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A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH TO BUILDING POLICY CONSENSUS: THE RELEVANCE OF THE IRRIGATION MANAGEMENT POLICY SUPPORT ACTIVITY OF SRI LANKA FOR INDIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explain the basic principles and objectives of a unique project, the Irrigation Management Policy Support Activity (IMPSA) of Sri Lanka. It describes the processes leading to the creation of consensus in policy formulation within and among the various government agencies and non-government sectors.

The paper also critically discusses the conditions that affect its success or otherwise, and the implications of the lessons learned for other countries, especially in South and Southeast Asia. The paper is based on the premise that the approach used, with suitable adaptations, would be an appropriate methodology for creating consensus on irrigation management policies in other countries, including India.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Paper

Sri Lanka has been experimenting for several decades with alternative approaches to encouraging a higher degree of peoples' participation in rural development. More recently, both the government and nongovernment organizations have implemented a number of pilot activities for enhancing farmers' participation in irrigation management. During the 1980s, the government actively encouraged such experimentation, and began incorporating the lessons learned into government policy. In late 1988, the Government formally adopted a "participatory management policy" for irrigation system management, which called for substantial devolution of authority and responsibility for system management to farmers' organizations, supported by the State agencies. However, at this stage, it was not clear how this policy could be operationalized and effectively implemented.

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1. Former Head, Sri Lanka Field Operations (SLFO), and presently Member, Performance Task Force (IIMI), Director, Irrigation Management Policy Support Activity Secretariat, and Senior Irrigation Management Specialist, IIMI-SLFO, respectively.

In 1990, a unique program to address this issue was initiated by the Government, with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This "Irrigation Management Policy Support Activity" (IMPSA) is carrying out a systematic planning process to assess recent experiences and recommend suitable policies and strategy guidelines, and through a process of consultation with people at all levels, from the farmers' fields to the policy makers' offices in Colombo, achieve a clear consensus on what should be done over the next decade and beyond.

The purpose of this paper is to describe to a non-Sri Lankan audience what IMPSA is, what were the conditions that led to its establishment, how the process works, and what the emerging recommendations are. Based on this overview, the paper identifies lessons that may be applicable to other sectors and especially to other countries' irrigated agricultural sector. The paper is based on the premise that although the details of IMPSA are specific to the Sri Lankan context, the broad approach, suitably modified to fit other contexts, is very relevant to other countries addressing similar issues in irrigation management policy. In the Indian context, the approach may be most relevant at the State level.

1.2 Background: Irrigation in Sri Lanka

The irrigated area of Sri Lanka has more than doubled since Independence, to more than 550,000 hectares (ha). About 65 percent of this area is under "major" irrigation schemes, defined as irrigating more than 80 ha. This heavy investment in irrigation has enabled Sri Lanka to reduce its rice imports from 60 percent of its annual requirement in 1948 to about 10-15 percent today, despite an annual population growth rate of 2.2 percent. Since the early 1980s, as the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Program has been completed, irrigation investments in Sri Lanka have shifted from new construction to rehabilitation and modernization of existing systems. Research has shown the while the economic returns to new construction have declined, the returns to rehabilitation projects, particularly those accompanied by management improvements, are often quite dramatic (Aluwihare and Kikuchi 1991).

Although Sri Lanka is not one of the "Big Powers" of Asia in terms of irrigated area, it does have a surprisingly complex governmental institutional landscape. One is tempted to say that it has more "irrigation institutions per ha" than most countries (Merrey 1991). The Irrigation Department is the oldest irrigation management agency, consisting almost entirely of civil engineers, which has been responsible for all major irrigations systems outside the Mahaweli systems until recent devolution of some systems to Provincial Councils. The Mahaweli Authority of Sri Lanka is a multi-purpose organization with special powers delegated by Parliament, to develop and manage the Mahaweli River Basin including systems that benefit from its waters outside the basin; and it also manages a major non-Mahaweli system in southern Sri Lanka. These two departments are under the Ministry of Lands, Irrigation and Mahaweli Development.

Within the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Research, the Department of Agrarian Services has been responsible for "minor" irrigation, defined as those systems with 80 ha or less of command; it now shares this responsibility with the Provincial Councils. The role of the Provincial Councils is still evolving, which further adds to the confusion. Groundwater development is under yet another Board. This proliferation and confusion of agencies is a serious impediment to developing and implementing consistent irrigation policies in Sri Lanka.

