



13th WEDC Conference

**Rural development in Africa
Malawi: 1987**

DISCUSSION GROUP REPORT

Community participation in water supply programmes - A

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Discussion papers: (i) P. Chola

(ii) Ministry of Works and supplies, Malawi

INTRODUCTION

The group started the discussion by asking the question "Why is community participation essential." It was felt that community participation promotes the sense of ownership of the project and, therefore, will easily take the responsibility of its maintenance. Generally, it was felt that where governments have planned and implemented projects for the people, management and maintenance of the system have failed.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT AND PARTICIPATION

The group felt that there is a lot that the government can do in promoting community participation. Although the people can identify the problems, they often lack technical skills and expertise in implementing the projects. In that case, the government must provide the necessary technical backup. One of the roles that the government could play is to sensitize the community to identify their own needs and assist them in organizing themselves to meet the identified needs. The government should also be responsible in training the communities in order to impart the necessary skills for maintenance of the projects. Provision of adequate funds to supplement community resources was one of the aspects the group felt that the government does not undertake. Care should also be taken that government does not impose leadership on communities. Government should not see community participation as a threat to its own power but as an essential element for sustained development.

SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS IN COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

In order for community participation to be successful, those responsible for programmes should take time to understand the social structures within the community and any cultural aspects that may hinder or promote community involvement. Even within the same country, development organisations should not assume that something that works in one community will equally be successful in another.

CHOICE OF TECHNOLOGY AND THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY IN DIFFERENT WATER PROGRAMMES

The type of programme to be implemented for example, a borehole, gravity-fed piped water or mechanized system will to a certain degree dictate the choice of technology to be used which in turn will influence the level of participation to be expected. It has been said that in Malawi, the hydrological siting of the borehole and its drilling are both high technical activities which can only be undertaken by professionals. Therefore, the involvement of the community in this programme has almost been nil, even though there is provision for the community to provide an apron and drain around the borehole. In contrast, it has been observed that in piped water schemes there is a great degree of community involvement due to the fact that the technology is simple enough for the community to understand and maintain.

In order to sustain community motivation, the people must be assured that the technology works. It may, therefore, be important to start a project on a small scale so as to bring about results in as short time period as possible. It is also important that in the planning stage adequate provision should be made to ensure that spare parts for the maintenance of the scheme will always be available.