

Searching for Equity. Conceptions of Justice and Equity in Peasant Irrigation

(English edition)

Buscando la equidad. Concepciones sobre Justicia y Equidad en el Riego Campesino

(Spanish edition)

Editors: Rutgerd Boelens and Gloria Dávila

The theme: water management and social justice

Water is life, water is power, water is social struggle. In a world of growing scarcity and increasing inequality between the water haves and have-nots, the issues of equitable water distribution and appropriate water management are likely to become two of the most urgent issues in the 21st century. In the field of irrigation, it is especially peasant and indigenous populations who are losing control over the process of water management and its benefits, while carrying most of the burdens. It is not uncommon to observe that national policies, legislation and development interventions, often unconsciously, not only reinforce unequal water tenure structures and social differentiation, but also neglect or destroy the great diversity of equitable rules and practices often present in peasant irrigation. This paradox, of the peasant and indigenous demand for both the right to equality and the right to difference, lies at the heart of this book. Within a wider context, the book focuses on the Andean situation to probe and illustrate the central theme.

Peasant irrigation systems which are based on users' conceptions of equitable distribution of rights and duties are often not only more fair but also more sustainable and more productive than those which ignore these conceptions, but

- *what is equity and who defines its rules?*
- *what are peasant conceptions of equity in irrigation and can they be assessed?*
- *how are they rooted in history and in local culture?*
- *how are they expressed, through processes of negotiation among interest groups, in organisational forms and technological designs?*
- *how can we cope with the enormous diversity among peasant norms, as well as their contradictions and interaction with 'officialdom'?*
- *how can conceptions of equity be materialised in irrigation systems and in society?*

Peasant and indigenous leaders, social scientists and irrigation professionals, bring together their experiences, knowledge and visions, providing groundwork for this urgent debate. A debate that must bring us nearer to more social justice in day-to-day practice.

From the contents

The book's contents are structured like a funnel, in which 37 chapters lead the reader from general approaches to more particular cases and analyses:

Preface		<i>Rigoberta Menchú</i>
Prologue: "Agua"		<i>Rutgerd Boelens</i>
Part I	Equity and Justice	
1	Justice and equity: a critical perspective	<i>Pat Lauderdale</i>
2	Reclaiming equality, equity and diversity	<i>Annamarie Oliverio</i>
3	Equity and rule-making	<i>Rutgerd Boelens</i>
Part II	Equity, Power and Peasant Rights	
4	Peasants and power	<i>Jan Douwe van der Ploeg</i>
5	The imposition of Western values and the peasants' struggle for equity	<i>Gerrit Huizer</i>
6	Equity and legal pluralism: taking customary law into account in natural resource policies	<i>Franz von Benda-Beckmann, Keebet von Benda-Beckmann & Joep Spiertz</i>
7	The rights of indigenous peoples over their territories and natural resources	<i>Xavier Mena V.</i>
Part III	Irrigation and Equity	
8	Collective management and social construction of peasant irrigation systems.	<i>Rutgerd Boelens</i>
9	The technocratic vision of equity in the distribution of water: a matter of context	<i>Geert Diemer</i>
10	Equity considerations in system design and in the allocation and distribution of water	<i>Gilbert Levine</i>
11	Commodity and community water values. An experience from the U.S. Southwest	<i>Helen Ingram & F. Lee</i>

12	Notes about irrigation projects, equity and the actor-oriented approach	Alberto Arce
Part IV Equity considerations in peasant irrigation: case studies around the world		
13	Water rights and equity issues. A case from Nepal	Robert Yoder & Edward Martin
14	Equity and accountability. Water distribution in a South Indian canal irrigation system	Peter Mollinga
15	The irrigation scheme in Sabié: a case study from Mozambique	Bart Pijnenburg & S. Simbine
16	Equity in irrigation management transfer: Alto Río Lerma, Mexico	Wim Kloezen & Carlos Garcés
17	Values, ideologies and equity in water distribution. Perspectives from California	Kate Berry
Part V Irrigation in the Andes		
18	Andean social construction of identity and political direction	José Almeida V.
19	Andean irrigation in history	Jeanette E. Sherbondy
20	Irrigation in the Andean environment	Linden Vincent
21	Peasant economy and Andean irrigation	Rutgerd Boelens
22	Water distribution, social organisation and equity in the Andean vision	Zulema Gutiérrez & G. Gerbrandy
Part VI Andean Irrigation: Policy and Legislation		
23	Competing cultural logics: State and "indigenous" models in conflict	Paul H. Gelles
24	From agrarian reform to privatisation of land and water in the Peruvian coast	María Teresa Oré
25	The Ecuadorian water legislation and policy analysed from the indigenous-peasant point of view	Nina Pacari
26	Water Law and equity in irrigation projects: Ecuador	R.Boelens, H.Castanier & F.Terán
27	Water as private property. Notes on the case of Chile	Jan Hendriks
Part VII Conceptions of Equity in Andean Irrigation: Experiences		
28	River water distribution in a community of the Bolivian Altiplano. Sullcayana	Gerben Gerbrandy
29	Water distribution in the inter-Andean valleys: the case of Chilijchi, Bolivia	Gerben Gerbrandy
30	Multiple-source irrigation systems and transparency. Punata, Bolivia	Zulema Gutiérrez & G. Gerbrandy
31	Irrigation, Guaraní territory and conceptions of equity	N.van Dixhoorn & José L. Gareca
32	Peasants, Andean irrigation and equity. Chingazo-Pungales, Ecuador	Nelson Martínez B.
33	Andean irrigation and the education of professionals in agrarian sciences <i>Vivanco</i>	Félix Hernández & Ketty
34	Ethical principle and social control. Morasloma, Ecuador	R.Boelens, X. Caiza & R. Unda
35	The historical development of equity in irrigation. Urcuquí, Ecuador	F. Apollin, P. Núñez & T.Ruf
Part VIII Andean Irrigation, Organisation and Equity		
36	Andean irrigation and gender equity	Aline Arroyo & Rutgerd Boelens
37	Water users' organisations, support approaches and the defence of equity	Rutgerd Boelens & Gloria Dávila
Reflections		Rutgerd Boelens & Gloria Dávila

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