

## **Democratization of Irrigation Systems Management**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The democratization of the country is impossible without existence of active civil society, and therefore the first step of democratic transformations should be the formation of such a society among the population. In the countries where a significant part of the population lives in villages the issue has certain peculiarities. In such cases, it is possible to form an active public position around the issues related to labor activities that cause a significant interest among the population. In case of Georgia, one of these fields is irrigation. The paper considers one of the forms of civil society - the issue of organizing and managing associations of a temporary irrigation system network. It should be noted that after private property was established on the land, the works for arranging as well as maintaining the temporary irrigation network became the responsibility of the land owners, which in its turn is practically impossible to perform individually. The necessity of such unions is substantiated in the paper, also, there is also an explanation of the reasons for the failure of the first attempt to form such associations (irrigation and drainage user associations) in Georgia and there are given some of the principles of their successful functioning as well. At the same time, the necessity of keeping the principle of voluntary creation of the union should be noted as well as the question of the authority and professionalism of its leadership. and on the turn of the local leadership considering the decisions about the issues in the jurisdiction made by the union, which is the basis of the successful functioning of the union.*

**Key words:** Democratization, civil society, temporary network of irrigation system, voluntary association.

### **Introduction**

One of the crucial factors for the creation of civil society, democratic forms of government and effective working conditions of enterprises can be considered private property, which, in

accordance with changing market conditions, undergoes constant modification and adapts to the modern requirements of business development. It should be noted that even in the conditions of the developed market economy, tendencies to modify the forms of ownership are constantly being manifested although the issue of the form of ownership should have been removed. The fact that joint-stock property has become the dominant economic form of ownership in advanced countries, while the economy itself is mixed, containing at least two - joint-stock and state - forms of ownership is a good example of above mentioned.

### **The main part**

Traditionally, the irrigation network in Georgia was owned by two owners. The head structure and the main (permanent) canals, which served several farms, were operated by the State Reclamation Service. The last-line distributors, which supplied water to the only one farm as well as the temporary network channels coming out of them, were owned directly by the farm, whose functions included the annual cutting of the temporary channels as well as ensuring their working condition [1].

At the end of the 20th century, agricultural land was privatized in Georgia. Along with the land, the temporary irrigation network became the property of the farmers, and the systematic cutting of it became the obligation of the population. It should be mentioned that it is practically impossible to arrange and manage a temporary irrigation network by an individual farmer (peasant) without agreeing with each other.

In order to put these conditions right, a project to create irrigation and drainage user associations was implemented. It was based on a successfully approved practice in the world - voluntary association of farmers to receive irrigation services [2]. The transparent and democratic principles of management and decision-making of such associations have ensured high results of activities, maximum efficiency of the irrigation network as well as maintenance of infrastructure and relevant production potential.

According to the existing practice, the governing body of such unions is the general assembly of farmers (peasants), that makes decisions about the directions of future activities of the union. For operative management, the assembly elects the council and the chairman, whom their turn are accountable to the assembly in their activities. The practical activities of the union are led by a professional or at least experienced manager.

Since the end of the 90s, the creation of irrigation and drainage user associations began with the financial support of the World Bank. Up to 80% of associations were created in almost all areas of irrigation agriculture in Georgia (except Imereti). The area of the associations ranged between 150 ha and 2000 ha. The World Bank allocated 100 USD per hectare for the association

infrastructure rehabilitation, provided that the additional 25% of the work would be done by the members of the associations as co-participants. The allocated amount was distributed over 5 years, after which the association would have to function on its own. It should be noted that according to the demands of the World Bank, the association had to have its own office, even in the form of a mobile carriage. In the small associations (up to 400 hectares), the purchase and repair of such office space cost 50-60% of the allocated amount. In addition, the farmers who were the members of the associations mainly performed the work defined by the co-participation on their own lands and ignored the rest.

Despite the fact that experienced professionals took part in the development of associations' development plans, unfortunately, in Georgia, this project did not succeed. The main reason was that the creation of associations was not done voluntarily, but was directed by the Ministry of Agriculture; The appointment of a chairman was also directive, who, in the best case, had a general idea about the land reclamation. The chairman did not have proper authority among the members of the association, he/she just relied on the support of higher authorities and was mainly focused on collecting water usage and membership fees. All these factors led to inefficient disposal of the allocated funds and insufficient amount of harvest on the areas of the associations.

The situation was relatively better in those single associations, where the majority of member were not against the union from the initial point, and the chairman and the council conducted their activities, first of all, in order to support the interests of the association members.

Although the attempt to form associations failed, the following conclusions can be drawn from the project in the future [3]:

- ✓ Owners of this area should unite to arrange and manage a temporary network of irrigation systems;
- ✓ Farmers (peasants) should become familiar with the necessity of such union;
- ✓ Each member of the union, regardless of the area of the land owned must have equal rights in voting;
- ✓ The issues to be discussed at the general meeting of union members should include:
  - the amount of union membership fee as well as the time and form of payment;
  - the time and the form of irrigation water tax payment;
  - the review and approval of the next year's budget;
  - the terms of using the equipment owned by the members of the union for common purposes;

- the issues of enrolling as well as expelling members;
- electing or suspending the members of the Union Council;
- ✓ The service area of the union should preferably be at least 500 ha.
- ✓ As an exception, in some cases it should be permissible to set up the union office in the building of the village council;
- ✓ The members of the union council, including the chairman, must necessarily be members of the union;
- ✓ The council members and the chairman should be acquainted with the melioration problems of their village and municipality;

### **Conclusion**

One of the main issues for democratic transformations in modern Georgia is the formation of a socially active civil society. One of the ways to create such a community in rural areas is to organize and manage temporary networks of irrigation systems and to involve the maximum number of people in them. The essential conditions for the successful functioning of such associations are as follows:

- Compliance with the principle of voluntary creation of the union;
- Maintaining the supremacy of the decisions for the general meeting of the members of the union;
- Electing informal leaders full of initiative as members of the Union Council and even more so as chairman;
- The members of the union council, including the chairman, must be advance holders to the general assembly.

In order to give some weight to the initiatives of the union, at least one of the members of the council should preferably be a member of the village council.

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