

Organizing Effective  
Community-based Groups:  
*Lessons from the Irrigation Sector*

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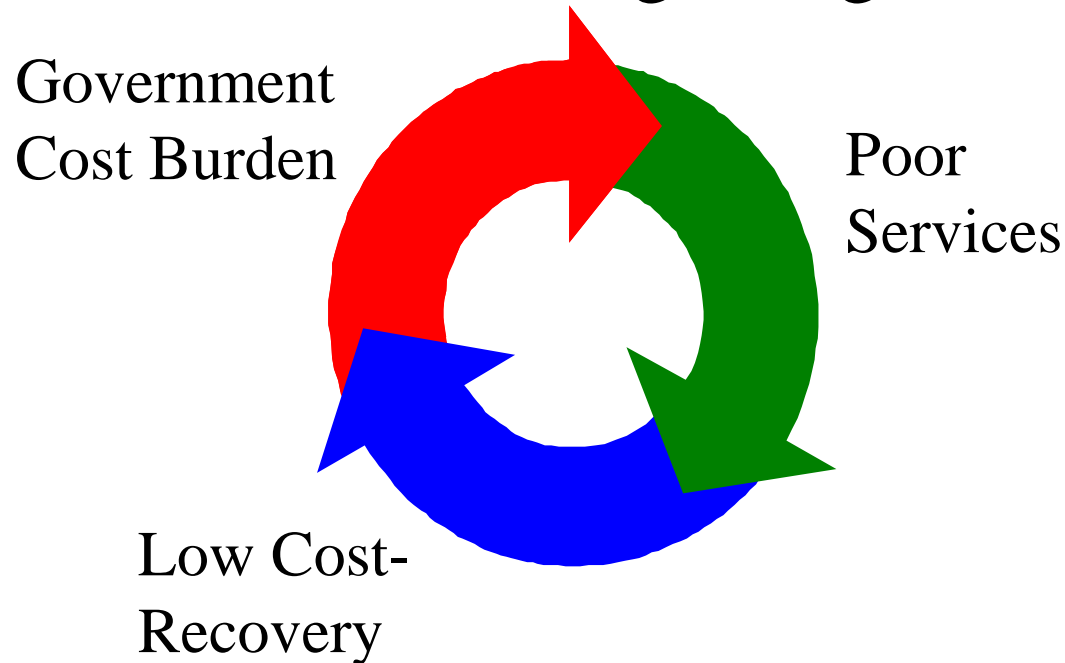
# The Importance of Irrigation

- *Food:* A third more people to be fed with ~10% less water/land
- *Environment:* Agricultural pollution is becoming *the* major environmental problem
- *Empowerment:* Local communities have much to lose, or gain



# Irrigation as a CBNRM Issue

- Governments can't manage irrigation



- But farmers *can*

# The CBNRM Challenge in Irrigation: *Then and Now*

## 1970 - 80s

- How to organize groups of 20-50 farmers at the lowest level of canal networks

## 1990s

- How to establish user-managed corporate entities to manage large irrigation networks

# User Management with a Difference

- Farmers don't manage the irrigation system directly
- Farmers manage (and employ) the technical managers

