



## Capacity-Building Strategy for Watsan Reform

Prakriti Kumar Chakroborty, India



### Background

In Water Supply & Sanitation (WATSAN) sector of rural India, major initiatives have been spearheaded to reform the conventional supply-driven centralised approach to demand-responsive decentralized approach for more effective and sustainable delivery of water and sanitation service with specific focus on meeting the demands of the poor. The initiatives aiming to institutionalise the process of empowering the community particularly women whereby water supply and sanitation schemes are to be planned, designed, constructed as well as to be managed by the users' group according to their choices and affordability.

Since 1999-2000, for perfecting reform approach, Government of India (GOI) have been providing requisite policy and financial supports for implementations of pilot projects in the selected districts both in the rural water supply and in the rural sanitation sector. But in many of the districts the reform initiatives are yet to gather the desired mass and speed; consequently, substantial opportunity cost is getting lost. There is pressing urgency for initiating necessary corrective measures for accelerating, adoption and implementation of reform process.

### Pilot Districts of Assam

The paper proposes to discuss certain specific issues having relevance with evolving capacity building strategy, particularly in the context of three pilot districts viz Jorhat, Kamrup and Sonitpur of the State of Assam. In each of the three districts, both sector reform project for water supply and Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) for sanitation sector were sanctioned and first instalments of GOI share were also released during March 2000. But till now very little progress could be made in those projects. Weak capacity has been considered as one of the primary constraint for the implementation of such reform initiative. In absence of proper strategy, the activities taken up so far for capacity-building are only on ad hoc basis without any visible impact on reform initiatives.

To facilitate user's involvement, the importance of strengthening alternate institutions, developing human resources as well as creating enabling environment though have been appreciated but many of the essential

parameters of such approaches still not duly understood or absorbed in the pilot districts.

### Issues for capacity-building intervention

Capacity-building initiatives to be effective need to be problem and issue specific. Following are few of the identified issues felt necessary to be tackled through capacity-building intervention—

- According to prescribed guideline for the implementation of sector reform and TSC projects State Govt. notified formation of different committee at state, district, block and village level as alternative institutions. But due to certain apprehension and absence of clarity regarding changed roles and responsibilities between the nodal agency Assam Public Health Engineering Department (APHED) and various alternate institutes created, till now APHED have been playing the prime-role at each level and processes with very little involvement of alternate institutions. The purpose of creation of such institutes still remain only as requirement for fulfillment of guidelines;
- Though Assam Panchayat Act, 1994 incorporating 3-tier system as prescribed by 73rd Constitution Amendment received the assent of the Governor on 5th May, 1994, but only on January 2002 for the first time, elections of PRI held according to the Act in the State. As PRI institutes now started functioning involving PRI both in water supply and sanitation sector developing their capability need due attention. Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC) is the most important grassroot level institute which have to play the pivotal role. Again according to the provision of the constitution, PRI is responsible for the delivery of basic services to the rural population including water supply and sanitation. VWSC status, roles and responsibility need to be redefined in that context;
- Capacity is the combination of demonstrated competencies as well as unrealized potentiality. Leadership, individual commitment and group consensus for change is one of the most important requirements for channelising the available human

capabilities for influencing the process of reform. Quality leadership for providing the inspiration, direction and strategic guidance along with the effective mechanism of activating the commitment and capacity of the grassroots is found to be lacking. The training through conventional lecture as have been organized now on its own can neither address the issue of individual commitment nor can influence the social dimension of the process.

