

# GOVERNANCE ISSUES AFFECTING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FARMER ORGANIZATIONS IN MAINTAINING MINOR IRRIGATION SYSTEMS: CASE STUDY IN SIWALAKULAMA CASCADE SYSTEM

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**Abstract:** Minor Irrigation Systems (MISs) are administered by the Department of Agrarian Development, and primarily maintained by Farmer Organizations (FOs). Under a diminishing performance context of FOs, this study evaluates the governance issues affecting the effectiveness of FOs for maintaining MISs in the Siwalakulama cascade system, Galenbindunuwewa, Sri Lanka, based on governance principles: Participation, Responsiveness, Accountability, and Transparency. Data were collected from a randomly selected sample of 82 farmers representing seven FOs of the Siwalakulama cascade system through a pre-tested questionnaire survey and focus group discussions. Results of descriptive data analysis revealed poor farmer participation as a key issue for maintaining MISs (79%) due to a higher number of part-time farmers and farming became a secondary income source (86%). FOs' were less responsive (76%) for MIS maintenance requirements as well as for addressing the needs of the member farmers. The lack of transparency (74%) of operations and decisions, focus less equitability for members of FOs (83%), poor handling of FO funds (77%), lack of financial records keeping (74%), and improper audits (75%) were the most reasonable factors for poor transparency among FOs. Lack of accountability (71%) was due to leadership issues (77%), leaders' decision-making errors (73%), low level of accountability for maintaining irrigation infrastructure (79%) on the role of FO officers and members for MIS maintenance were among the key governance issues identified. Findings conclude that the FOs are less effective in maintaining MISs with respect to governance issues. Improvement in governance aspects considering socioeconomic, demographic, and climatic changes in village-based agricultural communities is recommended to improve the effectiveness of FO for maintaining MISs.

**Keywords:** Governance; Maintenance; Village-based agricultural communities.