, West Bengal, U.P., Punjab, Haryana, M.P., Karnataka, Kerala where PIM had yet to establish itself. Even in other states the progress was not rapid. Andhra Pradesh was the only state which had enacted a comprehensive law for the purpose. The impact of this would, however, been known in future only.
- 7.2.4 To sum up, the progress made could not be considered as fast or even satisfactory. It had been quite slow. Precise quantitative figures were, of course, not available; nor could they be made available quite easily given the evolutionary stage of the new paradigm having a variety of forms ranging from loosely formed rather non functioning associations to fully functioning ones. As we know, the concept in its modern form was being emphasized and propagated ever since the eighties. And yet by the end of 1988 the proportion of irrigated area covered under PIM had been quite marginal. Even in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Tamilnadu, where PIM had a larger presence, bulk of the irrigated area was still under governmental management. It would obviously take several decades for the entire country to come under the spell of PIM if the same rate of progress continues. The reasons for the slow progress deserve to be looked into so that remedial measures may be envisaged and evolved.

7.3 Reasons for Slow Progress

- 7.3.1 An important reason why PIM was not spreading fast in India was the prevailing administrative ethos which were weighted heavily in favour of both centralisation as well as bureaucratisation, whereas PIM implies both decentralisation and debureaucratisation. It may be said that the country had already launched a process of liberalisation since 1991 and that the 73rd constitutional amendment made recently had already tried to tilt the balance towards decentralisation. But liberalisation so far had been confined mainly to foreign trade and industrial sectors of the economy. Even the advocates of liberalisation of agriculture, both Indians as well as foreigners, concentrated mainly on the liberalisation of product market including product prices. Liberalising supply of irrigation water had yet to catch the imagination of the so called liberalisers in India. The Panchayati Raj movement had also been limping despite the constitutional amendment largely because the amendment was half hearted as it did not give enough powers and funds to Panchayats. As result, Panchayats were far from functioning as organs of self governing institutions. The newly elected Panchayats were reported to have started feeling restive on this account and it was quite likely that their disenchantment and discontent might in due course result in making them more powerful and

functional. But for the time being, the status quo may continue and till then the administrative ethos may remain the same. Given this macro scenario very fast progress towards WUA does not seem likely in the near future. The scenario may change in case the macro environment changes.

- 7.3.2 Another reason behind slow progress lay in the initial lukewarm or even somewhat hostile attitude of the lower level irrigation bureaucracy based on their assumed apprehension of a threat to their own interest in terms of reduction of their patronage and power at the local level on the one hand and shrinkage in their promotion prospects on the other. The lower bureaucracy had lurking suspicion that PIM would ultimately result in reducing the functions performed traditionally by the department which in turn might result in downsizing of the department. This would dampen their chances of promotion. Such fears came to light during the in-house consultations taken by WALMI Patna while introducing PIM in Bihar. Their attitude changed after they were informed that introduction of PIM would not result in retrenchment and that what would change would simply be their nature of work. Such fears are genuine. It is, therefore, necessary that advance action should be taken through appropriate training programmes to allay such fears and motivate the lower level bureaucracy towards PIM.
- 7.3.3 Another inhibiting factor might be the suspicion of the farmers that they might have to pay higher water charges under PIM as compared to the present system under which they paid only nominal charges because of the considerable disguised subsidy provided by the State government by keeping the charges much lower than the actual costs. It might be said that farmers would have no hesitation in paying the full cost as they had already been doing so in the case of tubewell irrigation. It can also be said that farmer members of the so called successful WUAs in India were already paying higher charges without any grudge. But it could not be forgotten that in both these situations, farmers get assured water. As shown below, the prospect of getting assured water had been a very important factor motivating farmers to form WUAs.
- 7.3.4 Our studies indicated that it was easier to motivate farmers having inadequate and untimely supply of water from canals to form WUAs than those having assured supply of water. As seen earlier, farmers of the command areas of Karjon project in Gujarat and those of control areas of Parunde project in Maharashtra, and Paliganj and Asarganj distributaries in Bihar were not interested in forming WUAs because they had no problem in getting water as per their requirement. In karjon, because of the adequate and timely supply of water even

before the formation of WUA only 79 out of 499 farmers i.e. 16 percent could be persuaded to become members of the WUA. Availability of assured irrigation both in terms of quantity and timeliness in certain areas like Punjab & Western U.P. which are located on the head reaches of major canal systems and where warabandhi system was in vogue, was the principal reason why spread of WUAs had been the slowest in these areas. On the other hand, farmers of the Paliganj distributory in Bihar could be persuaded to form WUA even though the canal system was in a dilapidated condition primarily because of the uncertainty of getting water from the earlier system and expectation that the situation might improve after formation of WUA. In Palkhed, ensuring availability of assured water was one of the cardinal reasons for signing MOU with ID. If the farmers were getting inadequate or untimely water, then they would be made willing to form WUA to get assured supply of water even if by doing so they had to pay full cost of water which was higher than the subsidised water charges fixed by the state. But if farmers were already getting assured supply of water at cost lower than full cost as for example in Punjab, Haryana and Western U.P. then the incentive to form WUA would be less. A rise in water rates to cover the full cost of irrigation would be needed to motivate such farmers to form WUAs. Because then, there would be some prospect of reduction in cost due to self management of irrigation system. It may also be pointed out that WUAs even if formed would not be sustained in the absence of assured delivery of water to them. As is known, the failure of the pipe committees of A.P. during the eighties was mainly due to this reason. The poor performance of Loni in our study was also due to this factor.