1.3 A Decade of Experimentation

In the late 1970s, several experiments with farmers' participation in irrigation system improvement and management were initiated by both government and nongovernment organizations which led to perceptible improvements in system performance. These efforts were soon integrated, conceptually at least, with government efforts to develop a new system of integrated project management with active farmers' participation in a few selected major irrigation schemes in the country.

In 1983, a more comprehensive program, Integrated Management of Major Irrigation Schemes (INMAS), was launched to promote improved irrigation system operation and maintenance (O&M), better coordination of inputs, and increased farmer participation. To implement this program, the Irrigation Management Division (IMD) was created within the irrigation ministry. IMD works in parallel with the Irrigation Department, and is located in the Department's building. The organizational arrangement under INMAS was progressively extended to cover about 44 major irrigation schemes including several important donor-funded rehabilitation projects (for which IMD is the implementing agency); this program has been used as a mechanism for experimenting and learning lessons from the field. It took only a few years for what began as isolated experiments to become an official "let 100 flowers bloom" policy (Abeywickrema 1986).

How has this "revolution" in thinking occurred? Space does not permit reviewing the past decade in detail; only a few key experiments can be highlighted here. One very important strand of experiments is purely indigenous. Two examples are the "Kimbulwana case" and the "Minipe case." In Kimbulwana scheme, a dedicated technical officer of the Irrigation Department decided that without farmer involvement, an donor-funded rehabilitation project was not likely to have a lasting impact. He therefore motivated the farmers to form committees and get involved in the improvement of the system, and its subsequent operation and maintenance. He was successful in assisting farmers to improve the equity, efficiency and reliability of water deliveries, and thus improve cropping intensity and yields. Perhaps more important, he assisted farmers to set up a management system in which farmers continue to take the primary responsibility for system operation, and are maintaining the entire system including the main system (Gunadasa 1989).

In Minipe scheme, one of the co-authors of this paper (then Deputy Director of Irrigation for Kandy Range) implemented a committee system for improving the maintenance and performance, beginning in the late 1970s (de Silva 1984). This experiment has been a specific source of a number of the management principles now used in the INMAS program, though at the time, as was the case in Kimbulwana, the experiment received little official support. During the 1980s a nongovernment organization has built on the Minipe experience through the implementation of several more pilot projects, which emphasize building institutions so farmers can take substantial management responsibility.

Another strand of experiments exemplifies cooperation between local and international specialists, with assistance from an external donor (USAID). Begun officially in 1979, the Gal Oya Water Management Project has had a tremendous impact not only in Sri Lanka but beyond. The original concept of this project was focused on rehabilitating part of the then-largest irrigation scheme in the country, the Gal Oya left bank system, but the package included a large training component, technical assistance, research, and experiments with farmers' organizations. Over time, this project evolved from a primarily construction-oriented effort, to one focused more seriously on institution-building. Among other lessons from this project, came a tested methodology for assisting farmers to organize effectively using "institutional organizers" (IOs) as catalysts of the process; a methodology for implementing rehabilitation of the physical system in a cost-effective and participatory manner (called "pragmatic rehabilitation"); and an organization design for joint management of irrigation schemes (Merrey and Murray-Rust 1987). These important lessons emerged because an explicit "learning process" methodology underlay all of the institutional and strategic experimentation.

The organizational design that emerged, modified further based on other experiences as well, is now generally accepted and being implemented under the INMAS program. It consists of an informal "primary group" at field channel[2] level as the foundation. This group chooses one member to represent its interests on a distributary canal organization, a formal farmers' organization. Representatives from the distributary groups in turn are members of a project management committee. This is a joint committee of farmer representatives and officials, on which farmers are expected to be in the majority.

A more recent project funded by the same donor has been building on previous experience in the four major schemes in Polonnaruwa District. The Irrigation Systems Management Project has the objective of establishing a management system on these schemes which could operate them on a "sustained renewal" basis. Use of IOs to form farmers' organizations, and pragmatic rehabilitation with much of the work carried out by distributary

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2. In Sri Lanka, a field channel is the lowest level of canal, taking water to the fields of farmers; in modern systems it is a one cusec (28.3 liters per second) canal irrigation 8-15 one-hectare allotments; distributaries are canals feeding a number of field canals.

organizations under contracts are key components. This project has also introduced the concept of a project-level farmers' organization, parallel to the project management committee; and is currently testing procedures for turning over complete O&M responsibility to farmers' organizations.

