


Strategic Advisory Service  
for Human Resources



**The OneStaff Approach  
IWM's Journey**



The Strategic Advisory Service for Human Resources (**SAS-HR**) works to strengthen the human resources network of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). It devises strategies that recognize the diversity and autonomy of each participating CGIAR research center, define short- and long-term needs with staff and management, create solutions, and help establish a virtual community of human resources professionals in CGIAR centers, donor agencies, and partner institutions.

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# Introduction to the Good Practice Showcase

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*"If only we knew what we already know" is a dilemma that haunts knowledge-based organizations. The CGIAR is no exception.*

**Every organization does certain things exceptionally well. But most organizations do not actively capture those experiences or make them available to others. As a result, valuable knowledge is lost.**

The CGIAR system is actively renewing itself. In the complex network of autonomous centers that characterizes the system, sharing good practices will help to save money, speed progress, avoid costly errors, foster teamwork, and enhance the quality of our products and services. All of this will strengthen our brand in the world and reinforce the faith of stakeholders in the ability of the system to evolve and meet future needs.

The Strategic Advisory Service for Human Resources—a service established by CIAT, CIMMYT, IPGRI, IWMI, WorldFish, and the CGIAR System Office—is pleased to present this series showcasing good Human Resource Management practices. The practices described come from staff members who chose ingenious options—often counter-intuitive to the thinking at the time—and managers who implemented them with imagination and effectiveness. By expanding the realm of the possible in the discipline, they also add to our body of professional knowledge.

For more information about the practice described in this publication, please contact the CGIAR Center that implemented the practice. For more information on other titles in this series, please contact the SAS-HR at email:[sashr@cgiar.org](mailto:sashr@cgiar.org)

# What Motivated the OneStaff Practice?

*"The deep divide between national and international staff categories is a threat to the very survival of our system. Human resources policies that may have made sense 20-30 years ago need major re-thinking today. We need to be bold to catch up with the world around us.*

*"OneStaff" is not an option - it is a must"*

***Frank R. Rijsberman***  
***Director General***  
***IWMI***

**Effective, human resources policies and practices must be robust and flexible-able to respond to the dynamic nature of business today. For knowledge-based organizations like the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) the need is even more critical. IWMI recognized that it needed to transform its human resources policies and practices to deliver the organization's new vision.**

IWMI had two distinct and separate sets of human resource management policies. One for nationally recruited staff (NRS) and another for staff recruited internationally (IRS). The policies were complex, vague, and confidential. They were interpreted by the human resources office and copies of these documents were seldom available to staff members. These two groups of staff were managed separately. Over the years, this created both real and perceived inequities between the NRS and IRS members, fostering an unhealthy and rigid cultural and social divide between the two groups. This divide and the feelings it created was incompatible with the ambitious vision of the new IWMI that called for creativity, teamwork, and partnerships. Overall, the human resources function was often mistrusted and there was a high level of frustration among staff members. These had to be addressed immediately.

The compensation and benefits policy of the organization was based on the nature of recruitment rather than competencies required for a position. This resulted in a strong discontentment among NRS who often thought that they should be compensated on par with their IRS colleagues. This perception was not necessarily true. IRS were hired through international competition with higher level of competencies. The challenge was to clearly articulate the competencies required for every role and link it with the nature of employment and compensation.

This dissatisfaction and inequities led management to implement a OneStaff approach. While a simple and practical idea in concept, in its implementation this new vision for staffing was a major cultural transformation for the Institute. Culture is people believing in and breathing life into a set of values. The critical first step was to define these values. IWMI OneStaff initiative was driven by the following set of core values:

**Fairness and Equity:** Required the creation of a common set of policies for all staff members irrespective of the nature of their employment contracts. This would embody a fair set of rules applied consistently to all staff. Equal pay for equal work, equal opportunity for all staff, and avoidance of all types of exploitation would be the cornerstone of such a policy. The aim was to ensure the respect for every staff member's dignity and self-esteem.

