



Why Participatory Irrigation Reforms Fail? An interpretation through key governance concepts

Muhammad Mehmood Ul Hassan
Pakistan (mhassan@uni-bonn.de)

The participatory irrigation reforms have largely failed in most parts of the world in achieving the targeted performance indicators. While the reform targets were largely of a managerial nature, the route to achieve the targets has often been improved governance arrangements. The paper argues that since the conceptual differences between governance and management were misunderstood, misinterpreted and ill implemented, which led to this large scale failure of reform. This paper discerns between irrigation governance and management and articulates the governance concept and its sub concepts through a literature review. The governance improvements of the irrigation from selected cases in Asia is analyzed using key sub-concepts. The paper identifies five key concepts that are useful in analyzing reform as institutions, intentions, instruments, implementation and impact. The analysis reveals that poor governance results from poor design of representation and accountability in the reform. The interplay between institutions, their intentions, instruments and implementation arrangements used by reformers in the selected cases have tended to create information asymmetries amongst the users, which have led to poor awareness and participation by potential members for effective governance. While reforming the irrigation governance attention needs to be paid to institutions, reform intentions, instruments, and implementation arrangements simultaneously. Design weaknesses of any one of these four components of governance can lead to suboptimal impacts. The studied management transfer programs remained unable to improve irrigation performance owing to weakness in one or more of these governance ingredients.