

A community-based handpump rehabilitation and maintenance programme

by Birgit Madsen

The District Development Fund and Danida are active in water projects in Zimbabwe in which women play a key role. Birgit Madsen tells the story.

TO COMBAT THE ephemeral success of many water development programmes, work is in progress to establish a community-based maintenance structure for this Zimbabwean water project. This will be similar to others Danida has funded through its Community-based Handpump Rehabilitation and Maintenance Programme. The programme is being implemented in selected districts in the Midlands and Matabeleland North provinces.

In implementing this programme, a systematic approach to community participation has been developed, carried out, monitored, adjusted, and finally, after 18 months, presented in a training manual on community participation in the programme. The long-term objective of the programme is to improve the quality of life, including better health, by making sustainable improvements in the operation and maintenance of existing—but malfunctioning—handpump installations.

The immediate objectives are to rehabilitate 1,800 damaged or broken handpumps (the district surveys have so far identified 1,456 of these handpumps), including the construction of proper sanitary headworks (pump platform, drain, washing slab and cattle trough). While this work is in progress, a community-based handpump maintenance structure should be established.

Women and water

Given the fact that women have the primary responsibility for domestic water supply, they have a particular interest in securing safe and adequate water. It is therefore essential that they

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are actively involved in the programme from the beginning.

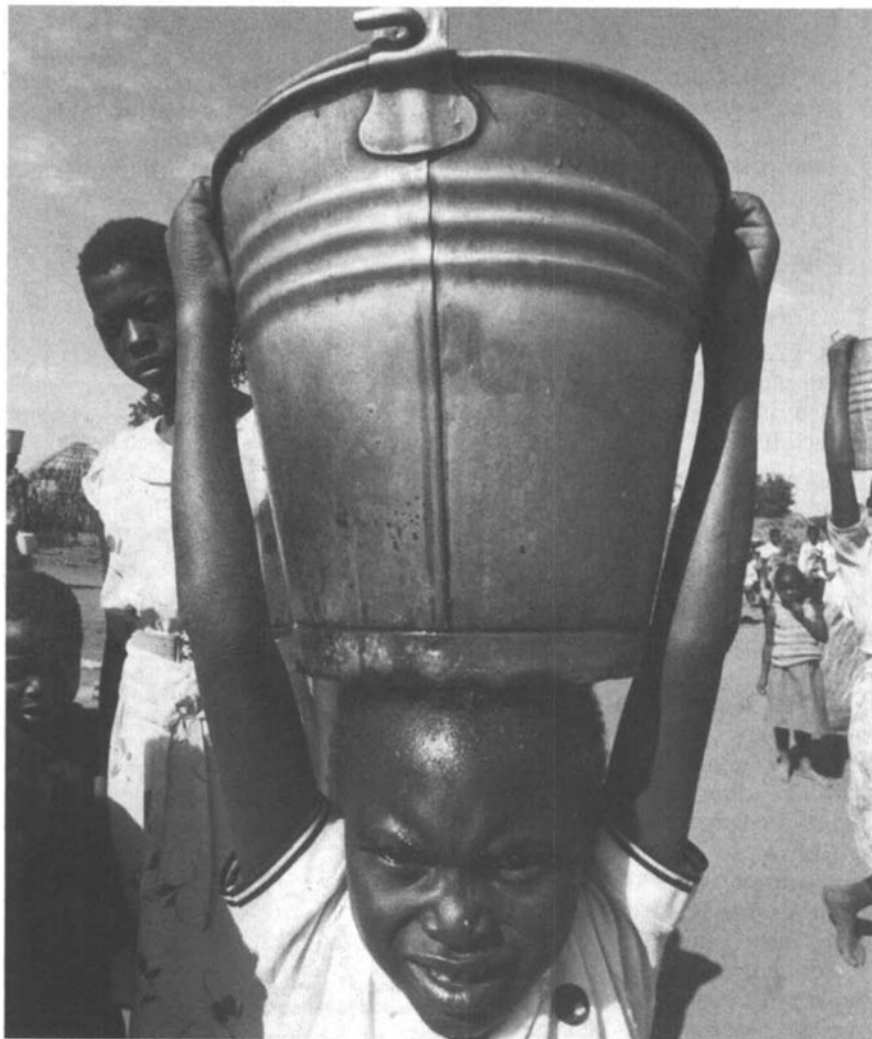
Accordingly, a handpump sub-committee will be set up at community meetings with local women elected as members and one as caretaker for each pump. The handpump sub-committee will organize the users of the pump to assist the DDF repair gang or the pump minder in the rehabilitation of the handpump and the builders in the construction of the headworks.

In order to ensure that the roles of

the users, sub-committee, caretaker and Vidco (village development committee) are properly defined, a Constitution will be drawn up in the local language. Another document will be written specifying what the project will provide (for example, materials) and what the community will provide (for example, labour). These two documents will be carefully explained and discussed at community training sessions.

Training

There is a community training programme which is run by the project's trained facilitators (these are local government promotion officers at district level). There are three main types of training.



The tasks of sub-committee, caretaker and users must be carefully be defined.

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Handpump installations and headworks must be properly maintained.

- A two-day training workshop for chiefs and the district council.
- A series of one-day training sessions at ward level for Vidco members, party leaders, women's league chairwomen, *kraal* heads and community extension workers from the various ministries.
- A series of one-day training sessions at ward level for handpump sub-committee members, caretakers and pump minders.

