

## Module 6 /// Innovative Activity Profile 3

### WIN: A Holistic, Gender-Responsive Approach in Irrigation and Water Resource Management Improves Livelihoods and Food Security<sup>1</sup>

#### Project Objectives and Description

##### The WIN approach

From 1999 to 2003, FAO implemented the WIN Project, “Empowerment of Women in Irrigation and Water Resources Management for Improved Food Security, Nutrition, and Health,” funded by the United Nations Foundation. Even though the WIN Project has come to an end, the WIN *approach* continues to attract interest as a gender-responsive, people-centered, and interdisciplinary means to build capacity and improve rural livelihoods. The WIN approach is to create catalytic and collaborative partnerships and linkages between governments, NGOs, local institutions, and farmers.

Many of the WIN approach's elements and tools were not innovative in themselves. However, the *overall and iterative combination of methods* reinforced the gender-responsive message of WIN for government staff and at the local level. This approach can be applied to many types of programs and projects, not only irrigation. Note also that the WIN approach reflected FAO's normative role: to develop, test, document, and

**What's innovative?** An interactive package of gender-sensitive, people-centered, and participatory tools proves its worth in a number of settings to assess local needs and build capacity in communities and the people who serve them.

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make available new approaches but not to be heavily operational. Partnering, therefore, was a key strategy for implementation.

##### The WIN Project

The WIN Project was implemented in Cambodia, Nepal, and Zambia, three least-developed countries with high levels of stress on the rural poor (recovery/reconstruction and unexploded ordnance in Cambodia, civil war in Nepal, and HIV/AIDS in Zambia). The project's objectives were to:

- Increase women's capacity to participate in and influence irrigation and water resources management, and increase their access to productive resources.
- Assist poor households in increasing and diversifying agricultural production for their own consumption and increased farm income, introducing time-saving and income-generating technologies.
- Incorporate public health considerations in the design and development of irrigation and rural water management projects (including water supply systems and preventive measures against waterborne diseases) at the household, irrigation scheme, and community level.
- Strengthen the local and national capacity to assist effectively in incorporating gender, household food security, nutrition, and health considerations into irrigation and water management projects.

WIN was a pilot, operational research project designed specifically to test a new multisectoral approach. The project directly supported sustainable livelihoods by contributing to the empowerment of women in managing irrigation systems (and addressing related health issues), accessing water resources, and diversifying crop production for greater household food security, nutrition, and health. All WIN staff were government officers assigned part-time by line ministries representing various sectors, supported by a part-time visiting Chief Technical Advisor (CTA) and a core team from FAO headquarters. Interdisciplinary district-level teams received gender sensitization and other training in a variety of food security, health, nutrition, and livelihoods

issues. The teams conducted gender-sensitive participatory rural assessments (PRAs) and organized training based on the needs and interests of local groups, which included women, men, and children.

### **Gender Strategy**

The WIN approach is multidisciplinary and uses an iterative package of people-centered, gender-sensitive, and participatory tools for assessment and capacity building. The approach recognizes that the local context is key to assessing the food security situation. The tools included:

- Gender sensitization of stakeholders at all levels.
- PRAs that focused on tasks and information needs by gender and stage in the life cycle. The PRAs were done to understand property rights as well as the distribution of water and food production tasks by gender and age. Information obtained through the PRAs helped the district teams determine who should be targeted with technical or production information. It also helped the teams to understand who would make decisions about technologies introduced by WIN, such as treadle pumps.
- Community-based nutrition assessment for district planning.
- Interdisciplinary training of trainers, resulting in district-based WIN teams that included the district irrigation, nutrition, planning, agricultural, and development officers.
- Group formation, sensitization, capacity building, and training in various economic and livelihood activities.
- Frequent backstopping at the village level by national experts, supported by a visiting CTA and FAO technical staff.
- Steering committees drawn from multiple government ministries and services.
- Participatory monitoring and evaluation as a complement to formal evaluation.
- Focus on partnerships to implement all activities.

### **Benefits and Impacts**

The WIN Project concluded with evidence of specific positive impacts and outcomes across a number of sectors. For example:

- The project established cost-effective, cohesive, multidisciplinary district teams, which worked closely with communities in all three countries.
- Good results from gender sensitization training were reported at the community level, including greater acceptance by men of women in water user committees in Nepal and a decline in domestic violence in Cambodia.
- Small-scale irrigation and water conveyance technologies were introduced.
- Vegetable production and household diets were diversified in food-insecure households, including those affected by HIV/AIDS, and incomes improved from vegetable sales.
- Participants gained knowledge and capacity in a wide variety of topics selected according to local needs; examples include water sanitation and conservation, food production, food storage, HIV/AIDS information as well as information on the nutritional needs of people living with HIV/AIDS, group strengthening and management, and literacy.
- Technical irrigation and agriculture staff gained a better understanding of gender, health, and nutrition issues and have brought this awareness into their daily work.

The project has successfully surpassed its set quantifiable targets in terms of women inclusion. For instance, the percentage of women beneficiaries is 70 percent average in three country cases, compared to the 30-percent target (see Table 1).

