



WATER, SANITATION, ENVIRONMENT and DEVELOPMENT

Working with rural folk in the North



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Introduction

The Project, Village Water Reservoirs, has the objective to provide potable water to the rural folk in parts of the Northern Region known as the horse-shoe area where the situation of water is very critical.

An American Psychologist, namely Abraham Maslow, noted that among other things, water and food are survival needs of humans. In many parts of the Northern Region however, water is very scarce commodity.

The Project has four sections namely; Workshop, Technical, Administration and Animation. This paper aims at discussing the activities of the Animation Section, focusing on innovations and problems. So far, the section's activities are centred on the Tolon-Kumbungu, Savelugu-Nanton and Tamale districts which have the same culture and traditions; Dagbon. All the villages are the same tribe and speak the same language. There are hardly any "strangers" in these villages.

At the beginning of the project, many of the villagers are enthused about the project but when practical project work starts mobilisation becomes a problem.

An overview of animation programme

A village's involvement with the Project starts when it applies in writing for a reservoir. Typically, the chief or the Assembly-man signs the letter. An appointment is then made for an orientation visit to be paid to the village by a combined technical/animation team which reports on the level of water need, feasibility of dam construction, alternative possible sources of water-supply and apparent capacity of the village to mobilise itself for its part as a partner to the Project.

After a village has been selected and served with its bill, the next contact is made after 50% of the bill has been paid when the social survey begins.

The social survey comprises three main parts; the water sources survey, the administration of interviews and focus group discussions.

Guinea-worm survey comes after the social survey. In the guinea-worm survey, incidence of guinea-worm is measured, knowledge of guinea-worm prevention and possession and use of filter cloths are investigated.

A period of Health Education starts with slides and discussion on guinea-worm and filtering.

Meanwhile the Technical Section busies itself with topo surveys and their findings/decisions are discussed with the village. This is the "Discussion of Technical Possibilities". Construction begins when decisions on siting and design have been agreed upon by both villagers and the Technical Section. An Animator liaises with the villagers and the Technical Section and discusses with the Chairman and "Magasia" arrangements for feeding the workers of the Technical Section.

Maintenance teams of equal numbers of men and women (4 in total) are chosen to take care of the dam. These are trained with others from other project villages with dams on health topics chosen by the villagers.

During the first rainy season, the Animation Section mobilises both the Maintenance Team Members and villagers for the Technical Section to show them how to plant and space clumps of vetiver grass on the inner and outer embankment, and how to fill erosion gullies.

Follow-up visits are made to the village maintenance teams two years after the dam construction to encourage them in sustaining their health promotion activities.

The Project has implemented a Long-term Maintenance Programme in which participating villages pay a fee for the Project Maintenance Team to visit dams twice a year for routine checks.

Below is an account of some problems the Animation faced in the execution of the above activities.

Problems

The Animation section was created in 1988 and passed through a lot of problems. The first was inability to recruit people. The section started with two animators and an expatriate, the latter as head of section. Machines were new and were working full-swing. However, construction depended on how fast the Animation section came out with social survey reports. This was a strain on the section. The method of mobilisation was through general meetings. However, the villagers did not always come out in their numbers. "Participation" was at the core of project's policy and the poor response was a sign of the villagers' unwillingness to participate. Thus the team (A.S.) could travel to a village, sit in wait for the people to come out in

their numbers and after sometime "walk out" of the village without working if the attendance was poor.

"Time" was a major problem. The villagers invited the team to come to their village in the morning. The project worker's morning begins at 7.30am whereas the local people's morning lasts from 6a.m to 11a.m. When we left the project at 7a.m. and got to a village at 8a.m they wondered if we slept on the way! Their morning was about to start. These were a few of the general problems of the section.

Specific problems

Orientation visit

In 1990, January, when I joined the Project I had the opportunity of assisting in that wet season's orientation visits as participant observer. Application letters came with a long list of villages written and signed by one person. This was understood to mean all the villages wanted one dam. Letters were sent to the first village in the list summoning a general meeting on a particular date. The other villages only sent representatives or never knew of these meetings. Wrong venues were taken for these meetings and the A.S. could repeat visits to these venues several times without success - the expected audience was never there. And this was disappointing. It was soon realised informally that the Assembly men sometimes wrote these applications on behalf of the villages without their knowledge. Information flow was poor and moreover some of the villages thought the venues chosen by the A.S were small villages - politically - and meetings should not be held there. Some of the villages did not have a water need - they were included in the list for economic reasons - they would contribute for the dam construction of a big village.

