PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT IN IRRIGATION PROJECTS: THE UN ISHE EXPERIMENT IN SRI LANKA

by

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PART I

The concern with improving the management of irrigation systems is of recent origin Still more recent is the realization that beneficiary involvement in irrigation management is something desirable. The change in attitude in an earlier era was largely influenced by an egalitarian and populist ideology which demanded that decision-making authority be transferred from the bureaucracy to the farming community (e.g. the Cultivation Committee under the Paddy Lands Act of 1958). In more recent times. the overriding consideration has been, on the one hand, the escalating costs of operation and maintenance of irrigation works, whilst on the other, the progressive scaling down of the budgetary allocations for such works.

The challenge had to be faced by effecting major organisational changes and policy shifts. These changes stipulate that the cost burden which had hitherto been borne by government alone, be shared with the beneficiaries, and therefore irrigation management, previously an exclusive concern of officials, be also shared with the farmers. Even voluntary agencies were brought into the arena. Thus beneficiary participation in irrigation management, which once was an end in itself, has now become the means.

Today, participation bas become the concern of the many. It is best to remember that "....participation can refer to many different things, not all of which are relevant or desirable in any specific project context. Overly enthusiastic arid uncritical advocates of participation have impeded its extension as much as have its adversaries. Social research has arrived at a stage at which it is possible to be more precise about participation" (Uphoff 1985). Therefore, it becomes necessary to distinguish between types and degrees of participation as well as between different forms of participatory management.

The intent of this paper is to draw attention to a few recent approaches to participatory irrigation nianagcmcnt in Sri Lanka, and whilst doing so to present the results of social research and related writings bearing on the subject.

One could view beneficiary participation as the combined effect of several factors:

1. Macro-policies of which the key instruments such as price policy or marketing policy either favour participation or not;

2. Technology which favours or discourages employment creation, income distribution, and is made available to the few or the many, due to costs and complexity;

3. institutions which are by the very nature popular or bureaucratic, pro-rich or pro-poor, urban-biased or rural biased.

However, in this paper, 1 propose to deal largely with the institutional factor, for that remains to be fully explored, due to the variability in the sociocultural settings across countries and within the same country. Even here I am tempted to select one administrative district in Sri Lanka, wherein a number of noteworthy approaches to participatory irrigation management have recently been experimented with.

"Axioms" of Participation

Participation by the local community is today taken as a defining feature of community development. However, confusion remains as to whether all community members or only select target groups need to participate.

The sponsoring agency could be either indigenous or exogenous. In Sri Lanka, most projects have been sponsored by an outside agency; even those initiated by local officers would more correctly be called exogenous efforts. In

evaluating these projects, it is best to postulate the principles of community participation against which the empirical experience will be matched. Emrich (1979) has suggested the following "axioms" of participation:

1. Participation must begin at the *very lowest*, and must offer opportunities for the *poor* to be involved in decision making;

2. Participation must take place at all stages of the development process, from pre-planning, plan design and implementation to monitoring and evaluation;

3. Participation must be by groups and not by individual members;

4. Participatory process must deal with the allocation and control of goods and services:

5. Participation will cause conflicts in some form, and suitable machinery to resolve them must he found.

In this model the focus is on the weakest sections and require their empowerment. Hence the approach is confrontational rather than consensual.

Recent Experiments

The management of irrigation schemes, meaning the season to season operation of the system for water distribution and its on-farm use as well as the periodic maintenance of the physical apparatus, is a crucial area of water user participation. In Sri Lanka, during the last decade and a half, several different experiments were launched in which the central focus was on the involvement of the water-users in irrigation management. Kurunegala district is one area that carries representative types of these various experiments, and further, where the activities in most experiments have been documented.

These several experiments in the Kurunegala district can be presented in the following typology, with examples of each type.

