



# Participative approach in water resources management in Lebanon

Insights from the field, challenges  
and opportunities

Dr. Marie-Helene Nassif,  
Researcher in Water Governance and Policies,  
IWMI Consultant

# Context of adopting IWRM and Participative Approach in the Lebanese Water Sector

- Water sector development is highly reliant on external funds and donors. Increasing influence with government indebtedness and need of external donors
- International policies and paradigms highly influence Lebanese national strategies and policies
  - Water Sector Reform (Law 221) and its principles was guided by the World Bank
  - National Water Sector Strategy (2010) supported by a plethora of organizations
  - Update of NWSS (2020) funded by UNICEF
  - Bekaa Water Establishment Master Plan (2014; 2019): funded by USAID
  - Code de l'Eau guided by Agence Francaise du Developpement (AFD) and Water Users Association Law first saw the light under a UNDP project (2010)

# Participatory policies in national strategies and projects

- First mention of IWRM and Water Users Associations in late 1990's (10 years strategy of MEW 2000-2010).
- National Water Sector Strategy (2010): clearly states the objective of creating WUAs and transferring to them the management of public irrigation systems.
- First Draft law: 2010-2012 (Ibrahim Abd El Al Foundation, Litani River Authority and UNDP)
- Many projects promoted this policy and several tried to put this policy into practice:
  - ADELNORD, 2011 (North Lebanon Water Establishment)
  - SWIM-EU, 2012
  - UNDP (2009-2012): Canal 800 area (Marjeyoun), ongoing state irrigation system
  - IRWA, ISIIMM, LRBMS (USAID): Canal 900, existing state irrigation system (South-Bekaa)

# What is the result on the ground?

- Example of 3 attempts to form Water Users Associations in Canal 900 Irrigation system

