7. MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS

7.1 MAJOR FINDINGS

1. Majority of the farmers are not getting water as and when required, especially in the tail reach. The main reason cited by both the farmers and the officials for this situation is that the conveyance system, water courses and control structures, is faulty. As the problem is severe in the case of Chowara branch canal, water availability in this canal is less, compared to that of Vizhinjam. Cropping pattern of the command also has been affected due to lack of irrigation water. The average size of wetland at Chowara is only 0.04 ha (10 cents), whereas it is 0.16 ha (40 cents) at Vizhinjam. Wetland cultivation (mainly rice) is found more at the head reach of the branch canal command. More dryland cultivation (mainly coconut) is there in the middle and tail reaches.

2. Large majority of farmers, as well as officials, have well perceived the idea of participation of farmers in irrigation management. When more number of farmers wanted participation in all areas of irrigation management, more number of officials wanted it to be restricted to operation and maintenance only. The officials consider participation as obligatory on the part of farmers since the command area development activities are solely for their benefit and therefore there is no need to be invited by the Government agency. But the farmers consider it as a necessity for the system improvement and they insist that the agency should ensure this. The main reason for poor participation is attributed
to the weakness on the part of officials and farmers, as expressed by both the communities. Farmers accept the fact that there is non-cooperation among themselves and officials accept their inability to assure adequate supply of water. However, farmers blame official agency for not offering sufficient incentives and water supply and officials in turn blame farmers for the non-cooperation and leadership crisis severely felt among the farmers.

3. Majority of the officials, who are concerned with the irrigation and command area development activities are not trained in any of the concerned fields. The number of officials without training are more in CADA belonging to the engineering discipline. Almost all the field staff and some of the senior/middle level officials have not attended such training courses. Major reason cited for this situation is that they have not been deputed by the authorities for attending training course. In fact, irrigation management and command area development are relatively new concepts and specialised areas in which sufficient orientation is required for the officials for properly carrying out their activities.

4. The study has revealed that the functioning of CADA has not been effective so far. More than a quarter of the farmer population in the command do not know the existence of CADA and its activities. It has not been succeeded in ensuring the required irrigation water for the farmers, especially in the lower reaches. Many officials have admitted the failure of CADA due to lack of an integrated approach and coordination among the officials of different disciplines. The three-tier system instituted by CADA for ensuring the participation of farmers has not been successful. Another important factor which has led CADA not
to achieve the intended results is that those posted in CADA in the senior levels remain in their positions for only short periods. To many of the officials, it is a convenient placement before retirement. This state of affair to a great extent resulted in bringing down the enthusiasm of officials.

5. Majority of the farmers in the command area are not members of the farmer associations. About one third of the farmers have never heard of an association functioning in their localities, though the CADA documents show that associations are functioning in all the areas under the present study.

6. The farmers response to farmer associations was found to have a direct relationship with the availability of water for irrigation. Large majority of the farmers of Vizhinjam branch canal command are aware of the associations; they even know the individual members of the associations. The case is different with regard to the farmers of Chowara branch canal command, where only a few are aware of the associations. The rate of membership is high in the tail reach of Vizhinjam, followed by the middle and head reaches. Whereas the rate of membership is high in the head reach of Chowara and low in the middle and tail reaches. In other words, the rate of membership is in an ascending order from head reach to tail reach, at Vizhinjam. But it is in a descending order, from head reach to tail reach, at Chowara. This trend is related to the attitude of farmers to irrigation in the canal commands.
We have also found that the intensity of involvement of the members of the farmer associations is high at Vizhinjam, than that at Chowara. Not only large majority of the farmers of Vizhinjam know the date of joining the associations and their membership status but also most of them consider the functioning of the associations useful, compared to the farmers of Chowara. The sustenance of the associations are also better at Vizhinjam than at Chowara. As evidenced from the study, participation of farmers of Vizhinjam in the functioning of the canal committees is also better to that of Chowara. It is the farmers of Vizhinjam who are relatively better aware of the functioning of the Project Committee. Precisely, the three-tier system of CADA instituted for ensuring participation of farmers in irrigation management is comparatively better operated in the Vizhinjam command than that at Chowara command.

