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EVALUATING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

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by

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ACRONYMS

CP	Community Participation
O&M	Operations and Maintenance
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
WASH	Water and Sanitation for Health Project
WS&S	Water Supply and Sanitation



Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade in 1980, a substantial body of literature has focused on ways to achieve community participation (CP) in water supply and sanitation (WS&S) development. There is now wide agreement that three outcomes should be anticipated from communities as part of the community participation process (which includes community management) and as part of the project: *responsibility* (community takes ownership of the system and of the attendant obligations); *authority* (community has the legitimate right to make decisions regarding the system on behalf of the users); and *control* (community is able to carry out and determine the outcome of its decisions). However, it is not always clear how best to measure these elements. A persistent problem has been the lack of valid evaluative data that clearly identify the successes and failures among such efforts. Because project managers, always under pressure to meet coverage targets, have tended to view community participation primarily as a strategy for achieving construction goals, they have frequently evaluated it only in terms of the water systems completed and the amount of labor contributed.

More recently, development objectives have shifted toward the enhancement of local-level managerial capability as a cost-effective way to achieve community-level project *sustainability*. With this shift, and as project control has moved from donor agencies to communities, evaluation has become more complex. It is now recognized that evaluation must be a dynamic, continuous learning process rather than a static, one-shot methodology for determining project worth. It should be a flexible, responsive problem-solving tool that produces information directly useful to project accountability and improvement.

For an evaluation to produce useful information, it must start from the priority issues or questions of the key evaluation *stakeholders*—those individuals and organizations potentially affected by the evaluation results. These stakeholders should include donors, project designers, project implementers, host country officials, intended project beneficiaries, community groups, and other individuals possibly affected by the project's performance. To develop this type of responsive methodology, the evaluation designers must do the following:

- Identify the most important evaluation stakeholders and plan for their continuous involvement in the evaluation.
- Identify priority information needs—what do stakeholders want to learn about the project and when do they need this information?

- Determine the information required to meet these information needs and agree upon what constitutes valid evidence of project performance.
- Develop an information-collection plan with appropriate quality-control safeguards.
- Establish an analytical and interpretative framework that will reveal the desired evaluative information within a reasonable time.

These guidelines are offered as a tool for use in evaluating community participation.

Chapter 2 discusses the concepts of *community participation* and *community management* and their importance to development goals—not only of the water and sanitation sector but also of broader objectives. This section should be especially useful to development planners and policy makers. Chapters 3 and 4 describe an effective approach for evaluating a project that has community participation as a focus. This section is intended primarily for technical personnel responsible for project design, implementation, and evaluation.

Chapter 2

TERMS AND CONCEPTS

2.1 Community Participation

At the beginning of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (1980), the term *community participation* meant the organizing of community members to provide cheap construction labor for WS&S systems. This narrowly defined role, which placed participation within a largely technical perspective, aided coverage but ignored the need to develop the community's sense of ownership and also its willingness and ability to maintain the new system. When this development gap was recognized later in the Decade, the CP concept expanded to include beneficiary participation in the planning and design of projects and also in their direction and execution.

As the issue of project sustainability has moved to the forefront, the definition of participation has begun to distinguish between internally (i.e., within the community) and externally supported projects. Donors and development partners have reevaluated the traditional aims of external support, which often stressed hardware installation as an end in itself. Now the emphasis rests, as well, upon the development of community management capability, without which sustainability can rarely be achieved.

Responding to an expanded vision of participation that now includes both capacity-building and community organization, water and sanitation projects have begun to give greater weight to these two elements. Projects emphasize community problem-solving capacity, and human resources development has begun to replace construction schedules as the basis for defining community participation. Understandably, such projects demand longer preparation; it is immeasurably more difficult to identify community groups, train them, and adapt their resources for effective self-management than to develop local support during a brief construction period. However, the added investment of time yields a twofold benefit: broadened and more-venturesome community attitudes and increased community skills.

Since the late 1980s, community participation has emphasized the following community functions as a means to promote community management capability and project sustainability:

- **Community mobilization and organization.** Community participation efforts involve as many community members as possible by providing an institutional vehicle through which they can act.

