

VALUES, BEHAVIOR, AND IRRIGATION: SMOOTH INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES

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The author investigates how water authorities and operators of irrigated ricelands prevent or minimize conflict over water delivery. Completed in 1972, the study focuses on ditchtenders and irrigators in three national irrigation systems in Cavite Province. Conflict is found to be managed chiefly by behaviors that create, strengthen, or repair smooth interpersonal relations (SIR) between the representatives of the National Irrigation Administration on the one hand and the farmers on the other. Suggestions are made for the improvement of management conflict in irrigation systems.

The ability to get along well with others is explicitly and highly valued in Philippine society (Lynch 1970: 48). One setting in which great stress is placed on this value is in gravity irrigation systems, particularly those in which scarcity of water is a frequent problem. In such irrigation systems the management of conflict is an important factor related to the effectiveness and efficiency of the system.

What is of interest to this discussion is the potential emphasis on smooth interpersonal relations (SIR) that occurs between irrigators and water authorities, and the variety of behaviors that both sides exhibit to create, strengthen, or repair SIR. Such data should be useful for our further understanding of the processes at work for the management of conflict in Philippine irrigation systems.

To deal with this question I refer to data collected from personal interviews with 22 ditchtenders in three irrigation systems in the province of Cavite in the Philippines.¹ These interview data are supplemented by information gathered in conversations with other participants in these irrigation systems, as well as by background information collected within these irrigation systems during the first six months of 1972. In this study the water authorities are the ditchtenders of the National Irrigation Admini-

stration (NIA), the one NIA representative with whom most irrigators have frequent contact (Wickham 1970). These ditchtenders are the usual decision-makers regarding the distribution of water in their irrigation section and represent to the irrigators the benefits and deficits of the irrigation system as well as the rules and regulations for the use of water.² It is in this role of water allocators that the greatest potential for interpersonal conflict exists.

The Intermediate Value of Smooth Interpersonal Relations

As presented by Lynch (1970), social acceptance, that condition when one is not rejected or improperly criticized by others, is a thematic value in Philippine society. Two middle-range values which serve as means to the attainment of social acceptance are smoothness of interpersonal relations and sensitivity to personal affront. Our concern in this discussion will be with smoothness of interpersonal relations.

SIR is defined as the ability to get along with others in such a way as to avoid outward signs of conflict, even under difficult circumstances (Lynch 1970: 10). The three major ways of attaining SIR are said to be concession, the use

of euphemisms in speech, and the use of go-betweens.³ Concession as a behavioral response means that when one is confronted with a request, demand, or order he will go along with that request (or seem to) even though he may be uninterested in the suggestion or even disagree with it. Euphemism as a behavioral response means that an idea which is unpleasant, for example a divergent opinion, a request or a correction, will be worded as pleasantly and respectfully as possible. The use of a go-between as a behavioral response means that in anticipation of situations that may negatively affect SIR, or when attempting to resolve a situation that has negatively effected SIR, one will in that situation interact through a surrogate.

There is an additional aspect to maintaining SIR that must be considered. As Hollnsteiner (1970: 65) has indicated "... where people are so concerned about getting along with others, reciprocity is a constant consideration."⁴ One must reciprocate favors received or he will fail to establish, or maintain, SIR with the donor. Likewise, given the principle of reciprocation as a means to SIR, one can supply favors in anticipation of subsequently demanding their return.

To summarize, in Philippine society, getting along with others in a respectful manner is a highly valued style of action. In situations where it is, or may become, difficult for two or more people to attain smooth interaction, or exchange, someone in that group will be likely to engage in one or more of the following actions in an attempt to preserve SIR: concession, euphemism, employment of a go-between, or gift-giving (anticipatory or reciprocal).

SIR Stress in Irrigation Systems

One important form of SIR stress in an irrigation system arises out of the nature of the basic exchange between the ditchtenders and the irrigators. The major request from irrigators is that water be delivered when needed. The major request from ditchtenders is that the irrigators obey their decisions regarding water distribution and pay their irrigation fees. These exchanges might occur smoothly were it not for one important variable: supply of water. When

the supply of water is scarce, there is stress on the exchange between the ditchtender and farmer since the ditchtender is unable to meet the farmer's request for water and the farmer is in turn less inclined to follow the ditchtender's directives. To a rice farmer or a ditchtender, insufficient water is a stressful situation and maintaining SIR in that situation requires "... being agreeable, even under difficult circumstances ..." (Lynch 1970: 10).

