



## Sarvodaya's integrated approach to water and sanitation

Vinya S. Ariyaratne and Palitha Jayaweera, Sri Lanka.

THE SARVODAYA SHRAMADANA MOVEMENT (SSM) of Sri Lanka is by far the largest Non Governmental Organization (NGO) in the country. It is also the largest NGO working in water and sanitation sector in Sri Lanka. The methods and techniques developed by Sarvodaya in building community awareness, ensuring community participation and sustaining community management of integrated community water supply & sanitation schemes in hundreds of Sri Lanka villages on a national scale has been its greatest achievement.

Based on its expensive field experience Sarvodaya has postulated a five-stage model of village community development (Figure 1) and, water & sanitation related activities are initiated in the Third Stage of village development. The *First Stage* is that of psychological infrastructure building. It begins quite simply with a village level discussion about local needs and organizing self-help activities. Villages enter the *Second Stage* of social infrastructure building when they have formed one or more community groups of; farmers, mothers, children, youth and elders. The *Third Stage* of the Sarvodaya development process is a very critical one. At this stage the village is organized to satisfy its own basic and secondary needs. It is at this stage that water & sanitation related programmes are initiated. In addition the village Sarvodaya groups are brought together and institutionalized as a legally incorporated body (the Sarvodaya Shramadana Society) which is entitled to open its own bank account, obtain loans and start economic activities with support from District level and National Level Sarvodaya structures. Villages in the *Fourth Stage* are expected to become self financing in their Sarvodaya activity and they assist neighbouring villages as well in their *Fifth Stage*.

The Sarvodaya Rural Technical Services (SRTS) which is one of the 8 main programmes of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, is responsible for implementing integrated community water supply and sanitation projects in 16 out of 25 administrative districts in Sri Lanka. It provides technical and financial assistance to village societies in relation to meeting their basic needs primarily with respect to water supply, sanitation, energy and transport. Community water and sanitation needs are satisfied through the construction of gravity water supply schemes, hand dug shallow wells and low-cost latrines, with maximum community participation and mobilization of local resources.

Once the legally independent Sarvodaya Shramadana Society (SSS) is formed at the Third Stage of village development, the society could own land, buildings,

vehicles, equipment, and receive loans and seed capital from an external agency other than Sarvodaya itself.

A close contact is maintained between these societies by a full-time Sarvodaya worker known as the Gramadana Worker. "Gramadana" is a word which means "sharing of resources" at the level of villagers on a voluntary basis. Several clusters of such villagers are organized around Sarvodaya Divisional Centres, and a several divisional centres around District Centres which corresponds to the government administrative units.

The decision making process involved in a typical SRTS water project is presented in Figure 2. Firstly, a formal request seeking assistance for the need for improved water and sanitation is submitted to the Sarvodaya District Coordinator by the officials of the SSS through the Gramadana Worker. On receiving such a request the District Coordinator will assess the availability of funding and hand it over to the SRTS technician for further action. The technician will visit the village with the Gramadana Worker and the members of the society and have a preliminary participatory survey to check the technical feasibility of the project. This survey will lead to the discussions with the SSS to decide the technology and options which will be selected for the project. If the project is technically feasible SSS will start the mobilization and educational activities with the assistance of the Gramadana Worker. In the mean time SRTS technician will prepare the necessary plans and the cost estimates for the approval of the Sarvodaya Head Office. The financial input provided by Sarvodaya will be complimentary to what ever the villagers themselves can provide within their means. This would ensure village self reliance and self confidence. All critical decisions as to the choice of technology, levels of service, location of facilities etc., are taken by the community, in addition to their cash, material and labour contributions.

As soon as the Head Office approves the project, the funds would be released to enable the SRTS technician to start the construction work on a "shramadana" basis. With the commencement of the construction work, the SRTS technician will train two village youths who have been selected by the SSS as Caretakers for the maintenance of the project. While SRTS contributes financially and technically, the society will provide the available raw materials at village level and the unskilled labour required. On completion of the project, the scheme operation and maintenance (O & M) will be formally taken over by the society and trained caretakers will look after the project under the guidance of the SSS. O&M will be the