- **Project negotiations.** Communities need to communicate their preferences and have a say in the type of projects considered. Input may be given in consultations between community leaders and agency officials or in public discussions within committee meetings. There may even be formal bargaining on such issues as project design, community contributions, and external assistance.
- **Committee operation.** Community organizations are usually elected or appointed committees. Their potential operating effectiveness depends upon the degree to which they are allowed to function in project development.
- **Community contributions.** Observers frequently equate the level of a community's contribution of goods and services to the level of its commitment to a water and sanitation project. Certainly, community contributions are necessary, in part because they help to promote a sense of community ownership of the improved facilities. Also important is the fact that it is uneconomical for donors to pay for such inputs as labor and local materials. However, the time that community members spend in planning and in operations and maintenance (O&M), or in health training is an important contribution to project success, as well, and should not be undervalued.
- **Hygiene and user education.** Hygiene and user education provide communities with a sense of the value of the infrastructure—what benefits it can bring to them. From this knowledge communities gain a sense of responsibility for the system and a potential sense of control over the new technologies in their midst.
- **Training.** Ongoing training needs to be provided for system managers, committee members, and all others involved in project implementation. As with all other functions, donor support is needed; the objective of this component is to develop community-based trainers who will continue the training function among their people after donor input has ceased.
- **Operations and maintenance.** Sustainability of the improved facilities depends on the community's ability to carry out O&M functions. It is understood, however, that communities alone cannot carry out all O&M functions. Both public and private sectors have an important role to play here.

- **Cost recovery.** Infrastructure sustainability depends on community ability to collect the funds needed for ongoing operations and maintenance. These funds must be collected on a regular basis so that capital is available to replace large segments of the system or the system itself (if need be).

This new emphasis on community participation, linking responsibility to sustainability, redefines the process as one in which communities *learn to control and deal with technology, change, and development*. It is a necessary component of every water supply project that has maintenance and long-term sustainability as its objective (Donnelly-Roark 1987).

2.2 Community Management

The distinction between community participation and community management relates not to function but to rank. Community management is an *element* of community participation that encompasses the skills a community gradually develops through its participation in a project. Within the WS&S context, some of those skills would relate to operating and maintaining the infrastructure; other acquired attitudes and skills—self-confidence, organizing techniques, lessons learned—would also fall within the scope of community management and could be applied more broadly. The degree of management capability a community attains will often determine whether the community sustains its new or improved systems and also whether it chooses to expand upon its experience and undertake new development efforts.

2.3 Sustainability

Sustainability is a central goal of WS&S projects. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has defined sustainability as the ongoing, dynamic process of continuing the valued results of development activities after donor support has ceased. Sustainable program activities are characterized as—

- Covering the recurrent costs by becoming self-sustaining or by diversifying sources of funding when donor financing ends.
- Continuing to provide results or to have an impact on the community even though the specific activities or the initial benefits may be modified or discontinued.
- Promoting institutional longevity; that is, the process becomes institutionalized even though the precise organizational arrangements may change over time.

If community members develop the managerial skills necessary to sustain benefits created by a WS&S project, they will in the process also become more capable of undertaking other development activities in their community, a critical goal of WS&S projects. To achieve this kind of goal, community management requires a greater investment in time and resources by both implementing agencies and local communities.

Chapter 3

A MODEL FOR EVALUATING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Donor agencies and field staff need clear guidelines when assessing WS&S projects that use community participation components as the critical means to achieve sustainability. These guidelines must take into account the elements to be evaluated and also the methodologies that are suited to such an evaluation.

3.1 Elements to Evaluate

Community participation is concerned with all issues pertaining to responsibility (ownership), decision-making authority, and control over project development and systems operations. Often, the qualities of *community management* are not evident during a project's initial stages; the capability to show ownership, decision-making authority, and control is likely to be demonstrated after the project has been functioning a while. To attain management capability, a community needs the following attitudes and skills, which must be built into the project:

- Understanding of the need for improved water sources
- Willingness to care for and use the improved facilities to improve health and achieve consequent economic benefits
- Willingness to work on local committees that train community members and perform other management tasks
- Knowledge of how systems are constructed, operated, maintained, and repaired
- Knowledge of fee collection and financial management

An evaluation must try to determine the extent to which the project has developed these attitudes and skills.

3.2 A Participatory Strategy for Evaluation

The evaluation of community participation cannot be based on the sustainability of project infrastructure alone. If maximum project benefits are to be obtained, evaluation must instead

be viewed as a routine process focused on generating information that provides an indicator of progress made toward building the management skills needed. The process needs to permit adjustments during the course of an evaluation to ensure that it continues to produce useful information. This means that the evaluation must be responsive to the conditions under which CP projects are designed and implemented.

