

# **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT (IN TERMS OF WUAS IN KYRGYZSTAN)**

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Present-day water resources management should be based on an integrated approach and participation of managerial agencies at different levels and from different sectors. Participation of users is necessary to establish realistic prices for water use and to implement water protection measures with maximum efficiency and effectiveness. The public should be informed of water resources quality and quantity as a water user and a partner in water resources protection.

Thus, integrated water resources management includes a substantial organizational component: preventing or settling conflicts through involvement of stakeholders in decision-making processes.

The basin approach and prevention of conflicts between various water users require complete participation of and cooperation between all the stakeholders. To reach a common agreement on to decisions made, it is necessary to involve not only governmental, local and municipal authorities, but also the private sector and public, and strive for a consensus. It would be much easier to implement a strategy and legal, administrative and technical actions under well-established consultation procedures.

The main objectives of the public participation in integrated water resources management are:

- to ensure use of the knowledge and experience of the public and other stakeholders in planning and management processes;
- guarantee identification of decision quality and adaptation to specific conditions;
- provide adequate planning and identification of problems while implementing decisions in practice;
- ensure consideration of public needs and priorities in making managerial decisions.

Basic principles of the public participation in integrated water resource management are:

- actively involvement of all the stakeholders and the general public, directly or indirectly;
- the process should be **open** and **transparent**, be conducted fairly and impartially, based on exchange of information, data and knowledge, using all appropriate information media; it is necessary to foresee certain conflicts and solve them;
- suitable mechanisms should be adapted to local conditions, problems and needs of all participants, focusing attention on reaching a consensus;
- participants should adopt a long-term vision on an acceptable condition of studied water body, watercourse or shore, recognizing the differences in their interests, working together and learning from each other;
- the participation should not only consist in solving problems, it is necessary to provide opportunities of **economic welfare** and **nature conservation**, compatible with broader acceptable development objectives.

The Kyrgyz Republic is admittedly a leader in the region in establishing Water User Associations (WUA), involving them in water resources management, and in governmental support to WUAs.

After achieving independence, Kyrgyzstan began implementing land reform. According to the decree No.23 of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, 22 February 1994, about the "Measures for land reform intensification", households earlier being governmental property were transferred to the ownership of peasants. Former collective and state farms were liquidated. Peasants received allotments. A part of peasants united in peasant (private) farms, agricultural cooperatives, but another part kept working independently. Under these conditions, irrigation network earlier belonging to former collective and state farms remained masterless. Instead of one water user, represented by collective or state farm with an average irrigated area of about 2,000 ha, 10 to 2000 water users exploiting a common irrigation network emerged. In such a situation, it was almost impossible to normally operate irrigation network and equitably allocate water. In the latter half of the 1990s, the Kyrgyz Government considered the development of WUAs as a potential solution to these problems. In this period, three independent grants were given by the ADB, FAO, and Japanese Government for developing pilot WUAs and studying international experience.

WUA is a voluntary union of farmers, peasant farms, and other water users for joint operation and maintenance of on-farm systems, regulation and use of water resources, meeting of irrigation water requirements of WUA members, carrying out of reclamation and environmental measures. Based on field data gathered by the staff of the "On-Farm Irrigation"

Project, it was revealed that 255 WUAs were formed (169 registered and 86 non-registered) in the republic. Unfortunately, almost all of them were set up without assistance, and, consequently, knew a little about functions of active involvement of farmer organizations. As a result, many of them held the old collective/state farm management system, and for the purpose of WUA management, often chose people that earlier worked in executive positions on former collective/state farms. Many of these managers began playing a dominant role in WUA that caused a number of serious problems regarding approach to development. Afterwards, WUAs applied to WUA support units at the Water Department for settling this situation.

At present, there are 409 WUAs in the Kyrgyz Republic. Under the project, a long-term strategy for WUA development in the country has been developed.

The long-term strategy for WUA development foresees:

- finishing the process of privatization of state water agencies and establishing, on their basis, systems of O&M enterprises with diverse patterns of ownership: governmental, private and joint;
- completing WUA formation, and their active participation in water system management and water resources protection;
- finally differentiating functions and powers of entities in water relations;
- limited participation of governmental bodies in maintenance at the expense of state budget, only O&M of strategically important water-management systems and facilities. Management and maintenance of the remaining part of water infrastructure is fully imposed on farmers or their unions.

With a view to develop water relations under market economy, the government is consecutively carrying out measures aimed at:

- adapting water users to market economy;
- supporting water users through allocating loans and grants, providing technical and methodical assistance, training and advanced training, providing information, helping to conduct construction, repair, renewal work, introducing new technologies and so on;
- supporting water user rights;
- stimulating establishment of water user associations (unions);
- reducing risks of water users in agricultural sector, through improving the insurance sector;
- gradually transferring the most basic assets of water-management systems to the ownership and jurisdiction of water users or their public unions.

The activities of water user associations (unions) are regulated by the effective Law on Water User Associations and subordinate acts developed in accordance with this Law.

