

Analysis of the Roles of the Irrigation Associations and Public-Private-Partnership Model in Irrigation Development and Management in Turkey

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The latest national development plan in Turkey emphasizes that priority is given to water, food and nutrition security in a competitive environment, hence, infrastructure investments in sectors like irrigation will continue with an intention to support economic productivity in the medium and long term. Yet, these macro-level policies require operationalization through the practices of adequate institutions. The paper will first critically analyze how these macro level policies are put into practice by concerned public and private institutions with a particular focus on water user associations.

Turkey has been one of the frontrunners in irrigation sector reform. The almost full transfer of irrigation systems to water user organizations, namely the irrigation associations (IAs), has dramatically empowered users of Turkey's irrigation systems. IAs has helped to overcome some of the problems such as collection of irrigation fees and operation of the irrigation network. However, an increase in water use efficiency remains a challenge. Considering the period before and after transfer to IAs - there is no significant change in irrigation efficiency. Moreover, the outcomes of irrigation management decentralization particularly in terms of participatory performances of IAs display mixed results. Hence, the paper will look into the reasons behind water use inefficiencies and poor participatory performance of IAs.

Under the accelerated transfer program of the 1990s, IAs were established by reference to various local government laws. For about a decade the need for an enabling law that would determine the principles of IA functioning was articulated by various stakeholders. IAs finally gained clear legal status following the legislation of the Irrigation Associations Law in 2011. With this law, which is essentially based on decentralization, many changes are brought to the structure and functioning of the irrigation associations. However, lately (2018) major amendments have been made into this Law, which put IAs strictly back under the control of the central state water agency. Hence, the paper will go on to investigate why this roll back process occurred at legislative level recently.

On the other hand, from the 1980s on, Turkey has experienced extensive privatization measures in a number of sectors including water supply and hydropower. In this context, Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) model was considered as an effective way to generate a partnership between public and private sectors and to join their financial resources, know-how and expertise to meet the challenges facing service provision systems. However, the privatization process, including the BOT model in the water sector, has resulted in mixed and mostly unsatisfactory results. Despite these disappointing results, BOT model was also tried to be applied in irrigation projects in early 2000s. Yet, not enough private sector companies showed interest in bids, which disabled a competitive environment. Thus, by utilizing primary sources, the paper will culminate by demonstrating the reasons why the BOT could not be implemented in the irrigation sector in Turkey.