At the field level, each project evaluation demands substantive knowledge of many individual components, as well as flexibility in relating the components to each other. For this reason, no single evaluation model can provide answers in all situations. Instead, what is needed is a collaborative, team approach that promotes maximum community participation in the evaluation process. The model presented in Figure 1 suggests a way to meet that need.

Preconditions for community participation may be viewed as the preintervention threshold conditions for community participation, and, at a minimum, must be present prior to project initiation for community participation to have a chance of being realized. Several questions can be asked about each of them:

3.2.1 Institutional Support

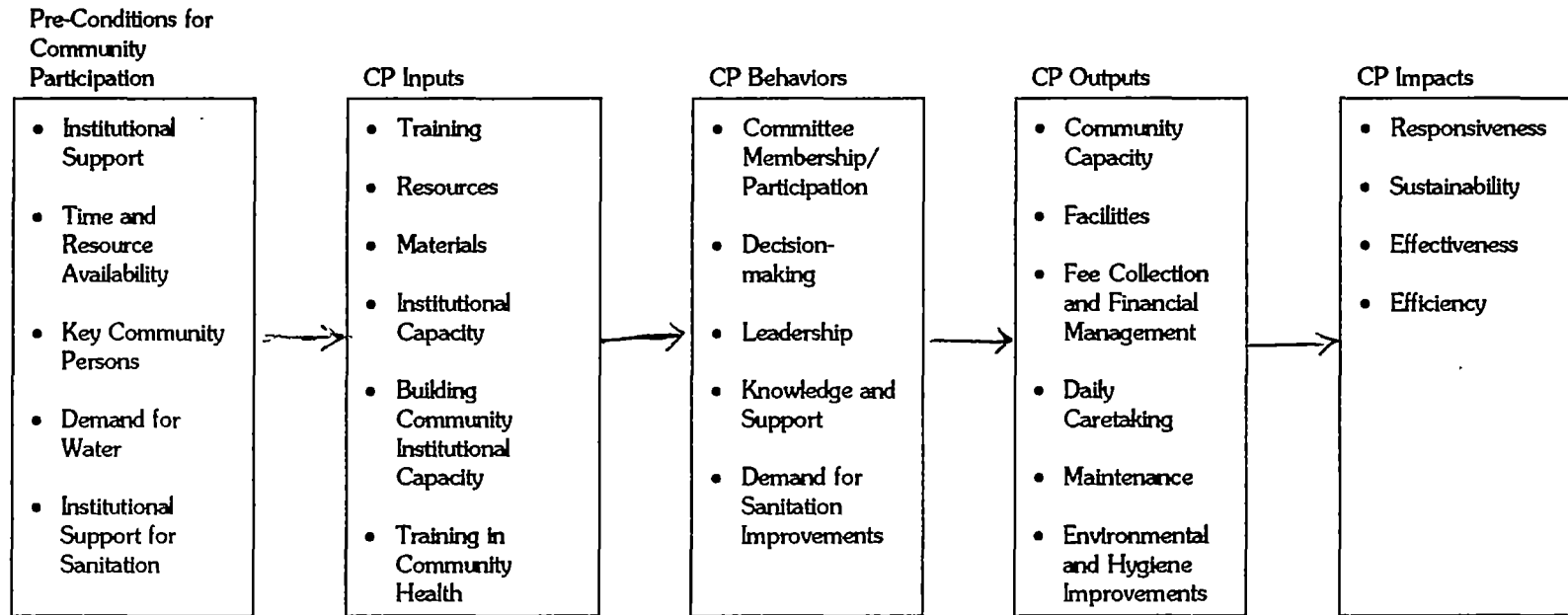
- Are national and/or regional institutions able to provide back-up support needed in community participation?
- Are relevant national ministries aware and supportive of environmental sanitation as part of WS&S projects?
- Do regional and national government institutions understand the concept of community participation?
- Do these relevant governmental institutions have resources that can support community participation?
- Is there commitment to community management?

3.2.2 Time and Resource Availability

- Realistically, do people have enough time to participate in the project?
- Do they have the time to be properly trained?
- Are there potential community pressures or forces that might work against community participation in the project?

FIGURE 1

Community Evaluation Model



- Will community participation divert community resources from other important projects or community activities?
- Is sufficient training provided to create an understanding of health and sanitation improvements?

