



19th WEDC Conference

ACCRA, Ghana 1993

## WATER, SANITATION, ENVIRONMENT and DEVELOPMENT

### Experience with water and sanitation committees



Andrew A Moseray

#### Introduction

One important aspect of achieving the aims and objectives of development agencies including water projects in Sierra Leone is the introduction of the self-help concept based on the formation of committees.

The formation of committees is a political process of undertaking development projects. In the case of water and sanitation committees the primary aim is that successful experience with water and sanitation based on the self-help concept would lead these committees to understand how to undertake future development projects.

The formation of committees is based on results of careful assessment of the following:

#### Existing leadership

Information has to be gathered informally on the existing leadership. Every village has a council of elders who look after the daily affairs of that village. If a new decision-making body is to be created, its roles and responsibilities have to be defined and properly explained in order to avoid conflicts and duplication of functions. While this in itself is not the wrong thing to do, sufficient time has to be allowed to understand and examine the capability and use of existing village management if suitable.

#### Existing committees

Water projects have found it advantageous and most useful to work through existing development committees because of the following:-

- experience gained with past self-help activities;
- elimination of duplication and conflicts arising from too many committees;
- well respected committees which have existed over a period of time are unlikely to disintegrate with the completion of the projects;
- this promotes consistency and sustainability;
- an easy path to reach the people

In cases where all of the above are not feasible, the formation of new committees becomes inevitable.

#### New committees

In the case of water projects the idea is introduced to village delegations during the application follow-up visit. The reason is to give the selection procedure time for all parties to hold intensive discussion in the villages for equitable representation.

Despite the above, minority groups, or otherwise known as minority tribes, will have their representation determined by these simple criteria:

- period of stay in the village;
- interest and degree of involvement in past village welfare activities;
- reasons for being in the village.

#### Why committees are formed

Some answers based on experience are analysed below:

##### Accountability

Committees account for decisions taken, action planned and implemented at local level.

##### Monitoring

Committees are overseers of their own development, which helps them to develop sense of responsibility and ownership.

##### Transparency

Committee members are aware of one another's roles and responsibilities including those of the aid agencies.

##### Evaluation

Committee members discuss and share their strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures for possible adjustments.

##### Sustainability

Committees learn to take decisions for future development with less outside involvement.

#### Ways of promoting committees

Committees are described as counterpart of national cabinet at community or village level. A representation of the views of the communities - hence the views of men and women. The combination of the views of men and women is an improvement on the culture and norms of the two sexes. This can encourage the men and women to sit

together, discuss development aspects and clarify roles and responsibilities which could be achieved through:

### Training

Training organised in the right context will help committees to find the energy and spirit to discuss actions to solve problems affecting their lives.

Training whether formal or informal is a key element of development - an important aspect of human resource development. Training in this context could be divided into project and village based with their advantages and disadvantages.

### Project based training

#### Advantages

- availability of power supply for the use of slides and overhead projectors;
- availability of suitable classroom;
- less distraction from outsiders.

#### Disadvantages

- the applications of urban examples to rural problems;
- occasional field trips are hurriedly organised under poor road conditions;
- participants are not familiar with training environment which causes depression.

### Village based training

A training organised in the village.

#### Advantages

- villagers act as co-organisers;
- the presence of real life examples are seen;
- demonstrations, case studies or problems and solutions are possible;
- is cost effective.

#### Disadvantages

- frequent distractions are caused by outsiders;
- lack of power to supply electricity;
- occasional problems of suitable classroom.

### Plan of action

At the end of the training, committees are encouraged to come up with plans of action which have to be assessed during post-training follow up visits for the following reasons

- to check commitments against training received;
- to check how training is reflected in plan of action;

- check on performances of committees in relation to plan of action made and receive feedback;
- discuss potential problems and solutions.

### Successes

- the status and participation of women in decision making are recognised;
- income-generating activities are planned and undertaken;
- committees undertake other development projects such as construction of roads, health centres and swamp farming without outside aid.

### Failures

- local politics undermined the organisation and strength of committees;
- civil strife causes members to abandon their posts;
- death of charismatic leaders;
- deceptive leadership.

### Conclusions

The aim of committees is to promote sustainable development. Most water committees vanish with the handing over of the projects, leaving questions of maintenance, tariff and other issues unanswered. Based on the over all content of this paper, I have attempted to spell out some basic factors to be considered for the formation and promotion of sustainable committees.

These points outlined in this paper will be most useful to colleagues charged with development tasks which involve the roles of committees.