



WATER, ENVIRONMENT AND MANAGEMENT

Village committee development: Seapala, Lesotho

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INTRODUCTION

The Seapala Water Supply and Sanitation Project, also known as Village Committee Development Project, was established in January of 1988 and is funded by PAC (Partnership Africa Canada), IFAD (International Fund for Agriculture and Development), Plenty Canada, BC Save the Children Fund and the local communities.

The Project operates in an area of approximately 600 km² with a total population of over 15,000 inhabitants scattered in more than 80 villages along the Seapala Valley in one of the poorest districts of Lesotho. Plenty Canada, a Canadian NGO (Non Government Organization), is managing the execution of the Project.

The people of the Seapala Valley have identified drinking water supply as their first development priority. Plenty believes that the successful management of village water supply projects and other development activities requires the formation of adequately prepared local committees and/or NGO's. Therefore, the overall project objective is the strengthening of village-level institutions in a rural area of considerable need to enable long-term development. This enabling process is facilitated through specific development initiatives, namely water supply and sanitation.

IMPLEMENTATION

Methods and Approach

The program concept is based on the recognition of the need for the development of village committees in the target area for the promotion, adoption and implementation of development activities by the local people. It utilizes a participatory approach coupled with intensive training and a very close follow-up

of Village Water Committees (VWC's), Village Development Committees (VDC's), Village Health Workers (VHW's), Caretakers and Local Latrine Builders (LLB's).

The participatory approach consists of beneficiaries' involvement in each and every step of a water project, including: scheduling the pre-construction, construction and post-construction activities (Planning), organizing the community for the collection of construction materials and the construction activities (Implementation), maintenance of the water system (Monitoring) and evaluation.

The process which the Project utilizes for the development of village committees is the implementation of gravity-fed water systems. Implementation consists of the following steps:

1. An application is normally submitted by the beneficiary to the Project, stating their interest to become a partner of the Project through the implementation of their water supply system. In most cases the beneficiary also includes in the application letter the amount of money collected as part of their contribution to the Project, and in some cases the names and capacity of the seven elected VWC members.
2. A general meeting is called. The Chief (local authority), VWC members, villagers and Project Staff members are expected to attend the meeting. At this initial general meeting the Project Staff (normally extension workers) brief the community with regard to the main objectives of the Project and receive feedback about a general consensus among the villagers in participating in the Project or not. If by any reason there is not a general agreement within the community, the Project defers any further step until total agreement

has been reached. Once a total consensus has been obtained, further issues are discussed such as the need of a VWC to be elected (if not already done), the availability of reliable springs (wells) and local construction materials, etc.

3. If no access road is available, the village normally takes on the construction of the road as the first step in the Project.

4. A technical survey is carried out after the Project and its Counterpart have agreed to develop certain springs.

5. Meanwhile, the Project extension workers start working with the VWC. A set of five record books, a VWC Handbook, a petty cash box and stationery are handed over to the VWC. At this stage, the VWC is made aware of the necessity of putting together a set of rules which will govern all the phases of the Project. As normal practice some guidelines are given to the VWC for that purpose. The VWC and the community discuss the rules. Upon approval the same are officially recognized by the local authority. The following is extracted from the rules of one village. It is self-explanatory and reflects the local views: "People who have good reasons for not attending work will not be penalised. such reasons include: illness or searching for lost animals."

Formal Training

A three-day Initial Course is organised and conducted by the project staff. Six to eight VWC's participate in it. Training is provided on topics such as: government policies (Village Water Supply policies); leadership, community management and communication; basic bookkeeping; role of VWC members; collection of contributions; water constitutions (rules, contents); health and improved sanitation.

The Project also provides the VWC's another two-day Refresher Course. During this workshop, VWC's receive training on the same subjects as during the Initial Course. Two additional topics are added: water

system damage and breakdown;; and relations between VWC's, VDC's, VHW's and Caretakers. Commonly two Caretakers are elected by the VWC and the community before the actual construction starts.

Follow-up and Non-Formal Training

This consists firstly of regular visits to the villages during and after construction of the water scheme. Record books are checked out and problems are discussed with the VWC's and community as well (on-the-job training).

One-day Intermediate training courses are provided and most of the topics mentioned above are dealt with, depending on availability of time.

With the assistance of Project Staff, every VWC opens a savings account in the nearest local bank and deposits its contributions.

Table I shows some Project Statistics with regard to training and follow-up activities as a whole. Table II gives us more insight on statistics per village and performance on acquiring management skills. Depending on the progress of the construction and the performance of the VWC's, the number of visits paid by Project Staff varies from village to village.

