



Implementing a participatory, gender-based approach in Baluchistan

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In rural Pakistan, low levels of literacy and the segregation of women pose particular challenges for involving communities in water supply and sanitation provision.

Background

Baluchistan is the largest province in Pakistan, covering 40 per cent of the country. It is also the least populated, with only 7 million inhabitants, most of whom belong to one of three main tribal groups. Infrastructure is limited, with only one hard-surface road running from north to south. The situation is slightly better in the north, where roads fan out from Quetta, the province's capital.

Baluchistan is mountainous and has a semi-desert climate — rainfall never exceeds 400mm per year. Desertification is the major environmental problem, as diesel pumps are depleting the already limited groundwater resources.

Most of the province's urban centres are relatively small and the majority of people live in villages with fewer than 500 inhabitants. Segregation of women, or **pardah**, is still quite prevalent among much of the population, and most settlements consist of an extended family living together in one mud-walled compound. The literacy rate in the province is 10.3 per cent (1.7 per cent among rural women). Less than a quarter of the rural population has access to safe water.

Pakistan has a decentralized government, with much executive authority delegated to the provincial governments. The country's financial situation is desperate. Matching funds are often a condition of support by external donors, so that finance is often only available for activities supported by such donors.

Rural water supply and sanitation (RWSS) is the responsibility of the Department for Local Government and Rural Development (LGRDD), most of whose staff work at the district level. Within the department, there is no division of tasks; staff working in water-supply programmes can be reassigned to another department at any time.

BRUWAS

Before 1992, the Baluchistan Rural Water and Sanitation Project (BRUWAS) was co-financed by the government of Baluchistan and Unicef. In 1992, the Netherlands began to support the project, and the second phase of the project, initiated in 1996, is supported only by the governments of Baluchistan and the Netherlands. The project aims to provide adequate drinking-water facilities (using boreholes with Afridev handpumps), on-site sanitation (using pour-flush and VIP latrines), and increase people's awareness of safe hygiene practices. The main components of the project are institutional development, gender-based community development, and privatization.

Although BRUWAS is a water supply and sanitation project, its engineering component is relatively minor. Most inputs, in terms of expatriate and local staffing, are related to institutional

development, community development and hygiene promotion.

Institutional development

To increase the attention and resources devoted to rural water supply in the LGRDD, a water supply and sanitation section was established in Quetta — it now manages the programme for the entire province. Officially, this section is responsible for planning, monitoring, training and facilitation, while project implementation is handled by field staff. The section plays a major role in all activities, however, as it is responsible for the allocation of vehicles, finance and other resources. Apart from BRUWAS, the LGRDD has had no externally funded projects for over eight years, so the department has hardly any funds for operational costs.

Section staff also include monitoring and support teams for fieldwork in each division. These teams supervise and train District Implementation Teams (DITs), who are responsible for the actual implementation of the programme in the villages. Although the DIT staff are presently engaged only in water supply and sanitation, the fact that they can be reassigned by LGRDD to other tasks at any time has led project workers to endorse a more decentralized organizational structure for the section to ensure its sustainability.

Under this structure, the role of the section is limited to back-up support, and implementation becomes the sole responsibility of field staff (monitoring support teams, DITs at the district level, and so on). The DITs work exclusively on water supply and sanitation, and the

programme will be fully incorporated into the LGRDD organization to ensure its sustainability after the current project terminates.

Community participation

The project approach is based on community involvement at all stages of the project cycle; a gender-based approach that takes into account the different attitudes, roles and responsibilities of both men and women; and hygiene promotion closely linked to the provision of water supply and sanitation facilities.

The vast project area, with its small, highly-dispersed communities, requires an integrated approach to improve coverage of sustainable services. The subordinate role of women in Baluchistan tends to deny them an active role, so special efforts have been made to involve community women as well as men in planning, implementation and maintenance. Special attention is also given to improving hygiene practices, since such changes in behaviour can dramatically increase the impact of new facilities. Interventions have focused, in particular, on teaching villagers safe and hygienic means of transporting, storing and using water, and the importance of handwashing after latrine use.

The approach employed by BRUWAS has the following innovative aspects:

- Technical and non-technical interventions are closely linked, to allow for fine-tuning, co-ordination and adaptation at the village level;
- Material for information and training follows a participatory, pictorial, gender-sensitive approach; and
- For the first time, village women have a say in community matters. Even LGRDD now employs female fieldworkers for the first time in its history.

