Development of the Greater Musayyeb project

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INTRODUCTION

The following presentation of the Greater Musayyeb Irrigation Project Development is based on the personnal experience of the writer and reflects his own approach for integrated rural development.

The Greater Musayyeb Project is located 60 km. south of Baghdad. It takes its water from the Euphrates River north of the Hindiya Barrage. The canal is designed for 40 cms. and runs south east. It has two main branches each is sub-divided into branch canals and ditches. It has a drainage net work as well.

The Project has a net cultivable area of 80.000 hectareas.

It was conceived in 1951, the land was soil surveyed, preliminarily in 1952 and the first settlers moved on it 1956. Although this project was studied, designed and fairly well constructed, it was poorly maintained; therefore, by 1968 the discharge of the canal was reduced from 40 cms. to 10 cms. most of the irrigation net work silted and the drainage net work clogged up with drifting sand or thick growth of reeds and the soils salinized. As a result most of the settlers either left the Project or became partly farmers and partly sheep herders.

DEVELOPMENT

In 1961 the writer initiated reclamation experiments in two sites of the Project as part of the research of the Soils Division, Directorate of Research, Ministry of Agriculture.

The research covered methods of reclamation, the depth of water needed to remove the salt from soil profile to enable acceptable plant growth and yield, rate and combination of fertilizers as well as crop sequences and movements of salt and water table.

The writer joined FAO Regional Office in Cairo from December 1965 until he was called by General Ahmed Hassan Al-Bakir, President of the Republic of Iraq to be Director General of the Greater Musayyeb Project.

The writer was convinced that the technical problems were the least difficult but the difficulties were to have the means to get the job done. This was stated as Men, Machines, Money and the authority to spend it. The President provided all the support to employ the men, allocated all the money needed and granted the authority to spend it and the freedom of operation.

The author turned to FAO for help to get more technical support and set up training programmes for the needed staff including civil, irrigation, mechanical engineers, technicians, agronomists and cooperative specialists.

The integrated approach in agricultural development was followed where all the needed inputs were provided such as adequate water, drainage facilities, machinery for agricultural operations, fertilizers, combat of insects and diseases, good seeds, etc. All these were relatively easy to buy or provide.

The biggest obstacle was the human factor. Initial reclamation and development depended almost com-

pletely on the Government employees while the long term development and cultivation depended on the settlers.

The Project had 12 cooperatives but they were relatively inactive. They were given technical advice and adequate loans to buy improved seeds and fertilizers, they were also organized to market their main crops, such as wheat, barley, zia maize, cotton, ground nuts and potatoes cooperatively.

A joint cooperation was set up to be the link between the individual cooperatives and the government organizations such as the Agricultural Bank and the supplies and marketing agencies of the Government. In many cases the Project Administration was their contact to facilitate their purchase and marketing.

Schools, and a boarding house for secondary school students were built or allocated. Cold storage for potatoes were built and grain storage and silos were built. Roads were constructed, a hospital and drinking water supplies were built as well as electricity net work. A milk collection center was built also.

The Project Administration had two complementary tasks:

1) To develop state farms on which it runs its applied research and to produce improved seeds to distribute to the farmers.

2) To help the settlers to develop and cultivate their holdings. It provided them with the basic services either by renting government owned machinaries or by helping the cooperatives to provide those services.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Greater Musayyeb Irrigation Project (Iraq) was studied, designed and properly constructed. However, it was poorly maintained due to lack of proper institutional organization and properly trained farmers to cop with the new situation.

The Project declined form the first time the settlers moved on it until 1968 when President Ahmed Hassan Al-Bakir gave it his personal attention and provided the means for its restoration and development.

The integrated approach in rural development was adopted and much progress was made. But it remains a fact that the human factor was the hardest to change, and unless the settlers themselves participate and believe in new development and become eager to properly use and maintain the facilities and feel that every-thing on the Project is for them and should treat it as their very own and take good care of it, any progress made by virtue of the intervention of the Government will be temporary.