While these developments were taking place, it was realized that there were a number of important areas where further work was needed to interpret experience, choose among alternative approaches, establish or legitimize institutional arrangements, indicate future directions, and overcome bottlenecks and constraints to moving to the next stages. Examples of the problems that needed attention include cost-effective methods to organize farmers' organizations, criteria for the turnover of irrigation systems to farmers' organizations, strategies and procedures for strengthening farmers' organizations, institutional arrangements for decision-making and effective operation and maintenance of systems, criteria for planning the rehabilitation and modernization of schemes, equitable and workable arrangements for joint financing of O&M, and building the capacity of the implementing agencies to work with the new farmers' organizations.

The initial idea of obtaining official Government sanction and policy directives for the developments that were already taking place and which were to come in the future originated in the IIMI-Sri Lanka Consultative Committee[3]. Following from the recommendations of a national workshop co-sponsored by IIMI on "Participatory Management in Sri Lanka's Irrigation Schemes" held in May 1986 (IIMI 1986), the Consultative Committee arranged a special meeting of the Secretaries of the Ministries in charge of Irrigation and Agriculture and other key senior officials to discuss the steps that should be taken to obtain the Government's approval at the highest level for the participatory irrigation management system being developed in various projects. As a consequence of that meeting, a Cabinet Paper containing the broad policy framework for the introduction of participatory irrigation management was prepared. This document was submitted to Cabinet jointly by the two ministers in charge of Irrigation and Agriculture, and approved by Cabinet in December 1988.

The new participatory irrigation management policy outlined in the Cabinet Paper was only a skeletal framework establishing the main features of a joint system of irrigation management in which farmers' organizations would be responsible for operation and maintenance at the distributary and tertiary canal levels and the government would maintain and manage the headworks and main system. Though setting a clear and broad direction, the policy statement left many important issues related to implementation unresolved. Some of these issues were highlighted more recently at a national workshop on "Resource Mobilization for Irrigation Management" held in early 1990 (IIMI 1990).

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[3] This Committee is a formal committee which provides overall guidance to IIMI's program in Sri Lanka, and communicates the important findings and insights back to policy makers.

In November 1988 when the Government was considering the final draft of the Cabinet Paper on participatory irrigation management policy, the Government and USAID agreed to undertake a joint investigation of the need for a policy planning program to investigate the numerous issues related to the implementation of the proposed policy likely to constrain its implementation.

A year later, the Government approved the Irrigation Management Policy Support Activity (IMPSA), to be implemented by the Ministry of Lands, Irrigation, and Mahaweli Development, with the assistance of USAID. Under the agreement, USAID's support was to be provided through the Irrigation Support Project for Asia and the Near East (ISPAN), in collaboration with the Sri Lanka Field Operations office of IIMI. Actual implementation of IMPSA began in June 1990, and is scheduled to be completed in June 1992.

2.0 IMPSA: A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH TO BUILDING POLICY CONSENSUS

2.1 The Project

As noted above, IMPSA was designed to carry out a systematic and analytical planning process to assess recent experiences and formulate and evaluate alternative policies and guidelines for implementation of the new irrigation management policy. The resulting expanded policy framework will consist of policies, principles, guidelines and criteria, and institutional, administrative, and legal arrangements to govern and guide decisions concerning programming, project design and implementation, allocation of resources, operation of systems, maintenance, and capital investment in water resources management and irrigation. The social and economic context of the Government's strategy and objectives in the irrigation sector has been changing and will continue to be transformed in the future. The policy framework would also be similarly dynamic and evolutionary. Hence, IMPSA was also to focus on developing a continuing policy planning capability in the Government's irrigation sector.

It is expected that the outcome of IMPSA will be improved implementation of on-going projects, new projects and programs consistent with the participatory management policy which is at the core of the government's strategy in the sector, and public sector organizational and staff improvements and changes to enable them to perform more effectively within the framework of the new irrigation management systems that will be established.

It is also important to note that IMPSA is not an activity in which a group of people prepare policy documents in isolation and present them to the Government; it is not a "turnkey" operation, and it makes only minimal use of foreign expertise. IMPSA is a

broadly participatory activity, involving a wide range of Sri Lankan specialists, irrigation managers, and farmers' representatives with a high value placed on achieving a broad consensus on future directions.

2.2 The Irrigation Management Policy Advisory Committee (IMPAC)

Under the Project, the Government has set up an inter-ministerial Irrigation Management Policy Advisory Committee (IMPAC) to provide broad guidance for the implementation of IMPSA and to provide a mechanism to achieve consensus among the divisions and departments of the concerned ministries on the recommendations to be adopted and implemented by the Government. This committee, comprising of about twenty members, is chaired by the Secretary of the Ministry of Lands Irrigation and Mahaweli Development, and includes the Secretary of the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Research and all the heads of departments and agencies under the two ministries, as well as representatives from the policy and finance ministries.

