

## **REGIONAL ASSESSMENT - WATER USERS' ASSOCIATIONS IN THE SWIM-SM PARTNER COUNTRIES: IRRIGATION MANAGED BY THE FARMERS FOR THE FARMERS**

“Give your bread to the baker, even if he ate half of it” (Lebanese Proverb) how about if you get more from your bread? Giving the farmers independence in managing irrigation has shown tremendous improvements in management quality, water efficiency and infrastructure longevity over management by the government.

Water User Associations (WUAs) are farmers associations in charge of managing their irrigation water. Countries with operational WUAs have witnessed an improved use of water for irrigation and less conflicts and damage to the irrigation infrastructure.

The term Participatory Irrigation Management PIM refers to the participation of users – the farmers- in all aspects and levels of irrigation management. A more comprehensive variant of PIM is Irrigation Management Transfer (IMT) which is the full or partial transfer of responsibility and authority for the governance, management and financing of irrigation systems from the government to water users associations (WUAs) (Vermillion, 2005; Peter, 2004).

While Governments have been successful in raising the financial resources needed for the development of irrigation infrastructure, they have been less successful in creating an effective institutional and legal framework within which the infrastructure can be exploited in a sustainable manner.

Therefore, government-controlled irrigation systems often failed to achieve their development objectives in terms of irrigated areas, increases in productivity and poverty alleviation.

This reflected the facts that:

- Government managed irrigation systems tend to perform below their intended capacities;
- The financial and institutional resources needed to make Government-controlled irrigation systems sustainable have been beyond the capacities of most Governments to bear; and;
- Under Government managed irrigation systems, farmers lacked the motivation to make economic use of water due to a distorted perception of the true cost of water delivery, and often its unreliable nature (WASAMED, 2003).

SWIM-SM conducted an assessment to review the progress of PIM, identify the range of experiences and assess the status, achievements and challenges of the WUAs in the nine Partner Countries (PCs), draw lessons and opportunities for improvement.

From the report, one can understand, that different countries are at different levels of advancements of WUA. In some countries, associations are fully operational. In others, national policy stipulates the transfer of irrigation to farmers but implementation is faced by constraints and still underway.

In depth assessments carried out in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia also display the diversity of experiences.

Consequent to the above, the document identifies options for improvement and sustainability of Water Users Association's, such as:

- Institutional development and enhancement
- Improved design through participation
- A clearer legal status
- An adaptive continuous monitoring and evaluation system
- Increased financial support for WUAs
- Systematic public awareness campaigns and capacity building
- Develop and strengthen federations of WUAs

The final conclusion of this report is that the irrigation sector needs reform. When irrigation water use is 80% of the total water budget of the country, this sector cannot be disregarded. Water user associations can function properly, and farmers can take the responsibility and improve irrigation management.

For the full report [click here](#)