**Equal Pay for Equal Work:** Necessitated the development of a transparent set of competencies for all jobs to clearly differentiate the professional differences at different levels in the organization. This was essential to justify and rationally explain the compensation differentials.

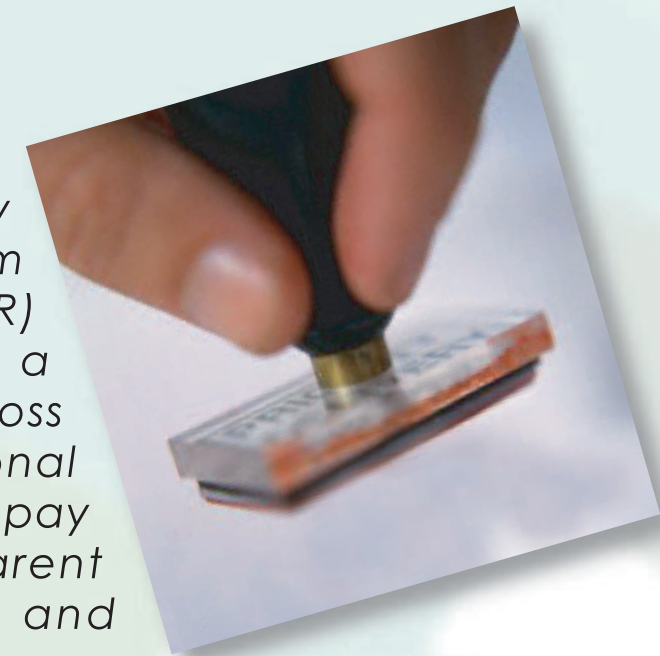
**Open Communications:** Openness and transparency in sharing information and two-way communications with all staff were basic tenets of the new approach. This was a critical step to move toward a culture of knowledge sharing and progressive empowerment.

**Commitment to Professional Development:** The organization's commitment to developing the capacities of staff, especially women and men from developing countries, had to be established and communicated. Development of all staff members with potential was essential to support this commitment and for IWMI's strategy of growth and development.

It was clear that a dramatically different approach to Human Resource Management, with a clear value system, philosophy, and supporting policies and practices were essential for IWMI to become an employer of choice and to create high performing teams. The OneStaff approach provided such a framework and IWMI decided to embark on this ambitious and difficult journey to design and implement it.

## What Was Done?

*In November 2000, the IWMI Board of Governors accepted a far-reaching recommendation by IWMI senior management to reform the IWMI Human Resources (HR) Management system towards a "one-staff" system; integrated across national, regional and international divides, with demonstrable "equal pay for equal work" and a transparent system of compensation and performance evaluation process.*



## Preparing the Launch Pad

**A major challenge and priority was to revitalize the NRS category where most staff had been stagnating in the same positions for several years. To address this need, new positions were created in the existing structure and NRS members were encouraged to apply for these new positions at higher levels.**

This internal competition created a lot of positive energy and smart staff members with superior skills got into the new roles at a higher level through a well-defined internal selection process. Receptionists were promoted as secretaries; secretaries were promoted and transferred to other departments as administrative officers. This was a quick win for the Institute as well as staff members and appropriate for IWMI's lean economic situation at the time.

A few high potential national staff members were given the opportunity to work outside the home base, supported by clear plans for development and for mentoring by senior staff members. These temporary assignments were given on the existing terms of employment. On achieving the desired performance levels they were promoted from NRS to higher staff levels (i.e., regionally recruited and internationally recruited categories). These placements provided for the first time a track for high potential staff members to gain international experience and showed them the career path to reach higher levels in the organization.



In addition to the internal career progression and all the positive energy, an external recruitment drive was launched to attract highly qualified young national researchers

into the organization from the national talent pool. This had not been done before. The focused recruitment effort led to hiring of 15 new research officers in Sri Lanka. In parallel with this, a new Post Doctoral fellowship programme was launched to attract young researchers from around the world on a two-year fixed term contract. This effort added 20 fresh post-doctoral scientists to IWMI's staff of young researchers in the first wave of recruitment.

