Building Institutional, Technical Capabilities of Water Users Associations in Jordan Valley

The Jordan Valley Authority, the bulk water distributor of the country’s most productive agricultural area established its Water User Associations as part of a new management strategy: participatory irrigation management.

The WUAs are the middlemen, operating under the JVA which delivers water from pumping stations or gravity turnout at the King Abdullah Canal to the WUA, and interacting with and delivering water to the farmers.

However, as the JVA was priming the WUAs to take over as the new retail distributors of Irrigated water, the WUAs lack of governance abilities and technological know-how turned detrimental to the success of JVA’s plans and the sustainability of irrigated agriculture in the Jordan Valley.

“The danger of transferring retail water supply to WUAs that are not fully competent will affect the rehabilitated networks which could deteriorate quickly, the investment in rehabilitating the networks will be lost, and on farm water losses will continue or in the worst case scenario, be more intermittent or scarce,” according to MIRRA’s project report at the time.

Methods for Irrigation and Agriculture (MIRRA) were tasked with filling the void in WUA’s training that fractured their capacities of both the necessary soft skills to collaborate and communicate the needs of farmers to the JVA and the Jordan Valley Water Authority and technical skills. For example, not all WUAs were equally capable of diagnosing, operating, and maintaining daily diagnostics and preventive maintenance tasks needed for on-farm networks, let alone on JVA networks. Additionally, a handful of WUAs consistently delayed and recorded unreliable information.

MIRRA set out to address these issues by developing a training curriculum to improve the quality of WUA services, creating a framework for unifying the various WUAs to improve farmer representation and participation, developing a means to improve transparency. In this way, the goal would be for the WUAs to become advocates for farmers under the platform of the Jordan Valley Water Forum, raise awareness among farmers about water shares.

MIRRA conducted various training sessions on the topics of “Operation and Maintenance of Irrigation Water Delivery Networks”, “Governance and Sustainability Training”, “Basic Computer Skills Training”, and “Accounting Training” wherein accounting software was installed in computers.

A majority of the WUA candidates attended the training sessions and provided feedback. Additionally, the technical training was integrated into the JVA’s plans and has since actively sought out training and capacity building opportunities to maintain hard skills within its operations.

According to MIRRA’s project report, "the close relationship that was established with the JVA and WUA personnel has contributed to a deeper understanding of the underlying issues and a more fruitful exchange of ideas. Moreover, ensuring that the beneficiaries are made well-aware of the objectives of the project results in greater appreciation of the impact and cooperation throughout the project implementation phases.

The successful training initiative undertaken by MIRRA is a testament to the importance of training for the success and sustainability of water user associations. The project not only improved the technical skills of the WUAs but also enhanced their ability to communicate effectively and provide better services to their farmers. This is crucial for the development of the Jordan Valley as a whole, as it ensures a more efficient and sustainable water management system. The project also highlights the importance of collaboration between the Jordan Valley Authority and the water user associations, which is essential for the effective implementation of irrigation management strategies. Overall, MIRRA’s efforts in training WUAs have set a positive example for future initiatives in the region.

MIRRA's approach to training is commendable. It not only addressed the technical skills required for effective water management but also emphasized the importance of communication and cooperation. This holistic approach is crucial for the success of any project and ensures that the beneficiaries are well-equipped to face future challenges. The project's success also underscores the importance of investments in human capital development, as skilled and knowledgeable water users are key to sustainable water management.

In conclusion, MIRRA's training initiative in the Jordan Valley has been a significant step towards improving water management in the region. The project's success demonstrates the importance of training in achieving sustainable development goals, and it is hoped that similar initiatives will continue to be implemented in other regions to ensure a more efficient and sustainable water management system.