In such a situation the value of SIR takes on great importance as a mechanism of social control and tension management. As the following data will indicate, the means of achieving SIR in this stressful situation follow rather closely those means that researchers have observed are used in a variety of other settings in Philippine society.⁵

Actions to Support SIR

1. The ditchtenders' actions to the farmers

Ditchtenders are interested in achieving SIR with the farmers so that farmers will cooperate with them in obeying the rules of the irrigation system.⁶ In so doing, the ditchtender is attempting to add influence to his role of authority. As David (1967) suggests, only in this way can orders be given effectively. When asked how they attempt to achieve SIR with the farmers the responses summarized in Table 1 were obtained.

As can be seen from Table 1 the responses of the ditchtenders indicate they use three of the four means for achieving SIR discussed previously.⁷

In addition, ditchtenders engage in a variety of activities generalized in Table I as positive service. Some of these activities might also be categorized as concession (e.g., rearranging water schedules) or gift-giving (e.g., helping in work other than irrigation). However, I have categorized these activities as positive service to connect them with a further observation of Lynch (1970: 50) that one is expected to show gratitude for positive service provided by others as part of their official roles.⁸ The ditchtender's positive service is seen by him as a means of creating reciprocal obligations with the farmers.

Table 1
Summary of actions used by ditchtender to achieve SIR, with
farmers (Cavite Province, Philippines, 1972)

| Response | General category |
|--|------------------|
| 1. Provides water when asked | Concession |
| 2. Participates in farmers' recreational activities when invited | Concession |
| 3. Donates money when requested | Gift-giving |
| 4. Invites farmers to his house for food and drink | Gift giving |
| 5. Gives cigarettes to farmers | Gift-giving |
| 6. Does not speak like a boss | Euphemism |
| 7. Helps in work other than just irrigation | Positive service |
| 8. Wakes farmers when water is to be delivered to their place | Positive service |
| 9. Rearranges water schedules from night to day, if possible | Positive service |

Table 2
Summary of actions used by farmers to achieve SIR with
ditchtenders^a (Cavite Province, Philippines, 1972)

| Response | General category |
|---|------------------|
| 1. Follow the requests and directives of the ditchtender | Concession |
| 2. Provide snacks and cigarettes to the ditchtender | Gift-giving |
| 3. Provide a larger share to the ditchtender at harvest time | Gift-giving |
| 4. Act respectfully toward the ditchtender | Euphemism |
| 5. Provide companionship to the ditchtender when he is working at night | Job assistance |
| 6. Speak to their landlords and other farmers about the need to pay irrigation fees | Job assistance |
| 7. Help cut the grass on the canal | Job assistance |

^aAn interesting comment not summarized in Table 2 was made by one ditchtender who reported that he felt the farmers maintained SIR with him by reporting the ditchtender's mistakes directly to him rather than to his supervisor.

He can expect that in the future these reciprocal obligations will be repaid by the farmers in the form of obedience to his orders and directives, thus promising some degree of SIR.

2. *The farmers' actions to the ditchtenders*

Farmers are interested in achieving SIR with the ditchtender so that he will respond positively to their requests for water. The ditchtender is a resource-controller with whom the farmer must deal.

When asked how farmers attempt to achieve SIR with them, ditchtenders gave the responses summarized in Table 2.⁹

Table 2 indicates that farmers use concession, euphemism, and gift-giving as means of achieving SIR with the ditchtender. One frequently mentioned form of gift-giving is the provision of a special rate for harvesting labor. Many ditchtenders reported that when they, or members of their family, assist in harvesting the rice crop of irrigators whom they serve, they are given a share larger than the traditional one-sixth. Some reported receiving one-half of what they harvested and one farmer reported that he gave to the ditchtender the entire amount of palay which the ditchtender harvested.

In addition, they engage in a number of activities which I have labeled job assistance (which might be thought of as analogous to positive service in the role of farmer). Job assistance is an especially relevant behavior for creating SIR, since on the one hand the job of the ditchtender involves a great deal of physical labor and on the other hand requires skills which the farmer can contribute.

The Role of the Tagakaón in SIR

Some farmers in the irrigation systems under study have joined together to employ an individual they refer to as a *tagakaón* (literally, "one who fetches").¹⁰ Significantly, this most often occurs in those sections of the irrigation system which are at the greatest distance from the source of water, and therefore with the greatest stress on SIR.¹¹ I am not suggesting that these farmers hire the *tagakaón* solely, or even primarily, to assure SIR, but merely pointing out

that the *tagakaón* does perform this function as part of his role.¹² Recall that the use of a go-between is one strategy used for achieving SIR. As will be shown below, *tagakaón* often performs this role of surrogate.

