

Linking land and water governance

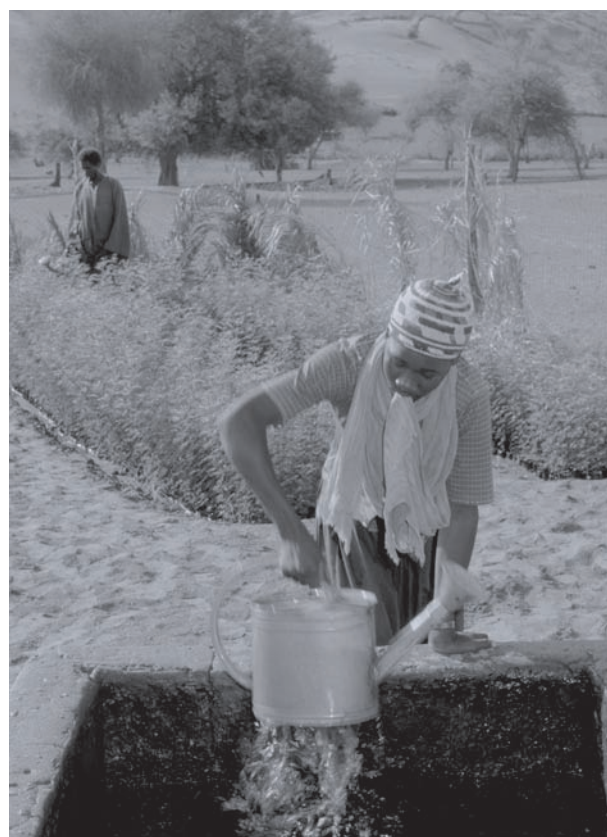
Secure access by rural poor people to both land and water is central to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, in particular the target of reducing by half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. Most of these people depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. However, international debate continues to address land and water issues separately, and to view the significant use of water in agriculture as problematic.

In most developing countries, agriculture uses more than 80 per cent of mobilized water resources. But more than half the water diverted for agriculture does not contribute directly to food production as intended. With an increasing number of countries facing severe water shortages, efficient use of water by agriculture to reduce poverty and hunger is a significant issue.

Most international development agencies and water managers, such as UN-Water, Global Water Partnership and World Water Council, now agree that better governance of water resources, rather than availability, is the key to resolving the growing water crisis in developing countries. This involves putting in place the political, social, economic and administrative systems needed to develop and manage water resources, and to ensure equitable delivery of water-related services.

But for poor smallholder farmers, secure access to water cannot be separated from secure access to land. For example, land without water is of little use to a farmer living in an arid climate. When farmers have secure access to both of these natural resources, they invest with confidence in management practices, training, technologies and organizations that enable them to use limited water resources wisely.

The growing water crisis can be addressed comprehensively only if the links between secure access to land and to water are recognized, and the related governance issues are understood. Success depends on local solutions to the challenges of poverty and the environment – by making the livelihood and income strategies of rural poor people the basis for sustainable resource management.



IFAD's role

IFAD's mandate focuses on three strategic objectives:

- strengthening the capacity of the rural poor and their organizations
- improving equitable access to productive natural resources and technology
- increasing access to financial services and markets

In recent decades, IFAD has supported changes in land and water governance as a way to improve rural poor people's access to these natural resources, and to ensure poverty reduction, increased food security and better livelihoods. This involves working through

community-based and civil society organizations and NGOs to better identify the changes that are needed, and with national and local governments to change policies and legislation. The aim is to empower rural poor people to participate in managing the common property resources on which they depend.

IFAD has carried out a series of case studies to document the results of these initiatives and to better integrate the lessons learned into its broader work. The case studies, from Bangladesh, Peru and the Sudan, demonstrate how reforms in land and water governance can significantly improve the livelihoods of rural poor people.

BANGLADESH

Better governance of inland waters benefits rural poor people

Poor landless fishers in Bangladesh have benefited significantly from major reforms in the governance of inland water bodies. Inland fisheries are critically important for food security and livelihoods, but access to lakes by poor, landless fishers is problematic. Wealthy people tend to dominate annual leasing arrangements, leaving poorer members of the community to work as share catchers with minimal reward. Lack of secure access to both lakes and shores means that poor people have little incentive to invest in protecting the lakes. This leads to increasingly poor catches, which then have a negative effect on local livelihoods.

During the past 14 years, with the support of the IFAD-funded Oxbow Lakes Small-Scale Fishermen Project, the situation has improved significantly. Long-term lease arrangements for public lakes and shores have been introduced and fisher groups now have a more active role in resource management. As a further measure to protect poor people, membership of the groups is limited to those living below a set poverty line. These reforms have gradually encouraged the fishers to invest in the lakes, resulting in improved productivity and infrastructure, better fish stock levels, and higher incomes for fishers. Women in particular have benefited from reforms that give them full access to fish resources in ponds.

