

INSPIRE

International Network of Service Providers for Irrigation Excellence

The International Network of Service Providers for Irrigation Excellence (INSPIRE) is a platform for knowledge exchange on service delivery among managers of irrigation and drainage (I&D) systems.

INSPIRE serves as a technical working body with a worldwide reach, supported by multiple development organizations, and initially incubated by the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID). INSPIRE meetings will present and discuss hands-on experiences, innovations, and best practices in improving the quality of I&D services.



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RATIONALE

Global experience suggests that the sustainability of irrigation systems and the financial viability of irrigation agencies relies, to a large degree, on the quality of the irrigation services that they provide to farmers. Reliable service provision increases the farmers' willingness to pay for delivered water, reduce water wastage, provide a starting point for agricultural intensification and diversification, and help break the vicious build-neglect-rebuild cycle that many irrigation systems are locked into.

However, despite its importance, service delivery has not always received adequate attention from irrigation professionals. Instead, poor service delivery is often accepted as an unavoidable necessity, and efforts to improve services are often seen as too difficult and time-consuming.

Some I&D agencies have undertaken significant reforms to improve the quality of their services and have adopted innovative ways to engage with farmers and nonfarming stakeholders, monitor key performance indicators, achieve financial viability, and improve efficiency. Agencies across the world have piloted a wide array of activities, have adopted their own home-grown pathways to solutions, and have achieved various degrees of results.

Other agencies are beginning the process of identifying and implementing measures to improve the quality of their service provision to their customers. They would like to better understand what they can do to get started, how they can prepare for those initial steps, and where they can find more information and guidance. However, not much of this information is readily available.

Thus, there is a need for an exchange of information, experience, and lessons learned among I&D agencies interested in improving their services. Issues of interest include accountability and financial viability, systematic monitoring of customer satisfaction and benchmarking of performance, better management of assets, and adoption of a broader management function within the water system in which they operate.

A better exchange of information between I&D agencies can help generate knowledge, provide incentives, and create momentum for improvements in I&D service delivery. It would help I&D agencies learn about various pathways that can lead to more sustainable I&D service delivery and provide a platform for discussing ways to improve technical operations and innovation, service orientation, commercial operations, financial sustainability, human resources, and corporate governance.

OBJECTIVES

Depending on demand from its members, INSPIRE meetings will present and discuss hands-on experience, innovations, and best practices in improving the quality of I&D services. This includes but is not limited to operational efficiency, managerial efficiency, financial efficiency, and institutional reform.

While I&D will be the focus of INSPIRE, experience from other related sectors can be presented as well, particularly when relevant for achieving the forum's objectives. For example, lessons will be shared from similar regional and global forums in other service sectors, such as regional utility associations and forums of water regulators.

As a new initiative, the initial focus of INSPIRE will be on setting a learning agenda and defining what should be the characteristics of a future Irrigation Manager, utilizing the following metrics:

- Operations and maintenance performance standards and resilience (including performance assessments, technical innovation in infrastructure and system operation, water and energy efficiency, rational scheduling, conjunctive use, and so forth);
- Service delivery attitude and inclusive customer orientation (including business planning, management information systems, human resources, billing and collection systems, and customer service and engagement strategies);
- Understanding of the budgetary systems to prioritize long-term investment, asset management, and institutional planning (including financial management and budgeting, management of revenues, expenditure reviews, asset management, and cost recovery mechanisms);
- Embracing of modernization and smart innovation in practical and coherent ways;
- Understanding of the context within which I&D systems operate and of the level of their integration within wider water and agricultural networks;
- Influencing the broader governance environment (such as separation of functions, advocacy of a sound legal and regulatory framework, and transparency standards).

VISION

INSPIRE's vision is economically profitable, financially viable, and environmentally and socially sustainable irrigation. INSPIRE recognizes the important role that managers of irrigation systems play in achieving that vision and aims to support them and strengthen their capacities through collecting best practices and information exchange.



MEMBERSHIP

Membership is not restricted to a specific group of professionals and is based on interest in improving I&D service delivery provision, including in both developing and industrialized countries. INSPIRE strives to become the meetings place for all professional constituencies. It is recognized that decision makers of large irrigation and drainage schemes are made up of a diverse group of people, including heads of departments, chief executive officers (CEOs) of irrigation utilities or boards, local governments or water users' associations (WUA)s.

SUPPORT FROM PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

As part of the efforts to improve the quality of irrigation services, international organizations working on irrigation are committed to supporting the establishment of INSPIRE. Partners organizations include the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID), Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), International Water Management Institute (IWMI), and the World Bank. Support provided by INSPIRE's partners will leverage their comparative advantage and include contributions for the exchange of knowledge and global best practices, for capacity strengthening, and for technical assistance.



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