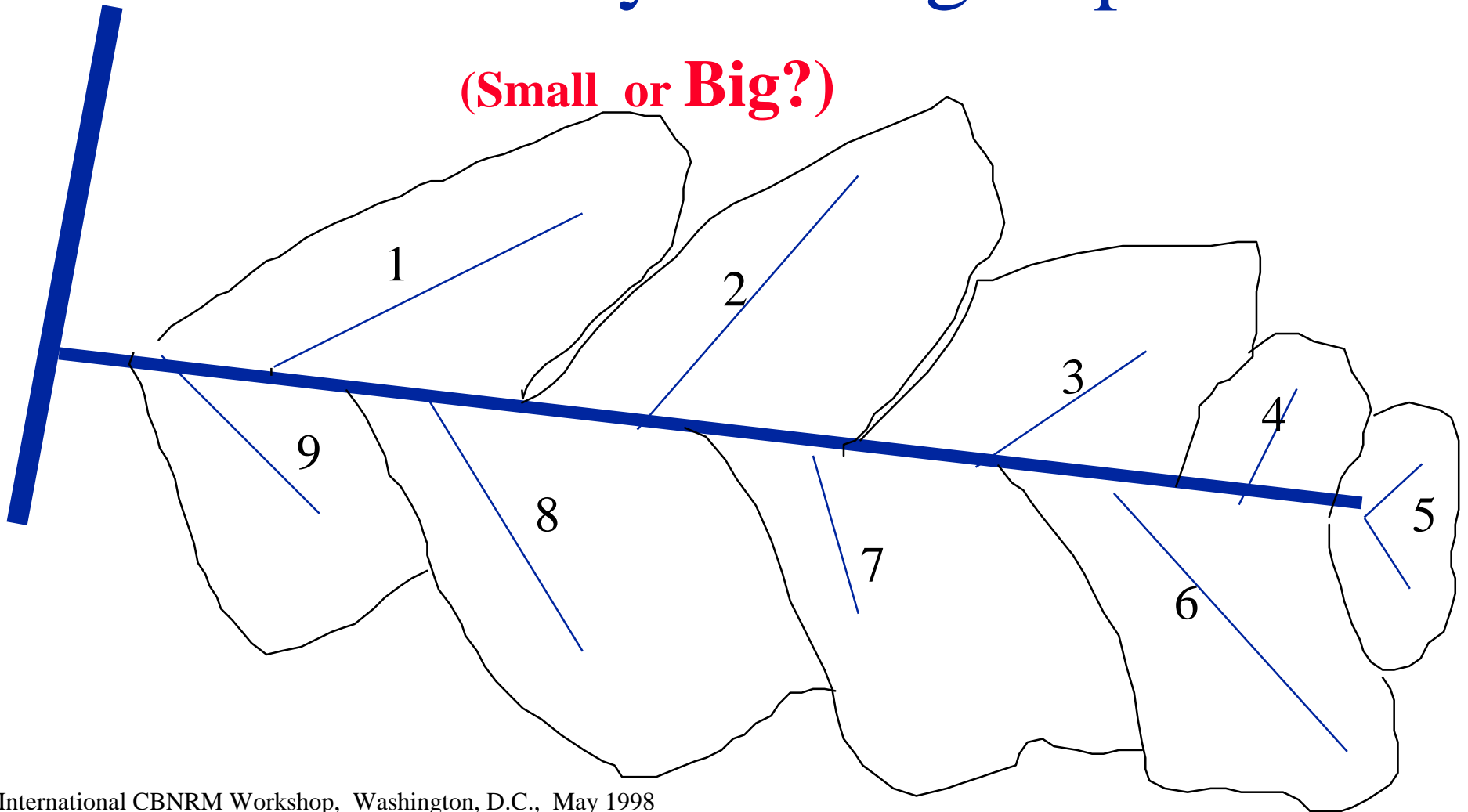


# Three Issues

1. *What* are “effective community-based groups” in the irrigation sector?
2. *Why* organize them?
3. *How* to organize them

# 1. Identifying effective community-based groups

**(Small or Big?)**



# Optimal scale

- Management tasks need to be sufficiently challenging and rewarding to attract participation
- Organizational capacity is a constraint but not a “limit”; organizations can and should evolve

## 2. Why organize water users?

- **Production / Efficiency Advantages**  
(better irrigation systems/projects)
- **Environmental benefits** (water conservation; basin allocation)
- **Empowerment** (social capital)

# Participation is a social “good” (and so is water...)



- Individual as well as community empowerment is part of the development objective
- Participation in irrigation management is an empowering process