Cambodia, Nepal, and Zambia have officially requested that FAO and UNF continue through a second phase. Nepal has committed financial resources to a second phase and has adopted the WIN approach in its national program of work and budget. The WIN Project in Cambodia initially relied upon a more structured, input-oriented approach, but in 2003 it began new

initiatives in gender sensitization and training of trainers and in community-based action planning.

*Although the WIN Project is now ended, the WIN approach could be applied in other settings.* The multidisciplinary, people-centered WIN approach strongly complemented national development goals and the Millennium Development Goals. Tested under less-than-ideal conditions, the approach proved to be valid, replicable, and useful under a wide range of conditions and constraints. The approach proved its value and gained support among governments, line agency staff, and participants. There is consensus that such projects are slow to implement at first, given the need for PRAs and bottom-up planning, and that achievements and impacts may not be seen for at least one or two years. Even so, the process initiated by WIN has remained in place in Nepal and Zambia since the project ended, and positive impacts are still reported. Participants in the project evaluation workshop agreed that WIN broke new ground despite the challenges involved in promoting new ideas and methodologies, especially if they are multidisciplinary and people-centered.

*More generally, the WIN approach contributed to goals of decentralization in Cambodia, Nepal, and Zambia.* It built capacity in multiple areas at all levels, which is essential for decentralization. For example the project developed concrete methods and actions at the local level in community action planning, gender action planning, and farmer seasonal planning, which empowered local communities. At the district level it fostered multidisciplinary WIN teams who facilitated community planning processes.

*The WIN approach has potential to play a constructive role in emergency preparedness and in mitigating critical food insecurity.* The approach has shown some potential to mitigate the impacts of severe food insecurity arising from drought and HIV/AIDS (Zambia) and to promote peace and reconciliation (Cambodia and Nepal). In Cambodia, WIN fostered the social acceptance of women in local decision making and as officers in local water user associations (where they had never served before), WIN also advocated respect and full participation of women in decision making at the household

and commune levels. As noted, in Cambodia these efforts helped to reduce domestic violence. In Nepal, communal vegetable gardens were planted and made available to anyone affected by civil conflict and flight. The consensus-based decision-making promoted by WIN was adopted at the panchayat (village council) level in districts affected by conflict.

### **Lessons Learned and Issues for Wider Applicability**

WIN was an operational research project that gave careful attention to developing and testing new approaches, methods, and tools. Key outcomes and lessons are summarized in the paragraphs that follow.

**Capacity building.** WIN had its greatest success in building many kinds of capacity at all levels (national, district, and local) and among government staff and communities in all three countries. The project succeeded in establishing an institutional structure that facilitated the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of a multisectoral, interdisciplinary, gender-responsive project for improved household food security and nutrition. Zambia and Nepal showed notable success in establishing effective multidisciplinary WIN teams at the district level, which are now effective, gender-sensitive trainers and development catalysts.

*Lessons learned:* The early investments in participatory, empowerment-oriented strategies paid off, particularly in Nepal and Zambia, but participatory empowerment strategies like WIN generally take more time to organize and to show results than more conventional projects. Positive results may not be seen until the second year of implementation and not fully apparent until the third or fourth year.

**Partnering.** All three WIN countries learned the synergistic value of partnering, particularly with NGOs and national institutions in areas where WIN has limited capacity. The Nepal and Zambia teams developed a sense of working together with multiple agencies and organizations in a gender-sensitive way.

Table 1. Selected Outputs and Outcomes, FAO WIN Project 2002-2003

	Targets called for in project document	Actual Totals: Cambodia	Actual Totals: Nepal	Actual Totals: Zambia	Grand Totals
<b>Targeting Information</b>					
# beneficiaries	18,000	1168	2015	696	3879
# households	3,600	835	1084	116	2035
# pilot sites	36	25	10	8	43
% women beneficiaries	30%	54	98	57	70% (average)
<b>Capacity-Building and Training Activities</b>					
# Interdisciplinary district teams trained	100 (individuals)	15 teams	10 teams	8 teams	33 (district teams); approx.165 team members
Women farmers trained in field schools	1,200	835	423	116	1374
Senior gender trainers trained (TOT)	Not noted	37	30	0	67
Beneficiaries receiving gender sensitization	Not noted	1168 (estimate)	490 women; 80 men	696 (estimate)	2434
Women elected to water user groups	Increased representation of women in 36 water user groups	86 women	13 women	2 women	101 women
<b>Livelihood Activities</b>					
Small-scale irrigation technologies installed	36	14 hand pumps; 100 well rings 1 culvert	14 water storage tanks 1 micro-sprinkler 60 treadle pumps	90 treadle pumps 3 shallow wells	283
Savings groups started	Not noted	0	62	0	62
New producer groups formed	Not noted	15 (village-based)	150 (women's groups)	8	173
New business start-ups	Not noted	0	5 (mushroom production) 4 vegetable production	Specific number not recorded, but approximately 5	14

*Note: This table summarizes WIN's outputs and outcomes as of December 2003. A full assessment of quantifiable project outcomes and impacts could not be done due to funding limitations.*

*Sources: FAO (2003), Pradhan, T., and P. Bhattarai (2003); other project reports and documents.*

*Lessons learned:* Partnering with national institutions and I/NGOs in some cases yielded greater synergies and more sustainable outcomes than partnering with time-bound projects, but collaborating directly with projects also brought synergies. These two strategies are viewed as complementary, not exclusive. Early adoption and acceptance by national government, especially by high-level officials, contributed to WIN's success, and to sensitizing staff of international development organizations.

