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**Agency versus community participation approach in development of water supply and sanitation programmes**

The modern concept and focus of development has seen a shift from a traditional approach of top-down planning to a new approach that recognises the need for more emphasis on decentralised administration and flexible planning to allow for support for locally formulated approaches to development issues. In the traditional approach where development paradigms were based on capital investment, e.g. big power water schemes, there was no need for dialogue or involvement of the poor recipient majority in decision making related to development. 'Policies were to be decided by university-trained technocrats and carried out by rationally organised beauracracies'. (Uphoff 1979 p.2.). The poor communities remained dependent materially and psychologically on the authority of these detached elites. In many cases, whether the criteria of these technical decision-makers included community participants, their backgrounds and values, their biased, isolated perspective on society related in part to their interest in maintaining the status quo, often leading to formulation of development priorities which were culturally and technologically inappropriate for the populations they were supposedly intended to benefit.

The legacy of control of development decisions by such elites in the absence of any input from the poor majority has been detrimental to adequate development. Rachman, a Bengali economist discusses the material and psychological victimization of the masses this way:

"In large parts of the third world, the lack of participation by the rural poor in development reflects the domination of rural society and its development effect by certain privileged society groups or classes on whom the rural poor are critically dependent for their material subsistence. This material dependence inhibits them from taking independent initiatives of their own to improve their lives and status in society, and produces in them an attitude of mental dependence on the dominant social groups. Together, such material and mental dependence enables 'the dominance/dependence relation to perpetuate'. Rahman, 1981 p.3-4.

This traditional approach has not only been evident in water supply and sanitation projects only but also in other aspects of development. Large scale water schemes with an

emphasis on urban piped water supplies and other expensive schemes made both urban and rural communities dependent on the providing agency (Government or NGO).

The modern trend in development planning has taken a different approach of community involvement and participation. The development model which is seemingly becoming universally accepted includes the need for the increased participation of those under developed rural communities for whose benefit such efforts are undertaken. The call for such participation is consistent with Nyerere's insistence that 'People cannot be developed, they can only develop themselves'. (Nyerere 1973 p.60). With this emerging development paradigm, it is advocated that not only must communities have more input into the kinds of programmes which will affect their lives, but that they must have the opportunity to actively participate in the process of development from beginning to end. This paper's content is drawn from experiences of three water and sanitation projects. Busia in W. Kenya, Kibwezi in Eastern and Kwale in Coastal Kenya.

The new approach implies significant change not only in the content of development activities but radical change in the process through which such activities are realised. This shift in the empowerment of communities to influence their own destinies implies a break in the dependency on beauracratric elites, an increase in community self-reliance through their concrete experiences in the process of defining and resolving certain problems. Hall, an author especially concerned with community participation in the process of development writes:

"Development is more and more seen as an awakening process, a process of tapping the creative forces of a much larger proportion of society, a liberating of more persons' efforts instead of a 'problem' to be solved by the planners and academicians from afar". (Hall, 1979 p.1).

With the advent of the proclamation by the United Nations of the years 1981-1990 as the International Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, community participation has been seen as an important aspect to achieve the decade objectives. During this decade, governments and development agencies would develop water supply and sanitation projects that are

responsive to the needs of low-income urban fringe and rural areas, affordable by the beneficiaries, and which could be realised and widely implemented within institutional, financial and socio-cultural constraints (WHO:1981). Adequate water supply and sanitation through community participation have been given special emphasis because this will improve community quality of life, facilitate other development activities and reduce the time and distance to the water source, etc. 'Focus on the drinker not the well' brings home the point that the success of water supply systems does not rest solely on drills, pipes and installations, nor on technicians and engineers. Any system whether based on sophisticated imported pumps or simple bamboo pipes - can only be effective if accepted and supported by the people who use it.

The greatest assurance of this comes when:

- Users participate in planning and choosing the location of wells, pipes, taps or latrines.
- local labour and skills are mobilised for construction.
- community residents are trained to maintain the completed system in good order.
- the relationship between clean water and sanitation, and between them and better health and productivity are understood and visibly proven by community members themselves.

The analysis of water supply systems in Kenya for example, falls into four categories according to whether initiation, ownership, management and operation is by the community or by a government agency or NGO. The categories are - (Oendo, 1983):

- a) projects that are initiated, managed and operated by agencies e.g. large scale urban pump systems or Ministry of Water systems where people either have individual connections and/or collect water at a fee.
- b) projects initiated and managed by the communities e.g. usually self-help small scale water wells with or without hand pumps and sometimes in rich communities, diesel pumps. These projects are self supported by the communities within a limited area.
- c) projects initiated, managed and operated by the community but with substantial inputs from external agencies. Normally these projects are pump systems donated to communities by developmental agencies with some operational funds.
- d) projects initiated by external agencies but managed and run by communities.