IWMI Management recognized the need for HR to play a more critical role in the strategic issues of the Institute to implement OneStaff approach successfully. To accelerate this change, the functional reporting and accountability of HR was changed from the Finance and Administration division to the office of the Director General. A comprehensive center commissioned external review (CCER) of the HR function was done. The review looked at all existing HR processes and the skills of the HR staff members. It made detailed recommendations on the new HR processes and skills that were required to drive the HR function towards the new strategic direction. Once the core recommendations were implemented and new skills hired, the reporting relationship of HR was moved back to the Finance & Administration division.

# The beginning of OneStaff approach

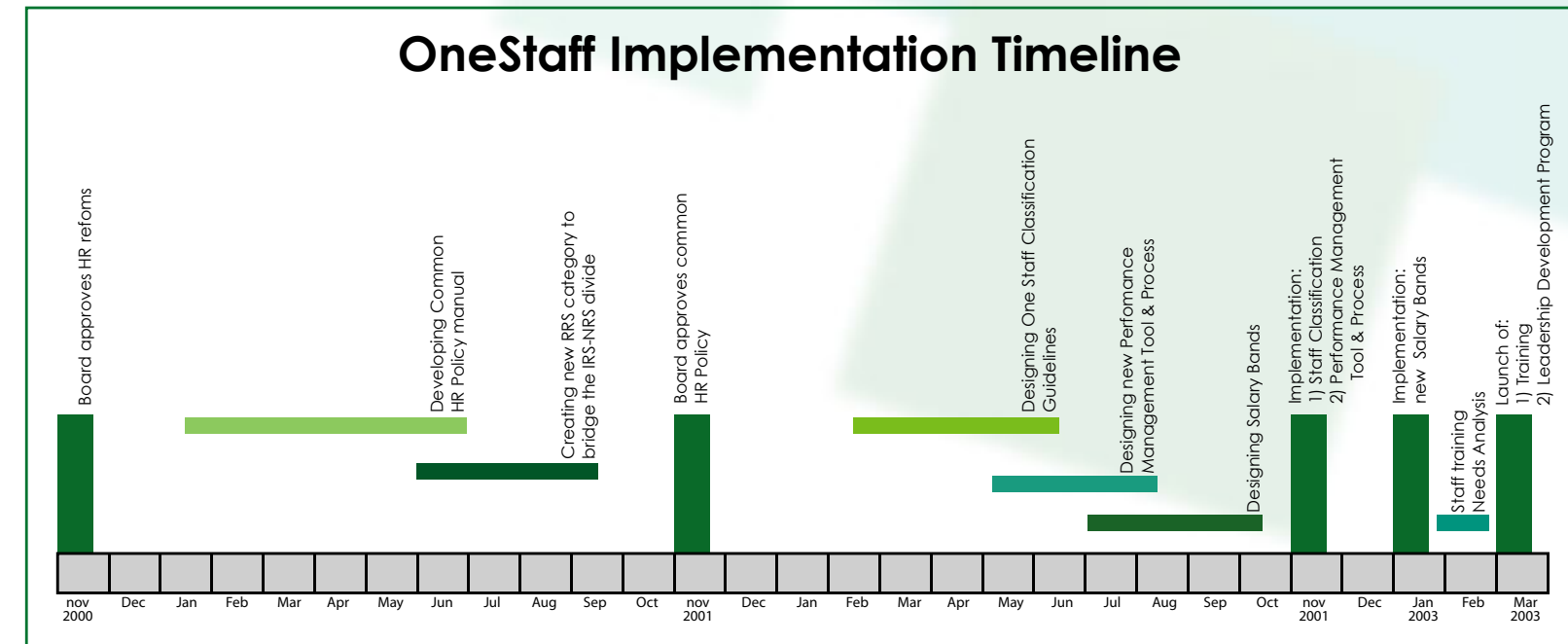
The OneStaff foundation was laid with the creation of a positive feeling among many staff that they had new opportunities to progress within IWMI and new blood in the system through a new wave of recruits. The time was right to start working on the HR policies and processes to support the OneStaff approach.