# Participation means...

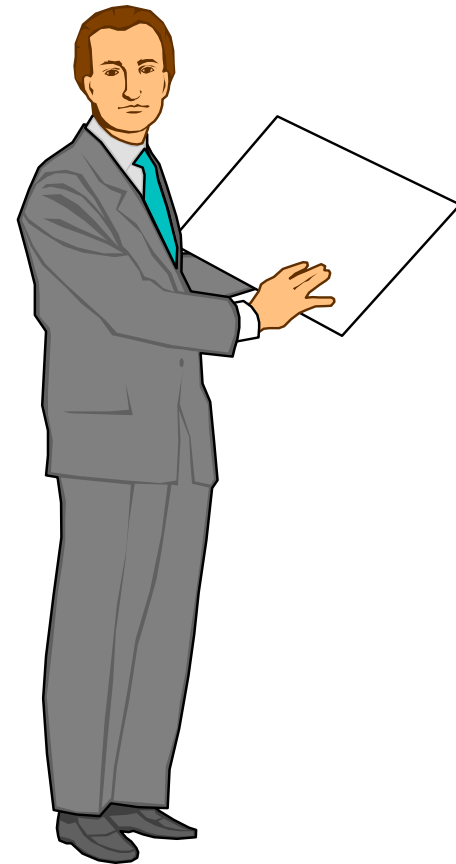
- Participating in the full life-cycle of the irrigation system:
  - The *management* of the resource (the irrigation system)
  - Decision-making about *new investments* (e.g., rehabilitation projects)
  - Decisions about the structure and *functions of the users' organization*

### 3. How to organize irrigation user groups?

- Start with clear **policies**
- Strengthen **capacity** (agency, training institutes and/or NGOs, farmer leaders)
- **Organizing** strategy/process (doing it)
- Post-transfer **guidance**/assistance

# *Lesson:* The organizing process is critical...but...

- Organizing needs to be preceded by enabling *policies*
- If the policies are loud and clear, the inevitable problems of organizing can be dealt with as they arise



# If the logic of organizing is not obvious...

- Farmers need to be persuaded and convinced
- But the new organization may not be sustainable

