

Experience and lessons of irrigation management transfer in Central and Eastern European countries in transition

Project proposal

by the

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a working unit in the European Regional Working Group (ERWG)
of the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID)**

Introduction

The International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID), an international Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) of professionals in water and land management has a European Regional Working Group (ERWG). The main purpose of ICID and of the ERWG is the exchange of information between member countries with the objective to learn from each other. In addition, ERWG targets to initiate and promote practice oriented actions and projects focussed on water management in agriculture. During the meeting of the ERWG in Brno in June 2001, a special Work Team on Sustainable Irrigation Management was established to draw lessons on irrigation management transfer in Central and Eastern European countries, which are in transition from the former centrally planned Soviet system to the future decentralised society with market orientation.

Background

Irrigated agriculture is facing organisational changes worldwide. In many parts of the world, irrigation has been initiated by Government investments in irrigation infrastructure. Government authorities frequently implemented the subsequent management of the irrigation systems. There is a growing recognition world wide that irrigation water management is a service provided to customers with better results when operated by decentralised organisations: irrigation management transfer.

Irrigation management transfer is believed to relieve the Government from the difficult task to raise the operation and management funds for water management and to improve services by removing the bureaucratic procedures associated with governmental organisations. It is assumed to give customers direct influence on the services provided (empowerment) in return for paying for these services. It is also believed that payment for service will improve the technical efficiency of allocating water as a scarce commodity to the sectors, crops and regions where benefits are obtained. To say it in a different way: it will eliminate water allocation to sectors, crops and regions where no economic returns on water use are attained.

Irrigation management transfer is a complex process, involving possibly infrastructure changes, institutional changes and legislative requirements. In countries, formerly belonging to the Soviet Union with its central planning system, this process is further complicated by:

- the transfer of agricultural management;
- insufficient development of the market economy;
- lack of entrepreneurship.

During the past ten years the irrigation sectors in Central and Eastern European countries have been struggling to continue to deliver their services to the agricultural sector. The irrigation systems, for which the sectors are responsible, although often of good quality, were designed on the basis of design criteria, which do not fit present and future conditions. Examples of this are systems that include water-lifting stations, which are expensive to operate.

Institutional and legislative issues form an additional challenge for countries in transition. One acute question concerns the appropriate management structure of the irrigation systems: Should systems, or parts of them, be privatised? Should the operation of the system be privatised, but the infrastructure remains state property? How should farmers be involved in decision-making? This question is complex because it cannot be seen separately from the mode of privatisation of the large collective farms. Will privatised farms be managed collectively? Or will they be split into small individual private farms? Choices in this sphere will influence the most appropriate solution for irrigation water management transfer.

Under the current conditions of transitional economy, clear strategies for sustainable development in irrigation management have to be developed. Priorities in irrigation management improvement include institutional reorganisation, and reformulation of water management practices, as well as strategies for the rehabilitation and modernisation of technical installations.

During the past decade, each of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe has tried to solve these problems locally. Some of the countries have progressed further than others, some have failed more than others. In order to learn from each others' successes and failures the European Work Team on Sustainable Irrigation Management (EWTSIM) will initiate a platform to discuss lessons learned in the country concerned. This platform aims to benefit from the lessons learned and to prepare for the sustainable future of the irrigation sectors in Central and Eastern European countries.

Objective

The objective of the project is:

- ***To study and compare the problems that the irrigation sectors of the participating countries face;***
- ***To formulate best solutions for sustainable irrigation development, taking into account the special circumstances of economies in transition;***
- ***Taking advantage of the each other's experience during the past decade.***

Work plan

The implementation period of the project period is 12 months. It is divided into three phases with the following details:

PHASE	PERIOD	ACTIVITY	REMARKS
1	Month 1-4	Preparation	- methodology and data collection - workshop on methodology
	Month 5	workshop I	- methodology and data collection
2	Month 6-9	data collection	- data collection per country - writing draft report per country
	Month 10	workshop II	-analyses of irrigation development in each country -formulate lessons
3	Month 10-12	project rounding up	- writing workshop recommendations - writing final report

Phase 1 will cover the period month 1-4 of the project. During this period, formats for data collection and reporting will be prepared by the chairman of EWTSIM. This work is of critical importance to the ultimate success of the project. It will ensure that the information coming from the participating countries is comparable.

