

SAFE-World Project/Initiative Summary

Country: Sri Lanka

Project/Initiative Gal Oya

Nos. farmers: 500,000

Hectares: 750,000

Agro-Ecological Zone: I

Improvement types

1x	2	3	4x	5x	6x	7	8	9
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A. Key Impacts

A1 – Productivity

	Before/Without	After/With	% change
Rice	3130	Small increase	Extra crops

A2 – Impacts on natural capital

Better water management has led to extra season crops

A3 – Impacts on local community (social capital)

33,000 Water Users' Associations

A5 – Key changes in farm / regional system

?? Small increase in rice yields

?? Production/ unit worker up 4 times in the last 10 years

B. Types of Sustainable Agriculture Improvements

Type 1: Better use of available renewable natural capital

Type 2: Intensification of single sub-component of farm system

Type 3: Diversify by adding new productive natural capital and regenerative components

Type 4: Better use of non-renewable inputs and technologies

Type 5: Social and participatory processes leading to group action for making better use of natural capital

Type 6: Human capital building through training-learning programmes

Type 7: Access to Finance

Type 8: Add value by processing to reduce losses and increase returns

Type 9: Add value by direct or organised marketing of produce to consumers

	Yes/No	Narrative
Type 1	x	
Type 2		
Type 3		
Type 4	x	
Type 5	x	
Type 6	x	

Type 7		
Type 8		
Type 9		

D. Contact Point for Project/Initiative

c/o Rachel Hine
Senior Research Officer,
Centre for Environment and Society

<mailto:rehine@essex.ac.uk>

E. Project Narrative

The Rehabilitation of Gal Oya Irrigation Scheme in Sri Lanka

In 1980, the Sri Lankan government's Irrigation Department, the Agrarian Research Training Institute (ARTI), and the Cornell Rural Development Committee began working with small-holder farmers in the Gal Oya irrigation scheme. At the time, this was the largest and most run-down scheme in Sri Lanka. The approach to rehabilitation was to place young community organisers in the field, who would encourage farmers to form water users' associations, so that they could solve irrigation problems for themselves. The historical context was one of 30 years of conflict and non-cooperation. A senior official in the Irrigation Department said *"if we can make progress in Gal Oya, we can make progress anywhere in Sri Lanka"*.

The organisers were recruited and trained by ARTI to live and work in the communities, with the primary objective of ensuring that all plans were the farmers' own. Water users' groups were formed, but not forced on farmers. The organisers, also called animators, promoters or motivators, worked as catalysts to stimulate and nurture local organisation. The usual approach to establishing rural organisations (calling a meeting, passing a constitution, and electing officers) was known not to lead to sustainable organisations. Here the approach was to let groups evolve, beginning first with problem identification and collective action, which could lead to formal organisation later. The process brought forth more tested and altruistic leadership, who had solid support amongst their members.

The project has rehabilitated 10,000 ha, with benefits exceeding costs by a ratio of 1.5 to 1. The economic benefits of the project depend primarily on increased water use efficiency, which enabled farmers to increase their cropping intensity and thereby raise production. There were also some increases in yields. These changes in the efficiency and equity of water use have been dramatic and long-lasting. The number of complaints received by the Irrigation Department about water distribution fell to nearly zero, as adjustments were made by farmers and field-level staff. Before the project, 80% of channel gates were broken; afterwards this problem practically disappeared. Farmers' organisations have maintained themselves, progressed institutionally, and developed their own capacity for dealing with problems.

Farmers' organisations, once established, have used their new capabilities to deal with many other needs, such as crop protection, credit supply, settlement of domestic disputes, land consolidation and reducing drunkenness. Bureaucratic reorientation has been essential for success. This has been promoted amongst engineers and officials by demonstrations of

farmers' knowledge and ability to achieve unexpected improvements. This iterative process has been crucial: *"displays of initiative and intelligence by farmers gained some respect from officials, and this in turn encouraged farmers to show more capability, which again increased the respect accorded them by officials"* (Uphoff, 1994).

Data for this project is in hard copy format and is not currently available electronically. If you would like further information please contact Rachel Hine