During the training both the technical and organizational aspects of the project are dealt with as well as demonstrations at a pump site.

The training is based on the participants' active involvement in the learning process. There is an emphasis on dialogue and discussion rather than lectures; for this reason posters and drawings have been developed and proven to be very effective.

Within the period of project implementation (since November 1986) approximately 11,000 people (from district politicians to village pump minders, have been trained and attended refresher training sessions in seven districts.

Monitoring

Monitoring of project implementation reveals that sub-committees and women caretakers have been elected for each handpump. It also shows that the user groups have been and are active in the rehabilitation work. Indications so far testify to the fairly good use of the headworks.

But has the target group actually

changed their attitude towards accepting and assuming full responsibility for both rehabilitation and maintenance of the pump sites? And if not — which is in fact the case — how do we ensure that it will happen?

One way of fostering this responsibility is to allow the user group enough time in which to build optimal community participation (in this context donor-funded programmes are justified when applied to a specific production target to be achieved within a limited period of time). It is

important to remember that to bring about change in both attitudes and practice is a very slow process, particularly when it is accompanied by a demand for labour from an already over-worked community. Therefore, the technical people — in this case the builders — must encourage the users — mainly women — to help in all phases of the construction work, in order to foster a sense of responsibility for the project as well as providing them with the technical know-how they will need to handle the future repair work.

The users must also be allowed to plan the time that they need to give to the water project. It is no good expecting people to turn up for work during times of peak agricultural activity. Instead the users themselves must schedule the work according to their own priorities.

Building strategies

If they are on a contract, the building team will invariably complete the headworks construction very fast, rather than waiting for community labour to be organized. On the other hand, if the builders are not contract workers, the project could experience very slow progress in building the headworks. To a certain extent, this is because of poor community involvement in the project. It



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demonstrates that members of the community have still not begun to look at the project as relating to themselves yet.

This change in attitude is essential for the success of any project. When the pump is part of the DDF programme, local people may use it, but they will not repair it. This was the way of thinking before community participation became a goal.

Today, the request to the individual user is: 'You as a user together with other users take full responsibility for the pump and its maintenance'. Naturally it takes time to comprehend what this change actually means; not only for the community, but also for DDF staff, including the local community-elected pump minder, and other relevant district extension staff from other ministries.

An extensive training programme for district staff is carried out to ensure that they plan and act according to the new approach. Due to inertia, it is still not unusual to find the DDF field officer or supervisor together with the repair gang repairing a broken pump without any community participation involved. Unfortunately, even among the pump minders, it is possible to find situations where they think of the pumps as DDF property rather than the community's. DDF has initiated an internal evaluation in order to identify major constraints and find the appropriate solutions for them.

In some areas with deep boreholes, it will be beyond the capacity of the pump minder—with or without community assistance — to repair the pump. Accordingly the pump minder ends up doing exclusively above-ground repair, which is a task that could easily be done by the caretakers, provided they were given some technical training and a small monthly allowance. If that were done, and if the district repair teams could be upgraded, most mechanical and maintenance problems could be solved.

Resistance to change

Unfortunately, there is resistance to change both within the community and within the DDF. The reasons are various. Some are of a political nature, others are related to logistical and technical constraints, while others still are of a cultural and social nature.

Of the cultural constraints, beliefs in connection with water source and water use are most common. In some areas it is difficult to convince people to give up drinking river water which they find more tasty than borehole

water. However, health education campaigns have been launched with the Ministry of Health taking the leading role.

Another socio-economic constraint is caused by the fact that women have neither enough time nor money to work voluntarily considering their poor conditions and many household responsibilities. It is from that perspective that questions and comments from caretakers should be understood. For example, sometimes villagers want to know 'Are we going to be paid as caretakers?' and 'How much?' or 'We prefer to go to work on the Food-for-Work Programme where we are paid \$2.00 a day'. But attitudes are changing for the better. At the most recent training workshop for district project facilitators — who are mainly men — there was a discussion about how they have grown in knowledge and changed their attitudes due to their involvement in the programme. One man explained: 'We first thought that women could not do such a job as caretaker'. He gave one reason for female caretakers saying: 'Some male users have never been at the handpump site since the borehole was drilled so that's why we have female caretakers'.

It is equally encouraging when a DDF field officer explains that with the next intake of pump minders (about four are expected), he intends to employ one or two women, since he has noticed that there were some very good female workers from the district already working within DDF's Water Division at district level. But it is best

of all when the beneficiaries help themselves. The caretakers explain how they organized community participation in the headworks construction: 'We went to the fields to inform people about the work, then they collected gravel for the builders'. Another caretaker explained, 'The community assisted the builder and we had a good relationship. I would hit the borehole as a bell for people to hear that they should come. We worked in two teams morning and afternoon'.

Traditional vs. modern values

Although it is difficult at first to engender, the approach based on community participation has proved efficient in helping to transform people's attitudes as well as in the competition between traditional and modern values. If allowed time the change in attitudes will eventually lead to corresponding changes in practice and actions. Provided quality of life is related to self-reliance, the programme has great potential for giving responsibility to handpump users themselves. With an empowered user group the sustainability of the community-based maintenance structure will stand a good chance of survival and development. An in-depth survey of the community participation component of the programme will be conducted later this year, in a few selected districts, and with assistance from students from the Harare School of Social Work. ■



Contract workers will often exclude the community from headwork construction.