3.2.3 Key Community Persons

- Is there appropriate community leadership, i.e., is it representative of the community?
- Will this leadership be committed to making the project a success?
- Are there relevant community people with interest and support for sanitation improvements (i.e., teachers or traditional birth attendants)?
- Will this leadership support community participation as a critical component of project success?

3.2.4 Demand for Water and Sanitation

- Is there demand for water in the community?
- How strong and widespread is the demand?
- Do community people value sanitation improvements?

3.2.5 Institutional Support for Sanitation

- Is the Ministry of Health active in sanitation?
- Is there effective coordination between ministries responsible for water and those responsible for sanitation?
- Does the ministry responsible for water place importance on environmental sanitation, or is it simply involved in drilling and construction?

3.3 Community Participation Inputs

These inputs refer to the resources, or raw materials, that will be put into the project to achieve its goals and objectives. The evaluation will need to determine whether the inputs are

sufficient in amount and quality. Using the following range of questions, the evaluation can help measure the effectiveness of the resources devoted to the project:

- How much training—types and amounts—did the extension agents receive?
- What training materials were used and were they appropriate?
- How much of the extension budget was allocated exclusively to community participation?
- What organizational and information-sharing meetings were held, and who attended?
- What capacity-building occurred at the community and institutional levels, and was it enough to ensure project effectiveness?
- Did the community participate in initial identification/survey of health issues related to water and sanitation?

3.4 Community Participation Behaviors

Several CP behaviors contribute to project effectiveness: these behaviors refer to actions of community members and organizations that serve to convert community inputs into outputs; they are the behavioral link between the CP inputs and outputs. They can also be thought of as the immediate results from the infusion of CP inputs into the community, and would consist of the following:

3.4.1 Committee Membership/Participation

- What is the usual committee composition, e.g., are women and other community representatives/"gate keepers" part of the committees?
- Do certain members or individuals hold the same positions all the time?
- Are the members who are selected representative of the community?
- How are members selected or recruited?
- How active are committee members in the planning process?

3.4.2 Decision-making

- How are decision points first identified or recognized?
- Who makes decisions?
- Who participates in the decision-making?
- How are decisions made?

3.4.3 Leadership

- How are leaders selected?
- How representative are they?
- How long do they stay (tenure)?

3.4.4 Knowledge and Support

- How aware are committee members of what is happening in the community?
- What is the level of perceived need for the activities?
- What is the level of expressed agreement/disagreement?
- What attitudes can be discerned? Are some committee members willing to participate in various aspects of water and sanitation?

3.4.5 Demand for Sanitation Improvements

3.5 Community Participation Outputs

The outputs refer to the intermediate results of community participation. If CP does, in fact, produce measurable changes in the project's community-level organization and operation, the model suggests several output indicators that could be examined in an evaluation.

3.5.1 Committee Capacity

- Did community people themselves decide the criteria for choosing water committee members? Were those elected able to function as active water committee members?
- Does the committee membership reflect the different functions that the committee needs to carry out?
- Is the water and sanitation committee able to train others?
- What form does the training take? (This can be either informal or more-formal training sessions).

3.5.2 Facilities Construction

- Is the labor contribution being viewed as the indicator of ultimate ownership of the improved facilities?
- Have community people participated in the planning of construction activities?
- How was the construction contribution organized by community members?
- What role did women play?
- How did absent community people contribute their share of labor?

3.5.3 Fee Collection and Financial Management

- Are fees being collected regularly to cover O&M costs as well as eventual capital replacement?
- Were community people clearly informed of the cost implications associated with the technologies?
- Were different technical options presented in terms of cost alternatives?
- Has the financial management experience of the project been applied to other activities?

- Do community people willingly pay dues for improved facilities?
- Has the finance committee adapted its training and its financial procedures to the particular needs of the community?
- How much time is being spent on fee collection?

3.5.4 Daily Caretaking

- How was the caretaker selected?
- Is the caretaker aware of his/her scope of work?
- Did the community decide to pay the caretaker?
- Is the area surrounding the well or water source kept clean?
- Is the bucket or other dipper (in the case of hand-dug wells) kept from contamination?
- Does the caretaker function rotate among other community members?