The formats will be discussed at Workshop I, the Workshop on Data Collection and Methodology. Research leaders from the participating countries will attend the workshop and will be informed about the issues to be covered and the methodology to be applied, if applicable. The workshop will take place early in month 4 of the project.

Phase 2 is the data collection phase. The subjects agreed on during Workshop I will be studied and each country team will prepare a report/paper. The studies and the reporting will be completed in six months time. In most cases, the studies will concern the collecting, analysing, and preparing for presentation of already existing data. Each country will appoint a study leader.

Also phase 2 ends with a workshop. At his Workshop II, the Workshop on Sustainable Irrigation Development in Central and Eastern European Countries, the results of the preparation studies will be presented and discussed. Basically, the discussions will focus on the different solutions that countries worked out for the problems their irrigation sector is facing. All countries are in transition after the collapse of the former Soviet Union and face similar problems, but may have applied different solutions.

During Phase 3 the project will be terminated. Two actions take place. First, the proceedings of the Workshop on Sustainable Irrigation Development in Central and Eastern European Countries will be prepared. This will be a reference document for each of the countries concerned: it will systematically describe the approaches selected to deal with the problems that countries have applied. Approaches that were successful will be distinguished from approaches that were less successful.

EWTSIM and the Institute of Hydraulic Engineering and Land Reclamation, Kiyv, will link the project to an activity presently in preparation. This activity relates to a pilot area to compare two alternative approaches for irrigation water management transfer. One will be based on a prototype of a co-operative farm where the irrigation infrastructure will be included in the co-operative property of the farm and will be managed by the farm management. The second one will be based on the concept of complete privatisation of the farmland and the presently collective property of the farm. In this situation installation of a Water User Association will be tested. In the study, existing informal initiatives in irrigation water management transfer will be taken into account.

The Institute for Hydraulic Engineering and Land Reclamation, Kiev, Ukraine, will be prepared to act as host to both Workshop I and Workshop II.

Issues and methodology

The sustainability of irrigation systems in Central and Eastern European countries in transition is threatened. Preliminary fact finding has generated a number of issues that would appear to be relevant to the irrigation systems in each of the areas concerned. The following is a list of the issues; the list will be further elaborated during Phase 1 of the project and will be discussed during Workshop I:

MAIN SUBJECT	DETAILS	CLARIFICATION
physical works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - maintenance - replacement, rehabilitation - adaptation to new (economic) conditions 	agricultural production structure has changed: collective farms have decreased in size, emergence of privatised farmers, agricultural output no longer centrally planned but depending on the market
system operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - staffing - office running costs - monitoring 	many systems lift water using electric pump systems
Institutional aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - privatisation - decentralisation of management - farmers' participation - Water Users' Associations - client orientation - service level agreements 	
Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - existing legislation - required new legislation 	For a good functioning of the market economy, property rights and allocation of responsibilities must be properly ensured
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cost-benefit analyses present situation - cost-benefit analyses different options 	

The participants of the workshop will decide upon the list which will guide the data collection exercise in the subsequent phase. In order to facilitate discussion and data comparing, a reporting format reflecting the main subjects will be issued to the country study teams during or immediately following the workshop.

In as far as possible, data collection methodology will be standardised. Among others this is achieved by formulating a set of standard questions that each study team use as a data collection guide (Workshop I). It is expected that mainly secondary data, which is available in reports and otherwise, will be used.

It is acknowledged that the agricultural sector as such may also be in transition to the market economy at different stages in the participating countries. Important agricultural services such as credit facilities, extension facilities, marketing facilities, agricultural input facilities may be lacking or not fully effective. Obviously, this will affect the irrigation sector. The constraints in the agricultural support services sector will be taken into account during the workshops. The agricultural support sector as such is not a topic of study, however.

Participating professionals

The project will involve senior country representatives from the participating countries in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as experts on irrigation management transfer of IWMI (Colombo), The Netherlands, Germany and the World Bank.

The majority of the participating countries are active members of the European Regional Working Group (ERWG) of the International Commission of Irrigation and Drainage (ICID): Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine and Yugoslavia.

The experts from IWMI, The Netherlands, Germany and the World Bank cover the following subjects: irrigation systems and hydrology, institutional aspects, economy, ecology and legislation. Experts from France and Spain will be consulted on special issues.

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