

# 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.

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