Capacity vs action

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SUSTAINABILITY OF COMMUNITY based water projects depends equally on appropriate technology and appropriate operation and maintenance of the installed system.

A prerequisite of successful operation and maintenance is that the system owners have the necessary capacity and, where this is not the case, that they receive training. However, even in cases where there has been considerable investment in training water committees, systems are often not maintained resulting in a loss or reduction in domestic water supply.

In these cases it is often assumed that there was a problem with the training: it was inappropriate, ill targeted, insufficient or simply no good. This assumption ignores the difference between training and performance. A person may have the capacity or be trained and still not perform well if they lack motivation, the opportunity to perform or an environment that supports performance.

When assessing the sustainability of projects one must evaluate the training and assess the factors impacting on performance as separate issues. Non performance does not necessarily equate to lack of capacity. Capacity to perform and the performance itself are distinct.

This paper identifies indicators to evaluate skills transfer resulting from training and factors that inhibit the application of those skills being applied 'on-the-job'.

Capacity building is an on-going process which includes a range of processes and events, one of which is structured training. Other aspects of capacity building include community mobilisation, meetings discussions and awareness training - services and processes currently referred to as social consultancy by DWAF. This paper focuses on formal training for the purpose of imparting skills and knowledge necessary to perform specific tasks and activities. Training is a sub-process of capacity building. The steps within the training process are: Conduct a training needs analysis (TNA), design the training to meet the identified need, develop the training materials and resources, deliver the training and evaluate the training. Results from the evaluation of the training contribute to the design of subsequent or similar training and can be considered to form part of the needs analysis, hence the training process is cyclical.

Monitoring and evaluation of the training process is possible at each step of the process. Indicators that may be assessed in relation to the TNA include: checking that a task analysis was completed to identify the content of the training i.e. what is to be taught and assessment of existing levels of competence so that the training is at an appropri-ate level, collection of demographic and socio-cultural information to assure the delivery methodology is appropriate to the learners. When these things are not done the training may not meet the needs of the learners. Things that may be assessed in relation to training design include: setting specific measurable objectives for lessons, ensuring lessons build on each other and are contextualised to the needs of the trainees, establishing the evaluation criteria as part of the design of the training and seeking input from subject matter experts to ensure the validity of the design. The materials developed must be appropriate to the trainees, things to consider are the use of mother tongue, the use of visual resources for non literate groups and adequate references for use 'on-the-job' after the training event. Factors impacting on the delivery of the training include the skill and style of the presenter, the environment in which the training is presented and logistical factors including timing. Evaluation of training is one of the items addressed at the design stage, however careful consideration must be given to ensure the information will be useful, ie ask the right questions, test the right things , decide on what it is that needs to be evaluated and what the information will be used for. Objectives based training means that the participants should know or be able to do some thing different as a result of the training, one component of the evaluation must be to check that the participants have in fact met the objective of the lesson.

If the training process has been followed faithfully and the results of the evaluation indicate the a transfer of skills and knowledge did occur as a result of the training event, then why do people still fail to perform the task or activity for which they were trained? Because training is distinct from performance.

Delays in the implementation of projects (e.g. waiting for funding or materials) result in delays between the training delivery and the opportunity to apply the learning. This can lead to skill decay, forgetfulness or lack of confidence resulting in the situation where the person is no longer able to competently perform the task for which they received training.

A lack of resources necessary to perform the task is a common problem among disadvantaged communities, for example how can a person trained as a secretary keep minutes and records without access to stationery? Or how can a pump operator work effectively when there is no diesel?

Social, cultural and economic factors also impact on many water projects. For example, people who have

successfully acquired new skills and knowledge may seek employment elsewhere, this has occurred in many rural communities, the result is that although the training was successful, there is still a lack of capacity in the beneficiary community (this issue in particular is an argument for careful selection of trainees and the need to provide skills in the least mobile sectors of the community). Many funders for training have a requirement that women are active participants in all aspects of projects. However, when this policy is not accepted fully by beneficiary communities, a woman may find she has been trained for a role which she is not permitted to perform or the performance may be sabotaged.

There may be conflict within the community that inhibits the performance of activities such as collection of tariffs - it is not a lack of skill but a lack of cooperation or a fundamental disagreement in the community with the values or concepts that have been taught.

People may not have support to perform the task or role for which they have been trained - and who wants to work hard if they are not appreciated? This is essentially a lack of incentive for performance. Alternately, the task or role may be difficult or may have a direct cost to the individual in terms of needing to provide resources themselves or a negative impact on their popularity in the community - in these situations the person is being 'punished' if they do perform as they have been trained.

It is important, when evaluating projects, to assess whether each step of the training process has been completed correctly, whether the training event itself was successful ie the transfer of skills and knowledge did occur, and the broader context in which the skills and knowledge are to be applied. Where barriers to performance such as those mentioned are present the intended outcome of investment in training will not be realised. This lack of performance does not reflect the quality of the training per se, but rather the context in which the training is to be applied.

References

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