The distinction between a major and minor irrigation work reflects both a statutory prescription and an institutional arrangement. A minor scheme is one which commands a cultivated area of less than 200 acres. Socially too, this distinction is important. A minor scheme is always a village tank where the land-owners and cultivators under it are closely related as kinsmen, fellow-citizens, and residential neighbours, who have developed as a community over a long period. On the other hand, the major schemes, are those that were recently

TABLE 1: Irrigation Project Experiment in the Kurunegala District

Size	Sponsoring Agency	
	Government	N.G.O.
Village Tank	1. IRDP Tanks (DAS)	1. Kelegama (Marga Institute)
	2. Wew Sabhas (NFFHC)	2. Tank Restoration (National Heritage Movement)
Major Tanks	1. Kimbulvana Oya Project (Irrig.Dept.)	1. Kimbulvana Oya Project (IHAP Project)
	2. Hakwatuna oya INMAS project (IMD)	2. Small Farmer Development Association (FAO/ARTI)

renovated or constructed by government. Especially in the case of large schemes of over 2000 acres or so, where the majority of the cultivators are introduced to the area as new settlers, and where community formation and collective spirit in these new settlements or colonization schemes, are less evident due to dispersed residences, heterogeneity of social and geo-cultural origins, and an absence of long-standing historical traditions. These contrasting historical origins as well as the present circumstances therefore, are relevant factors which influence community participation by villagers and colonists.

The type of agency which initiated and concucted the management experiment is also an important factor bearing on the nature of participatory management. The broad distinction here is between government officials and non-government agencies. Government officials have got involved due to two reasons: one is where democratic idealism has motivated certain officials to begin innovative management systems, where such experimentation was tolerated by the establishment (e.g. at Kimbulvana oy a Technical Officer and at Minipe by a Deputy Director, both of the Irrigation Department, and a little earlier by the Turnout Groups of the Mahaweli H area initiated by officers at headquarters and project level). The other reason is the project officials' compliance with a government policy requiring the involvement of farmers through some kind of grass-roots organisation. Must such projects are foreign funded and the donors have insisted on mechanisms for beneficiary participation in the decision-making process.

For most NGOs, popular participation was a compelling ideological commitment combined with a search for either indigenous technology or preservation of a heritage or the promotion of self-reliant rural community development. Improved irrigation management was only part of a comprehensive rural development strategy that the NGO's pursued.

The selected experiments in the Kurunegala district will be briefly examined in this short paper, in the hope that it will yield insights into various styles of irrigation management in Sri Lanka, which in turn should provide useful guidelines for policy orientation and for working out implementation strategies.

PART II

Village Tank Restoration under the Integrated Rural Development Programme (KIRDP)

Agriculture Department's researchers developed what was popularized as the Walagamhuhuwa concept, with two essential features: (a) changing the farmers' habit of beginning cultivation only after the tank is full with Maha rains (at Walgambahuwa, sowing was done early with the onset of rains, thus saving tank water); (b) Adopting a short-age (three to three and half months) variety as against the customary four-to-five-months variety of paddy.

As a result, farmers adopted improved rice technology, and were able to increase rice yields and expand the acreage cultivated because of saving on water (Sikurajapathy et al. 1980).

Even before the research at Walagambahuwa was finalized, it's tentative results were adopted to frame the model for the rehabilitated minor tanks under the KIRDP. The results of its application in the first 10 village tanks are examined by Gunewardene (1981). The model required (a) the controlled issue of tank water, **(b)** dry sowing of the crop early in the season to capture the rains, (c) adoption of certain improved managenent practices which entailed purchased inputs such as weedicides and fertilizer for weed control.

For the purpose of water management, extension workers (KVS) of the Agriculture Department were newly appointed, one for each tank. The **KVS** took all the decisions regarding water management. "There was little participation of farmers in the water management activities. Participation was largely limited to the KVSs working with few farmers (usually good farmers from an extension point of view, often contact farmers were included). In certain instances even the kanna meetings were not involved. However, it was found that the KVSs to a large extent were able to achieve what they desired (as far as control of water is concerned) through these means ... . The success of this approach is less likely when farmer numbers are greater and when conditions are more complex" (Cunawardene 1981). The few recorded instances of farmer participation at meetings of the management project, were, occasions when they made useful suggestions as well as castigated the authorities for many defects in physical structures as well as for irregularities in water distribution.

