



New approaches to community management

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RURAL COMMUNITIES in the Upper Regions of Ghana have acquired awareness about the linkage between diseases and water supply. They are therefore making demands through self assessment of real needs combining possible technical options, choice, service levels and price that is best to them.

The Community Water Project (COWAP) is a CIDA/Ghana six year Project, which is to assist the Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation (GWSC) to carry out its Rural Water Supply Programme in the Upper Regions, by adapting to the structures and approaches of the Government Strategic Investment Programme (SIP). The SIP calls for individual communities, using the "demand-driven" approach, to plan, own and manage their water and sanitation facilities, with the private sector providing goods and services and the Government facilitating the process. The main objective of the COWAP, however is to transfer the ownership and management of some 2700 centrally-maintained handpumps to village level operation and maintenance (VLOM) system. This involves the redevelopment of the boreholes and the replacement of all the VLOM handpumps (AFRIDEV and NIRA).

A project such as the Community Water Project seems to be complex in nature, considering the fact that collective management of handpumps is a new experience for communities. It has been found that village level organizational difficulties normally arise through the problems of cash management, illiteracy, the relative autonomy of households and gender divisions. The Community Water Project since its inception in 1993 has been concerned with working out strategies that will enable communities appreciate the concept of community ownership, given the fact that the users have been living with the idea that the systems are government-owned for the past 20 years with their inputs only limited to payment of tariffs.

This paper therefore compares the Strategic Investment Programme (SIP) with the Community Water Project (COWAP) strategies and outlines some of the steps and approaches which have been taken by COWAP to address the issues in order to ensure sustainability of the systems.

Strategic investment programme and community water project

Concerned elements

For both the SIP and COWAP, the key elements required for sustainable water supplies are "demand-driven" and

technology choice. In the project area, hand-dug wells with handpumps and boreholes fitted with handpumps are available water supply technology options. However, costs and potential benefits differ for each option and technology. "The technology chosen should give the community the highest service level that it is willing to pay for, will benefit from and has the institutional capacity to sustain", (Arlosoroffs, et al. 1987). In the COWAP project area, the boreholes were drilled and installed with handpumps without considering the social acceptability and the capacity of the communities to manage them. Choice of technology at this stage is therefore limited to handpump type, i.e. AFRIDEV and the NIRA and not the type of water system, whether borehole or hand-dug well. This has put the Community Water Project in a quite peculiar situation.

Implications in community's limitation of choice

The siting and drilling of the boreholes in the Upper Regions were based primarily on hydrogeological criteria, with little or no consideration given to such issues such as proximity to compounds or traditional boundaries between villages and clans, affordability and social acceptability. Neither was there any opportunities provided for communities to choose their type of pump they wanted and make their own arrangements for pump maintenance at the community level.

The provision of the boreholes, thus made the communities to be dependent totally on the Government for the supply of basic infrastructure. This approach has impacted negatively on the communities initiative and ability to manage the water system. This has contributed to gender division roles, nonpayment of tariff, taste preference, and water quality problems, therefore contributing to community water management problems.

However, from a development perspective, improved water supplies have clearly helped to overcome a fundamental blockage to improved productivity and handpumps represent one of the few development interventions directed in the right place for instance.

"The rural inhabitants of the upper regions have unquestionably reaped great benefit from the exponential reduction in the incidence of guinea worm which has without doubt improved the productive capacity of rural households during the planting period when labour needs are great". These were expressed by a District Community Development Officer in the Bawku East District.

The community water project strategies

As already mentioned, the COWAP is peculiar in the sense that it aims at the replacement of handpumps which were centrally maintained with VLOM handpumps.

It also has the goal of transferring the ownership and management of these pumps to communities that opt for replacement.

The project staff realized from the beginning that the project could only succeed if strategies were developed with the involvement of the people who were going to benefit from the project.

Realizing that communities are not homogenous and that each community is unique, COWAP adopted rather flexible approach by allowing communities to take the lead in all stages of the project cycle.

