

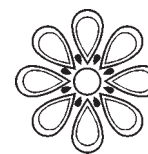


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REACHING THE UNREACHED: CHALLENGES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Community management and socialising engineers

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THE IMPORTANCE OF community involvement in water supply and sanitation programme was recognized in early 1970's. However, community Management (CM) became a global concern following the experience of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (1981-90)

Global Consultation defined community management as {empowering and equipping communities to own and control their own systems" Community management of systems, backed by measures to strengthen local institutions and groups in implementing and sustaining water and sanitation programmes was adopted as the guiding principle for the programme objective of Global Consultation (New Delhi 1990). Capacity building was recognized as the underlying key in making community management effective and enable beneficiary communities play a leading role.

Nepal's experience - department of water supply and sewerage (DWSS).

Critical review of water and Sanitation Decade's performance in 1990s made DWSS reassess its approach to rural water supply and sanitation programme.

Experiences of the Decade made it obvious that community management is much more than participation and/or voluntary labour contribution. Since 1992, under the Third Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project (TWSSSP) DWSS made community management integral of water supply and sanitation programmes in 40 districts of Nepal.

DWSS's approach to community management

Community Management can be effective when programme planners and implementors understand the concepts, are able and equipped to operationalise it. It involves complete reorientation of staff responsibilities, training on social and management skills, and professional attitude. At the beneficiary community level, it requires a special programme including additional resources in terms of trained manpower, time and money to enable them to understand, accept and develop capabilities to undertake management responsibilities.

Firstly, the DWSS organized a series of orientation workshops on concept of CM to planners and implementors of TWSSSP at the regional and district level. This was followed by development of TWSSSP working proce-

dures and guidelines including tools and technique of community management and participatory approach to be adopted in a project from the inception till its completion.

Secondly, engineers, overseers and field technicians were given training in community management concepts related to TWSSSP and applications of working procedures tools and techniques of participatory approach. Training included practical experience in applying community management techniques and related procedures in all aspects of TWSSSP beginning from demand creation, prefeasibility, feasibility, designing, preparation for construction, procurement, resource mobilisation, construction, operation and maintenance of the system. A support unit comprising of a social scientist was established to provide back stopping in social and hygiene education to District Water Supply Offices (DWSOs). For the first time, in the last fiscal year (1994) DWSS made allocation of budget and time for social preparation to encourage and strengthen community Management in TWSSSP.

Thirdly, social preparation measures were introduced in order to assess community need, interest, commitment and orient them with water supply and sanitation project working procedure, their roles and responsibilities as partners and managers of the project. This was followed by training the members of water users and sanitation committee (WUSC) to equip and enable them to be effective partners.

As a result, water supply and sanitation programmes is now becoming more need-oriented and participatory. WUSCs have demonstrated increased willingness and ability to undertake the construction work themselves, especially small schemes, and management of completed system. As they have come to realise that good quality work means less maintenance problems, they have also become more concerned with the quality of work. It is encouraging to note that:

- All the ongoing TWSSP subprojects have start up O&M fund. All 126 completed systems have their own salarised maintenance worker and water tariff system.
- DWSOs too are beginning to recognize and appreciate the important role and functions of WUSC. They are now concerned with the composition of WUSC members. The acceptance and appreciation of TWSSSP procedure is beginning to be reflected in the imple-

mentation of regular DWSS project including First and Second Water Supply and Sanitation Projects.

tion of adequate lead time and finance for social preparation/training.

Lessons learned/key issues

Social preparation/socialisation

Community management is at its best when technical personnel undertake social preparation as integral of water supply and sanitation programme. At the beginning, the engineers in the DWSO were ambivalent, pessimistic and outright hostile about the ability of beneficiaries in undertaking technical system, undertaking construction work, and management of completed system. Also, the engineers saw design and construction of water supply system as their main work for which they have been trained. They were also least concerned with community participation, social harmony and sanitation and hygiene education, for which they have little or no training.

However, the under current of skepticism and cynicism metamorphosed into a collective will to change, adopt new practices and roles as facilitators rather than provider/implementor as a result of training/implementor as a result of training/orientation on the concept of community management and participatory approach in relation to rural water supply and sanitation programme.

Community management/empowerment

Empowerment means building up and strengthening the skills and capabilities of the beneficiary communities to be effective partners and managers in the water supply and sanitation programmes. Only two-way purposive communication and dialogue will make intended beneficiary communities believe that proposed water supply and sanitation programme is in their interest/benefit. This will ensure community management and encourage them to take charge of the programme/system that affect their lives and community. Hence the need for the alloca-

Methodology/procedure

Effective CM in water supply and sanitation programme is possible only when we have clear understanding of the problems, resources, capabilities, skills and sociocultural practices. This calls for reorientation in the methodology. What is required is a methodology that stresses a strategy that mobilises intended beneficiaries into action groups, helps them understand/realise and identify their situation, resources, capabilities, and constraints. Our experiences in TWSSSP have shown that the participation of beneficiary community is not the fundamental underlying problem. The major problem is with the planning and implementation system which allow no room for active involvement of beneficiary community as partners in planning, designing, construction, operation and maintenance of the system. Hence a clear and detailed methodology that describes step by step procedure for both DWSO staff and members of WUSCs describing their roles, responsibilities and activities is vital for making water supply and sanitation programme meaningful, effective and sustainable at both DWSS - DWSO and community level.

Our experience in TWSSSP holds promise for countries where community management is considered number one task. Hundreds of those communities saddled with broken down systems have perhaps excluded beneficiaries as active participants in the programme. So long as beneficiaries are not involved as equal partners in all aspects of programme they will neither identify nor treasure water supply and sanitation programme as their own. No such water supply and sanitation programme/project will be effective or sustainable.

We wish to thank Dr. Subarna L. Singh, Development Economist Consultant for her valuable comments.