- In the reform initiative, users' community is expected to make informed decision regarding selection of viable technological option and their proper implementation and O & M. Orientation of community regarding how to enhance productivity with optimum utilization of resources and maintain quality of products and services is inadequate. The process involved in transferring technology related knowledge as well as technical skill building is complex and time consuming.
- In absence of reliable and updated data-base activities taken up or decision made in many cases not according to the requirements of ground realities consequently hardly had been able to add any values to the process

#### **Important Initiatives on Capacity Building**

Following are few important initiatives taken in the three Pilot districts—

- As suggested by G.O.I in accordance with the approach followed for scooping, Assam State Water and Sanitation Mission (ASWSM) have been formulating participatory assessment process involving mapping, analysis, planning for developing road map for capacity building activities;
- To enable users' community to assess, evaluate and verify by themselves whether the scheme undertaken according to their requirements and being implemented upon their satisfaction with optimum utilization of resources, social-audit intended to be introduced. Such audit aiming to measure short, medium and long-term out-come expected to enhance accountability, fairness and transparency. Preparatory works taken up so far are
  - Identifying scheme-specific key processes, impact indicators etc. for assessment;
  - Developing and testing acceptable measures for the performances to be audited and
- determination of bench-mark against which performance to be judged;
- Evolving simple methodology for conducting such audit by grass-root organizations and gearing them for the purpose.
- Inefficiency accompanying corruption if not effectively checked is likely to erode the public confidence damaging the reform initiatives. How to curb corruption, specifically stimulating the system by noble human values and ethics have been under serious consideration. Though transparency is also widely accepted as one of the most important tools to prevent corruption, but there is less agreement on how transparency can be institutionalized. Few of the important steps proposed to be taken are
  - Ensuring unrestricted information flow, shifting from present trend of 'Information hoarding' to 'Information dissemination'.
  - Undertaking studies of identified good governance practices documentation and dissemination of the same.
  - Creating enabling environment and imparting training for implementation of proven best practices aiming to good governance.
  - Developing effective redress mechanism, rating model, scheme of award depending upon quality of service delivery.
- It has been observed that community has not been able to perform effectively as they are not clear what to perform, why to perform and how to perform. ASWAM is providing guidance to the District Water Sanitation mission (DWSM) of each of the districts for systematically assessing not only the critical tasks/jobs need to be performed but also how such task/job to be performed (process) for grounding the reform in true sense of the term.
- Need to conducting a systematic study to identify the specific critical competencies necessary for performing the requisite tasks/jobs, along with understanding the levels of fundamental capacities of learning, thinking, relating and acting needed to acquire these competencies has been strongly felt. How pace of such learning can be accelerated also needs systematic search.
- Various studies suggested that we learn best and fastest when we are solving problems that matter to us. Working together in a group can be a motivating

and effective way of solving problems of understanding. Appropriate learning events and processes accordingly to be designed and implemented. Preparation of Project Implementation Plan (PIP) in a participatory approach may be considered as one of such learning events. It is not only stimulating process for mental exercise for target group but also helps in improving communication and coordination which is as valuable as developing PIP.

- ASWSM have been working to develop suitable ways of gathering information, methodology for generating choices, evolving and defining acceptable criteria for choosing options, gaining commitment from concerned stakeholders for effective implementation of accepted options.
- To accelerate the pace of reform, initiatives have been taken to encourage the involvement of younger generation particularly women as change-agent. Imparting proper orientation and training attempt have been made to involve such youth organization/ institutions as supporting organization. The

supporting organization may be engaged by ASWSM / DWSC / VWSC on specific terms of reference. The young are less conditioned by tradition, open minded and willing to try to do something new.

#### **Conclusion**

To enable key role holders to reflect upon the new directions and action choices, there should be focus on continuously realigning and recalibrating the approach effectively utilizing emerging knowledge, concepts and tool. Capacity-building strategy needs to have adequate flexibility to be suitable for the purpose. Developing authentic insight on available core-competencies, generating and adopting approach judiciously according to the capability is the key for success of such initiative. Information Technology needs to be fully utilized as a capability enabler tool and quality management to be allowed to drive the process as capability engine.

---

PRAKRITI KUMAR CHAKROBORTY, Additional  
Advisor, Department of Drinking Water Supply, Govt.  
of India

---