**Common HR Policy.** The first step was to develop a common personnel policy manual applicable to all IWMI staff across all geographic locations irrespective of the nature of employment. The policy was developed through an institute-wide working group with membership from all the staff groups. Care was taken to write it in a friendly and accessible style, to ensure it is easily understood by all staff member. It is posted on the Intranet and all staff members had access.

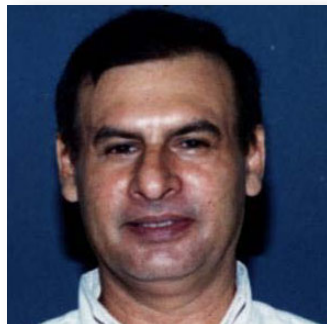
The new policy defines the values of IWMI, the terms of employment and brings several aspects of people management to a common platform. The Institute's policies on spouse employment were updated to encourage hiring of spouses and reflect the realities which professional couples face in considering employment overseas. This change allows IWMI to attract dual career families to consider IWMI as a preferred place of employment. The policy is 'localized' with supplements that address the few differences relevant to locations, statutes or contractual differences in the countries IWMI operates.



**Creation of a new Regionally Recruited Category.** The wide competency gap between the NRS and the IRS groups was recognized and had to be bridged. A new category- "Regionally Recruited Staff" (RRS) was developed to bridge this substantive divide between the NRS and IRS categories. It paved a career progression pathway for the NRS to progress to IRS levels through the RRS category. This new category also facilitated tapping into the strong talent pool in the region, which was not possible in the past because recruitment was limited to IRS based on worldwide competition and NRS selected on local competition within the country of posting. The professionals in the RRS group bring new value to IWMI as they have strong regional experience and relationships that support IWMI's business strategy at the regional level. This is a new talent pool for IWMI, which under the previous structure, would not have been hired at the IRS level or joined as NRS members.



## Talent is not linked to type of your contract



**M. Samad**

"You are already here as NRS. Why should we promote you to IRS? We can get two Samads for that cost"

Madar Samad clearly remembers what he was told early in his career when he enquired whether he could apply for an IRS position that was vacant. Samad joined IWMI as a NRS with 15 years research experience in the National Research Organization in Sri Lanka. He had done post-graduate studies at Cambridge and holds a PhD from Wye College, University of London. Now he leads the theme on Water Resources Institutions and

Policies at IWMI and is a member of the Management Team. "I joined IWMI as an assistant to the Director of Research and was promoted to the position of Research Associate."

While IWMI started recognizing his talent and progressively assigned him with higher responsibilities, progress on issues of compensation and equity did not follow. There were only promises of a promotion next time. "Next time never came because I was a good cheap resource. Another frustration was when equally experienced and skilled people were hired on substantially high compensation packages as IRS to work for you and you supervise them." "When Frank joined as the DG, he checked my background and what I had done. He told me, 'If you do work at that level, we should pay you at that level.' Many people had said similar things in the past but nothing materialized. Frank changed that. He created the Regional Staff." Samad was one of two staff members to be promoted to that group. The other is Upali Amarasinghe.

"When Tushaar Shah went to India, I was asked to act as the Theme Leader" (a management team position). The position was to be filled through external recruitment and was advertised twice. There were no candidates more suitable to fill the position and Samad was promoted to the IRS position.

"I never worried about the discrimination and always focused on my work. But what is happening at IWMI now creates much higher levels of motivation and loyalty to the Institute. Now people believe that IWMI is truly an equal opportunity employer. All organizations say they are but very few mean it and even fewer practice it."

How does IWMI's approach of active career development of high performers at all levels help the organization? Samad says it helps to retain high quality talent, make better use of the experience built over a long period. It creates a free and fair work place and ensures high value for money. He also feels there are key lessons for the CG system in this approach. "Talent is not linked to the type of contract. Once talent and potential are identified, the system should recognize, provide opportunities for development, and compensate equitably. That is essential for the future of the CGIAR."