**People-centered approaches.** WIN established or strengthened many local community groups and empowered them through a variety of training venues and approaches, such as farmer field schools and seasonal planning, district-based nutritional planning and nutrition education, gender sensitization and gender action planning, and community action planning. Community groups are now effectively carrying out their own local action plans, supported by district WIN teams, especially in Nepal and Zambia.

*Lessons learned:* Multisectoral approaches require considerable flexibility in training approaches and venues, especially for training in socioeconomic dimensions and topics, and especially among groups who organize their own self-help action plans. These people-centered approaches may require more time and administrative flexibility on the part of implementing agencies than more conventional approaches, but they have strong positive outcomes in building local capacity.

**Gender.** PRAs in all three countries gave project staff a sound understanding of gender roles in agricultural production and water management. The PRAs documented that women and girls lacked equitable access to irrigation and agricultural inputs and did not participate in decision making about water resources and irrigation. WIN embarked on an interdisciplinary program of technical training, gender sensitization, participatory gender action planning, and other techniques that could enable rural women to participate in management and decision-making with respect to water resources. Women were elected to water management committees (or managed their own water resources activities) in all WIN countries, and their male counterparts

became more supportive after gender sensitization. There is still room for improvement. For example, in Cambodia, women were elected as treasurers but have not yet been elected to positions of greater responsibility and authority.

*Lessons learned:* Despite initial success in achieving women's representation in decision-making bodies, further sensitization, training, and monitoring were needed to ensure their continued effective participation and their attainment of higher leadership roles and responsibilities. The early successes should have been followed by investing more time and other resources in training in management/empowerment skills as well as in longer-term monitoring by the WIN teams.

**Methods and technologies.** The methods and technologies tested and introduced by WIN showed strong promise for replication. First, the multidisciplinary district team concept was tested in various national contexts with very good results, especially in Nepal and Zambia. Second, the people-centered planning approaches used by the WIN teams (such as community action planning, farmer seasonal planning, and gender action planning) resulted in a variety of local self-help actions and local initiatives unprompted by project staff. Third, technologies tested and introduced (treadle pumps, community-based seed multiplication, community seedling nurseries, and many others) improved food security in households and communities.

*Lessons learned:* Each WIN national team adapted the WIN approach, developing and testing methods appropriate to the national situation and to the local needs that had been identified. Organizing multisectoral district teams takes time but results in a cadre of local trainers who can support each other. Together they assist local communities in a wide range of technical and socioeconomic topics. All three countries (especially Nepal) have recognized that the need for drinking water is at least as important as the need for irrigation water, as there is potential for the WIN approach to test and introduce appropriate technologies in this area as well.

**Potential role of WIN in HIV/AIDS, emergencies, and peace/reconciliation processes.** The potential for WIN to play a

constructive role in emergency preparedness and situations of critical food insecurity was appreciated by governments and FAO. In Zambia, WIN's role in mitigating food insecurity among households affected by HIV/AIDS and severe protracted drought was monitored with interest. In Nepal, WIN seems to have helped households in insecure areas better cope with conflict by promoting self-sufficiency, strengthening groups, and establishing community-based nurseries for vegetable seedlings. In Cambodia, WIN's gender-sensitization and training reportedly reduced domestic violence and built capacity among rural communities and households recovering from civil war.

*Lessons learned:* WIN has a broader, multidisciplinary leadership role to play in targeting food-insecure households with basic needs in several critical areas, including food, drinking water, and peace and reconciliation. The WIN teams recognized the need to target food-insecure and vulnerable households in addition to farmers associated with irrigation schemes. The WIN approach should be tested more broadly and applied in communities where emergency preparedness, mitigating the impacts of conflict, and HIV/AIDS are important.

In conclusion, there is a need to sensitize senior staff of national governments and international development organizations of the benefits of gender-responsive, multidisciplinary approaches. Not all stakeholders were convinced of the WIN approach; some remained disengaged. The WIN approach was new, untested, and evolved with time. There is also a need for gender sensitization of key national FAO staff and national project officers early in the project cycle; meeting this need will require flexibility on the part of administrators, national and agency-level steering committees, staff, and (especially) project budget holders at FAO headquarters.

**Project Timeframe and Budget:** The project had a budget of US\$1 691 011, provided by the United Nations Fund for International Partnership, and a scheduled duration of three years (1999-2003).

## Further reading

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