

23/07/2001
The East African

Reducing Poverty by Reviving Irrigation Projects

The Moshi-based Traditional Irrigation and Environmental Development Organization, at the foot of Mt Kilimanjaro, has a five-year plan to transform traditional irrigation schemes and skills to improve the well being of the poor in rural Tanzania.

TIP will provide technical and material support to build the institutional and organizational capacity of targeted groups in selected areas of the country. TIP's environmental advisor, Mr. Haus Keijzer, said recently that the organization would also promote effective communication on best practices in traditional irrigation and natural resource management through demonstration sites, printing, publishing and disseminating information on the organization's activities.

TIP, which has been operating as a donor-supported project for the past 12 years, is set to face new challenges as it undergoes transformation into a full-fledged non-governmental organization.

Registered in August 1999 as an autonomous NGO, having evolved from the Traditional Irrigation Improvement Programme (TIP), its first phase programme on irrigation activities began in 1988 under the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV), which is financed by the Dutch government.

TIP operated in partnership with seven districts in the northern and central zones, where traditional irrigation was being undertaken. These included Arumeru, Same, Lushoto, Iringa, Mpwapwa and Kilosa districts. The NGO's activities were confined to the northern zone for the first two years.

The second phase of the programme (1992-1997) concentrated on the consolidation of the programme and building capacity of collaborating district council staff and support staff in order to enable them to implement programme activities.

Phase three of the programme, which lasted for three years from 1997 to 2000, provided technical and financial support to districts implementing programme. During this phase, gender mainstreaming was adopted as one of the key elements of implementation.

Programme interventions have been implemented in Same, over land and water resources, he said. At the same time, Mr. Keijzer added, those guidelines were used as a tool for sustainable management of the natural resources, including land, soil, water and forest.

He said through workshops and training of local government staff, the programme tried to improve the management of natural resources at village level.

Water user groups are mobilized to organize themselves into water user associations. The programme stimulated the process of empowerment to enable the farmers to play their role in the negotiation process with the government on water resources. The group members were trained in leadership and management skills as well as in financial management of their schemes.

The traditional irrigation organization took over all assets and functions of the schemes in August 2000, with the aim of becoming the leading NGO in the country in the provision of improved irrigation infrastructure and strengthening of the organizational and institutional capacities of water user groups that comprise the rural fold in selected areas.

Mr. Keijzer noted that since this was the first full operational year of the NGO, key staff would be recruited and training of the board of directors, staff, and empowerment of the water user groups carried out.

The programme would also be expanded to cover three more districts. Activities in the new districts would include training water user groups, para-professionals and district technicians. An increased involvement of the private sector is foreseen in construction activities, while monitoring of project activities at district level will be improved through effective reporting and the introduction of collection and data management systems, he said.

Reviewing the performance of the programme, Mr. Keijzer said there was a steady upward trend in all the four main service groups of irrigation, organizational development and gender, capacity building, and soil and water conservation.

According to records, socio-economic impacts of the irrigation programme have included a significant improvement in farm yields, economic empowerment of farmers, better land use and improved environmental protection.