7.3.5 It may be noted that because of the reasons mentioned above, forming WUAs has yet to become a people's movement in India. Whatever has happened so far has been mainly the result of outside intervention e.g. from NGO or government or external donor or WALMI professionals etc. It is not yet voiced as a demand by the farmers. It is, therefore, not surprising that in Gujarat, an ordinance related to WUA lapsed in 1989 as the Assembly showed no interest in passing it. It is, therefore, necessary that basic issues like decentralisation, debureaucratisation, attitudinal change of lower level irrigation bureaucracy, augmenting irrigation supplies and upward revision of water rates needed to be tackled while devising a strategy for faster spread of PIM in India so that it can become a people's movement. It may be worthwhile for the Union Ministry of Water Resources to work out a broad time frame in consultation with the states.

7.4 Diversity of PIM Experiments in India

7.4.1 The formation of WUAs had taken place under major, medium and minor irrigation projects

on the one hand and under canal, tank and tubewell irrigation projects on the other. There were variations also within each of these categories. In Maharashtra, for example, WUAs under major projects were village based organisations each covering small areas of 100 to 300 hectares each. The scale of project was thus unrelated to the size of the organization formed. In Bihar, however, Paliganj WUA in a major canal project covered a vast area of about 8800 hectares in 55 villages commanded by a whole distributory. The number of villages covered were 33 in Asarganj and 28 in Thindal. Thus the area and population covered by a WUA varied considerably from project to project (from 172 hect. in Parunde to 8800 hect. in Paliganj and from 79 members in karjon to 1075 in Thindal and much more in Paliganj) No modal size, therefore, emerged. The percentage of farmers from the command area of an association also varied from 100 percent in the case of Thindal to as low as 16 percent for karjon. In this connection Maharashtra had a rule that at least 51 percent of the farmers having land under canal sub-minor had to be willing to form a WUA.

- 7.4.2 There was diversity with respect to organisational structure also. There were farmers committees at both distributory and village levels in the case of Paliganj. Distributory level committees were formed in Gujarat and Tamilnadu also. The latter had a three tier structure with farmers' committees at village, sluice and distributory levels. While the Bihar experiment in the large scale Paliganj area covered only one distributory that in Tamilnadu's Lower Bhavani project covered all distributaries though by different societies. Gujarat's models, both Mohini and Karjon, were similiar to that of Paliganj in Bihar in the sense that only one distributory was covered. In several other projects e.g. Lakhigam, Palkhed, Paruade, Anaikuppam only village level committee functioned. Thus no uniformity was found in this respect also.
- 7.4.3 Similar diversity emerged with respect to functions performed by WUAs as can be seen from Para 8.1.1 below. This partially reflected different stages in the evolution of WUA to which specific WUAs belonged.
- 7.4.4 The legal status too was not the same in all cases. MOU was not signed in the case of Asarganj in Bihar, Karjon in Gujarat and three associations of Tamilnadu. But in a majority of cases as in Paliganj, Mohini, Baldeva, Lakhigam, Palkhed, Parunde and Loni, MOU had been signed.
- 7.4.5 It is, however, necessary to point out that there is nothing wrong with regard to the prevalence of a diversified pattern with respect to organisation and functions of WUA in a large and diverse country like India. Their organisation and functions should not be predetermined to

fit into straight jacket models but should be allowed to evolve in the light of local conditions and their experience. They should decide as to which of the several functions e.g. operations, repair and maintenance, resource mobilisation, desilting, system improvement etc. they should take over and when. In other words, the time taken in bringing about management transfer would not be the same throughout the country. A similar approach may be followed with respect to the number of tiers at which WUAs should function e.g. village level or higher levels of sluice and / or distributory also. It may, however, be realised that if a large number of village based WUAs within a distributory start functioning, then some mechanism to control the head regulator of the distributory would become necessary to provide for orderly releases of water down below and ensure systems performance.

Socio-Economic Homogeneity

- 7.4.6 Notwithstanding the above diversity, there was a common thread across different experiments in different states. This related to socio-economic homogeneity among members of a WUA. Small and marginal farmers who constitute the bulk of the farming community in India also dominated membership of WUAs as can be seen from the table given below. The percentage was 100 in Vaishali which is a class by itself since membership of this WUA was restricted

Table 7.1 : Percentage of Small and Marginal Farmers to all Members of WUAs.

Name of WUA	% of small and marginal farmers (upto 2 hectares)
Paliganj	54
Asarganj	60
Vaishali	100
Mohini	74
Karjon	81
Baldeva	46
Lakhigam	96
Palkhed	82
Parunde	97
Loni	74
Thindal	86
Kodai	93
Anaikuppam	96

to small and marginal farmers only. The percentage was as high as 97 for Parunde, 96 for Lakhigam and Anaikuppam, 86 for Thindal and 81 for Karzon. The least percentage of 46 was in Baldeva followed by Paliganj (54). The percentage of large farmer members (more than 4 hectare) was small or even negligible in all the associations. The profile of the management committees was more or less similar and there was no evidence of group dominance in any case. This socio economic homogeneity of WUAs was one of the factors in their formation as well as smooth functioning as an organisational entity.