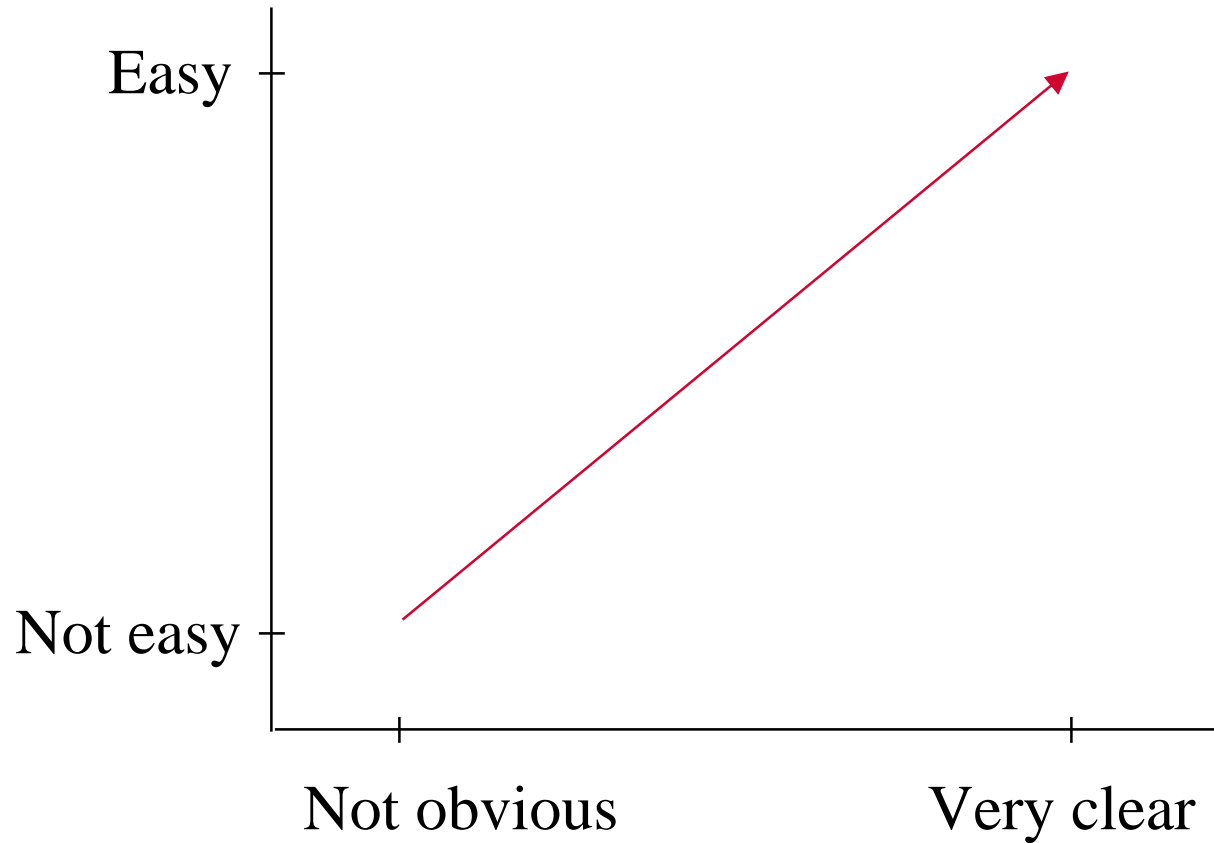


# If the reasons for organizing are clear...

- The organizing process can go directly into the “how” questions of establishing the new organization
- and the foundation is laid for a sustainable organization



# Ease of Organizing



## Logic for an Organization

# We once had great plans...

- Let the farmers manage their own affairs
- But they need to be organized first
- We'll send in social organizers
- We'll help them to help themselves



# What do we have to show for it?



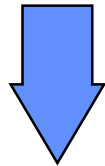
- Water user associations created by projects seldom survive after project funding stops
- But some WUAs do persist and show what's possible

# Best CBNRM Practice from the Irrigation Sector

- Philippines
- Mexico
- Turkey
- India

# PIM in the Philippines

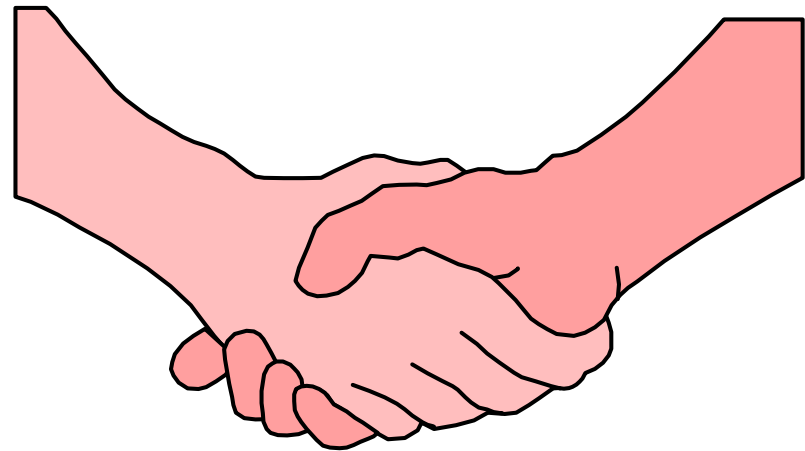
- 1974 amendment to NIA's charter
- Target of financial self-sufficiency



- Increased irrigation service fee
- staff cuts (31% decline, from 1986-96)
- performance-oriented management reforms

# Target = Joint Management

- 1,791 Irrigator Assocs.
- Avg. size = 350 ha
- replace ditchtender functions
- collect fees
- but **only 2.3%** of the IAs are fully turned over

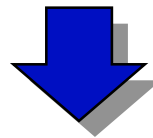


# Organizing Process in the Philippines

- Learning process in communal systems during 1970s → applied to national systems during 1980s
- Organizing function institutionalized within NIA (Inst. Dvlp. Division)
- Supplemented by organizers recruited from local communities

