

# Community Empowerment and Participation: Bridging the gap between discourses and practices



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# Context: small scale irrigation projects in five countries

- **High rate of “technical failure”**

Causes identified: lack of technical capacity, lack of supervision during construction

- **Low sustainability of water user groups**

Causes identified: lack of institutional arrangements and ownership of the community



# Reframing problems

- Lack of downward accountability to ‘beneficiaries’
- Poor involvement of the ‘beneficiaries’ in decision-making process
- Poor integration of local knowledge and customary institutions



# Improving community engagement

- Project staff directly interacting with project beneficiaries
- Building capacity
- Changing behaviours and daily working practices



# Discourses and practices on community engagement

- Empowerment, participation, equity, rights-based approach
- Vague, can embrace multiple meanings
- Lost their original political content
- Still can serve as a common ground for action and as a bridge between social activists, NGOs and bureaucrats



# Three principles

- Experiential process: learning by doing
- Appreciative approach
- Involving 'beneficiaries' in analysis, planning and decision-making



# Content

- Five days, including three in the field
- Introduction, understanding methods
- Interacting with a community on a real problem and coming up with plan
- Assessment of the training and follow-up



Activity	Where	Who?
PRA methods Case study role play	Classroom	Trainees
Authority briefing	District HQ	Trainees, District authorities
Community meeting	Village	Trainees, Community
System walk through Interviews	Village	Trainees, Community
Participation in the project cycle	Village	Trainees
Analysis using PRA	Village	Trainees, Community
Design Discussion	Village	Trainees, Community
Community consultation	Village	Trainees, Community
Training Assessment / Follow-up	Classroom	Trainees



# Lessons

- Be modest on the number of activities
- Include session to build interviewing skills
- Take into account the expectations and time constraints of the community
- Connect training experience with project realities



# Beyond building skills...

- Making people from different disciplines work together
- Demonstrating that an irrigation system is not an infrastructure but a complex social-ecological system
- Initiating reflections and dialogue among project staff on project constraints and opportunities



# Thank you!



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