**Competency and Staff Classification Framework.** The next significant milestone in the OneStaff approach was the challenge to develop a competency framework for all the existing roles across the organization. This process of defining the competencies led to the development of the "staff classification guidelines" that clearly define the competencies required to succeed. All positions across the organization were classified into 11 job families based on the required broad skills and abilities. These guidelines clearly defined the performance expectations and the competency requirements at the different levels for jobs in both research and non-research functions. The competencies were designed and implemented in consultation with a staff committee.

Once developed, the competencies were to be evaluated against standards. The processes of measuring these competencies led to the next logical process of designing a performance management process which complemented the new framework. The new performance management process improved productivity and objectivity by evaluating staff members' performance against the pre-defined performance indicators based on the staff members' individual operating plans (IOPs). This process required extensive consultation at the beginning of the review cycle between the supervisor and the staff member to define measurable performance indicators. In addition to the IOPs, the supervisors and the staff members had to discuss the competencies and development plans for each staff member.

**Setting OneStaff Salary Bands.** The existing salary bands were re-designed to complement the competency framework. The design of these new salary bands was uniform across all employment categories but different to locations, because of the NRS at each location are paid according to the local market conditions and local currencies. A single global salary scale for IRS and RRS was designed and implemented.

In the process of developing new salary bands, the current anomalies were reviewed and corrected. The compensation package for Associate Experts (seconded Junior Professional Officers) was halved because they were overpaid compared to National Scientists and was brought on par with the Post Doctoral Fellows.

Along with defining the salary bands there was also a major effort in standardizing the benefits package across the Institute for all the staff groups. An explicit uniform "expatriate package" was defined. It consists of a housing allowance (uniform for the staff groups) and children's education fees re-imbursment which is paid only to the staff that are posted outside the home base.



A standard benefits policy was introduced for students and interns to ensure that students and interns receive the same benefits irrespective of where they come from (North-South) and are not overpaid compared to NRS. (In the past, students received a cost of living allowance ranging from US\$1,000-1,500, equivalent to the salary of senior NRS.) All students receive a uniform allowance not exceeding US\$500, and the maximum a long-term intern can receive is US\$900 depending on the productive work experiences for IWMI.

**Training and Professional Development.** Another significant move for the organization was instituting a structured staff professional development program. This initiative was launched by publishing an annual staff training calendar in January 2003. The calendar detailed the training needs captured from the annual performance management process. IWMI management allocated a centralized staff training budget of US\$175,000 making a significant investment as well as endorsing its commitment to staff development. Programs on soft skills such as presentations, assertive communication, team building, project management, etc., and functional skills such as web design, proposal writing, language skills, etc., were held throughout the year across all locations. Along with these programmes IWMI was one of the five pilot centers to participate in the G&D Mentoring program with eleven mentor-mentee pairs.



## Move upwards or sideways.... either way an opportunity to learn and grow



**Gayathree Jayasinghe**

"With our HR reforms, IWMI has made rapid progress in organizing staffing based on competency and ability and bringing transparency to the salary scale. The mechanism of applying for a promotion with a written justification became clear to me. So, with the encouragement of my supervisor that is exactly what I did!" says Gayathree Jayasinghe holder of a M.Sc. in Biometry from the University of Reading and the first female NRS to be promoted to a RRS position.

Gayathree first came across IWMI in 1996 as a consultant and local representative for SPSS software searching for new clients. Was she successful? Yes. IWMI purchased the software and contracted Gayathri on short-term consultancies to train researchers on the use of SPSS and provide data analysis support. Following many consultancy contracts to train researchers on SPSS and provide data analysis support, Gayathree was offered and accepted a NRS position.

"It was only after joining that I realized I may have accepted a package that was too low with no clear means of justifying a review. At that time, there were only IRS and NRS categories and each individual had to negotiate his/her compensation package. There was no transparency in the system," she recalls.

What are Gayathree's views on the new HR management systems and the new RRS category? "I think the transparency in the system and process has opened the doors for staff to be proactive in steering their own career. This transparency is the key to removing real or perceived inequities in the system, and is a major contributor to improving staff morale." The grades within the RRS category provide the stepping stones for growth beyond NRS, which need to be coupled with real opportunities to grow.