3.5.5 Maintenance (depending upon system in place)

- How was the maintenance person selected?
- Is the tool box complete?
- Are spare parts available and easily accessible?
- Has there been any training of other community people in maintenance functions?
- Are committee people managing the O&M funds well? That is, are monies for these functions being maintained at a certain level? Do committee people withdraw monies for everyday functions—e.g, cleaning of latrines and well area or just for major repairs?
- Do regional- and state-level authorities provide the necessary back-up support to community committees?

3.5.6 Environmental and Hygiene Improvements

- Was the project introduced as a construction scheme or as one that would achieve health improvements?
- Is there a committee responsible for hygiene improvements?
- How was the committee selected? Why?
- How much training have committee members received?
- Are committee members able to identify negative and positive environmental and hygiene practices?
- Do members train others and communicate health improvements to them?
- What form does this training take?
- What kind of environmental sanitation interventions have been identified for implementation? (Latrines, grey-water, clean dipper, care in transport, care at the source and/or within the household?)

3.6 Community Participation Impacts

This final component includes the qualities that could be viewed as ultimate project outcomes, those results that are the desired long-term project effects or benefits. Included in this category would be several important indicators of project performance.

3.6.1 Responsiveness

- Did the project respond to the community's most pressing needs for clean water?
- Was the response limited in coverage or generally widespread to all in need?

3.6.2 Effectiveness

- Was project effectiveness consistent with project goals and objectives?
- Was the project cost-effective ?

- Have peoples' perceptions of their health, quality of life, etc., changed?

3.6.3 Sustainability and Efficiency

- Are people using the improved facilities and maintaining them?
- Are people's behaviors changing enough to affect community health?
- Is water available consistently with short downtimes?

Chapter 4

IMPLEMENTING AN EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

An evaluation of a CP project requires several steps: identifying the important evaluation concerns, focusing through stakeholder involvement, and eventually progressing to interpreting the evaluation results as a tool for modifying project implementation (if need be).

4.1 Planning

The first step is to identify key *stakeholders* (i.e., evaluation "clients") to determine their priority information needs and thereby focus the evaluation. Information needs will be revealed through informal discussions with the various clients—project manager, implementing agency, government ministry responsible for the project, and community representatives of the users. Such discussions would cover the following:

- Actual and perceived (by the stakeholders) project goals and objectives
- Rationale for the project design
- Actual project implementation (e.g., how was the project actually implemented and was the implementation consistent with the original project design?)
- Project costs
- Project effectiveness (e.g., appropriate effectiveness measures)
- Project effectiveness relative to costs
- Threats to the reliability and validity of the project results
- Format for presenting the project results to stakeholders
- Use of the evaluation findings for project accountability and improvement

4.2 Preparing the Evaluation Team

The evaluation team will include project (donor) representatives, representatives from relevant ministries, and community representatives, with the external evaluator acting as a facilitator for the whole team. It is important that the team share an understanding of the project's purpose and approach from the very start. One way to acquire this understanding is through reviewing the basic project documentation, such as the Project Identification Paper, Project Paper, project file information, project cost data, host country development plans, and any current research or analysis (Roark 1990). The team should also spend at least two days in group discussion to clarify and build a consensus on the evaluation's direction and important concerns. The team will want to consider—

- Project background and project goals and objectives from the perspective of the different agencies represented.
- Evaluation clients and their interests in the project and its evaluation.
- Scope of the evaluation and the questions it is attempting to answer.
- Methodology to be used in getting answers to the questions.
- Main threats to the evaluation's validity (eg., poor data quality) and how they will be handled.
- Organization of the evaluation team—each team member's contribution to the evaluation, respective work schedules, writing responsibilities, etc.
- Format and content of the evaluation product—final report or other product (including chapters or sections).
- Time schedule and budget for the evaluation.

4.3 Collecting Evaluation Information

Several techniques are especially appropriate for community participation evaluations. One of the most widely used is the *key informant approach*. Key informants are people who are intimately familiar with the focus of the evaluation and have a reputation for knowing "what's going on." Examples of key informants include the project director and key staff, village water and health committees, community and private-sector organizations, and government officials. By virtue of their position in the community in relation to the project being evaluated, they are experts: potentially rich sources of information on the operation

and effectiveness of the project within the community. The evaluator's task is to tap that expertise.

The key to the success of this approach is to select key informants that represent the important aspects of the project to be evaluated. This argues for seeking a wide range of community expertise to make sure that all issues are covered. For example, some informants may be very much in touch with community opinion about the project's usefulness, whereas others may be more knowledgeable about the technical details of project implementation. Still others may be tuned into the "politics" of project implementation.