Implementation and monitoring

Project start-up took an unusually long time, as specialized communication strategies had to be developed to overcome the barriers of illiteracy and women's subordination. Participatory materials, for example, had to be refined to reflect unique local circumstances and practices.

DITs are now active in about 40 of the province's 52 sub-divisions. Each DIT consists of a sub-engineer, and a male and a female community organizer — she is essential to the project's gender-based approach, since it is impossible to have meetings with men and women together.

The participatory, step-by-step approach employed by the DITs is broken down as follows:

- *Visit 1.* Introduction of the integrated package; selection of the village contact group (VCG); a village tour for site selection and assessment of hygiene conditions; and signing of the contract.
- *Visit 2.* Construction; and training of the VCG.
- *Visit 3.* Installation; VCG evaluation activities; and training of facility caretakers.
- *Visit 4.* Follow-up monitoring on use and maintenance of facilities, and the VCG's progress.

Visits 2, 3 and 4 also have a hygiene education component.

The DIT explains to the villagers what is included in the project package, and what contribution they are expected to make. The type and location of the new facilities is selected and the contract is signed with both men and women present. Consultation with women is critical for site selection as they are forbidden to visit places, such as roads and the front of mosques.

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Because of the Baluchistan villages' strict segregation, special efforts are being made to involve women in planning, implementation, and maintenance.

Cross-gender co-operation

Support from the project continues only after the preparation work by the community has been completed. The community contributes the labour and materials necessary for construction of the slab, draining and piping, while the project provides the handpump. To enhance sustainability, women play an important role in site management, and caretakers from the village are appointed to oversee maintenance.

For the latrines, each family digs its own pit, builds the slab, and constructs the superstructure; the project provides the pan. Women are generally more interested in sanitary improvements than men, as they are not allowed to relieve themselves in the open fields during the day.

Although there is a demonstration latrine in every village, and locally adapted strategies have been implemented, the project has experienced some difficulties in promoting latrine-use in rural areas. In the more densely populated villages and townships, however, the demand for latrines is high, and school hygiene educational programmes are also conducted.

Future targets

Regular monitoring is carried out by project staff, and at the village level the contact groups work with community members using pictorial evaluation forms. However, there has never been the qualitative, community development indicators measuring the impact of hygiene promotion and cross-gender co-operation that the project planners hoped for. Targets for knowledge and behavioural change have yet to be established, men do not consider hygiene promotion to be their responsibility, women continue to transport and store water in goatskin bags, and the real level of women's involvement is difficult to assess. Attempts are now being made to refine process and output indicators, and to modify and formulate new indicators for impact assessments.

Privatization

Privatization is being pursued in those activities, and at those levels, where it can perform more efficiently than the government, for example in the provision of hardware. Substantial support continues

to come from the project, however, to solve initial problems, to fill the gaps until the market for spare parts has grown sufficiently large, and to train shopkeepers (who sell the spare parts for the pumps) in the maintenance and repair of handpumps.

The non-commercial private sector — NGOs and CBOs (Community-based Organizations) — is in a better position to work with the communities themselves, and is working to increase the coverage of water and sanitation facilities and to integrate the software components effectively. Moreover, NGOs and CBOs are more likely to stay involved with the programmes after external project support has ended. Institutionalization of collaboration with NGOs will take place through the formation of an NGO cell within the water supply and sanitation section in the LGRDD at Quetta. This cell will liaise between programme workers and NGOs, and will act as a resource centre.

An uncertain future?

The BRUWAS project has managed to develop an implementation methodology which provides for sustainability, even after the initial project has come to an end. This approach is firmly rooted in the communities, with men and women working together. Water and hygiene are managed at the lowest appropriate level, and the community itself provides the funding for 60 per cent of all investments in water supply. This figure is even higher, 80 per cent, for sanitation facilities, and the communities have assumed responsibility for operation and maintenance of both water supply and sanitation projects.

The commitment by the government of Baluchistan to the gender-based approach is encouraging. However, many field and monitoring positions have yet to be filled, and the shortage of qualified staff poses a major risk to the sustainability of the project's community-based approach once external support has ended. Another concern is that the government of Baluchistan will be unable to fulfil all its staffing requirements, or fund all necessary operational expenditures, under its present budgeting system.

For this reason, it remains to be seen whether the LGRDD will be able to continue the project unchanged once external support has ended. One possible solution to this problem would be to strengthen the role of supporting NGOs so that they can help fill the gap. ■



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Pictorial evaluation forms are already a vital part of the monitoring process — now targets for knowledge and behavioural change must be established.

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