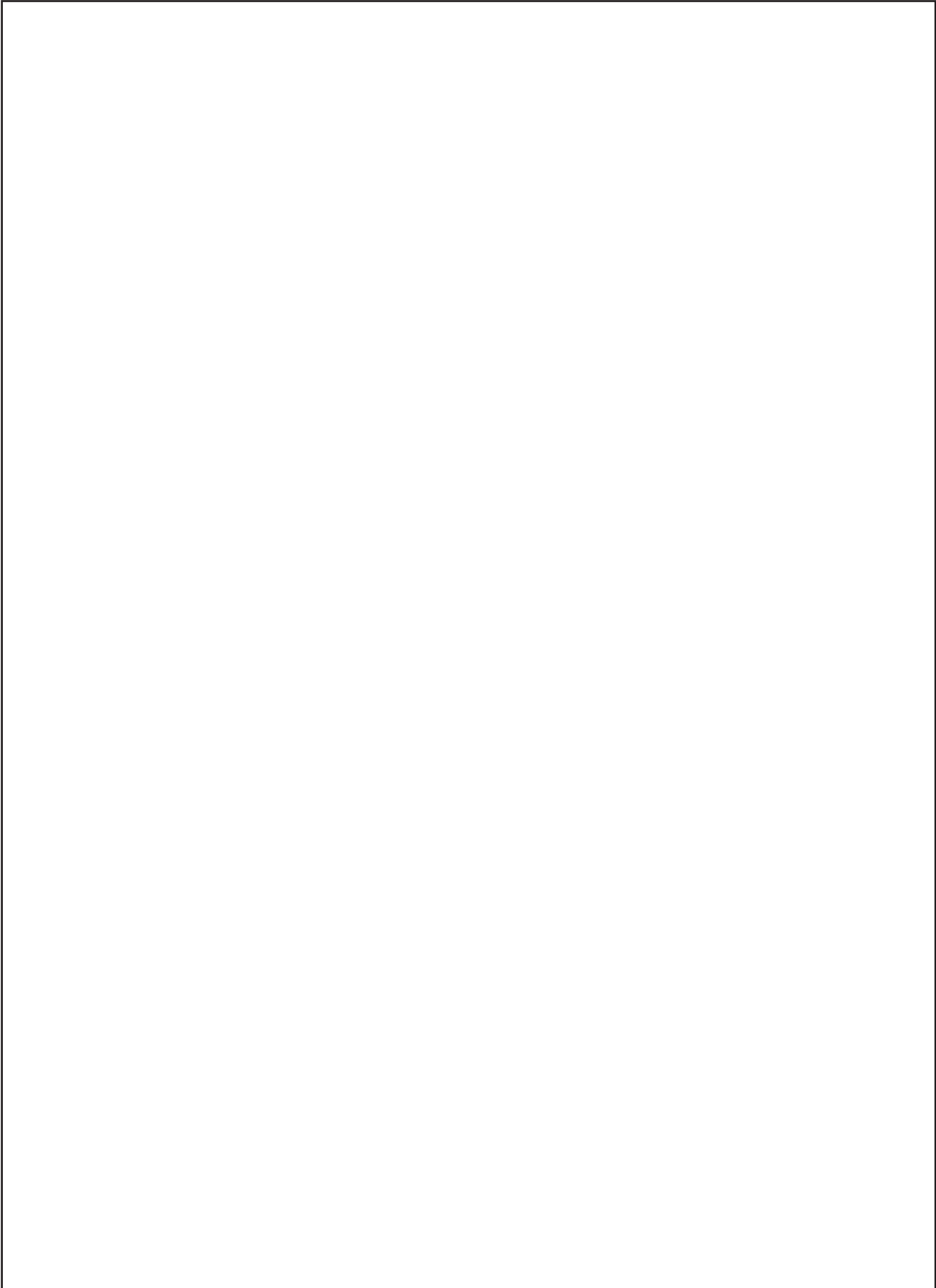


Figure 1. Sarvodaya 5-Stage Village Development Model.



**Figure 2. Decision making flow-chart of a typical SRTS scheme**

sole responsibility of the SSS but if there is any technical problem which goes beyond the capability of the caretakers the SSS can still contact the SRTS technicians for assistance.

During construction phase, an accompanying hygiene education activity is implemented through the pre-school and other social programmes initiated by Sarvodaya in the village. Women are involved through mothers' group and are represented in the village SSS. Thus, Sarvodaya's holistic approach addresses both technical and social

issues related to community water supply & sanitation while the activities that are carried out during the succeeding stages of village development directly address the root causes of ill-health; poverty and powerlessness. Further, Sarvodaya has successfully demonstrated that water & sanitation needs could be satisfied through an integrated community development approach which recognizes amongst others, the spiritual values cherished by the people.