It may be noted that both the canals, Chowara and Vizhinjam, were commissioned in the mid seventies. In both the commands farmers were mobilised by officials of CADA to join the associations during 1987 and the associations came into being almost at the same period. Therefore, it is clear that the concept of farmer association was driven to the minds of farmers in the area for bettering the irrigation system after the farmers were having the experiences of the canals for about a decade. In the initial stage of commissioning itself the supply of water was reasonably good at Vizhinjam. On the contrary, in the initial stage itself, the supply was affected at Chowara, due to the faults in the canal network. The membership in the farmer associations at the Vizhinjam command area is high, especially in the tail reach, mainly because the farmers of that area might have found the possibility of
Improving their water supply by responding to the wishes of the officials and joining the associations. But the farmers of Chowara command have not shown concern, as they might have been sure that the water will not flow to their fields unless and until the canal network is set right. Therefore, the farmers especially the tail-enders found it unnecessary to join farmer associations when the water does not even reach the outlet. It is clear that the availability of water and fair chance of improving the system have influenced the farmers of Vizhinjam for having better relationship with the farmer associations. Though farming nature, education level, size of holdings, income level etc may also contribute to the irrigation behaviour of the farmers, as proved in the previous Chapters, the most significant factor regulating the intensity of participation of farmers in irrigation management seems to be the assured supply of water.

7. Most of the farmer associations are either not functioning or not functioning properly. The reason for this situation is mainly attributed to the hurry shown by the officials in setting up the associations. The associations were formed by CADA in a war footing, by motivating the farmers through promises of assured supply of water and more material incentives. In fact, the officials who were assigned the task of forming the associations were neither trained, nor experienced enough to influence the farmers for participating in irrigation management activities. Their concern was only to form the associations some how or other. There are no officials to monitor the sustained performance of the associations or to oversee the fulfilment of the promises given to them. It has been found that after the associations were formed, there were no programmes or contact of officials for more than six months, which
lead to the retardation of many of the associations. The main reasons pointed out by the farmers for the ill-functioning or non-functioning of the associations, are that farmers lost interest in the associations, as these institutions could not make the intended results and the authorities lost interest due to their preoccupation. However, the officials blamed the farmers for the ill-functioning of the associations. They pointed out the disinterest of the farmers and disputes/rivalries among them as the reasons for the situation. Interestingly, they believe that if the officials are committed and efficient, the performance of the associations can be improved. They have suggested the strengthening of the extension machinery of CADA as the major step to improve the performance of the associations. Similarly, farmers suggested that officials should be there to catalyse the functioning of the associations.

The sustenance of the farmer associations is comparatively more intense and steady at Vizhinjam. More number of farmers at Vizhinjam are finding the associations useful. Vizhinjam command has better irrigation supply and also is bestowed with better farmer-officer relations compared to Chowara. The farmers of Vizhinjam are not only in more contact with the officials of all disciplines of CADA and Irrigation Department, but also are more satisfied with the interaction of the officials than those at Chowara. Of course, this may be to a great extent due to the better supply of water at Vizhinjam. The officials can meet the farmers at Vizhinjam without a prick of conscience, which is not the case at Chowara.

In the light of the improved and sustained participation of farmers and better farmer-officer relations at Vizhinjam, compared to
that at Chowara, and also in the light of the request of the farmers for an official catalyst and the demand of the officials for strengthening of extension programmes of CADA, it is felt that a closer interaction of the officials with the farmers is essential for the continued and more extensive participation of farmers in irrigation management. This has given valid backing to our hypothesis that continued presence of the officials is required for the sustenance of participation of farmers.

8. Canal Committees are practically non-functional. The meetings are not held regularly. Moreover, the convener himself and most of the other officials in the committee have not been present for the meetings even if they are held. The response of the farmers has also been very poor. It is expressed by many farmers as well as officials that there is a fair amount of vagueness in the definition of the canal committee. The role canal committees has to play in irrigation management is not at all clear to either officials or farmers. It is sure that in the absence of an efficient canal committee neither the farmer association which has to be coordinated by the committee, nor the Project Committee, which has to be fed by the information from the canal committees will work efficiently.