# **Mexico**

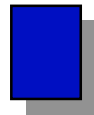
## **Debt crisis**



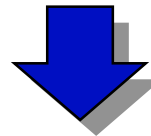
## **Management transfer**

# Mexico

## National Water Commission



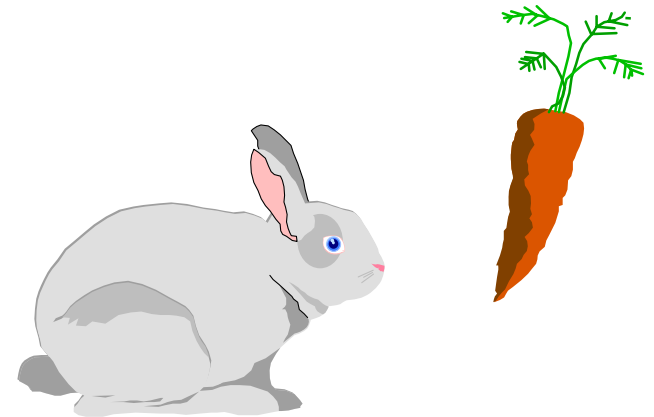
**80 irrigation districts**  
**(3.2 mil ha)**



**316 associations**  
**(70% of area)**

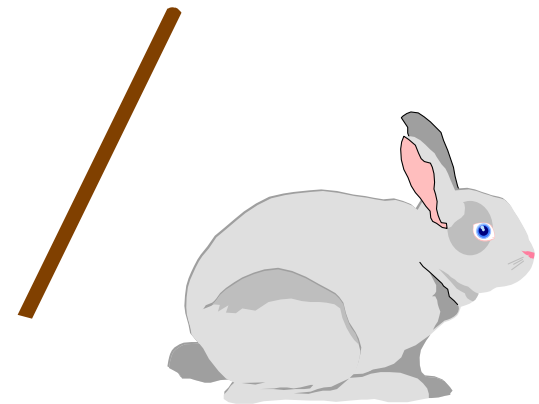
# “Carrots”

- **Management autonomy**
- **Maintenance equipment**
- **20-year concession**



# “Sticks”

- **Threat of deteriorating service**
- **Risk to production**



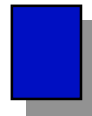
# Organizing Process in Mexico

- Hundreds of farmers meetings with CNA and IMTA officials
- Ejidos groups
- Producer groups
- Farmer federations
- Consultants