Another problem was, at the orientation general meeting, lots of questions were asked by the Animation team and only one man, the chief (if he was active) or the chairman, answered all the questions because when he does give a person the order to speak, he/she can not do so. The rest of the audience soon got fed up and moved out of the meeting grounds. Moreover, the very questions asked at the orientation general meeting were repeated during the social survey. The meetings were very long and tedious because our questions were too many.

In 1991, all these problems were addressed. Letters were written to individual villages even if found in the same letter giving dates for meetings. The truth came out at these separate meetings. However, where villages were close together, two separate meetings could be held on the same day.

The orientation visit questionnaire was also modified and the meetings were shortened.

Social survey

There were two questionnaires for men and women separately excluding young girls and young men. During the previous interviews it was found out that old / middle aged women did not fetch water. This was the duty of young girls (and young men in the late dry season when the girls have to travel about 8km. for water). The questionnaires were modified to reflect what the different ages knew. The landlord had questions, the women (middle aged) theirs, and the youngmen and the young girls also had theirs. The girls who were the water fetchers never wanted to answer questions while the older women were around. At focus group discussions they felt free to talk.

Initially, the social surveys were conducted over a long period of time. This was changed because the same answers were got because in the absence of animators, questions were discussed and answers were formulated to suit particular people's wishes - the opinion leaders. In November, 1991, the whole team of Animators spent three days in a village for the interviews. Nights were used for focus group discussion and better responses were obtained.

Discussion of technical possibilities

The Technical Section's proposals of technical possibilities were often not met. For instance, it may make two site proposals and the villagers would make a choice and the T.S. would come back to say the villagers' choice could not be met. Site proposals are now made after a careful study of toposurveys.

Land disputes

Because of land disputes, two villages (1990) have not had their dams even though one of them has paid fully for a dam. In 1992, in the middle of a dam construction, claim of ownership of the land led to a 2-week break in work. A decision was taken to ascertain the ownership of land as early as possible in every village. Of course, this had been done before but the Animation section always used to take the word of the village without further investigations. Now nearby villages are consulted on the ownership of the land for dam construction.

Water - hygiene education

The A.S. has to give health talks especially those related to water-borne diseases. The first question that comes in mind is how far are these talks to continue? What topics do we streamline? How long should the A.S. remain in a village after a dam has been constructed since the number of villages keep on increasing every year? The team can give talks on guinea-worm, diarrhoea and general hygiene. However, when it comes to diseases like malaria, cholera, bilharzia, skin diseases etc..., these are beyond our scope. Only the nurse animator can treat these topics.

With regard to guinea-worm discussions, the people believe that guinea-worm is in the individual's blood stream. However, there is spiritual guinea-worm cast by an enemy. Filtering is accepted because the people see living things in their water especially in the late dry season.

Feeding of the construction unit

The feeding of the construction unit by villagers has always been a problem especially when they have to work in villages in the lean season (construction takes place in the dry season when the land is firm and this may take a maximum of seven dry months). Furthermore the village youngmen who should offer free labour (one of our work policies) always feel that the construction unit are paid and should do all the work. Children are rather sent to the construction site to work instead of the young men and women. The A.S. therefore charges a small levy of \$1.50 on any youngman who refuses to work (Names of the day's workers are given to the foreman by the chairman of the village). Lateness to work also fetches a small charge of 50c. a defaulter.

Dam maintenance

The major problem with the dam maintenance is the maintenance works take place in the wet season when everybody is busy on his farm. Vetiver grass transplant takes place in July immediately it rains. The villagers don't see the need to spend time on the dam wall when there is work to be done on the farm. The section therefore has to pay several trips to villages in the rainy season to encourage the people to plant vetiver grass and mend erosion gullies.

Secondly, in a dry year, it is not possible to transplant vetiver grass.

Maintenance conference

A 3-day conference of VMTs from twenty-two villages was organised by the project in August, 1992 where topics related to dam maintenance, environmental influence of the dam, and the economic use of the dam were discussed.

Conclusion

Animation is an uphill task. To try to effect change in people is not easy. Yet, there are interesting times in the work. The beginning of the work in the village is always interesting:- That is when the team enjoys maximum co-operation. However, after dam construction, mobilization becomes difficult - It is always the chief, chairman, "magasia" and VMTs who attend to animation needs. For the rest of the community once they get water, they have finished with us. There is always "the other side of the coin" - And our joy has been the gratitude often expressed.

Acronyms:

A.S - Animation Section

T.S - Technical Section

VMTs - Village Maintenance Teams.