Like the canal committees, the Project Committee is also not functioning properly. It is not meeting regularly. All canal committees are not represented in the Project Committee as the officials concerned have not communicated their nominations. Moreover, there is no provision to ensure that the Chairmen of the canal committees to be represented in the Project Committee. This leads to the hinderance to the information flow or to feedback from the lower tiers of the system.
9. Major factor motivating the farmers in irrigation management activities is found to be material incentives, but large majority of them are not getting the incentives. Compared to the Chowara command, the receipt of material incentives is high at Vizhinjam command. This is basically because of the fact that the farmer associations at Vizhinjam are more healthy and are able to channelise the incentives easily. Most of the farmers as well as the officials consider that material incentives offered and the participation of farmers are related and the variations in the supply of incentives will be reflected in the rate of participation. The evidence from the Vizhinjam command and the opinions of the farmers and officials lead us to stick on to our hypothesis that participation of farmers will be more, if more incentives are offered.

10. The non-cooperative attitude of the farmers and the jealousy prevalent among them are related to a great extent. Lack of cooperation among the farmers is the basic reason pointed out by the officials and farmers for the lesser participation of farmers observed at present. Therefore, it is concluded that the jealousy prevalent among the farmers is a major factor that may incapacitate them to join the irrigation management activities.

11. Considering the opinions of majority of the farmers of different communities, irrespective of the dominant Nair community, as well as other communities, it is found that the religious/caste/community influence in the participation of farmers in irrigation management is minimal.
12. Data collected under the study prove that political differences among the farmers weaken participatory activities of them in irrigation management.

13. Even though there are certain disputes/conflicts with regard to irrigation exists, it may not be possible to say that the disputes/conflicts are the cause for the lethargy or ill-functioning of the farmer associations.

14. Though fragmentation of land holdings is attributed as a major reason for the lack of interest of farmers in irrigation, it is not always so. Most of the farmers seem to have reconciled to this peculiar situation common to all parts of the State. They also do not feel that the size of holdings has much to do with the yield.

15. The full-time farmers are more involved in the participatory activities in irrigation management compared to the part-time farmers, who are less committed to irrigated agriculture. Not only more number of full-time farmers are active members of the associations, but also beneficiaries of the activities of the associations compared to the part-time farmers.

7.2 SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING PARTICIPATION OF FARMERS

(1) Immediate action may be taken to rectify the defects in the canal network for the fair and assured distribution of water.
(2) Extension wings may be set up in the Irrigation Department and in CADA, basically for establishing more interaction between farmers and officials.

(3) Training may be imparted to all the officials concerned with irrigation and command area development, irrespective of disciplines and positions.

(4) Farmer associations may be expanded by including all the farmers in the command. The number of associations may be reduced as far as possible by merging two or three of them. Studies have shown that the membership between 40 and 150 is ideal from the functional point of view. Therefore, while reorganising, this aspect may be considered.

(5) Canal Committees and Project Committee may be given more role in the irrigation management activities. Vagueness existing in the definition of duties and responsibilities of both the committees may be removed. It may be ensured that the Chairmen of the canal committees are nominated to the Project Committee. Project Committee may be given the authority to manage the concerned irrigation project and statutory powers may be given to the canal committees.

(6) Action may be taken to establish more interaction among the various disciplines of CADA. It may be ensured that the senior officials posted in CADA remain in those positions for longer time.
Efforts to have the fair distribution of material incentives to deserving farmers may be taken up. Incentives, such as awards, promotion, etc. may be instituted to encourage the officers who do commendable service in irrigation management.

7.3 CONCLUSION

We have made an attempt to delineate the various aspects of participation of farmers in irrigation management with specific reference to Kerala. The state of the art of the performance of CADA and its three-tier system instituted for ensuring participation of farmers have been brought out by the study. We have also analysed the sociological factors that influence the participation of farmers, with the intention of identifying the problems presently faced in participating the farmers. Effort has been made to define the role, assured supply of water, farmer officer relations and material incentives play in the command area development activities. The suggestions emanated from the study envisages united efforts of the farmers and officials for improving the performance of the canal irrigation through participation of farmers, which is hoped to be a reality, in its fullest sense, in the near future.