

Participatory irrigation management

- The term participatory irrigation management (PIM) refers to the participation of irrigation users, i.e., farmers, in the management of irrigation systems not merely at the tertiary level of management but spanning the entire system.
- Participation should not be construed as consultation alone. The concept of PIM refers to management by irrigation users at all levels of the system and in all aspects of management. This is the simplicity and flexibility of PIM.
- There can be different forms of participation at different levels in the system with varying degrees of accountability and responsibility.
- Management by irrigation users, rather than by a government agency, is often the best solution.
- Contrary to the traditional concept that irrigation management requires a strong public-sector role, the PIM approach starts with the assumption that the irrigation users themselves are best suited to manage their own water.
- "Participation in irrigation management involves a larger role for farmers, water groups, and other stakeholders.
- It may range from offering information and opinions during consultations, to fully enabling farmers to act as principal decision makers in all or most project activities.
- There have been increasing efforts to use participation in various forms to improve the quality, effectiveness, and sustainability of irrigation systems.
- This makes it important to learn what has and has not been achieved in efforts to improve participation in irrigation management.
- Farmers' participation in irrigation management is not entirely new to India. There is considerable evidence that farmers in pre-independence years had been involved in irrigation management in different parts of the country.
- The phad system of Nasik and Dhule districts and the Malgajari tanks of Chandrapur and Bhandara districts in Maharashtra, the Ahar-Pyne system of Bihar, the Kuhl system of H.P. and the Kudimaramath of Tamilnadu are some of the important examples of PIM under traditional irrigation.
- Vestiges of these practices still survive though these have become quite weak or even extinct with the passage of time.
- A few formal water users associations were also formed from time to time like the Vadakku Kodai Melazhahian Channel Land Holders Association in Tamilnadu in December 1959, Malinagar Irrigators' Water Cooperative Society in Maharashtra in 1967, Vaishali Area Small Farmers Association in Bihar in 1971, Mohini Water Cooperative Society in Gujarat in 1978.

- It may be said that since 1972, after the establishment of CADA, a large number of farmer organisations at the outlet level were formed under the CAD projects.
- These were variously described as pipe committees, outlet committees and WUAs. These, however, lacked authority and responsibility and, therefore, could not serve any useful purpose. Many of these became non-functional after some time.

