

STATEMENT ON RODH KOHI/ SPATE IRRIGATION

The area under spate irrigation (or rodh kohi) in Pakistan is considerable. In spate irrigation short duration seasonal floods are diverted and spread around agricultural land and grazing areas and also used to fill drinking water ponds. In some areas spate flows recharge useable groundwater.

The most reliable estimate puts the area under spate irrigation in Pakistan at 1.4 M ha, which is equivalent to 9% of the total irrigated area. These spate irrigation-dependent areas are the areas where there is widespread poverty. In spite of this, this unique form of water harvesting has been very much neglected both by government and civil society. This is all the more regrettable because there is large potential to improve livelihoods in the spate irrigated areas. Besides, more intense water use in the spate irrigated areas will mitigate the damage from the hill torrent floods – both in the rodh kohi areas themselves and in the areas adjacent to them.

A holistic approach is required to develop the spate irrigated areas. There is considerable scope to improve livelihoods on many fronts: improved water management, increased and diversified crop production, improved drinking water supply, improved livestock production and spate irrigated forestry

Spate irrigation and Rodh Kohi agriculture should be given its due place in the Agricultural Policies of the each Province and not be omitted as now is sometimes inexplicably the case. Key decision makers, such as Chief Ministers and Governors, Heads of P&D Departments and donor representatives should pay more attention to the spate irrigated areas - to start with visiting, even though these areas are sometimes less easy to travel.

Several activities are required to energize the spate irrigation areas and to end the neglect:

- Allocation of funds and earth moving equipment to rehabilitate and maintain the earthen bunds. This should be done through water users associations and community organizations rather than through powerful individuals.
- Make appropriate investments in water management infrastructure. Experience is that minor investments in flow division structures, reinforced earthen bunds, field inlets and outlets – if made at the right location – can have very major positive impacts. All of this requires intensive involvement of spate irrigation farmers, who are the best experts on spate water management.
- Improve drinking water supply for humans as well as livestock by making improved water ponds, especially when there is no alternative source
- Identify existing good local practices and undertake research on dryland techniques, and very actively disseminate the findings to the main stakeholders – farmers and others
- More intensive programs of livestock development, training and involving local women animal health workers – as livestock is very much the domain of women
- Strengthen the local management of spate irrigation by developing and empower local organizations and water users association at all levels in the system, thus reviving regulation of water flows and improving local capacity to maintain, resolve conflicts and improve the systems
- Consider the development of Rod Kohi Authorities in the different provinces, that will work in partnership with local farmers and other stakeholders

- Better networking of all those that work in spate irrigation in Pakistan - to share knowledge between public and private parties, link with like-minded organizations and networks in other countries and to establish a forum of promoting and advocating the comprehensive development of spate irrigation-dependent areas - provide trainings in the different Provinces and districts where spate irrigation is prevalent
- Incorporate spate irrigation in the relevant university curricula to broaden the now limited pool of experts
- Overall, familiarize government organizations and NGOs on the development needs of spate irrigation areas and encourage them to work on this important area of livelihood improvement.