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## DISCUSSION GROUP REPORT

Community participation in water supply programmes - B

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We all know that Community Participation is an old practice in African Culture - it is nothing else but working together as a group to achieve expected benefits. It is important, therefore, in any development programme.

We are discussing it because we are aware of its natural death. People have been exploited for too long; now they do not trust anyone who asks them to work for nothing. Socio-economic and cultural values have changed - people need money to survive. Consequently, Community Participation is nearly a thing of the past.

Countries differ in their approaches to Community Participation. For example in Malawi the method involves:

- agreement between people and government
- selection of local committees
- digging of trenches
- training of repair teams
- monitoring assistance etc

The discussions showed that this society has very few problems on Community Participation as National Policies emphasise it and, hence, people are aware of its necessity.

It was noted that the proportion of the community affected is most important in implementation of certain programmes, hence the Government of Malawi would rather encourage programmes that benefit a large group than those benefiting only a few. In addition, participants had observed that provision of structures, without the involvement of the community in the initial stages does not guarantee that they will be used.

### Problems of Community Participation

In Malawi, DDC members are chosen from the existing committees making implementation easy, whereas in other countries various problems occurred.

1. Communication breakdown outsiders, who implement programmes, and the communities.
2. Negotiating at national level and making unfulfilled promises promotes distrust in communities
3. Priorities tend to be given according to noise and not to needs, especially where politicians are concerned.
4. Time is necessary for changes in attitudes towards new developments, hence, persuasion and counselling of communities should be taken seriously.

### Case Study - Ugandan Project

Problems encountered by experts included the following:-

- activities were left unfinished
- people were not fully informed
- there was a lack of mobilisers
- agriculture was the main priority in the eyes of the community, as they benefited from it (food and cash)
- socio-cultural influences were not understood

The group thought that such a society needs more patience to allow for effects of the civil war. Linkage of projects was recommended - eg the harvest has to be transported to market therefore

they need to construct roads.

"Is Community Participation really free labour where experts exploit certain sections of communities to get the job done?"

Discussion on this question suggested that it is not free labour as communities are asked to participate in projects that will benefit them. For example, -

- those who work in town can contribute money or food or hire labour from elsewhere to do their share of the work
- the price is decided by the community, calculated according to days or hours of absence
- the use of this money will be the choice of the community and not the project people (though they may advise)

The problem of what to do about villagers who do not participate was considered; eg are they allowed water from the project's stand pipe? It was concluded that Community Participation needs several approaches to convince people of the needs and benefits. Meetings alone can be ineffective. For example, the Community Development officers should find out the 'language' necessary to ensure people change their attitudes - this may involve moral, rational, emotional and sometimes religious approaches: legal requirements, as in Malawi ie non-voluntary participation may not work everywhere but needs to be looked into.