When irrigation water is scheduled for farmers far from the main canal, the water must pass by the farms of many irrigators who are not entitled to receive the water at that time. Nevertheless, many of those being by-passed may feel the need for water on their farms and may divert some of the water from the canal. Obviously, if many irrigators divert water, those who are scheduled to receive water may receive a short supply. For these distant farmers this problem is so important that some have hired a *tagakaón* whose major responsibility is to patrol the lateral from the point at which the water is delivered from the main canal to the area of the farmers' fields. His patrolling is to prevent, or correct, any diversion of the water enroute.

In carrying out this function the *tagakaón* acts as a go-between for the farmers scheduled to receive the water and those who may divert the water. Since the two groups of farmers may be kinsman, or barrio mates, the go-between allows for the communication of unpleasant information (i.e., "stop diverting the water") without directly involving the two parties concerned. Since most *tagakaón* are not irrigators, they are in a sense outside the system and therefore perhaps less subject than system members to the constraints of maintaining SIR with other system members.

Two other activities of the *tagakaón* also illustrate his role as go-between. Again, the suggestion is not that this is the primary purpose of these activities, but simply that they have this added function.

First, the *tagakaón* frequently acts as a go-between the farmers he serves and the ditchtender. Farmers sometimes voice their complaints, or needs, to the *tagakaón* first and he in turn communicates with the ditchtender. This varies from place to place and is not so common as the opposite flow: the ditchtender's use of the *tagakaón* to communicate the water schedule to the farmers. This latter pattern of

communication could be an important element in maintaining ditchtender-irrigator SIR if the water schedule to be communicated is unlikely to be satisfactory to the irrigator. Second, when the water arrives at the fields of the receiving farmer, the *tagakaón* sometimes has the responsibility of equitably distributing that water to the fields of each irrigator he is serving. Farmers using a *tagakaón* report that this procedure usually results in a fair distribution of water among their farms and results in little conflict and good SIR among the irrigators served.

The job of the *tagakaón* is important in helping the irrigator conserve his scarce resources of time, energy, and mobility. In addition, by acting as a go-between in various stressful situations the *tagakaón* increases the probability that the irrigators will act effectively as members of the irrigation system while maintaining smooth interaction with their fellow irrigators and the water authorities.

Implications for Irrigation Management

Conflict management is an important factor contributing to the successful operation of any irrigation system. In Philippine irrigation systems the creation and maintenance of smooth interpersonal relations are important mechanisms for the management of conflict. From this it follows that in designing the rules and roles for operating irrigation systems in the Philippines, attention must be given to the effect of these rules and roles on the ability of irrigators and water authorities to have SIR between, and among, themselves. Specifically, two generalizations are relevant.

Ditchtenders. First, the role of the ditchtender must be designed so that performance will involve both SIR-creating and SIR-maintaining activities. This is especially important in water scheduling. The procedures for scheduling the delivery of water should enhance the ability of the ditchtender both to get along well with the irrigators and to allocate the water efficiently.

Two procedures might contribute to this kind of behavior; namely, (a) reducing uncer-

tainty in the minds of irrigators by adopting more standard procedures and policies for decision-making,¹³ and (b) increasing communication between the water authorities and the irrigators.

The field data indicate that very little information is transmitted to the irrigators in written form. Some ditchtenders report the use of scheduling notices which are given to the irrigators. Farmers indicate that such notices are sometimes shown to other farmers as a means of avoiding water conflicts.

The field data also indicate that the ditchtenders seldom organize group meetings to communicate with their irrigators. The usual form of communication is with small groups of three to six men whom the ditchtender happens to meet simultaneously. While it may be assumed that these irrigators have horizontal communication with other irrigators, the amount of distortion in the ditchtender's original message may be assumed to be significant. Furthermore, the actual message of the ditchtender may vary from group to group.

Irrigators. Second, irrigators should be permitted to engage in activities that create and maintain SIR, including the identification and operation of informal irrigation roles. They should be encouraged and assisted in developing behavioral patterns, such as use of a *tagakaón* that improve their ability to get along smoothly with other irrigators and with the water authorities.