While IMPSA is designed to promote the involvement of a broad spectrum of public and private sector organizations in determining future irrigation management policy in Sri Lanka, IMPAC plays a critical role in the policy planning process by providing the essential forum for achieving consensus among the concerned agencies on policies and implementation measures to be recommended to the Cabinet. Once IMPAC approves a particular policy, IMPSA publishes a policy paper describing the proposed new policy, while the concerned Ministries prepare policy papers for the Government.

2.3 The IMPAC Working Group

In order to manage the numerous studies and activities, IMPAC has established a Working Group to manage the preparation of policy papers. The Working Group, which also consists of about twenty members, comprises some of the members of IMPAC and appointed nominees of the others. Its activities include:

a. Reviewing and approving the IMPSA workplan, schedules, working papers and study outlines; and

b. Providing detailed reviews of the findings and recommendations presented in the Secretariat working papers and directing the preparation of draft policy papers by the Secretariat for presentation to IMPAC.

2.4 The IMPSA Secretariat

To facilitate the activities of the IMPAC Working Group and to implement the project, a Secretariat has been established with a small full-time multi-disciplinary team of

Sri Lankan professionals. The functions of the Secretariat are to prepare workplans and schedules, engage local and expatriate consultants to carry out studies, and synthesize the outcomes of these activities into working papers and policy papers to be presented to the Working Group and to IMPAC.

ISPAN, a Washington-based support project funded by USAID, provides short-term local and expatriate technical assistance to assist the Secretariat to carry out the required studies and activities. The Director and other professional staff of the IMPSA Secretariat -- who are all Sri Lankans -- are employed by ISPAN as individual consultants to Camp Dresser McGee (CDM) International (the ISPAN prime contractor). Management support and technical backstopping, as well as office facilities, equipment, and support staff are provided by IIMI through a subcontract with ISPAN.

The Director of the IMPSA Secretariat is responsible for managing all Secretariat operations including:

a. Preparation of workplans and schedules;

b. Assigning technical, management and administrative tasks and responsibilities to professional and administrative support staff, and monitoring staff performance;

c. Preparing consultant terms of references, selecting consultants, negotiating consultant contracts, and monitoring consultant activities;

d. Supervising the preparation of working and policy papers;

e. Supervising the design, organization, and implementation of workshops and seminars; and

f. Performing the duties of secretary of the IMPAC working group and making presentations of draft policy papers to the IMPAC working group and to IMPAC.

2.5 The Role of IIMI

The staff of IIMI's Sri Lanka Field Operations (SLFO) participate directly in IMPSA, providing management support, technical backstopping, and technical assistance to the IMPSA Secretariat. The relationship between IIMI/SLFO and the staff of the IMPSA Secretariat is governed by open discussion and communication, and a collaborative approach to making decisions affecting the implementation of the project that relies on consensus.

whenever possible. In other words, IIMI/SLFO and the IMPSA Secretariat operate as a team.

IIMI's specific roles in IMPSA include the following:

a. The Head of IIMI/SLFO is a permanent member of IMPAC and the IMPAC Working Group, and IIMI/SLFO staff play an active role in technical and management discussions in the IMPAC working group;

b. The Head of IIMI/SLFO collaborates with the Director of ISPAN in providing management and technical support on a continuing basis to the Director and staff of the IMPSA Secretariat. In particular, IIMI/SLFO takes a leading role in providing continuing technical backstopping and support in the following areas:

- preparation of workplans and schedules;
- working paper study designs and preparation of terms of reference;
- selection of consultants;
- review of reports;
- preparation of working paper summaries and synthesis of findings and recommendations; and
- preparation of policy papers.

In general the Director and staff of the IMPSA Secretariat are responsible for completing all documents and studies, relying in most cases on local and expatriate consultants for the basic work. The role of IIMI is the important one of advisor, assisting directly whenever and to the extent possible, particularly with organizing, designing, scheduling, monitoring, and reviewing activities and studies. In addition, IIMI also has specific responsibilities and obligations with respect to particular working and policy papers as mutually agreed.