Wew-Sabhas under the National Freedom from Hunger Campaign (NFFHC)

The NFFHC programme of small tank *(wewa)* restoration seems to be the most successful attempt in procuring community participation. Indeed, community participation, community management and local self-reliance are the major planks of the NFFHC's philosophy and they guided project activities from beginning to end (Katnatunga 1982).

In the NFFHC programme, community participation is reportedly very high. (Richards 1983; Howes 1984) The initiative in the identification of an abandoned tank to he restored or an existing tank to he improved came from the interested village community. The NFFHC helped with guidance and technical investigation and information. Once a tank was included for restoration, the local community was required to form themselves into a ***wew-sabha*** (reservoir canal) and to elect a *wew-lekam* (Reservoir Secretary).

The wew-sabha was required to start its own maintenance fund with contributions from the membership, which amounted to a small sum equivalent to the value of a season's seed paddy. The monies were kept in a deposit account with the local bank. Matching contributions were madt: into the fund by the NFFHC. The operation and control of this fund was left in the hands of the wew-sabha.

Another strategy adopted to increase local self-reliance was to develop some simple technical and managerial skills within the community. The wew-sabha Secretary and others were exposed to seminars and training classes where they were able to discover and develop organisational capacities among themselves. The construction work required some technica. knowledge. Were the wew-sabhas to expect them from the government officials, there would be considerable delay and over-dependence on the hureaucracy. To overcome the possibility of delay as well as to make such skills available within the community itself, the NFFHC selected educated unemployed youths and arranged for their technical training. Even certain survey instruments were niodified and simplified so that they could be used by these village youths.

By insisting on and helping develop the community's own maintenance fund, its own wew-sabha organisation, and its own trained personnel, NFFHC has laid the groundwork for local self-reliance and project sustainability. The smallness in the size **of** tank and its community, as well as the smallness in the scale of operation were no doubt contributory factors.

The Kelegama Project of the MARGA Institute

MARGA Institute's interest in irrigation manngement is a by product of it's

wide-ranging research into forms and varieties of indigenous technology. The persistence of traditional agricultural methods and irrigation practices in the face of a demanding modern paddy cultivation clearly demonstrated the strength of tradition and the adaptiveness of indigenous technology. MARGA researchers focussed on these aspects and launched, what is called, an action-research programme. The Kelegama village in Kurunegala District was selected as the locale for the experimentation (Fernando and Gunasekera 1982).

The main features of the Kelegama project which are of immediate concern to irrigation management, follow:

1. MARGA placed one of its employees as a resident researcher who also functioned as a educator and catalyst. Me was backed by other specialists from MAKGA headquarters, who visited the village from time to time.

2. MARGA researcher and specialists, assisted the village citizens to identify the agricultural problems and to design an action-plan to overcome them.

3. Local resources wcrc taken to mean more than the cash/materials contributions and free labour, usually denoted by that term. Already existing, stable social networks and their leaderships, the folk knowledge and technical competence possessed by the village citizens were also treated as equally important local resources.

4. To implement the project, no new organisation was created, but existing networks and leadership were mobilized. In other words, water management was not treated as a separate and distinct activity, but as one of the many activities which make up the tota ity of community life.

5. External funding was kept to a minimum, and in fact was negligible. The total direct cash contribution from MARGA was a mere Rs. 68/- for a steel gate. The government contributions were nil. Most construction materials were purchased with funds raised by the community, and that too did not amount to much.

The project resulted in an equitable distribution of water, and the cultivation of certain fields, which hitherto had remained abandoned.

