

Fact Sheet 6 Community-Based Organisations and Local Water Management

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Water constitutes the core resource for local livelihoods and regional development in Can Tho City. Since a significant number of community-based organisations emerged in Can Tho City in the mid-1980s and in recent years, a survey was conducted in order to identify the relevance of these organisations for local water resources management.

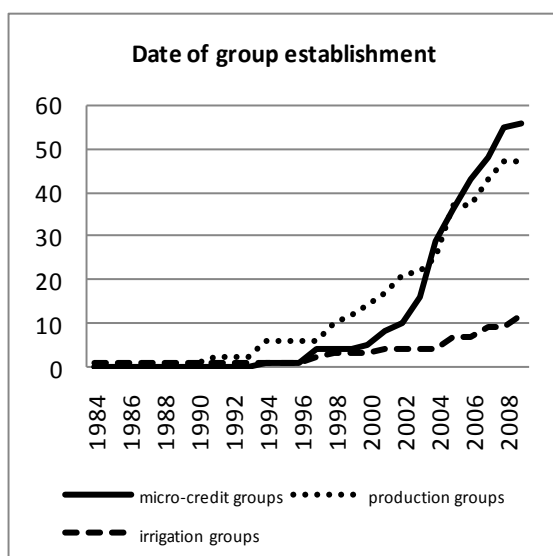
The emergence of community-based organisations is linked to a set of policy reforms, Doi Moi (renovation), which paved the way for economic liberalisation and administrative reforms in 1986, and profoundly revised the constitutional framework for water resources management. Following the introduction of the first water law in 1998, state management functions were divided in order to separate water resources management from water services, while a new ministry was set up to implement the law.

The new water policy (2006) is based on IWRM (Integrated Water Resources Management) principles and provides a number of regulations and sanctions for water control and protection.

While water resources management is defined as a state function, water users also engage in many related tasks including irrigation and drainage pumping, canal digging and maintenance, as well as improving water and sanitation infrastructure at household level. Nevertheless, little is known about how these activities are organised and how water user groups relate with state agencies.

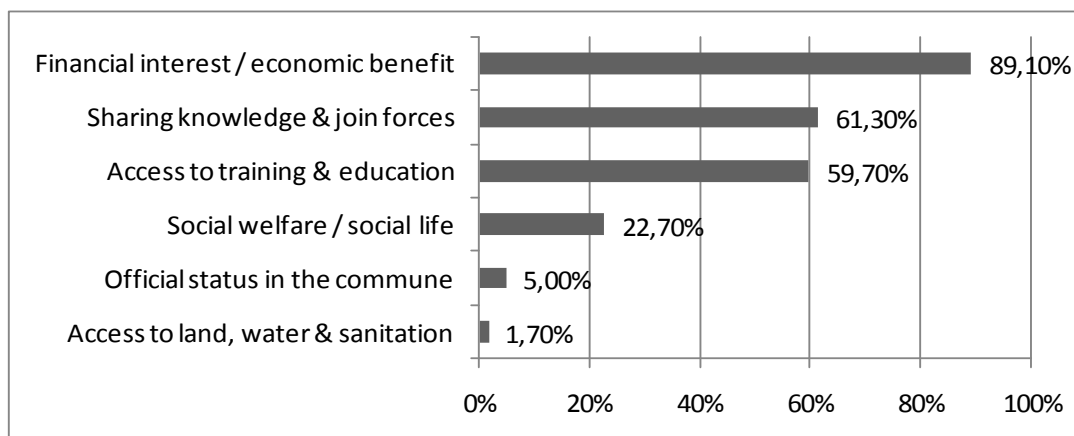
In order to gain a better understanding of these issues, a questionnaire was implemented in four districts of Can Tho City, which aimed at understanding the group formation process and their activities with regard to water management in agricultural and other sectors.

The survey of a total of 120 groups encompassed 47 production groups (*tổ hợp tác sản xuất*), 12 irrigation groups (*tổ hợp tác bơm tưới*), 56 micro-credit and saving groups (*nhóm tín dụng/tiết kiệm*), one club (*câu lạc bộ*) and four groups that stated they were involved in both production and micro-credit activities. All groups operated within communal boundaries and often on a smaller scale (hamlet communities).



Source: Field survey conducted by the authors in Can Tho City (2009 / 2010)

Motivating factors for CBO formation



Source: Field survey conducted by the authors in Can Tho City (2009 / 2010)

The majority of these community-based organizations (CBO) started as a new initiative, whereas 35 out of 120 formed out of former agricultural collective groups (*tập đoàn sản xuất*) and agricultural cooperatives (*hợp tác xã*). As illustrated in the chart, the motivation to set up groups encompassed the anticipation of economic benefits, time saving and learning opportunities.

With regard to water management, a significant number of groups were active in the fields of rural production (notably irrigation) as well as sanitation. Although water supply and water quality were identified as major challenges for sustainable water resources management in the case study area, none of the groups actually engaged in such fields.

Awareness campaigns on hygiene and water treatment by the Women's Union and their affiliated groups touched on these issues, but represented coping strategies for clean water supply deficiencies rather than tackling the root causes of deficient water supply. Environmental issues were not addressed by any of the groups either.

With regard to the formal and informal spheres at the interface of local state and people's grassroots organisations,

there is a need for further research and a more holistic understanding of the specific practices and backgrounds in the delta.

Upcoming investigations should include clubs as a new format of widely spread community-based organisations in the research framework.

Future analysis should take the specific environmental conditions, historic development and geopolitical location of the Mekong Delta (being far away from the centre of power) into account, which will help to better understand how community-based groups can participate in and negotiate local agendas for water resources management.

Further Reading

WAIBEL, G. (2010) State Management in Transition: Understanding Water Resources Management in Vietnam. ZEF Working Paper Series, No. 55. Bonn: University of Bonn.

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