

Some for all?

by Nick King

If successful water and sanitation projects are really to influence the coverage of water and sanitation facilities in the South, then they have to be not only sustainable, but also replicable.

'SOME FOR ALL rather than more for some' was the key phrase of the statement issued at the end of the meeting convened in New Delhi to review the achievements of the International Drinking Water and Sanitation Decade. The statement goes on to suggest that universal coverage could be within range by the end of the century 'if costs were halved and financial resources at least doubled'. We can dream and lobby for the doubling of financial resources, but we can take action now to halve costs.

NGOs have already successfully developed many cheap ways of enabling communities to improve their water supply and sanitation systems, but we need to do much more than just halve costs.

To achieve progress, widespread replication needs to become a key goal of every programme. The emphasis placed by the Decade on sustainability resulted in a decreased emphasis on replication. Of course, projects have to be sustainable, but if there really is going to be 'some for all' then we have to renew the focus on replication.

Replication

Replication has a number of meanings; I would like to focus on two. The conventional meaning is 'see and ask': communities see a project in the village next door, and they send a delegation to the project office and ask for it to be repeated in their village, using the project resources. A more

radical view of replication could be 'see and do'. Community members are trained in the techniques of the project. They see it in practice and then do it themselves, with minimal external resources.

This second definition of replication is intimately tied to the actual practice of community participation. Again, this is a concept with a number of different interpretations: a minority of project staff still see community participation as the provision of unskilled labour for their project. Many more see it as the involvement of the community in their project, which the community will manage after they have departed. Others see it as their involvement in the community's project.

Although moves towards widespread 'see and do' replication depend on many factors, the articles in this issue focus on the two most important: project staff must develop attitudes which encourage greater involvement by communities, and they must choose technologies which enable communities to take greater control of their project at the implementation stage, and not just take care of the maintenance. Figure 1 is a summary of some of the factors, but of course this article does not attempt to consider all the possibilities. Greater private sector involvement, for example, may be a way forward in some circumstances.

You might feel that the whole-hearted adoption of the 'see and do' approach is unrealistic or too idealistic. That may well be the case in some circumstances, but that should not stop us moving towards it. There are in fact some very good models already in existence, many of which have been proven over hundreds of years. No woman waits for a development project to tell her which type of water pot to buy or to make. No rural family waits for an engineer to design their house.

In the water and sanitation sector, the best examples of this approach are in sanitation. WaterAid has supported a sanitation project in an area of eastern Nepal where 98 per cent of the households now have latrines. WaterAid contributed nothing to the construction of the latrines, but it did pay the salaries of sanitarians who explained the need for improved hygiene and offered advice on appropriate latrine designs.

Previous issues of *Waterlines* have reported on similar but more ambitious

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Project staff must develop attitudes which encourage greater involvement of the communities.

sanitation projects in southern Africa (Lesotho and Mozambique to name but two) which include the training of sanitarians and the creation of a market for their skills.

So the models are there, but the approach must become more widespread, if there really is to be 'some for all'.

Project staff attitudes

The attitudes of the engineer and the rest of the project team make or break this approach. Consciously or unconsciously, the project staff have a significant influence on the role of the community in the project. Often it is the engineer who holds the purse strings and decides how much to let go, and therefore how much the project belongs to the project team or truly to the community.

Engineers and other team members need consciously to select an appropriate style. Do they focus on the needs of the project — completing it on time and within budget — or do they focus on the needs of the community — training its members to implement and manage the new technology?

Communities and field staff implementing a water-supply scheme are pulled in many different directions. Initially, communities will often want improvements to water supplies, and may appear to be uninterested in sanitation and hygiene. The health educators will be arguing that the

<i>Type of replication</i>	See and ask	See and do
<i>Approach of project staff</i>	Project focused	Community focused
	Imported technologies	Upgraded technologies
	External support needed	Minimal external support needed

Figure 1. Comparison of two types of replication.

project should slow down so that the communities can have enough time both to absorb new information about hygiene and to take decisions. The head office will be seeking monthly output figures which match the budget.

Focusing on the community implies that the engineer and the rest of the project team must balance these demands in favour of the community, while at the same time properly stewarding the project funds and resources. This will be difficult. The temptation is to do what comes easily or what produces the quickest results. Those who have been trained to produce quick results will not find it easy to wait for a community which does not have the same training.

Health educators trained to protect springs or to give advice on the construction of latrines can often have a more appropriate balance. They have been trained both to focus on health

education and to assist the community with the technology.

Setting objectives

Clear and appropriate objectives can be used to establish the optimum balance in the project. Far too many project designs are framed only in terms of the number of wells dug, or the percentage of the community covered. These objectives are necessary, but additional objectives, such as the quality of water that people actually drink in the home, will integrate the work of the engineer and the health educator.

In the same way, replication can be encouraged by the development of appropriate objectives. If 'see and do' replication is accepted as a firm initial objective it will influence the whole project, its approach, and the choice of technology.



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The training of the community prepares the way for effective management.



The choice of technology must be guided by the aim to give the community control over their project.

Projects must decide on the balance which they wish to adopt and then assemble a team with the right skills. Bridging gaps between specialities is vital, as is training. Training in technical skills is obviously important, but training in working with communities is just as important, right down to the level of the technician. Equally, it would be irresponsible for an engineer to hand over the control of a project to a community that is unready and unprepared to take responsibility. The training of the community or of individuals within it is also vital.

Choice of technology

As one example, WaterAid has recently provided funds for local masons in an area of western Uganda to be trained to build small cement rainwater jars of the type now well-established in south-east Asia. These jars have now been accepted in Uganda, and the masons are able to earn an income from this work, completely unsubsidized by the project.

The decision by the engineer to choose a community-based technology and to teach it to others has resulted in much greater replication than an earlier programme of larger rainwater harvesting tanks at schools, hospitals, and churches. Useful as they were for the institutions, they were too expensive and complex for use by individual households and could not be replicated spontaneously.

One of the most important decisions an engineer makes in any self-help

project is the choice of the technology to offer to the community. So much else about a project flows from this basic decision and it sets the framework for the community's involvement.

Bore-holes drilled by high-tech drilling rigs are a prime example of a technology choice which removes control from the community. In contrast, a decision to dig a well by hand gives the community far greater control over the project, as the article by Ron Bannerman demonstrates.

One of the lessons which WaterAid has learned, particularly in the area of sanitation, is to start with what is already there. People are far more ready to accept small changes to what they know, changes which they can readily understand, than completely new technologies. Demonstration latrines built out of brick with galvanized sheet roofs are a valuable asset to any school. But if these are not the local materials normally used for house construction, then the technology choice has placed latrine construction outside the reach of the community. Helen Causer's article describes an alternative approach, one which began by considering how best to upgrade locally constructed latrines.

Engineers know that there is always a better way of doing something. The temptation is to strive for technical improvements for their own sake. A crucial question for all developments should be, 'Does this help the community to take greater control over their project?'

The technique of sludging to drill tube-wells is well known in the Ganges basin. It is also used in the Terai of Nepal, but its use is limited in the hills because of the large stones in the soil. Simon Trace and Greg Whiteside report on developments of this indigenous technique which enable it to be more widely used.

'Some for all rather than more for some' requires a renewed focus on the practicalities of replication. Project staff need to develop attitudes and approaches which encourage community replication, and to offer technologies which enable communities to take control of both the implementation and the maintenance of their projects.

These points can be summed up by considering the well-known saying, 'Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him to fish and you feed him for life.' We can go further: teach him to teach others and you feed the community for life. ●

References

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