2.6 Activities under IMPSA

IMPSA's activities are primarily focused on articulating policies or developing related guidelines and procedures to overcome constraints to implementing the Government's participatory irrigation policy. However, the choice of which issues have a high priority and

which options should be considered is greatly affected by the shared vision of the role and function of irrigation in the future agricultural system of the country and the strategy the government chooses to achieve that vision. Hence, in the initial stages of the project, IMPSA has forged within IMPAC a consensus on a vision of the irrigation sector in the future and the issues that will affect progress towards that vision. The subsequent activities under IMPSA have detailed the policies and strategies that will enable the realization of that vision.

IMPSA's program includes the preparation of 10 policy papers and over 50 supporting staff working papers. A policy paper is a concise statement of the recommendations of the Working Group. It is presented to IMPAC at a Policy Workshop along with a supporting presentation and the related working papers. The staff working papers consist, in general, of a summary description of the background, context, and importance of the issue being considered, a description, analysis and evaluation of the range of options, and findings and recommendations.

One of the most important inputs to the policy formulation process in IMPSA is the series of over 25 workshops and seminars. The participants at these workshops are carefully selected to include government officials at various levels, representatives from research institutes, universities, and non-government organizations including the private sector. Special workshops are also arranged for farmer representatives from various parts of the country. These workshops are not only an important source of ideas and suggestions, but also contribute to the creation of a consensus on many issues. For most participants, it is a unique experience to be consulted on policy issues; and it is this consultation process that makes IMPSA unique as a mechanism for developing policy.

In addition to the workshops, for each staff working paper a consultative panel of experts and specialists is constituted. Each panel usually has about four to ten specialists, who participate in three to ten meetings during the several months' period over which staff working papers are prepared. The IMPSA team guides the discussions at these panel meetings, in order to benefit from the range of views represented, and attempts to achieve a consensus on key issues; and most of the draft staff working papers are discussed in detail, often until there is a consensus on its contents.

3.0 SUBSTANTIVE RECOMMENDATIONS EMERGING FROM IMPSA

As of mid-February 1992, nine of the 10 planned policy papers have been prepared and formally approved by IMPAC and six have been published. Work is presently underway on the 10th paper, which will be a synthesis of the major recommendations to come out of IMPSA, and the steps for implementation. A complete list of the ten papers is attached as an Annex.

The first policy paper proposes an overall vision and a set of broad guidelines, principles and objectives, for the future direction of irrigated agriculture in Sri Lanka, with an emphasis on irrigation management. The next eight policy papers elaborate on the necessary steps to achieve the vision, and provide detailed policy statements and strategies for implementation. Guiding the whole process is a vision of an irrigated agricultural sector that will be dynamic, diversified, efficient, equitable, productive and sustainable, and will be characterized by strong farmers' organizations managing the key resources, especially water.

To make this vision of a broadly prosperous and growing irrigated agriculture come true, IMPSA has recommended specific major transformations in the overall policy and the implementing institutions, major technological innovations to be encouraged over the long term, and greater attention to rural development, improving the overall infrastructure as well as the quality of life for the rural poor.

A two phase implementation strategy has been proposed. During the first phase, roughly the decade of the 1990s, conditions for future success will be created by implementing the policy and institutional transformations to enable an agricultural "take off" and achievement of immediate gains in profitability and labor absorption using present technologies, encouraging private investment in micro-technologies, and supporting applied research. The second phase, beginning in the late 1990s, will involve major investments in new technologies to increase small farmer productivity, based on the results of the applied research, and will be demand-driven and largely financed by the profits of the sector itself.

Some of the key recommendations emerging from the subsequent completed policy papers include:

a. specific guidelines and methodologies for the design of scheme-level management systems for both farmer-managed and jointly-managed systems, including a specific process for turning over authority and responsibilities to farmers' organizations;

b. specific policies for financing and implementing operation, maintenance and modernization of systems, which involve progressively increasing farmers' roles and responsibilities;

c. specific suggestions for significant reforms of the implementing agencies to enable them to play their new role of supporting and assisting farmers' organizations effectively, with broad guidelines for implementing the reforms;

d. mechanisms to improve planning, funding, and coordination of applied irrigation management research and the dissemination of results;

e. a plan for a major effort at developing human resources in the agencies and among farmers;

f. a broad interim policy for water resource development including the detailed terms of reference for a long-term study on appropriate water resources institutions, policies, and a master plan for future development;

g. some suggested fiscal and trade policies that would enhance the diversification and profitability of irrigated agriculture; and

h. a specific investment strategy for achieving the objectives agreed upon under IMPSA over the next decade.

