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Roles and Rules of Irrigation Water Use in Khorezm, Uzbekistan: A Lifeworld Analysis

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Abstract

With an annual precipitation of less than 100 mm, agriculture in Uzbekistan's province Khorezm is bound to irrigation. The water resources that are needed for the production of cotton, rice, wheat and other crops are diverted from the Aral Sea's (now intermittent) tributary Amudarya. The extent of this diversion and the inefficiencies with which irrigation water is conveyed and applied have gained notoriety for their detrimental impacts on the environment, notably for the desiccation of the Aral Sea. In response to the environmental problems, scientific research has engaged in developing technologies that make irrigation water use more efficient and save water for alternative uses and environmental needs. While many research projects have succeeded to develop technologies, most of these have never been adopted by farmers.

To shed light on why water-saving is not practised, this paper investigates the perceptions and institutions which shape the way farmers use water in Khorezm. Conceptually, the analysis draws on Schütz' lifeworld concept (Schütz and Luckmann 1974) and Berger and Luckmann's theory of social construction (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Based on empirical research in two water user associations in Khorezm, the paper describes the spatial and temporal categories in which water users attach meaning to the resource water and their water use practices and analyses typifications of roles and rules as they guide farmers' behaviour. The paper thus reconstructs the subjective everyday water lifeworlds of farmers in Khorezm. It closes by drawing conclusions on the role of water lifeworlds for the adoption of water-saving practices.

Keywords: Central Asia, irrigation water use, lifeworld, social construction, technology adoption, Uzbekistan, water saving

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