Guidelines were therefore developed from the communities themselves to be able to increase their ability and confidence to plan, make decisions and carry out technical and financial management. The project team developed a methodology where strategies were developed through field work and trials which were then piloted and when found suitable, the Partner Organisation's (POS) and District Water and Sanitation Teams (DWSTS) were trained in the strategies and later a transfer was made over to them to replicate in other communities, with the project team monitoring and evaluating.

This process in our situation, though time consuming, perhaps is better than any community participation approach developed as a blueprint for use in all communities. When the "token" system of payment for handpumps water usage was developed for communities in the GWSC Assistance Project (GAP) in Northern Ghana, some communities resisted after a while. One community at Binaba lamented, "we are not used to buying water, we want to go the COWAP way" (reported by Regional Community Relation Officer, GAP, February 1996).

COWAP also discourages the use of a "demonstration project" approach being taken into a regional programme which Van Wijk-Sijbesma (1979) described as a risk.

The strategy for conversion to the VLOM handpump involves the following:

Meetings

- A level one meeting, is an electoral or cluster area meeting with the communities. It is to find out existing situation about Community Water and Sanitation issues and to introduce COWAP and its goals.
- A level two meeting which is usually by request from the community is to discuss and confirm decisions and plans made after level one meeting.
- A level three meeting is at the same handpump community after level II meeting, and is to assess and confirm community readiness, for VLOM change over.
- Borehole redevelopment, though, a technical activity has become a community awareness - creation tool for VLOM handpump change over since in most commu-

nities, this activity proceeds any other community meeting.

The facilitation techniques adapted during these levels of meetings include the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques which allows the free flow of information sharing.

The purpose of this process is to enable full and effective community participation in planning and thereby creating a sense of ownership and further motivation for long term operation and maintenance and the capacity to carry it out on their own.

At a level I meeting with a community at Nankpawea in the Tumu district, the chief expressed "if the government cannot manage the handpumps how can we manage them."

At Anafobisi, a community in Bongo District, the day the pump was received and installed after going through the participatory process with the community, it was expressed that "Today we have accepted and married our new wife". At Garu, another pump community, a member expressed "You mean women can repair these pumps?". At Saboro, in Kassena-Nankana District, a female member said "Since women can repair this pump, our pump will not breakdown again". These remarks have inner dimensions and therefore reflect communities views towards gender roles, ownership and management. It also reconfirmed the communities faith in the project's approaches.

Radio

One very important tool available to COWAP is the radio. Information on the project's goals and objectives and issues related to ownership and management are broadcast on the local FM station in the various local languages daily.

Progress/success of COWAP

Though the focus has been on creating awareness, promoting the demand for VLOM change over and generating enthusiasm for community action to achieve the project goal, much has been achieved. Some of these are:

The project has led communities through a process of planning and has selected, trained and coached Partner Organizations who are at work in all the districts. Those selected to date are being deployed to mobilize communities and assist them make a responsible choice about a VLOM change over on contract basis.

- As part of the strategies, women organizations are identified in these communities and women are included at all stages of the process. With the 400 VLOM pumps installed, 60% of handpump caretakers are women.
- Private sector mechanics and rural water supply mechanics have been trained and formed into teams to redevelop boreholes, install VLOM pumps and train

handpump caretakers. This work is being undertaken on both contract and in-house basis.

- District Water and Sanitation Teams are in place in all the eleven districts and are taken increasingly significant role in Partner Organizations selection and coaching and the assessing of community readiness for VLOM changeover and management.

Conclusions

The Community Water Project which is not starting from a plain ground like other water projects has a lot to share with new water projects on approach to community management.

The strategic investment programme approaches are laudable and could be adopted fully by all future Community Water Projects, but not in a situation such as the Community Water Project. The reason being that the project is mandated to change existing handpumps to VLOM which is different from projects dealing with new water sources.

Approach to community management should not start with detail blue-print plans but with guidelines devel-

oped involving the communities at the community level which could become more detailed step-by-step once implementation begins.

The approach used by COWAP, though time consuming, is gradually eroding the difficulties on collective community management and gender divisions.

References

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