4.0 IMPSA: THE PROCESS AND ITS LESSONS

4.1 "Getting the Process Right"[4]

Throughout this paper we have emphasized the importance of the IMPSA process itself -- trying to build consensus through maximizing the participation of people who have relevant experience, or who may be responsible for future implementation of the new policies, or who would be directly affected by these policies. Not only has IMPSA benefitted from these inputs -- particularly the farmers whom we have found to be especially forward looking -- but this participation has been very important to building a consensus on the new policy initiatives. The phrase "consultation, compromise, and consensus" has acquired a political meaning in Sri Lanka, but these values have guided all our efforts.

One important impact of this process that we have observed is a radical transformation in attitudes and perceptions of many key people who were initially skeptical and only minimally supportive. It took months of discussions to achieve a consensus on the original "vision", but now we find many people referring to this automatically as the accepted reference point in terms of which other proposed changes are analyzed. Very large changes have therefore occurred in peoples' perceptions of the role of farmers' organizations, the necessity for reform of implementing agencies, and the involvement of the private sector. It is unfortunate, with hindsight, that we did not carry out a baseline survey which could then be replicated at the end of the two years to measure these changes.

But it is important to note that these benefits have come at a considerable cost as well. First, the whole process is very time-consuming. The papers can be written in a

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4. With apologies to Norman Uphoff (1986) who both personally and through his book with this title has been an important influence on our thinking.

relatively short time, but getting peoples' consensus and agreement, convincing people to accept new ideas, and accommodating contradictory views, take up much of our time and that of other participants. We are convinced this time is worthwhile, but it must be planned for from the beginning.

Second, in some cases it is likely that the policies and guidelines agreed upon are not "optimal" in the sense of being the ideal solution. A serious effort to reach consensus among people with a wide variety of interests and experiences necessarily involves compromise. At some points these must be accommodated -- and sometimes the compromise is actually an improvement over the original proposal; but often it is necessary to make a difficult choice between a "consensus" view, and the best professional judgement of specialists.

We do not wish to convey the impression that the "consensus" achieved is the lowest common denominator. The process of building consensus and agreement has been guided and directed by the IMPSA team, whose members are not at all neutral. Most of the team members, even on the IIMI side, have had a long involvement in research, testing and promoting management innovations and reforms in the irrigation sector, and have strong views based on years of practical experience as well as research.

We have often found the IMPAC members as well as the farmers' representatives are more consistently "radical" in their views than others involved in the process. This was the case for questions of empowerment of farmers' organizations for example. In other cases, particularly agency reforms and the roles of private enterprise, less than optimum solutions have sometimes been arrived at in order to avoid serious conflict that would endanger implementation at a later date.

4.2 Building on Past Experiences and Relationships

The previous decade of pilot projects and experiments has provided a firm basis for IMPSA's recommendations. IMPSA could not have been done ten or even five years ago effectively, because there was not sufficient experience. As important as the existence of this experience, has been that there has been a broad sharing of these experiences through written media, workshops, consultancies by people involved in more than one activity, and study visits. Further, in our consultations with farmers, we have drawn upon their rich experience both before and after the various pilot projects and experiments. The demonstrably constructive performance of farmers' organizations, even during the serious disturbances of 1988-1989 when government agencies were ineffective, has also been very important. We doubt this type of process would be successful without this firm foundation in experience.

Another important factor is that many of the people involved in IMPSA have had a continuous involvement in the experimental phase for a decade or more, and have developed close personal and working relationships. The Director of IMPSA has been a pioneer in

these efforts, and he and the Head of SLFO have known each other for many years. The Director of IMD was the Government Agent -- top administrative official -- overseeing the Gal Oya Project in the early 1980s. One member of the IMPSA Secretariat had been involved in the Gal Oya Project, while another worked as a research associate with IIMI in addition to his many years experience in the Irrigation Department. There are other examples. The fact of having a core group with a long involvement, and with close personal relationships has been an important factor in the smooth and relatively rapid progress of IMPSA, though we do not believe it is a necessary condition for success.

The policy changes and institutional transformations recommended are evolutionary in nature, rather than radical replacement of existing structures and approaches. This has been a deliberate decision: although one could make a strong case for radical reforms of the existing implementing agencies for example, we have chosen not to do so, as this would be inconsistent with the participatory and consensus-building philosophy of IMPSA, and in our view would lead to such strong antagonisms as to endanger achieving success in the long run.

This also means that implementation of the recommendations must also follow this same participatory approach. We have strongly recommended that agency reforms, for example, be implemented in a phased manner, with a large emphasis on getting the staff fully involved, i.e., making it a participatory learning process, with professional assistance, and a large amount of training and workshops to facilitate and guide the process.

