Messica Irrigation Pilot Project (MIPP)

Up-scaling a rural innovation approach to irrigation development

The Messica Irrigation Pilot Project aims to demonstrate that sustainable and pro-poor smallholder irrigation can be developed cost-effectively at a large scale by means of an innovative approach to irrigation development. This 2-year project in Manica province of Mozambique is financially supported by the Dutch Government.

Farmer-initiated irrigation
In Sub-Saharan Africa the area under smallholder farmer-initiated irrigation is steadily growing at a rate of about 3.7% per year. This is much higher than for other sectors of irrigation. This shows that despite the complexity of smallholder irrigated agriculture, farmers do experiment and find irrigation solutions. Lack of finance, poor agronomic practices, lack of agricultural inputs and marketing difficulties are, at times, more important obstacles to increase irrigated production than the construction and maintenance of suitable irrigation infrastructure. In this project we aim to craft solutions to tackle these obstacles by combining the experiences of farmers with engineering and other expert knowledge.

Engineering, empowerment and education
The consortium consist of a mix of organisations from Mozambique and the Netherlands; Royal Haskoning and Resiliência Moçambique (innovating engineering companies), ETC Netherlands, Micaia and Caritas Messica (NGOs with ample experience in rural innovation and farmer empowerment) and Wageningen University and ISPM (research and higher educational institutes). The combination of irrigation development with action-research, capacity building and farmer mobilisation creates synergies that are an essential aspect of the approach.

Monitoring progress and results
The flexibility required to give farmers a central place in the project implementation often conflicts with stringent project progress requirements and narrowly defined implementation targets. The project will elaborate a smart monitoring and evaluation system that can fit the tender procedures and control requirements of large-scale, donor-funded projects, while at the same time respecting the dynamics of participatory processes. The project will develop clear procedures that allow for transparent monitoring and evaluation to show the effectiveness and efficiency of the approach.

Concrete objectives
1. A rural innovation approach to irrigation development, suitable for large-scale commercial implementation, elaborated and demonstrated
2. Experiences with the approach documented and made available (in different forms) for practitioners, policy makers and scientists
3. An area of 100 ha irrigated smallholder production sustainably developed
4. A participatory irrigation design course developed and taught at the superior polytechnic in Chimoio (ISPM)
5. A group of 20 professionals, technicians and farmers trained in the irrigation development approach, which makes it possible to involve them in new projects with a similar approach