Assessing the feasibility of participation helps determine whether project objectives requiring community decision-making or cooperation are achievable and helps identify appropriate ways to facilitate participation. This assessment should be done during the earliest design stages, before a project's purpose and strategy are finalised. Many community participation advocates agree that participation is possible if:

- a) Communities have had previous experience in water supply activities or organising and managing resources. This greatly facilitates participation in any new project. Existence of such groups, as women's groups, self-help groups is evidence of a communities organisation around an issue or need and can provide a point of entry for the community organizer. In Kibwezi Division of Machakos District of Eastern Kenya, there existed self-help groups, women's groups and organised indigenous village development committees. The activities of these community groups included digging of water wells, access roads, construction of primary schools, etc. These groups and their activities provided a good entry point for the Community Based Health Care Programme that was introduced by the African Medical and Research Foundation in 1980. Small-scale water activities have been organised in the Kibwezi villages without any participation problem because, besides the organised water committees, water was a felt need. (Omambia, D.O. 1980).

By contrast, in 1975, in a cholera control programme in Busia District of Western Kenya, many wells were dug and fitted with hand pumps. Labour and all materials were paid for by the Ministry of Health. During this control process the Community Health Committees were formed by the control team with a hope that they could maintain the safe water points that had been provided. It was only after a few months, after the control team had left that the pumps broke down and people returned to their traditional water sources and/or using buckets to get water from the wells. This contaminated the well water and cholera continued to recur as before. Not enough feasibility research work was done on community participation that would have ensured continuity after the control team left. (Omambia, 1984).

Secondly, water was not a problem since during the rains, there was stagnant water and two permanent rivers. What was lacking was an awareness concerning the transmission of cholera through unsanitary health behaviour and the use of contaminated water.

- b) Attitudes of civil servants, a funding agency or an implementing agency are not paternalist. They may refuse to share authority with those who are less educated, less well placed socially and less technically qualified. The attitude leads officials to underestimate local capabilities and leads rural people to resent officials, refuse co-operation and sometimes actively oppose official projects. A survey conducted in Kwale District of Kenya showed that in 1964 and 1978 respectively two development agencies covered some traditional wells and fixed hand-pumps without consulting communities. (Oendo, 1983). These hand-pumps broke down and since there was no manhole left to get water the wells were abandoned much to the disappointment of the villagers. The introduction of a hand-pump testing project in the same area of Kwale has seen very little cooperation and active participation from communities because of the frustration they had had previously.
- c) Political, organisational, socio-cultural, economic and physical characteristics of the specific communities within a project area are examined. Communities are rarely homogenous entities, and planners should examine the community's internal structure, degree of stratification and decision-making processes. Preference for certain water sources or a supply system may be more common in one cultural community than in others.
- d) Some degree of flexibility is built into a water supply and sanitation project's design. This has important ramifications for community participation. If projects follow a 'blue print' or detailed plan they are less likely to succeed than those that pursue a 'learning' approach to planning.

Although the extent of community participation in development-orientated projects is an essential determining factor in the success of the decade approach, few projects systematically monitor or evaluate community participation. References in evaluation documents have little emphasis on the factors that influence participation. The implicit purpose of many evaluations is to secure continued funding for current and future projects with results only being shared by funding agencies and government officials. The emphasis should change to continuous monitoring and evaluation and also involving community in the on-going evaluation.

#### CONCLUSION

The benefits of the community participation

approach can neither be over-emphasised in water supply and sanitation activities nor can the importance of agencies be underestimated. Community participation is designed to lessen dependence on outside agencies and increasing community self-sufficiency. But we should realise that self-sufficiency cannot be and is not absolute but the point is rather to find the optimum point to which self-sufficiency can be carried for each community and in respect of its needs. It cannot be expected that once a community has embarked on an autonomous path of development, external input will be disregarded.

From the analysis of the activities in these three projects we find that the use of indigenous resources needed for relatively self-sufficient development requires the stimulation and encouragement by government or other agencies which hold and emphasise such ideas of self-reliance.

There is normally, even inevitably, some form of dependence on either the government or other agencies. It is unrealistic to call for an ideal form of community participation which would be at the same time endogenous (self-generating) fully community controlled (self-determinant) and maximising the self-sufficient use of local resources. A more realistic policy recognises the reality that the relationship between an agency pursuing a development project in a community, and that community, is one of negotiated collaboration. When this is recognised it is possible to plan an approach which provides for an appropriate level and type of community participation and contribution from an external agency: By 'appropriate' is meant one which is technically feasible and which takes into account the interests and needs of the local communities and does not disregard the national socio-economic structures and aspirations. I will conclude by quoting Nyerere - a leading proponent of the participatory approach in development.

He says:

"...people cannot be developed; they can only develop themselves. For while it is possible for an outsider to build a man's house, an outsider cannot give the man pride and self-confidence in himself as a human being. Those things a man can create in himself by his own actions. He develops himself by what he does; by making his own decisions, and by his own full participation - as an equal - in the life of the community". Nyerere, 1973.

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