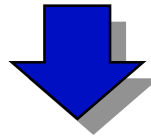


# Turkey

**DSI**



**580 irrigation schemes  
(1.6 mil ha)**



**407 associations  
(62% of area)**

# **Turkey**

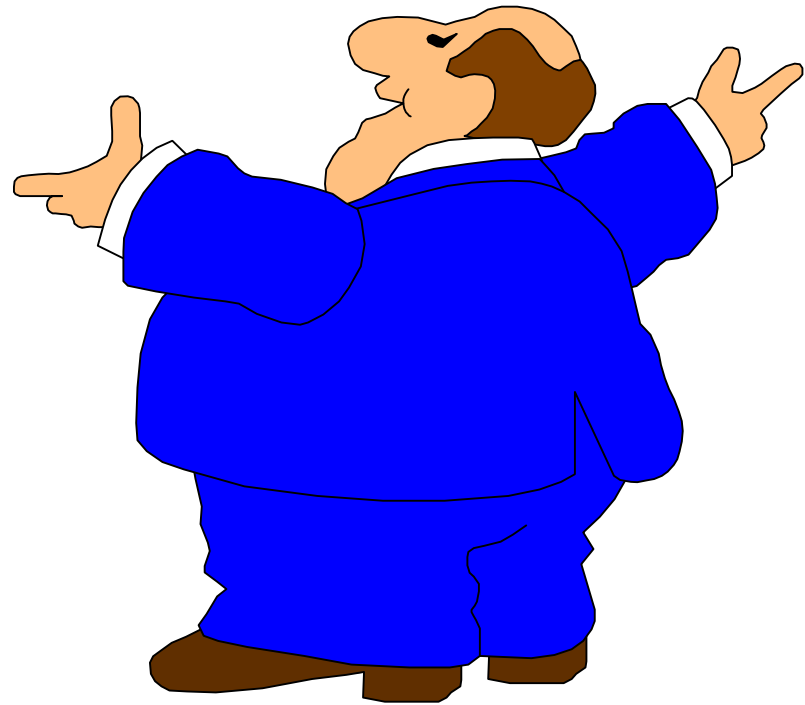
## **Management transfer**

### **BUT**

## **With continued subsidies**

# Organizing Process in Turkey

- Study tours to Mexico, meetings/seminars
- DSI announced an attractive package to would-be WUAs:
  - *Free water*
  - *Free use of equipment*
  - *WUA control over technical staff*



# Andhra Pradesh, India

- Long history of conventional and temporarily successful PIM experiments
- New Chief Minister undertaking reforms to privatize and “participatize” the economy
- 10,292 Water User Associations created by law (not voluntary) in June 1997

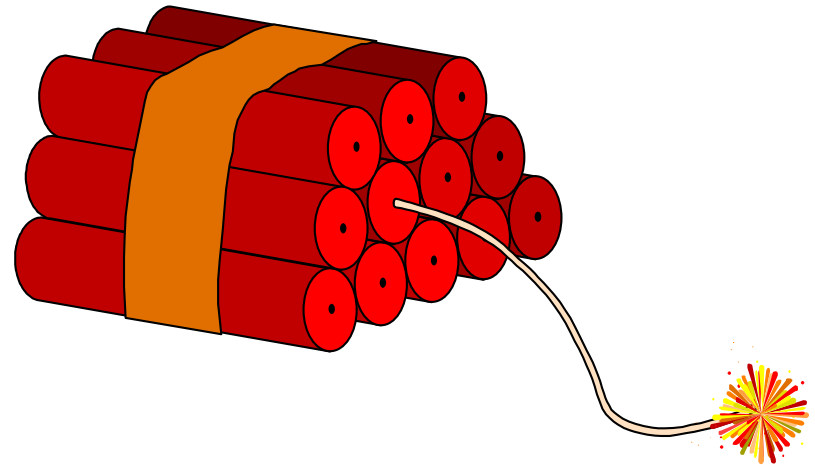
# Features of the AP Case: transfer of real property and authority



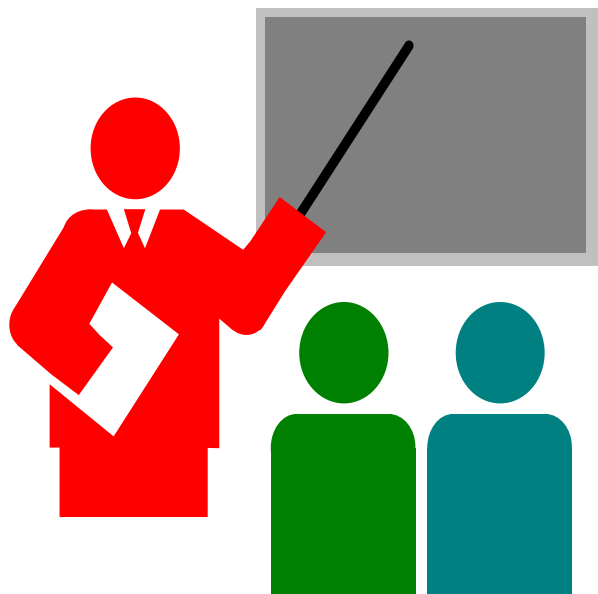
- Government property is legally transferred to WUAs
- Government servants become entrusted to serve the WUA