An interview/discussion guide geared to the priority evaluation issues (relevant to the key informant's expertise) is also recommended as a way to expedite data collection. The evaluator should use the guide with some community people to see if it works—ie., elicits the desired information—and to avoid any inappropriate (e.g., overly sensitive) questions or any *misunderstandings* of the questions, both of which could jeopardize completion of the data collection.

A related data-collection approach is the use of *focus groups*. These are a form of group interviewing in which people who share "expertise" on a topic (eg., community opinion about the project evaluated) are asked to respond to a set of questions in any way they choose. The objective is to create a relaxed atmosphere in a small-group setting (8 to 10 people) that encourages people to share their knowledge and opinions with other group members. The group-interaction approach is designed to create a synergistic effect such that the insights and total information generated exceed what might be obtained through individual interviews.

Important to the success of this approach is the role of the group facilitator, who should unobtrusively promote the discussion using a list of issues to focus the discussion when it begins to drift or lose energy, but otherwise remain in the background and let the participants run the session (since they are the principal data sources). It is also helpful if the group is homogeneous relative to the topic/issue to be discussed, to avoid extraneous discussion.

A variation of the focus-group approach is the use of *community interviews*. Community interviews involve a much more heterogeneous grouping of community members, usually at naturally occurring events like well-publicized village meetings. A team of two to three interviewers will use an interview guide to lead the discussion through a series of topics, making sure that all participants at the meeting have a chance to be heard. In-depth familiarity with the community and appropriate language skills are very important.

The above techniques are most effective when they are combined with *direct observation* of the program as it is implemented in the community. Direct observation involves a formal and concentrated observation of the project implementation within the community. In assessing community participation, several questions could be asked in the process of observing the project:

- Are community meetings well attended and do people actively participate in them?
- Is the water supply clean and properly maintained?
- Is there widespread participation in maintenance activities?

For all of these techniques, the key question concerns their cost-effectiveness within the context of a particular evaluation. What will be the value of the information relative to the cost of obtaining it? For example, will the information pinpoint specific ways to improve project implementation in an evaluation where project implementation is a priority concern? The evaluator has to weigh usefulness against cost in designing an optimal information-collection strategy to avoid squandering often-scarce evaluation resources collecting marginally useful information.

4.4 Interpreting the Data

After the field-level information has been gathered, the evaluating team and field staff responsible for project implementation should spend two or three days together developing a common understanding of the information collected and deciding how it is to be analyzed and interpreted to provide an objective assessment that is useful for project accountability and improvement. The basic purpose of this exercise is to make sure that the implementing staff understand the processes of community participation and how the evaluation results can help guide this process.

It is very important that community participation be "operationalized" for the implementing staff. Quite often, due to biases induced by social class or training, staff members understand and support community participation in principle at an ideological level; however, when they go to the field, they may continue to emphasize numbers of water systems installed rather than community participation. Thus, the evaluation team must clarify the specific actions that will be undertaken to put community participation into place as the project unfolds or as it continues. The implementing team must be made aware that discrete actions, such as forming a water committee or signing a formal contract outlining roles and responsibilities, are important and must be done carefully.

It is likely that other factors in addition to staff misunderstanding may deter community participation; these must be taken into account in the evaluation and should be identified at an early stage. Some of these factors may result from outside pressures on staff members. For example, government requirements may pressure the implementing staff to produce a certain number of systems. Or, it may be revealed that some project decision-makers still look to villagers more for the labor they contribute than for anything else.

Yet other factors may relate to circumstances in the local community; for example, residents may not have identified water as a high-priority need. Or village committees may be unsure of their responsibilities or of the time required to carry them out. All of these factors have to be recognized when interpreting the information collected to ensure that the evaluation conclusions accurately reveal what the project did or did not accomplish and how it could be strengthened.