Village Tank Restoration by the National Heritage Movement (NHM)

The philosophy of the National Heritags is grounded on the desirability of resuscitating the traditional and organic links between village, temple, and tank. The tank restoration executed by the NHM represents its most cogent

demonstration of the "ideas-in-action" programme. A series of village tanks in Devamedi Hatpattu of Kurunegala District was taken up for restoration or improvement in 1976. The NHM sent trained volunteers who, together with the Buddhist priest of the village as the leader, prepared the people for the programme. The priest took the position of an overall programme leader in organizing voluntary labour and the cultivation programme assisted by the village elders. Collective action in water management resulted in achieving higher paddy yields, almost double that of previous years, as well as expanded acreage.

Heavy emphasis was placed on the social and cultural aspects that existed as part of the strategy for economic advancement. For this purpose, old and forgotten rituals were revived. For example, at Madulla village, ihe priest revived the custom of commencing work at an "auspicious time" for which the help of astrology was enlisted. This made it necessary that **all** farmers should start cultivation work at the same time, and hence a certain discipline, which was not earlier evident, was brought about in the farmers, so that they kept to a given and agreed cultivation calendar. Similarly, resuscitating what is claimed to be an ancient ritual, the *alut-pen-vedima* (offering of the new water from the tank to the village temple), and the associated organisation of the people of the same village and those of the neighbouring village for the conduct of the ritual, generated an atmosphere of unity and fellow-feeling and inspired many collective activities.

Ratnapala (1976) has documented a succersful attempt to revive socio-cultural traditions and to mobilize local religious leadership for irrigation development and its orderly management. Unfortunately, the study was completed a mere one year after the programme was launched, without follow-up, so that questions regarding the continuity and sustainahility of the innovation are left unanswered.

The exercise in renovating village tanks is, however, a useful one, in its tenacious pursuit of idealism. "National Heritage believes it is possible to demonstrate that an existing heritage shared by a people can be used as a set of organizing principles around which they can come together and solve their problems with little expense other than to themselves. Such a demonstration, if accepted as valid, will obviate the need for much foreign assistance and will allow greater precision in the pinpointing of specific needs for information, goods, and services to make lives that they deem desirable" (Moles and Riker 1984).

Kimbulwana Oya Water Management Project of the Irrigation Department

Kimhulwana Oya scheme, commanding an irrigable extent of 1,650 acres is

a medium-sized scheme for which the Irrigation Department is responsible. Following a substantial rehabilitation funded by the World Bank-financed KIRDP, the Irrigation Department officials (Irrigation Engineer and Technical Assistant ((TA)) began the difficult task of bringing order into the chaos that prevailed in regard to water distribution. With the transfer out of the Irrigation Engineer, it fell to the lot of the TA to undertake the bulk of the work.

By this time, the Irrigation Department, hacked by its Water Management Division, has experience in a rotational distribution system, and in organizing farmers to help in operating that system, and in the initial experiments at Hakwatunaoya and Vannikulam, followed by Rajangana, in the mid-1970s (Shanmugarajah 1976). It is natural, therefore, that Kimbulwana Scheme too was modelled on these early experiments.

At the helm of affairs in Kimbulwaua, is the Technical Officer, who presides over a Water Management Committee which meets regularly once a week. The Committee consists of local officials and the *Vel* ***Vidane,*** the elected farmer representatives. The water management system imposed by the TA is understandably functioning efficiently. Its efficiency is demonstrated by three activities.

First, maximizing the use of available water, including rainfall. This is done by imposing water conservation measures such as making use of rainfall, and hence advancing cultivation schedules; issuing the minimum amount of water required for cultivation operations; avoiding water loss by proper maintenance of the entire hydraulic system: and by enforcing a strict rotational water issue schedule.

Second, reducing disputes within the farming community. This was done primarily by ensuring that water deliveries were made on due time and in sufficient quantity, by ensuring impartiality in applying sanctions against offenders, and by these means, building confidence in the officials.