In particular, irrigators should be encouraged and assisted to organize their needs and activities so as to reduce the total number of interactions required to perform a particular task. By using the *tagakaón* to patrol the canal, the number of interactions among farmers in the receiving section and the transversed section is greatly reduced. Such a reduction in interaction is another important means of maintaining SIR.

Summary Comments

The interaction between ditchtenders and irrigators is influenced by the Filipinos' value of smooth interpersonal relations. The ditchtender attempts to create SIR with irrigators so as to

ensure their obedience to his directives. Likewise, irrigators are concerned with creating SIR with the ditchtender in order to influence the probability that their requests for water will be granted. Both parties use the familiar behavioral patterns of concession, euphemism, go-betweens, gift-giving, and positive service or job assistance as means for achieving SIR.

All of these actions may be seen as attempts to reduce uncertainty in decision-making. With the rather poor physical state of the irrigation systems there is considerable uncertainty as to just how much water will be available in any given season. Added to this is the seeming absence of a well-understood policy for distributing water in times of scarcity. Both of these conditions emphasize the need for the irrigator to have SIR with the ditchtender so as to be able to influence his water-scheduling decisions.

On the other hand, the ditchtender uses SIR to reduce the uncertainty that surrounds the farmers' response to his directions. This uncertainty appears to derive primarily from the mediocre irrigation service which the farmer receives. This is not entirely, or even mostly, the ditchtender's fault, but results rather from the present poor physical state of the systems. Nevertheless, given a situation of scarce water and rules for distributing water that are well enforced neither by socialization nor by punishment of offenses, the ditchtender is left with SIR as the means to achieve conformity to his orders.

The general impression of this observer is that under the present circumstances SIR is a functional value for the operation of Philippine irrigation systems. As these systems become more dynamic and as both irrigators and water authorities become more development-oriented in their activities, SIR as a highly ranked value could become dysfunctional. This hypothesis remains to be investigated.

Notes

At the time he submitted this article to PSR, the author was a development sociologist at the Interna-

tional Institute of Rural Reconstruction (Silang, Cavite). Dr. Coward (Ph.D. sociology, Iowa State University, 1969) is now an assistant professor, department of rural sociology, Cornell University.

1. The 22 ditchtenders interviewed represent the entire population of ditchtenders in these three irrigation systems. All are employees of the NIA. For his assistance in contacting these men I wish to thank Engineer Jose Cedeno, Provincial Engineer of the NIA located in Naic, Cavite.

2. According to NIA regulations an irrigation section should include about 150 hectares and be the responsibility of one ditchtender. Depending on average farm size, ditchtenders may be working with 50 to 75 irrigators.

3. 'Concession' is an English rendering of the Tagalog word, *pakikisama*, which has as its root meaning "accompany, go along with" (Lynch 1970: 10).

4. Reciprocity is defined as "that principle of behavior wherein every service received, solicited or not, demands a return, the nature and proportion of the return determined by the relative statuses of the parties involved and the kind of 'exchange at issue'" (Hollnsteiner 1970: 65).

5. These findings are summarized in Lynch (1970).

6. This statement is based on interviews with the ditchtenders. When asked if *pakikisama* was important in carrying out their work 12 of the 22 specifically mentioned the need for *pakikisama* in order to get the cooperation of the farmer in obeying their directives.

7. The use of go-betweens is discussed in a later section.

8. Lynch indicates that this point is supported in the work of Feliciano (1966) and Hare (1969). Hollnsteiner (1970: 75) makes a similar point: "The concept of impersonal service is not deeply ingrained in the bureaucracy or the general public; gift-giving and-receiving for service rendered is common."

9. At the time of this writing I also have available interview data from a small number of farmers (n = 27) in which they were asked what they do to create *pakikisama* with the ditchtender. All their responses coincide with the information obtained from ditchtenders.

10. For another discussion of this role see Coward (1972). Farmers sometimes refer to this role with the English word, watertender.

11. Also, some *tagakaon* are employed only during the months of critical water shortage, namely, September, October, and November.

12. Responses from the 27 farmers interviewed indicate that the major reason for hiring a *tagakaon* is to avoid having to leave the farm, or other activities, to patrol the canal when water is delivered to one's section.

13. Using the terminology of systems theory there is need for the establishment of "internal test parameters," a set of criteria for designating the water needs of a farm, or section, and "criterion-testing sub-systems," an individual, or group of individuals, who evaluate the situation by applying the internal test parameters (see Kunkel 1970: 197-200).

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