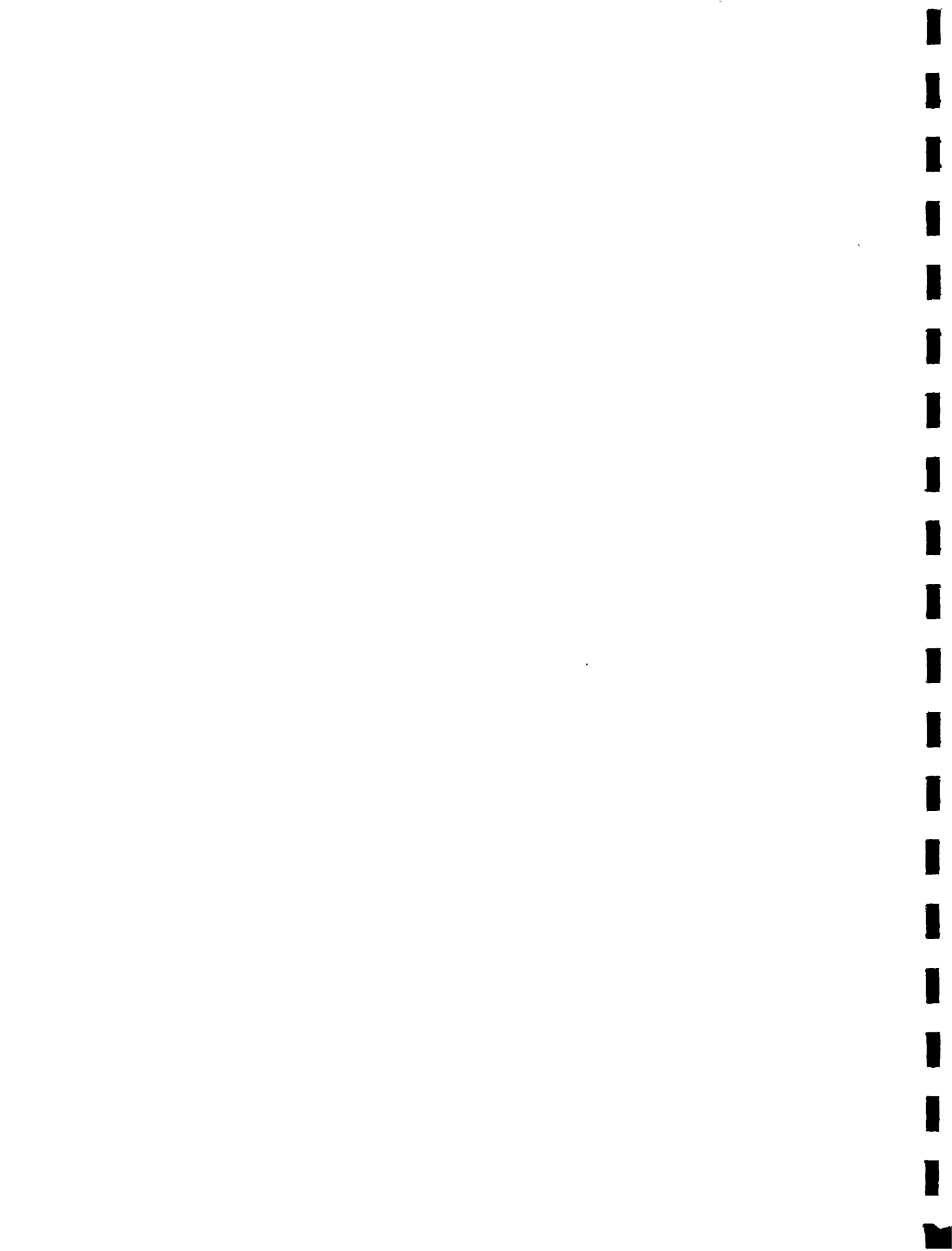
4.5 Modifying Implementation Based on Evaluation Findings

Community participation may fail to achieve its anticipated outcomes for many reasons; thus, it is important that all actions taken in the course of implementation of the project be well documented before the evaluation starts.* Otherwise, evaluation of outcomes will be meaningless.

One rule for sustainable water projects is that community institutions must be capable of managing the improved sources over the long term. The evaluation may shed light on the degree to which this management capacity is present (or absent) and, therefore, help determine if this is an issue needing additional assistance. In some projects, sustainability may not be achieved because members of water committees do not continue their interest beyond the development of the water points themselves. Closer examination will usually reveal that the failures are not in community participation but in actions of the implementing staffs; water committee members may not understand their responsibilities or may have had insufficient training to exercise them. An excellent way to examine this possibility is to assess the sequence of events from the very start of the project to determine if the necessary understanding was present from the outset or, at least, the degree to which it was present. This information would then be useful in identifying project improvement options.