4.3 Integration of Policy, Implementation Strategies, and Investment Program

IMPSA has tried to avoid development of "idealized" policies separately from implementation strategies and the realities of the government's and donors' investment plans. In part this has resulted from the inclusion of implementors in the IMPSA process itself, which has led to a healthy regard for past experiences of impractical policies being enunciated, and then disappearing from view. Thus, the policy and staff working papers not only set out policy objectives in terms of turnover of irrigation systems and subsystems to farmers' organizations, for example, but also propose a specific phased strategy for the actual institution-building and turnover process. IMPSA has co-sponsored a national workshop on investment strategies based on several different studies which had suggested somewhat different approaches, and has built the results of this workshop into a specific paper on how the government's investment plans can be used to achieve the objectives emerging from IMPSA. The IMPSA team has had a direct influence on two large donor-funded rehabilitation projects to ensure it is shaped in a way that would directly support policies that were then just emerging from the IMPSA process.

4.4 Involvement of Politicians

An important issue that must be faced is the role of the politicians in a process like IMPSA. Ultimately of course policy is a political decision, and politicians must make the final decisions. But they usually do not have the time or sometimes the background and experience to be able to contribute to the process from the earliest stages. Further, there is a long tradition in many countries, including Sri Lanka, of civil servants developing and proposing policy for the approval of the politicians.

In the case of IMPSA, the necessary political patronage was obtained by first briefing the relevant Ministers and obtaining their approval for the IMPSA process and its objectives. Thereafter, it is expected they would sponsor the new policy documents produced by IMPSA and steer them through the Cabinet of Ministers for formal approval. It is only then that the respective ministries will have the necessary authority to implement some of the major the recommendations contained in the policy papers.

It is too early to say whether we have addressed this issue as effectively as we could have. Aside from some direct interactions early in the process, we had depended on the civil servants on IMPAC to keep the politicians informed, and had assumed that they were doing so. Recently, however, we discovered this may not be the case. Another problem has been changes in Cabinet Ministers during the IMPSA process. At the moment a Cabinet Paper based on the first three Policy Papers is being considered by the politicians. As the policies being proposed are very consistent with overall Government policy, we anticipate no difficulties in obtaining concurrence and even active support. Later, some legislation will be proposed, at which time politicians will become more involved. And at some point it will be important to brief a wider group of politicians, to ensure their support. But it seems important to ensure that key politicians are informed and supportive of the process, though direct involvement may not necessarily be desirable.

4.5 Policy Development, Implementation and Monitoring

As noted above, IMPSA is proposing policy implementation strategies as well as overall policies. But IMPSA has no role in the actual implementation, nor does it have a role in monitoring the implementation process. It could be argued that IMPSA would be more effective if it were institutionalized as a longer term process, and were given a role in guiding and monitoring implementation. In this way, it could both ensure implementation and learn lessons from implementation that could be used to further refine and improve the policies.

IMPSA is a time-bound activity and the IMPSA team is outside of Government, so that the present structure could not easily be used in this way. One of the stated purposes of IMPSA, however, is to contribute to internalizing policy development and monitoring

capacity within the Ministries. Unfortunately, this directly contradicts another political imperative to reduce the size and role of government, and particularly of ministries. Therefore, we find that the concerned ministries have very little internal capacity for policy development and monitoring. For effective implementation of IMPSA's proposals in the long run, this capability will be required; but at present it is not clear how it will be developed. One possible alternative for the next few years may be to obtain donor funding to continue something like the IMPSA Secretariat, at least until such time as the major policy changes are well underway.

4.6 Need for Broad Agricultural Sector and Water Resource Policies

One impediment faced by IMPSA is that the Government at the moment has not developed and articulated its agricultural sector policy as a context for the irrigated agricultural sector policy. This has led IMPSA to move into issues that go far beyond irrigation issues at times, or to make assumptions about the likely policies particularly in relation to the private sector role. Based on our experience, we see that a clear broad agricultural sector policy should ideally precede development of a more specific policy for irrigated agriculture. The absence of such a broad policy has led to a few unavoidable disadvantages for IMPSA, but has not had too serious an impact.

Sri Lanka has not yet developed a water resources policy and planning capability, as until recently water appeared to be quite abundant and merely need to be captured, conveyed and distributed. An attempt to begin developing a water resources policy a decade ago made little progress precisely because the importance was not yet recognized by many people. But today the Government has recognized the need for re-examining its options in terms of future water resource development. IMPSA has contributed by developing a policy paper on water resources, and has also prepared the draft terms of reference for a water resources master planning exercise.