Contributions toward the Water Scheme

As far as the actual construction of the water system is concerned, the Project provides materials, tools, skilled labour and training in general. The community's contribution consists of funds for maintenance of their water system, unskilled labour, basic tools, and collection and distribution of local materials.

COMMENTS

Under this heading the author wants to point out some of the main constraints, difficulties, etc., that the Project and Counterparts had and have to deal with.

On the side of the Project

1. A good number of villages are

TABLE 1: TRAINING AND FOLLOW-UP OF VILLAGE WATER COMMITTEES				
		PARTICIPATION [#s]		
ACTIVITIES	#	STAFF	BENEFICIARIES	VILLAGES*
TRAINING:				
Initial & refresher courses (3 days)	8	4	232	36
Intermediate (1 day)	10	2	195	35
Caretaker courses	3	8	56	33
COMMUNITY MEETINGS	76	6	-	40
FOLLOW-UP:				
Village visits	403	2	-	40
Meetings with VWCs	184	2	-	33
* The 40 villages involved have a total population of approximately 10,000.				

remote and accessible only by foot or horse-back.

2. The number of villages interested to participate in the Program has rapidly increased and is simply overwhelming.

3. At the first stage of the Project some staff members had to receive on-the-job training and most of them had no working experience, although they possessed the skills (local constraint).

4. The Appraisal Report did not reflect the existing reality in the field. The Project was put under the strain of satisfying the beneficiaries, donors and executing agency.

5. Due to delays at the beginning of the Project, the work load and some lack of planning and knowledge of the local situation, the Project was not always able to impart a close supervision to the community while she was engaged in preparation work

TABLE 2: STATISTICS PER VILLAGE ON MANAGEMENT SKILLS							
		CONTRIBUTION		EXTENSION		PERFORMANCE	
VILLAGE	POP	\$ US	% OF POP	# OF VISITS	# OF MTGS	MGMT	BOOKS
PONTSENG	800	120	35	59	10	poor	poor
LICHECHENG	150	50	65	61	18	well	well
HA THEOHA	231	110	90	15	3	well	exc.
SEKHUTLONG	204	80	80	30	6	well	well
MOTSAPI	368	280	95	49	14	exc.	exc.
LIHLABANENG	210	90	85	23	5	well	well
LETLAPENG	280	130	90	19	3	well	well
MALEPHANE	500	270	95	17	3	well	well
HA LINEO	212	140	100	16	4	well	well

for the water scheme. This fact sometimes caused the loss of interest on the side of the community.

6. On two occasions the behaviour of our Field Staff also had a negative effect on the development process of the Project.

On the Side of the Counterparts

1. In some cases the Chief (local authority) does not give enough support to the VWC. This fact hinders the work of the VWC when trying to enforce the rules. Many times some committee members have to face their own community when applying the rules and if they do not succeed, they may become discouraged and more passive.

2. Given that the Project relies exclusively on volunteer work from the community and the fact of the existence of food-for-work programs in the area, the villagers involved in the construction of their own water scheme are tempted to participate in these programs. A good percentage of the local people that do not have a regular income are sometimes forced to engage themselves in other income generating activities, if any are available. Poverty in the target area is quite noticeable.

CONCLUSIONS

Herewith the author refers to some of the necessary adjustments that were required and lessons learned throughout this development process.

1. As the Program started catching up with the original schedule, more time was devoted to planning activities. As time passed by, Project Staff got a better understanding of community approach.

2. In some opportunities a stricter management style was applied in order to increase the efficiency of the

Project and to rationalize human and other resources.

3. The Project has still to investigate the villages' request with regard to finding ways for a stronger enforcement of the village committees' rules.

4. A closer follow-up of Village Committees is a must. There is still room for a better relationship between Project and Counterparts.

5. After more than four years of the Project's involvement in the area the main objectives are well on target. What is more important, the foundation has been laid for the formation of a broad village-based organization (NGO), which will be able to meet and express the needs of the people in the area. This process will also enable the trained villages to play a leading role in the process of training new villages which join the Project.

6. It has also been demonstrated the fact that, the higher the participation of the beneficiaries on a specific project, the greater the chance for success and increasing motivation for sustainable long-term development.

7. High participation of women is of vital importance in the process.

8. The Project and Counterpart's feelings are that there is need for a more integrated organization to hit some other main concerns of the people.

9. Finally it must be said that the beneficiaries hold a bigger share in the accomplishments and success of the Program. On the side of the Project skills alone are not enough; there has to be a full commitment, sacrifice without selfishness and a real sensitivity towards the beneficiaries.