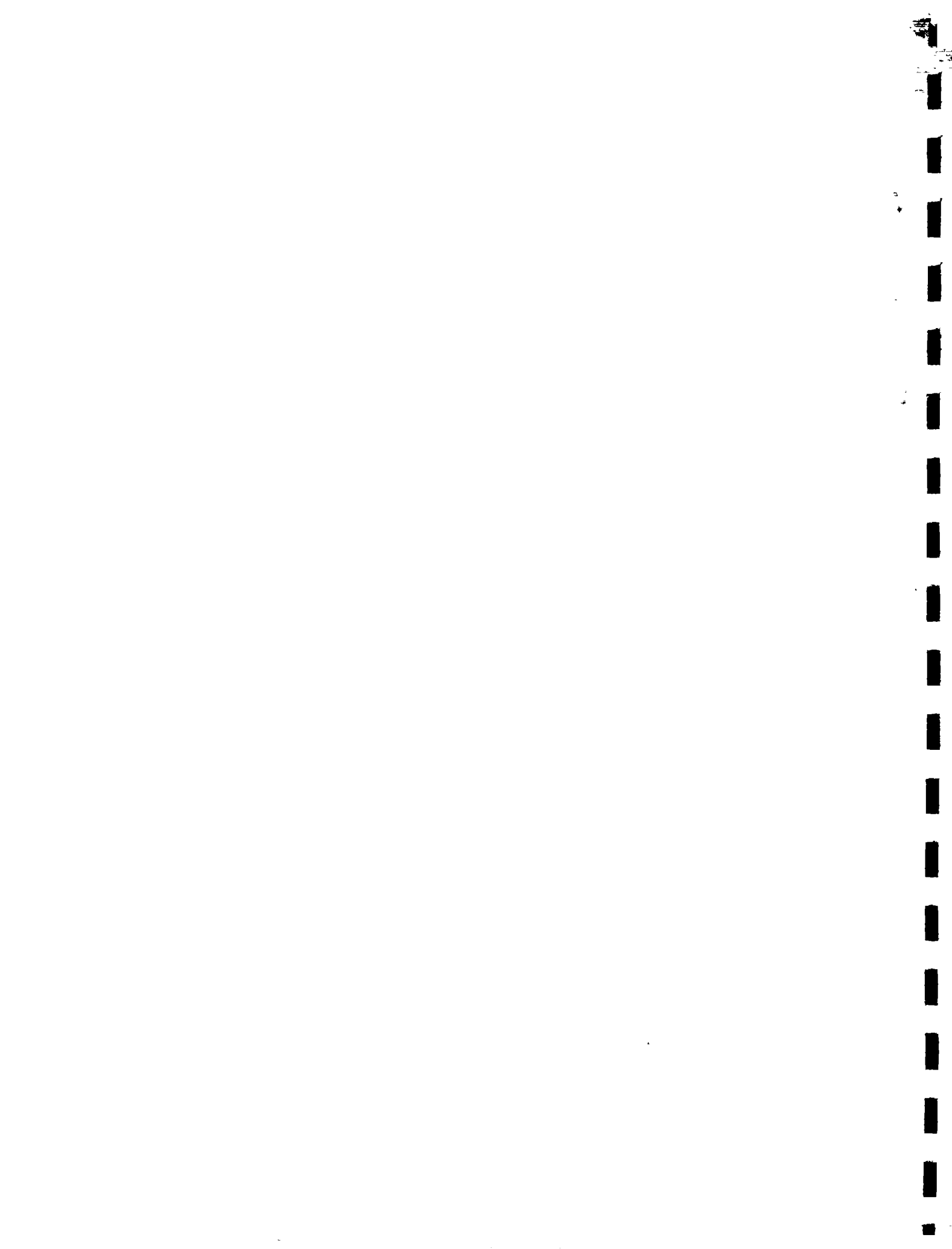
A committee that has had too little training or one that has an unclear sense of its responsibilities are but two of many factors that may contribute to a project's lackluster performance and hinder or even block the expected community benefits. A competent evaluation would likely uncover such problems, which project stakeholders may be too close to see, and the resultant modifications could mean the difference between a project that ultimately fails the test of sustainability and one whose benefits perpetuate themselves and enrich the community. Evaluation thus becomes a vital element of the development process.

*For more information on how this can be done, see *Tech Pack: Steps for Implementing Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Projects*, WASH Technical Report No. 62.



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