# The Process in Andhra Pradesh

- *Big Bang* seen as only possibility for success against entrenched irrigation bureaucracy
- Lots of meetings and rallies with farmers
- Lots of training for farmers and ID staff



# What can these cases tell us about the organizing *process* ?



- Qualifier: Irrigation has some unique features:
  - An input for something else
  - Extreme variability in access
  - Involves expensive infrastructure
  - Is already being managed by Govt.
  - *Process* = management *transfer*

# Lessons...

- **Lesson #1**

- There is a minimum effective scale of operation below which farmers won't be interested in management input
- But there is no *maximum*: “headroom” for vertical expansion and/or diversification (to non-irrigation activities) is important

# Lessons (cont.)

- **Lesson #2**

- Clear policy commitment is needed to overwhelm agency resistance to management transfer
- “Big-Bang” approach is often, but not necessarily, required
- (Question: Can a gradual approach lead to CBNRM in the irrigation sector?)

# Lessons (cont.)

- **Lesson #3**

- Some pre-requisites are more requisite than others...
  - The organizing effort is less important than the total package of incentives
  - Physical improvements to the systems are not a pre-condition to management transfer
  - A clear legal basis is essential, but can be tackled during, or even after, the organizing process

# Lessons (cont.)

- **Lesson #4**

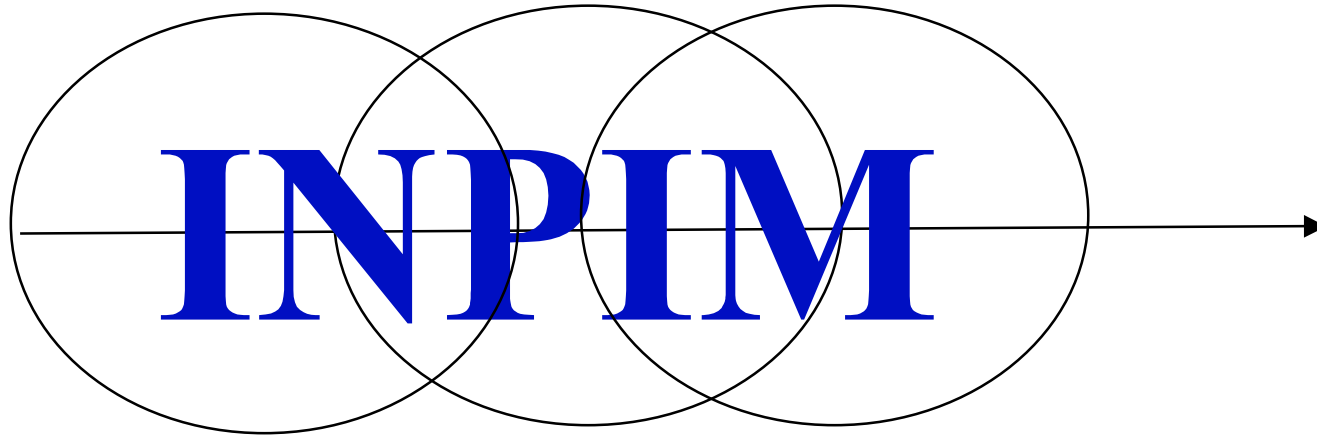
- Organizing process does not end with management transfer; it continues through training, guidance, and monitoring
  - Second-generation problems are the rule, not the exception
  - Continuing but new role for govt. agency in providing technical services
- Training and capacity building are long-term needs for WUAs and the agency

# Lessons (cont.)

- **Lesson #5**

- Need for new networks of CBNRM organizations

- Top-down bureaucratic agency network needs to be replaced by bottom-up federations and confederations of WUAs
- Information functions
- Political representation / lobbying functions



## **International Network on Participatory Irrigation Management**

- Established in 1995 as an NGO
- Mission to facilitate the exchange of people, ideas, and training materials on PIM
- EDI is current Secretariat
- 12 participating countries
- 5 registered national chapters

*Visit our Website...*

**<http://www.inpim.org>**