Third, providing water for all categories of farmers including those who are deemed to be encroachers, and hence with no legal right to water (Weeramunda 1985).

In applying a generalized, stereo-typed model that developed in the Irrigation Department, there was evident a great deal of imagination, innovation, and adaptiveness in the way the TA set about his tasks. Though this experiment will hardly be treated as a participatory approach, it is a successful example of the imposition of good water management.

Kimbulwana Oya Project: the Irrigation Component of the IHAP Programme

The International Human Assistance Programme (IHAP) launched a community development project at Kimbulwana Oya settlement, with funding largely from USAID. One of its major components was the construction of new irrigation facilities to benefit 32 farmers and 40 acres.

The irrigation development under the IHAP was relatively small indeed. The designing was done by the Technical Assistant (TA) of the Irrigation Department, the construction financed by the IHAP and the labour contributed by beneficiaries. The management of the new facilities was thereafter transferred to the Kimhulwana Oya Water Management Project headed by the TA.

Whilst the government-sponsored water inanagement exercise in the settlement was confined to the improvement and intensification of paddy cultivation, the IHAP project sought to promote crop (diversification. The **IHAP** project included roads, community Centers, library nursery schools and children's feeding programme, skills training fur non-farm employment, agricultural support activities such as supply of equipment, home-girden competition, extension service, and a credit programme for agriculture diversification. To orchestrate affairs, IHAP had a residential full-time project manager and a staff.

Though there were short-comings in the delivery of these community services and in the mobilization of popular participation, the IHAP approach was eclectic, both in terms of the variety of activities undertaken as well as the range of beneficiary groups convened. Especially noteworthy was the rural credit scheme, founded by **IHAP** initially, but operated quite successfully by the settlers own Co-operative Credit and Thrift Society (Wimaladharma and Bryan 1985). The IHAP project thus had the potential to complement and support the government sponsored water managcrnent project. But the two were at cross-purposes, one promoting crop diversification and the other continuing paddy cultivation. The links that should have been forged between the NGO project and government project were almost non-existent, and the policies that guided them were in conflict with each other. Both failed to promote local participation (largely due to the dominance and officious personalities of the Project Manager and TA) and also failed to recognize the potential of a fairly well established local institution, such as the Co-operative Crecit and Thrift Society, to develop into a powerful instrument for socio-economic growth in the settlement.

Hakvatuna Oya Water Management Project

Three successive exercises in improving water management were carried

out in Hakwatuna Oya Scheme, which is a major irrigation system. The first, in mid-1970s, was launched by the Irrigation Department's Water Management Division. After certain studies into water availability, systems improvement, conveyance efficiencies, etc., a rotational issue system was tried out by the officials. The involvement of the water-users in the experiment was taken for granted. Therefore, no attempt was made to experiment with a suitable institutional device, The second, in late 1979-80, was initiated by the Lands Ministry's Water Management Division. This organized the farmers into Water Committees with a part-time Project Manager at the apex. The third followed the current management system which is part of a national system instituted by the Irrigation Management Division (IMD) of the Lands Ministry. It seeks to consolidate the experience of the immediately preceding experiment and to institutionalize the Water Management Committee.

Hakwatuna Oya is one of 50 major schemes included in the Integrated Management of Settlement (INMAS), which is a comprehensive programme for agriculture and socio-economic development of the settlement-cum-irrigation projects, However, the initial phase of INMAS, concentrates only on the water management and agricultural production aspects. The main features of this phase of INMAS are:

1. The adoption of a project approach to management of the settlements' irrigation distribution, maintenance of the physical system and agricultural production. The several field officers of the line departments are brought together into a Management Committee, headed by a full-time resident Project manager appointed by the IMD.

2. The organising of water-user farmers at the Field Channel, D Channel, and Project levels in a serried hierarchy of committees comprising elected farmer representatives and field officers. These groups will be involved in decision-making at the respective level in water distribution, canal maintenance, and production programming.

