

Effects of the Traditional Irrigation Improvement Programme on Women in Northern Tanzania

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Abstract

This study was primarily about women. It was about the impacts of an irrigation programme on women's lives. It concentrated on women because it was generally understood that women could, and often did, experience things differently from men in their communities due to their status. The study delved into the notion of gender in order to explain the development of the theories of women in the development process and to situate this research and the irrigation programme involved in those theories. The Traditional Irrigation Improvement Programme (TIP), around which this study was based, was a partner organisation of the Indigenous Soil and Water Conservation Programme (ISWCP) which, in Tanzania, acted under the auspices of the Co-operative College Moshi. TIP was launched in 1988 under the Netherlands development organisation - SNV. During TIP's phase III (1997 -2001), it was decided to establish the programme as a Non-Governmental Organisation in order to promote its self-sustainability. During this change in the organisational climate and the self-reflection it provoked, it was decided that greater investigation was needed into the impact of the programme on various sectors. The study was part of such investigation. The research had shown, elsewhere, that many irrigation interventions in Africa and the rest of the developing world had adversely affected women in terms of their rights to water, land or the products of their labour. This meant that TIP, as an agent of change in the irrigation systems of Northern Tanzania, ran the risk of adversely affecting women in these areas. Generally, this study revealed an improvement in terms of women's participation in decision-making; hence, increased women's confidence, freedom, independence and power. In all the villages studied, women reported an increase in food production and an increase in food availability locally. Many of them also reported having a water source close to their homes which dramatically reduced their workloads.