5.0 CONCLUDING REMARKS

5.1 General Observations

We are still implementing IMPSA, so it is too early to come to any firm conclusions. There is a lot of interest and excitement (and of course sometimes controversy) generated by the IMPSA process, and both the donor and the Ministry of Lands, Irrigation and Mahaweli Development have indicated great satisfaction at what has been achieved so far.

Although it is too early to arrive at definitive conclusions, even at this stage we are convinced of the usefulness and importance of the participatory nature of the methodology being used. IMPSA is clearly demonstrating the effectiveness of a consensus-building

approach to policy formulation, building on shared knowledge and lessons from a decade of experiences in irrigation management. Irrigated agriculture necessarily involves people, both as beneficiaries, and as policy makers and implementors. Hence the most appropriate strategy for policy formulation is a people-based approach in which all the interested parties participate actively. This will ensure not only that the resulting policies will be pragmatic and implementable, but also that there will be a high degree of acceptance, commitment and cooperation during their implementation.

The participatory nature of the IMPSA exercise has been the key element to the success achieved so far. Although its implementation is not an easy or smooth process, we believe that investment in getting the process right at this stage will result in a much smoother implementation process. The transformations envisioned under IMPSA are broad and wide-ranging, and will no doubt contribute much to achieving the new vision of a prosperous irrigated agricultural sector in the next decade and beyond.

5.2 Relevance to India

It is clear that the IMPSA program cannot be transferred directly to India. Some of the unique conditions characterizing the Sri Lanka situation obviously do not hold in India. Furthermore, most Indian readers would perhaps be struck by the differences in scale: 17 million versus 800 million population; 550,000 ha versus about 70 million ha of commanded area. Nevertheless we would argue that key elements and lessons from IMPSA are very relevant to India.

First, we would suggest that a process modeled upon IMPSA, but suitably adapted, might prove very useful in some of the Indian states. Irrigation is a state subject in India. It is at the State level that the key irrigation management agencies and the policy-making institutions that directly affect these agencies are located. Further, certain Indian states do have sufficient experience, including research and pilot programs, and experienced and dedicated personnel, to provide a basis for elaborating and reaching a consensus on strategies and policies to build upon these experiences. Another key factor would be a recognition by State policy-makers that a shift from emphasizing construction of new systems to increasing the emphasis on improving the performance of existing systems would bring greater returns. This may be more applicable to water short states.

Second, we suggest that at least some Indian states have an advantage in having more research institutions, and more nongovernment organizations carrying out innovative pilot programs than one finds in Sri Lanka. Third, India has recently begun a restructuring process that in the long run will have a profound impact in irrigated agriculture in addition to other social sectors. An IMPSA-like process would enable Indian states to take advantage of these change processes, and guide and direct a reform process systematically. This would be

greatly preferable to being forced to accept changes under pressure at a later date, for which people are not prepared.

India is facing very serious problems and choices in all sectors, of which irrigated agriculture is one of the most critical to her future. Present levels of returns to farmers, to government and to society from the past investments in irrigation are very low by world standards, and far below their potential. A process modeled on IMPSA could be immensely helpful in identifying the critical issues, building a consensus on the solutions most likely to help solve them, and beginning a long term process of building a dynamic, efficient, equitable, productive and sustainable irrigated agricultural sector.

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Annex

LIST OF IMPSA POLICY WORKING PAPERS

PWP 1:	Irrigated Agriculture and Irrigation Management in Sri Lanka: Vision for the Next Decade and Beyond.
PWP 2:	Institutional Framework for Management of Irrigation Systems and Building Farmer Organizations.
PWP 3:	Achieving High Performance in Irrigation Systems: Strategies for operation and maintenance, rehabilitation and modernization of irrigation systems.
PWP 4:	Modernizing the Irrigated Agricultural Sector: Transformations at the Macro-Institutional level.
PWP 5:	Achieving High Productivity in Irrigated Agriculture: A Programme for Research and Development for Technology Generation and Diffusion.
PWP 6:	Human Resources Development in the Irrigated Agricultural Sector: Achieving the Potential.
PWP 7:	Sustainable and Productive Resource Management: Macro Policies for Land and Water Resources.
PWP 8:	Promoting Profitable Irrigated Agriculture: Trade and Fiscal Policies affecting Irrigated Agriculture.
PWP 9:	Macro Irrigation Investment Policy Issues.
PWP 10:	A Programme for Modernizing Irrigated Agriculture and Irrigation Management. (Title to be decided by the IMPAC Working Group).