**IWMI Leadership Development Program** A unique leadership development program (LDP) was born out of the OneStaff initiative. The program was developed with the primary objective of demonstrating mobility across the national-regional-international divides for high potential staff members. This initiative was conceived and designed by the Director General with the support of the management team.

A diverse group of 12 staff members was selected from across the organization for the LDP's first batch-an intensive two-year intensive program. This group includes seven women and five men. Nine have a research background; three are non-research; eight are from the south and four from the north.

Each LDP trainee has a mentor. In the first batch, all four mentors are from the management team, demonstrating commitment of senior management to the Leadership Development Program.

### The program is designed around three pillars:

#### Two 4-day group training modules per year.

The group training modules act as "anchor points" for the program. This brings together the trainee and the mentor twice a year and take stock of the development activities, plan for the next development cycle. This also provides the opportunity for sharing ideas and experiences. This is particularly important for the trainee-mentor pairs that are not located in the same location.



#### Continuous structured mentoring throughout the duration of the program.

The in-built structured mentoring element of the program ensures focus and commitment of both the mentors and the trainees.

#### Individual learning interventions and development plans.

This is developed jointly by the trainee and the mentor. The learning interventions of individual development plans vary in scope and intensity among the participants and are tailored to the development needs of each individual.



The first accelerated development will take some trainees from NRS to RRS positions and others from RRS to IRS positions. Some IRS staff would succeed senior IRS staff. This group plays a significant role in unleashing creative energy in the organization and catalyzes the process of change. The target date for completion of this first program is March 2005.

Here are some quotes from the participants of the first batch of trainees:

*"The development plans and learning interventions have made us do the impossible; go that extra mile, which if not for a program like this may have not materialized along with the regular individual operating plans for the year" - Upeka Kariyawasam.*

*"The LDP has been of tremendous benefit to me, and I expect I will continue to see the rewards long into the future, in terms of both my personal and professional development" - Rebecca Tharme.*

*"For me the LDP has been everything and much more than I thought it would be - it seems to be with me all the time. It's given me so many good opportunities, guidance and different outlook to life in general" - Sanjini de Silva.*

*"LDP has created a new perspective of me as a person, a researcher, and as a staff in an international organization. The program has really unlocked the potential in me" - R. Maria Saleth.*

*"The fact that several members of the MT take part is a highlight. It helps to break boundaries across ranks, to build trust and increase the (IWMI) family feeling including any related responsibility" - Pay Drechsel.*

*"I have developed my skills as a researcher and also in other areas; I have more confidence, dare to speak-out/share opinion and not afraid of rejection, more assertive, can deal with conflict, more circumspect thinking" - Wannipa Soda*

*"Achievement is largely a function of attitude. What the LDP has done and what has made it a success, is to unleash in the participants an attitude for initiative, success, and leadership"- Mark Giordano.*

## A very positive pressure on individual and organizational performance



R. Maria Saleth

Prof. R. Maria Saleth has spent many years in universities and research organizations and done project work with international organizations including the World Bank. When he applied for the position of Principal Researcher, he recognized international experience was defined quite differently. "It required experience working in an international organization, which is different from having international exposure." He could only be offered a Regional Researcher position. Why did he accept it? "I was told the concept is being changed, Frank explained these changes informally and the

new process sounded very fair, so I accepted." Maria believes that consistent actions, even on small things, are very important to bring about a culture change within an organization.

"It's not just about a title or a category. It's all the other things that support the culture you are trying to build. Even a simple change, say, from 'Senior Regional Researcher' to 'Senior Institutional Economist' can make a fundamental difference in one's attitude and performance. The fact that such changes have occurred without any one asking for it adds tremendous credibility to management's commitment to a real change process." Such subtle changes affect relationships, informal institutions, and unwritten rules. They help staff members assert themselves based essentially on their technical and intellectual capacity without being constrained by categories and official positions.