IRWA-EU  
2003-2009

ISIIMM-EU  
MEDA  
2006-2008

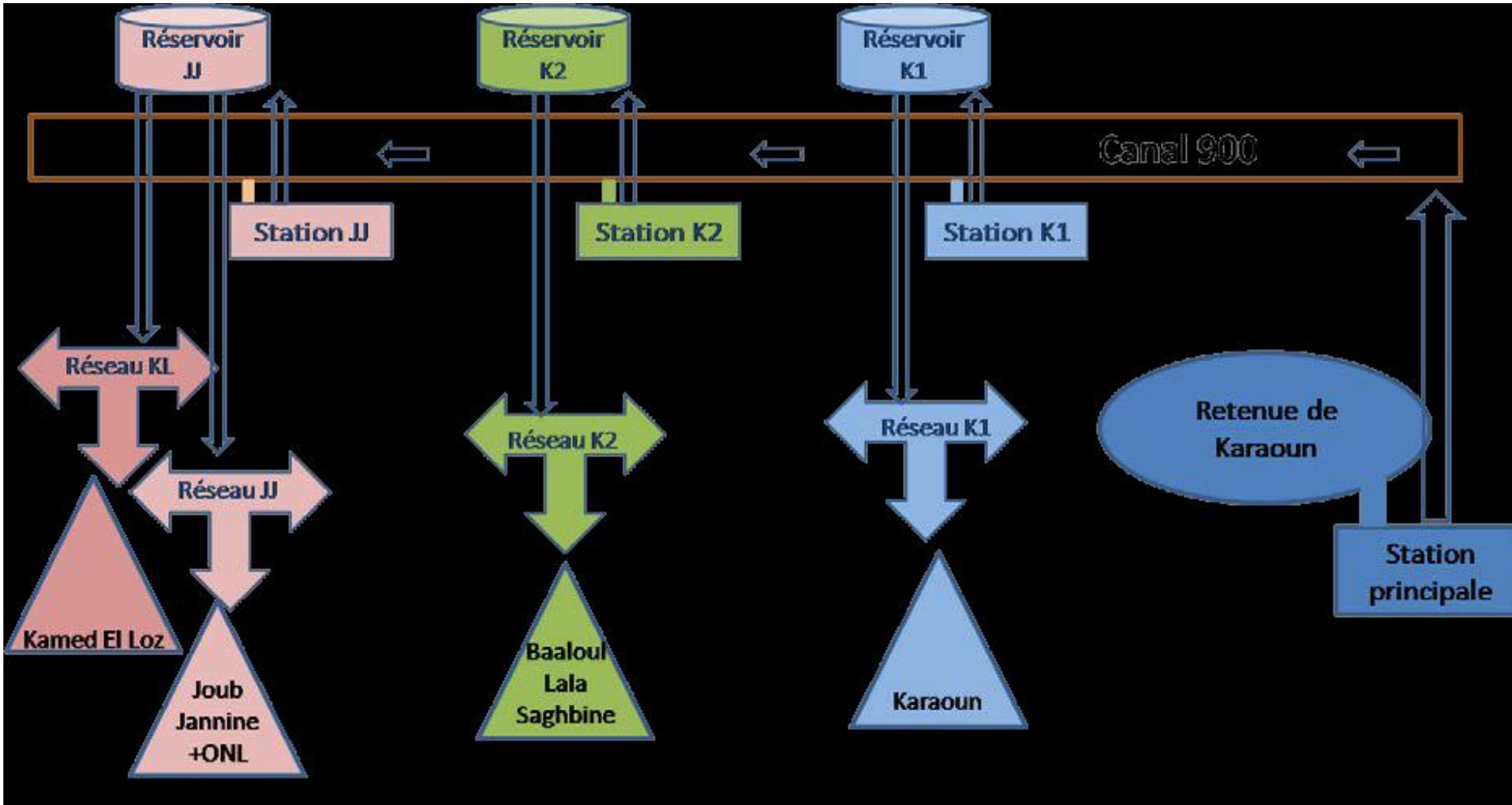
LRBMS-USAID  
2009-2014



Canal 900 Irrigation system (2000 ha), managed by the Litani River Authority, around 300 farmers







Very sophisticated system but many technical problems:

- Farmers unsatisfied from water allocation/ quantities
- Time of start of irrigation
- Other management issues

# IRWA Initiative

## The project

- Funded Agricultural Coop
- Involve farmers in decision-making around the management of Canal 900 Irrigation system
- Study tours to international WUAs in France, Morocco, and other

## Outcomes

- Farmers had several meetings
- But coop Dissolved after few years
- Conflicts around distribution of agricultural material

# What went wrong?

- Project approach and process of forming the coop
  - Coop President: local leader but not a farmer
  - Farmers did not represent the five villages and not all socio-economic categories were represented: mainly large farmers, close to the president
  - Scale of intervention: totality of the irrigation system while each network had its own problem



# ISIIMM

## The project

- Built on the same farmers committee constituted by IRWA.
- Created a legal framework for WUA
- Capacity building
- Visit to WUAs in France, Morocco, and other

## Outcomes

- According to ISIIMM: farmers were active and interested
- But they also stopped meeting by the end of the project

# What went wrong (again)?

- Project approach and process of forming the coop
  - Coop President: local leader but not a farmer
  - Farmers did not represent the five villages and not all socio-economic categories
  - Scale: totality of the irrigation system while each network had its own problem
- Position of governmental stakeholder
  - Participation not well accepted by the Irrigation system management
  - Initiative led by the Rural Development Department
  - LRA Reluctant to involve farmers, did not provide adequate logistics and follow up

# LRBMS

## The project

- Improved approach based on previous experience
- Work directly with Irrigation Department (Irrigation System manager) and involvement of LRA High Administration
- Agreement on list of objectives with the farmers
- Extensive meetings and local elections by farmers
- LRA took farmers on a tour to inspect pumping stations and operation process
- Identification of different socio-economic categories and specific problems to each network
- Clear goals: work on water allocation mechanisms

## Outcomes

- Better participation and representativeness of farmers
- Several meetings between farmers committee and LRA administration
- Last year of the project, farmers committee did not reach the goals requested from LRA





# What went wrong (and again)?

Despite the improved project approach and process of forming the farmers committee

- Position of governmental stakeholder
  - LRA did not implement what was agreed upon (warkat al tafahom)
  - Example: irrigation did not start earlier (to save cost)
  - Chief engineer did not trust farmers (illegal tapping in network)
- Farmers' level
  - Political divisions acted as an impediment
  - Socio-economic differences was also a barrier (educated farmers/ vs non educated)
  - Power relations and local hierarchies did not allow for more equity in water allocation