The case study demonstrates how reforms in leasing practices, combined with the legal establishment of fisher organizations and the empowerment of these groups to sustainably manage their resources, can lead to broad benefits for both poor communities and the government.

PERU

Building on local knowledge to improve land use

Land and water governance reforms based on established local management practices have transformed agricultural productivity and improved livelihoods in remote rural communities in the Peruvian Andes.

Much indigenous knowledge of hillside agriculture, terrace conservation practices and irrigation in Peru has been lost over the past 500 years. However, indigenous knowledge has survived in the community of Asmayacu, where more than 1,000 ha of pre Colombian terraces are cultivated and used as grazing lands year round. Community institutions are used to manage land and water resources, based on a time schedule agreed upon by the community. Women are traditionally responsible for irrigation.

Through the IFAD-supported Management of Natural Resources in the Southern Highlands Project and its contemporary participatory planning techniques, a traditional irrigation method was rediscovered and passed on to about 90 per cent of the families of Asmayacu. The method was then disseminated through tradition-oriented competitive fairs to hundreds of other communities in the region. The training was supported by a government decision to effectively decentralize extension and supply services to local communities.

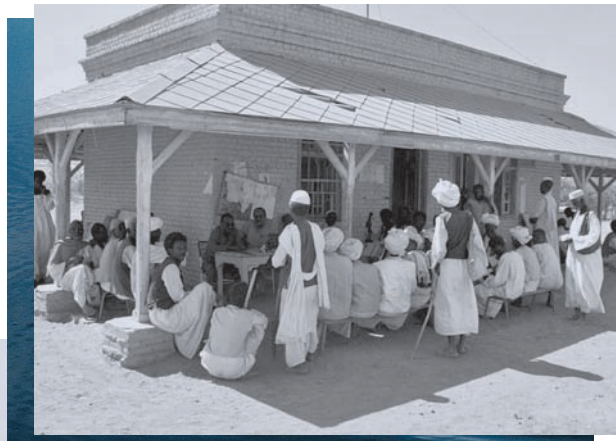
THE SUDAN

Making large-scale irrigation work for poor communities

More than 67,000 poor farming families in the Sudan are being supported to develop the individual and institutional capacities they need to manage a traditional large-scale spate irrigation scheme. Spate irrigation diverts water to fields from rivers during peak floods. The water is silt-laden and fertilizes the soil while wetting the root zone.

Established in the 1920s for cotton production, the irrigation scheme declined in the 1970s. The management was fragmented and clientelist, there was a shift to subsistence crops, and recovery rates of water fees decreased. The traditional approach to rehabilitating such schemes focuses on infrastructure, but the new IFAD-supported Gash Sustainable Livelihoods Regeneration Project puts household livelihoods first.

Capacity development and institutional reforms ensure that all stakeholders are involved in decision-making. This is seen as key to the success of the project. Land and water reforms to help people gain more secure rights to land and water are developed based on existing local organizations. At the same time, these land and water users' associations are strengthened to counter the strong tradition of supply-driven irrigation management. This is a major challenge to ensuring that farmers have land and water rights, and take responsibility for their own livelihoods.





Results and lessons

- In most developing countries, agriculture accounts for more than 80 per cent of water use. An increased focus on this sector is needed to address the water crisis.
- For poor smallholder farmers, water and land cannot be treated as separate issues. Government and development actions targeting only land or only water governance changes are unlikely to achieve sustainable impact.
- For poor farmers, secure land access can lead to secure water access, and the reverse is also true. This in turn leads to access to credit and investment in their farms, which can improve their livelihoods, and improve agricultural water use efficiency.
- At local level, land and water governance structures already exist in some form, but these are not systematically recognized at higher institutional levels. If reforms are to improve the livelihoods of rural poor people, their voices and concerns need to be heard and acknowledged as part of the reform process.
- Indigenous knowledge and practices need to be recognized as a strong basis for building lasting change in land and water governance.
- The role of women in land and water management and use must be recognized as part of the reform process.
- The capacity of individuals, communities and NGOs must be developed so they can take on the responsibilities associated with reforms.
- Building trust in communities and among partners is an essential part of capacity development, so that they can act collectively for mutual benefit.
- Sufficient time must be allowed for enlisting broad support for reform. NGOs can be a useful vehicle to support the reform process, which does not always fit with time and budget constraints of development projects.
- External support is important. Financial support, combined with policy dialogue, can be a catalyst for NGOs, communities and governments to pursue change. International agencies also provide small communities and local and national organizations with a valuable sense of international recognition, credit and encouragement.
- Documenting land and water governance experiences in a country promotes better understanding of stakeholders' and IFAD partners' views. This creates opportunities for effective pro-poor advocacy and policy dialogue at all levels aimed at improved access to productive natural resources and technology.

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LINKS

The full case studies, plus a synthesis paper on the results and lessons learned, are available at:
www.ifad.org/events/water
www.ifad.org/events/euroafrica/

Management of Natural Resources in the Southern Highland Project (MARENASS)
www.marenass.org



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