Participative approach in water resources management in Lebanon

Insights from the field, challenges and opportunities

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

• Position of governmental stakeholder
  o Participation not well accepted by the Irrigation system management
  o Initiative led by the Rural Development Department
  o LRA Reluctant to involve farmers, did not provide adequate logistics and follow up
The project

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

- Researched and aware of social specificities and dynamics
- Setting specific and realistic goals agreed upon with decision-makers
- Using appropriate expertise and methods
- Existing links and areas of collaboration
- Adequate Project Approach
- Successful Participation
- Social cohesion and incentives for collective action
- Government buy in and political will
- Full engagement and support in the process
- Integrity, transparence, internal coordination
- Trust in decision-makers intentions
- Willingness to involve farmers in decision-making process
Conclusions

Successful participation proves to be difficult in the Lebanese case

Adequate Project Approach

- Short time frame and activities constrained by donors' agendas
- A lot of time spent engaging public stakeholders
- Limited knowledge of rural societies, customary rules and sociopolitical dynamic

Successful Participation

Government buy in and political will

- Often reluctant to delegate power
- Top Down and State-Centered approach still predominant culturally
- Poor coordination within administrations

Social cohesion and incentives for collective action

- Competitive relations
- Lack of trust in government
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.