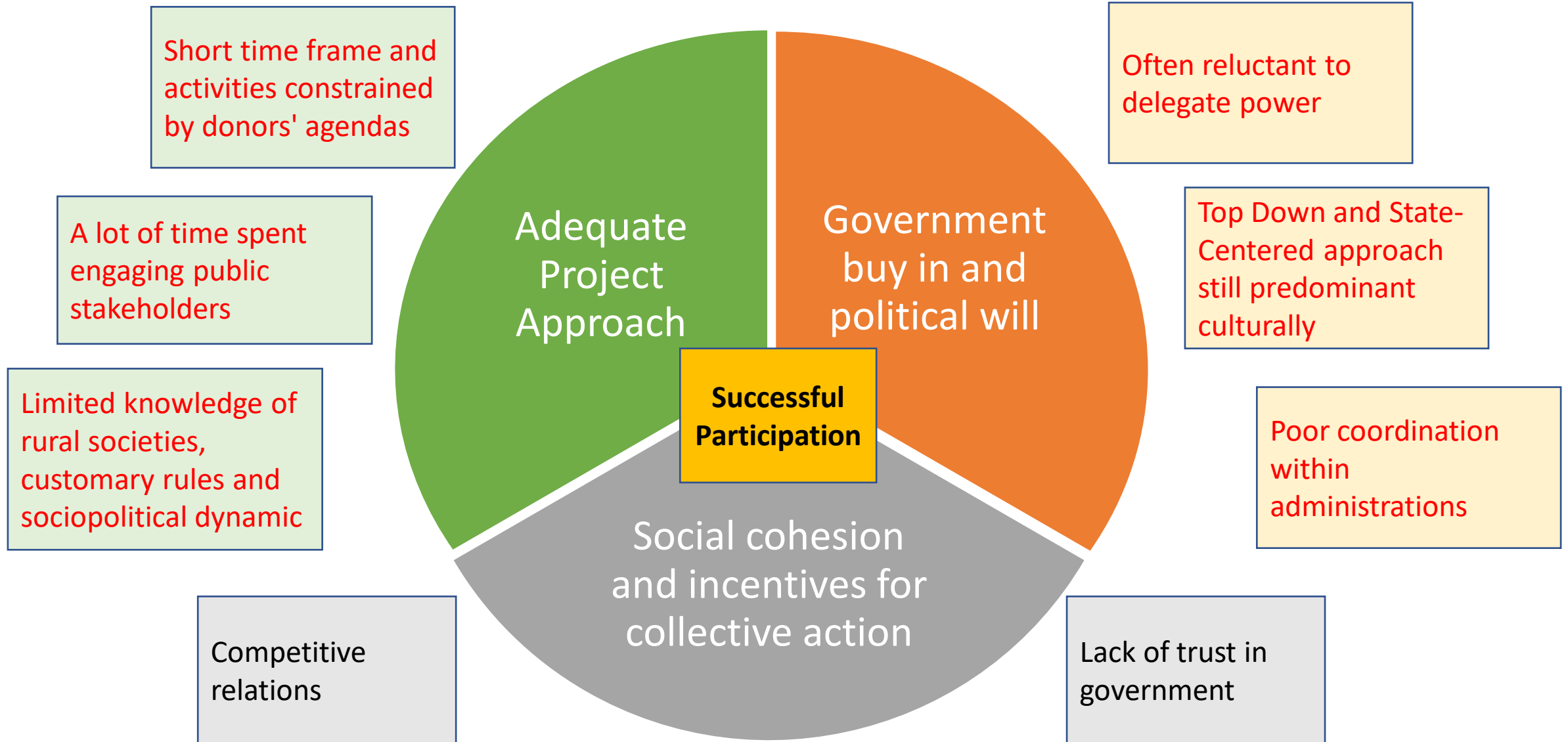
# Conclusions

## Participation is a complex endeavor: many social drivers must coexist



# Conclusions

## Successful participation proves to be difficult in the Lebanese case



## Opportunities and Recommendations

- Many initiatives around participation from which we must draw lessons
- Participation is slowly finding its way into decision-making practice and challenging Top Down approaches
- Research and academia should play a role in documenting these processes and assessing them
- Projects should start by setting realistic goals for participation and ensure minimum buy-in of decision-makers before engaging in the process
- It is long and complex process which requires research, budget, expertise and time and might not be possible
- Participation is essentially a political practice since it implies decision-making/power-redistribution. It cannot happen without challenging and questioning status-quo and existing power dynamics.