3. The provision that farmers pay for maintenance works into a separate fund, thus, giving a voice to the Farmer Committee in the decisions regarding the utilization of funds.

The experience in the two earlier experinents have not been systematically evaluated, nor have the details of the activit es been properly documented. The ill-effects of disturbing the existing and time-tested adjustment by the farmers themselves by the introduction of stereotype management innovations to satisfy administrative fiats, have been pointed out in a short study of the second experiment (Wimaladharma 1984).

Small Farmer Development Association (SFDA) of the DAS/ARTI

FAO launched a programme to improve the lot of the small farmers, tenants, and agricultural labourers in eight Asian countries including Sri Lanka. The ARTI and Department of Agrarian Services (DAS) collaborated in the programme. A number of SFDAs were set up first in the Galgamuwa area and later expanded to cover areas in Kurunegala District and elsewhere. FAO provided technical assistance; ARTI conducted training classes and did implementation monitoring and DAS furnished the administrative back-stopping.

The small farmers, tenants, and labourers vrere organized into groups on a tract/hamlet basis with an elected group leader: and the leaders formed a management council. The emphasis was on group endeavour in planning production activities, obtaining credit and other inputs, marketing, etc. The group leader had a pivotal role in collecting and analysing data on each small farm family, identifying new income generating activities, organizing group meetings and group production, liaising with local leaders and officials, obtaining institutional services, etc. An implementation review confirms that the SFDAs have been able to perform well on the production front (I'aihirana 1986). In these rural areas, it has essentially meant the organisation of the majority of water-users under either a small tank or major scheme, though the efforts of SDFA, covered other aspects than water management.

From a participatory management angle, the SDFA illustrates two key points: (a) giving a voice to poor families when organized as groups and hence assuring genuine participation in activities based on felt-needs, and (b) through trained leaders, building up skills and knowledge within the locality.

The SFDAs are cast in a manner that necessarily brings them in a confrontational course with the well-to-do and powerful farmers, with greater confrontation in major schemes compared to purana *villages*. There is therefore the further possibility of conflict in interest between SFDA and other agricultural and water management institutions in the area. These aspects have as yet to he studied and documented.

PART III

A Comparative Overview of the Different Experiments

Below is a brief analytical overview of the above experiments, placing them largely within the framework of the "axioms" of participation.

Nature. A general comment that can be made embracing all these exercises

is that they were not meant to be scientific experiments. Some were more orderly whilst most were adhoc attempts to come to grips with an immediate problem. None were haphazard affairs, hut, on the contrary undertaken in all seriousness, with even a missionary zeal evident in a few instances.

Scope. For most of the government sponsored projects, water management was the major, if not the sole, specific goal, whereas, the NGOs saw it only as part of a comprehensive community develapment. The former were heavily influenced by the early attempts of the Irrigation Department to introduce technological change; the institutional builc-up adopted later was more as a back-stop to technology (Shanmugarajah 19'76). The extreme case is Kimbulwana Oya project, which is so strictly confined to water management, it makes no attempt to link up with the IHAP Community Development Project operating within the same geographical area. On the tither extreme is the INMAS programme of the Irrigation Management Division, which is comprehensive in its long-range goals, but in its initial phase restricted to water management and related agricultural production, leaving the balance aspects of socio-economic development to other agencies. There is virtue in this approach only if the broader perspectives are kept in sight.

An overly compartmentalized view prevailing within the technically oriented departments, is only natural because each department is founded around one specialized discipline of another. Hence the Irrigation Department would pursue rotational water issue schedules, the Agriculture Department, its Walagambahuwa concept, and the IMD, its project management technology, as exclusive and undiluted management objectives.

On the other hand, the NGOs meet with no such inhibitions, and hence tend to cast their nets wider, even to the extent, as in the case of Kimbulwana IHAP Project, of letting irrigation management become a less important component.

