

OFFICIALS' RESPONSE TO THE ORGANIZATION OF WATER USERS ASSOCIATIONS UNDER THE WUA ORDINANCE 1981

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An Association under WUA Ordinance became a prerequisite for the renovation of watercourse. The study shows that the ordinance has not been considered very relevant by the water management officials who initiate the formation of an association. The legal type of authority established through a law like the WUA Ordinance has not effectively replaced the already existing traditional modes of decision making in a rural setting. This, therefore, leads to the poor functioning of the water users association organized so far.

INTRODUCTION

Mobilization of collective efforts are necessary for the rehabilitation and maintenance of a common watercourse which is shared by an average of fifty farmers (Lowdermilk *et al.*, 1975). The informal arrangements which had existed since the irrigation system was built in the Punjab had been unsuccessful because of the conspicuous deterioration of the water channels. Studies by Mirza (1975), Mirza and Merrey (1979), Merrey (1979) and Reuss *et al.* (1979) highlighted the need for a formal farmers' organization which could impose some legal sanctions for the defaulters to get the needful done. The government of the Punjab promulgated the water users associations ordinance in 1981. The ordinance was meant to ensure farmers' participation in the tasks related with a common watercourse. Its main features were:

1. The formation of a WUA is a prerequisite for starting any renovation work on a watercourse.
2. The association will be registered when the majority of the total number of

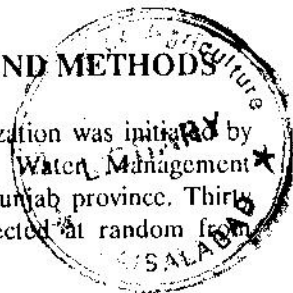
irrigators have agreed to improve their watercourse.

3. Once an association is formed, all the irrigators of the watercourse will be bound to participate in the renovation programme which requires manual labour.
4. Future maintenance of the improved watercourse will be the responsibility of the Association subject to such conditions as may be laid down by the Field Officer.
5. The leadership role will be played by the officers of the association duly elected by the irrigators from among themselves.

The objective of this paper is to report the reaction of the Officers of the on-Farm Water Management, who are held responsible for organizing water users associations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Farmer's organization was initiated by the officers of the Water Management Department in the Punjab province. Thirty six officers were selected at random from



different field teams in the Punjab. Personal interviews were held with these officers in their field offices. An interview schedule was prepared which contained mostly the open-ended questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

More than 50% of the officers admitted that the ordinance was not brought under discussion. Others who said that the ordinance was discussed with the farmers implied that just the agreement was signed to make the farmers understand that they were legally bound to provide labour and masonry charges and the department would be bound to provide them technical assistance and material for pucca structures (Table 1).

- fractional fire in the village community. Thus nominations were heavily relied upon.
- c. Even nominations against all positions were not possible because the selected few traditional leaders were considered enough to take decisions and in farmer's opinion the fewer they were, the quicker the decision making would be.
- d. Meetings at regular intervals were not held. Whenever general meetings were held, presence of majority of members (as per rules) was not cared.
- e. People looked towards the Chairman as if all the responsibility should be centered in him.
- f. As a net result the written agreement, signed by the farmers did not promote

Table 1. Officials' responses regarding education of farmers about the WAU ordinance before starting a WUA

	Number	Per cent
Total officials interviewed	36	100
Number of respondents discussing the ordinance with the farmers	16	44
Number of respondents who did not educate the farmers about WUA ordinance	20	56

Those who said that the ordinance was discussed or its contents conveyed to the farmers also realized that the requirements of the ordinance were not followed as required because:

- a. No bye-laws were ever framed by a water users association.
- b. Election of the office bearers through secret ballot seemed not to be feasible as it was likely to fan the flames of

democratic procedures for water management decision making at the levels of a common watercourse.

One-fourth of the officers interviewed thought that the agreement, inspite of its failure to lead to democratic procedures, developed confidence and better understanding between the farmers and the OFWM Officers with respect to a watercourse improvement task, as it definitely

made both parties feel secure and minimize risks of loss of efforts and of material resources (Table 2).

The officers felt that the ordinance did not have enough legal sanctions to deal with the factional tendencies among farmers. They had to intervene by using their personal influence by which the watercourse improvement work could be completed. The officers interpreted it as a built-in weakness of the law, as it provided them with no legal powers (Table 2).

jointly in their own interests for timely completion of the work.

In the opinion of the officers, the work could be carried out efficiently only if the law obligates the farmers to accept their orders. Otherwise, if personal influence of an officer gives way, he has to seek assistance from civil administration. Irrigation department can also be effective and seems more relevant but whenever requested, it has not given any response.

Table 2. Views of the respondents regarding effectiveness of the WUA ordinance

	Yes		No	
	Number	% of total	Number	% of total
Were the requirements of the ordinance followed as needed	16	44	20	56
Did the ordinance lead to democratic procedures	9	25	27	75
Did the ordinance develop confidence and better understanding between farmers and OFWM officials	9	25	27	75
Did the ordinance have enough legal sanctions to deal with factional tendencies among farmers	-	-	36	100
Does the ordinance provide legal powers to the officials	6	17	30	83

The agreement specifies roles for those holding positions in the executive committee, that they are responsible for day to day accomplishment. The responsibility is thus shifted from members in general to a selected few. The farmers through their committee (particularly the Chairman) and the OFWM field staff have to proceed

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