According to the plan for implementing the "On-Farm Irrigation" Project, WUA support units, which after the completion of the project are to join the structure of basin and district departments for water resources, are being set up in 19 districts through project funds. Similar services are expected to be organized in other districts of the country in the future.

For operation and maintenance of on-farm irrigation infrastructure, about 500-600 WUAs able to voluntarily unite in Water User Federations are to be established in the republic.

### **Positive aspects of establishing Water User Associations**

Establishing and strengthening Water User Associations in the Kyrgyz Republic have a number of positive and negative aspects. Below we will consider such aspects existing in our republic.

#### **Positive aspects:**

- farmers and other water users participate in management of water resources, particularly in irrigation stock;
- farmers and other water users combine efforts and facilities for concerted actions aimed at effective water resources use in irrigated and reclaimed lands;
- farmers and other water users participate in setting charges for irrigation water supply;
- farmers and other water users participate through Water User Association and its structures in making water policies;
- farmers and other water users have complete control over irrigation infrastructure and right of possession;
- farmers and other water users have complete control over O&M, financing and resolving conflict situations;
- farmers and other water users bear prime responsibility for financing, O&M, rehabilitation and modernization;
- farmers and other water users themselves develop strategies and rules submitted for approval;
- openness of administration, operations and activities is achieved in Water User Associations;

- Water User Associations, as a new institutional structure in rural areas, began demonstrating their prospects and viability.
- All control bodies of Water User Associations are dependent and responsible to each other that means efficiency of top-down and bottom-up control.
- Each farmer participates in decision-making within WUA, raises its sense of responsibility for executing decisions made.
- Water User Associations show a good example of management to other types of local communities.
- Water User Associations are an initial stage of reform in water sector and in restructuring governmental management of water resources.

### **Conclusions on the implementation of the “On-Farm Irrigation” Project:**

- Thanks to the assistance of specialists from support units, the number of legally registered WUAs increased to 409 in comparison with the project start;
- Moreover, many of non-acting WUAs were newly established, some of relatively small WUAs in Chui and Jalal-Abad provinces voluntarily united in accordance with the new law. Average irrigated area serviced by one WUA is 1735 ha, and number of WUAs with irrigated area coverage of more than 2000 ha is 74.
- With the help of specialists and in accordance with the new law, a package of documents was prepared for re-registration of 310 acting associations, of them 301 were re-registered;
- Kick-off meetings on the “On-farm Irrigation” Project and development of WUAs were held with the participation of representatives from governmental, provincial, and district administrations, district department for agriculture, provincial and district centers for land reforms, provincial and district structures of the State Real Estate Inventory Agency, heads of rural councils, heads and members of WUAs in 7 provinces and 26 districts in the republic, where the participants of the meetings were familiarized with the essence of the project and necessity to establish WUAs. Furthermore, tens of workshops were held on the experience exchange between water user associations and the interactive communication. 7 training courses were provided at central level for specialists of provincial and district departments and representatives of some developed WUAs, for the purpose to train them as instructors for WUA staff.
- Training was started and is provided at local level for WUA Councils and Direction staff in districts, where personnel of about 100 WUAs is

covered. Moreover, consultative and practical assistance is rendered to all existing WUAs in the republic.

- Over the project implementation period, design estimates for irrigation infrastructure in 12 WUAs were made, rehabilitation work was completed in 1 WUA, and is undertaken in 24 WUAs, and design estimates for 12 viable WUAs were completed.
- 2 subordinate acts were prepared and signed by the Kyrgyz Government, and among them there is a Decision of the Kyrgyz Government on “Transfer of irrigation systems to the ownership of Water User Associations”.
- Office work was put in order in almost all acting WUAs, their offices were established.
- At present, the trust of farmers in management bodies of economically viable WUAs is rising.
- By now, reporting forms have been developed of National System for Monitoring and Assessment of Water User Associations (NSMA WUA) with output data per district, province and the republic. This system is now being improved.
- WUA Regulating Body that was stipulated in provisions of the Law on WUAs has started functioning in full (its functions are entrusted to the Department of Water Resources by the Decision of the Kyrgyz Government).

The involvement of the public in water resources management in the Kyrgyz Republic has other direction as well. Within the “Integrated Water Resources Management in Fergana Valley” Project, in pilot Aravan-Akbura canal in Osh province, a Canal Water Users Union (CWUU) was set up. The Board of Union includes representatives of water users and suppliers, governmental structures and others. At present, the issue on joint management of canal by water users and suppliers is being considered. A draft agreement on joint management is being developed. The CWUU is now involved in consideration of a cost estimate for canal management, in approval of a candidate for Head of Canal Administration and so on. As its financial contribution to canal maintenance increases, the CWUU will be given more rights to solving principal issues.

The experience regarding pilot canal is proposed to be spread to other structures in the republic. There are similar pilot canals in Tajikistan (Gulyakandoz Canal) and Uzbekistan (SFC), covered by the IWRM-Fergana Project as well.

The provisions in the Water Law envisage gradual increase of public participation in water resources management through Basin Councils.

All the above-mentioned is an illustrative example for public involvement in water management process, the next step to establishment of a

partnership between water managers and water users in joint management, use and maintenance of waterworks and water resources.