These two extreme positions in regard to irrigation management have important implications for the question cf beneficiary participation. Is a functionally-specialized and interest group-specific organisation better able to procure fulsome participation than a multi-purpose organisation comprising a diffuse membership? There is little or no research on this issue. A skeptic might add that for the Sri Lankans the form of the crganisation is of little concern: the rural community will either create its own informal organisation, discover an existing one, or even commandeer a formal institution, through which it will attempt to achieve the commonly felt community needs.

Coverage. Whether the whole community or only a segment of it should be covered by an organisation is a question which has ramifications for the issue of

participatory management. Once again, the NGOs prefer to mobilize the whole community, irrespective of economic class or social status through the instrument of traditional leadership, religious institutions, and social networks, as was successfully achieved by the NH Movement and Marga Projects.

Of the government initiated projectb, the SF'DA, by definition, excludes the large-landowners and large-scale farmers, from its membership. However, the dynamics of this situation, the conflicts in interest between the large farmer and the small farmer, and the mobilization of state support on behalf of small farmer have yet to be studied. On the whole the other types of government sponsored organisations have sought to include all water-users within their membership. The very fact of giving a voice to the hitherto neglected poorly endowed farmers (and even encroachers as at Kimbulvana) is a progressive step. In the IMD projects this is successfully achieved through the device of establishing field channel level groups both as the basic unit which sends up elected representatives to the higher management committees as well as the primary unit for the organisation of all field activities.

Some see an inherent contradiction in situation where a commonly owned resource (irrigation water) has to be shared by individual users for private gains (Weeramunda 1985). Faith in the efficacy of traditional technology (eg. Marga and NFFHC) or in the wisdom of preserving a shared heritage (eg. NH Movement), are positive ways of seeking a resolution of this conflict,

Stages. That participation must take place at all stages of the development process is a condition that is satisfactorily met with in the small-tank villages. The smallness of numbers (eg. 15 to 20 members of the wew-sabha), the smallness of the investment, the simple technical tasks involved, and the traditional freedom from bureaucratic control hitherto allowed to farmers under small tanks, ensured that from pre-planning to progress monitoring of the project, the local community was directly involved in all the stages. Even then, where the government took the leading role in executing rehabilitation works and water management, full participation of the farmers, especially in decision-making, was the least evident (eg. the KIRDP village tank project). Participation, therefore, was evidently in direct proportion to the sponsoring agency's willingness to promote self-reliance in the beneficiaries. The NFFHC went so far as to train the wew-sabha members in the various aspects of participatory management as well as to develop the needed technical skills within the locality.

Organizing Farmers: The Unfinished Experiment

The observation is often made that there is a multitude of farmer organisations in Sri Lanka. Some complain that institutions have not heeo allowed to continue and grow for 5 to 6 years, and that instead, we have had a series of

experiments. We are the great experimenters: experimenting at village level with different farmer institutions, at the district level with DDC, and even at national level, for example, with the new constitutions .This reminds one of the fact that change is a crucial feature in a developing country. There is intrinsically nothing wrong in changing things and institutions. But the problem is that what is good for one is not good for another and what was good at one time is not good later. But before we condemn one experiment, it must be appraised. What is required is, to examine the results and the processes in a dispassionately non-partisan manner and then to draw conclusions. In chalking out a future path one needs to apply the lessons drawn from the earlier experiments.

In Sri Lanka, one often has to wait for a new government to come to office, to evaluate an experiment that the previous government had launched. Therefore, these evaluations become ex-post facto evaluations or more properly post-mortems. Many so-called evaluations of social experiments, which are sometimes undertaken whilst the experiment is on-going, are often little more than "appreciations" in which only the good things are pointed while excluding the bad. It seems to me, that the persons who are ready to critique an experiment during its lifetime, are foreigners, who have a freedom which many Sri Lankan social scientists do not enjoy.