"Now I know that the commitment of the management in breaking the barriers is real. You see changes not because you have been promoted. The same values are consistently being applied. No one has to ask for it. The opportunities are given, the ground rules are set, and the possibilities are clear. This can unleash the potential of every researcher."

Why are these changes important for an organization? Maria explains: "A matrix structure requires people to work together. Your performance depends on it. Such a structure decentralizes accountability and authority." Maria believes that the OneStaff approach not only ensures equity but creates a very positive pressure both on individual and organizational performance.

Being an economist, he closed with an interesting model. Equity supports diversity and improves the quality of input. It also improves performance because of the people at different levels feel the pressures coming from below. "Once I reach the top, because of these pressures I am no more insulated, but have to really perform well to stay there. There are now people below me at all levels who aspire to move up and can now rise as high as their talents will take them. So, it changes the ground rules on performance by creating a level playing field for talent."

# What Was Achieved and Learned?

Has this integrated HR Reform process created a fair, equitable, and productive workplace? Most staff members agree that the IWMI of today is very different from the IWM of three years back, offering more autonomy and opportunity for those who want to take up the challenge. Some of the key achievements to date:

## The Business Growth

IWMI achieved exponential growth during this period. This growth called for robust support systems to fuel and support it. The mandate for the organization expanded from irrigation to water management, the annual budget increased from US\$ 9 Million to 22 Million and the total staff strength increased from 210 to 365. The OneStaff approach along with other initiatives, critically supported achievement of the high levels of staff motivation and performance.



## Achievements in People Management

**The values and principles** of the organization regarding people management are translated into the personnel policies, staff classification guidelines, etc., and are consistently applied across all staff members. These documents are in the public domain and available to all staff.

**All staff members are treated fairly and equitably** irrespective of their employment categories. The competencies and performance levels required for career progression are clearly defined and communicated and barriers to advancement across job categories have been removed.

**Policies and practices incorporate** all the elements of diversity to ensure equal opportunities in staff selection, career development, and professional growth.

**A performance management system** applicable to all staff is in place. Within a single system, customized tools are used to evaluate professional staff based on job requirements.

**Staff members with the same competencies** and doing the same jobs are compensated equally. The compensation system is fair and has no explicit or inherent bias based on non-professional considerations. Staff members are paid fairly, according to their capabilities and performance. Irrelevant factors such as staff groupings or diversity factors (e.g., nationality, gender, age, and religion) have no bearing on compensation and reward decisions.

**A human resources information system** has been established to give all staff timely access to information and ensure continuous two-way communication.

**IWMI's management team has continuously driven** the changes toward the vision with courage and commitment.

## Learning

**Creating transparent,** equitable and fair workplace has clearly resulted in satisfied staff members and has led to unusual business success.

**Transparency and consistency** in application of these policies have clearly demonstrated management credibility and staff buy-in and fostered teamwork. Collaborative and partnership-based business strategies require internal partnerships and team work. A fair and transparent environment makes it possible and effective.

**Effective and consistent communication,** both vertical and horizontal, is important to manage staff perceptions and ensure the sustainability of this change management intervention.

**The cultural changes** associated with this journey to the OneStaff are not difficult but call for patience and persistence that come from a strong and fully committed management team.



# Where Do We Go from Here?



OneStaff is clearly a journey not a destination for IWMI. The organization is now poised to move to its next phase of growth and a corresponding wave of reforms. These include expanding career development opportunities for staff with potential, creating higher mobility across staff categories, gradually abandoning the IRS, RRS, NRS classification of staff, create equity in social benefits, especially in the areas of medical insurance for all staff, developing leadership skills at all levels and leading and supporting HR initiatives with other CG centers.

The organization will continuously evaluate the existing policies and practices to ensure they are effective and supporting the business objectives and staff needs. In this OneStaff journey, IWMI will continue to keep a close watch and eradicate inequities and discrimination of all kinds.

## *Credits*

*Sanjini De Silva, IWMI: Photographs  
Thushari Samarasekera, IWMI: Layout assistance*