projects the *reliability*, rather than just the size, of the income flows generated by the PWPs, said to be critical to the planning, scale and success of the new activities.

Feedback to the dryland farming system

The PWPs are bringing about positive changes in the local farming system, principally by creating a reliable dry-season income which is an important source of revenue for purchase of rainfed farm inputs. Many members report that they use their garden income to buy more seed, and surveys found that garden members are hiring people to plough, weed and spray their rainfed fields, and to maintain contour bunds. Critically, younger, poorer members of the community are keen to do this work; and they are happier to take on labour contracts if they are confident that there is cash for their work.

The way forward

For many dryland communities, productive groundwater development offers the possibility of stabilization and improved living standards. PWPs can help both alleviate poverty and improve rural peoples' organizational skills and confidence. In essence, they enable resource management to be decentralized to the lowest appropriate level, and allow water to be treated as an economic as well as a social good — in line with the wider liberalization principles underpinning economic restructuring programmes in many African countries. Local ownership and capacity to operate and maintain the resource are fundamental to this process. Placing an economic value on water through production may, in the longer term, also provide the best delivery mechanism for working with communities in dryland areas on broader resource-management issues. The conditions under which joint management of common property resources can be successful are either met or can be created through the development of PWPs. The ongoing challenge is to develop strategies for optimal groundwater use which promote both community-based management and the protection of natural resources in the surrounding catchment. ■

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Compiled by Darren Saywell, WEDC

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