



Community participation in Sindh, Pakistan

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THE SINDH PUBLIC HEALTH ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT (PHED) had adopted a very traditional engineering approach to water supply and sanitation schemes, with little community involvement or consultation. Scheme selection was often on a political basis with no regard to priorities based on real needs.

With an increasing budget deficit, the Government of Sindh with the assistance of the World Bank formulated a new approach to involve the rural communities in the routine operation and maintenance of the schemes as the only affordable and sustainable option the Government could follow.

The objectives of the new approach were as follows:

- A unified approach for all rural water supply and sanitation schemes was to be followed in which the community beneficiaries were to be involved in the scheme development.
- The communities would be required to undertake the routine maintenance themselves.
- PHED would undertake a programme of hygiene education and stimulate the construction of latrines.
- Affordability was to be one of the key decisions the community were to be involved with, particularly as the Government support for energy costs would only be temporary.

The task facing PHED is immense with currently only 920 completed schemes for both water supply and drainage and over 4000 villages above the cutoff population of 1000 with neither type of scheme.

Apart from the usual technical assistance to PHED the Consultancy Services included substantial inputs for training and institutional development support. The objectives of these services were to:

- Develop the capability within PHED for community involvement.
- Improve the project and financial management capability of PHED to handle aid assisted projects.
- Develop the ability of PHED to work more closely with other government and non-government organisations involved in the water supply, sanitation and rural development sectors.

The basic management structure of PHED is a conventional hierarchical pyramid with sub engineers (410 no.) forming the base of the pyramid. Each sub-engineer is responsible for an area with around 20 villages. Of these villages, 17 on average have not yet any scheme. It was

decided that activities would centre on the sub-engineer level where good and regular contact with the communities was possible, provided transport problems were solved.

With many of the PHED staff having over 30 years experience of their conventional approach, the change to a community involvement approach was difficult. Orientation courses for senior staff were held, followed by detailed training of sub-engineers on the community participation course, alongside newly recruited hygiene educators, community facilitators and latrine sanitation advisors. Initial results were mixed with still many sub-engineers doubting the viability of the approach. However when practical application commenced in the villages and the overwhelming positive reactions received from most villages, these initial doubts began to disappear.

However the main lingering doubt, is the ability of communities to organise themselves sufficiently to be capable of operating and maintaining schemes. Handover of schemes to the communities is in its initial stages but positive action is being taken by PHED to prepare the sub-engineers as "trainers of operators" and to develop an attitude which is supportive to the communities.

Self-financing of a village latrine programme was considered by many PHED senior staff as impossible and not affordable. Preliminary efforts have brought surprising results, particularly the revelation to PHED staff that many villages have informal women groups which establish a type of revolving fund for the purchase of goats. Efforts are now being made to see if the latrine construction programme can be integrated into this type of existing arrangement.

It is easy to concentrate on topics in a paper like this which deal with the interesting issues relating to the community process and the absorption of these PHED staff, but if any major investment programme is to be successful, the implementation agency needs to have the necessary skills and capability to plan, manage, monitor and report its activities. Considerable effort has gone into developing computer based systems and procedures for monitoring physical and financial progress. Training of PHED staff in their use not only for reporting but for forward planning and resourcing of the future development programme. Senior staff need improved management skills to cope with the larger workload and new demands the project places on them. This is being addressed through an intensive training programme.

A particular important aspect of this type of project is the involvement of NGOs, with the capability of assisting communities to organise themselves. In Sindh Province the project has identified around 120 NGOs but many of these cover a very small geographical area or have been established for a very specific project with no wish to be involved in a major development programme. However the biggest short term difficulty seen by the NGOs themselves was their inability to mobilise female facilitators.

Despite these problems PHED is determined to pursue the use of NGOs in “sensitising” the communities ready for the visits by the PHED community participation teams. It is hoped that this will lead to:

- A reduction in the length of the CP process, particularly for existing schemes.
- A strengthening of the NGOs themselves amongst the communities in their locality.
- A means for including other necessary activities such as income generation, which are not appropriate for PHED to undertake at this stage.

This project is still in its early stages but some of important lessons learnt to date are:

- Changing the attitude of a traditional approach Government Department towards a community based

approach is achievable with the correct training and support.

- In the rural areas of Sindh, regular community contact is only possible if transport logistics are solved.
- The integration of women into a male dominated Government Department requires significant support from the senior management. The logistics of unaccompanied females travelling in rural areas in an Islamic culture requires particular attention.
- The implementation agency must develop the necessary managerial skills to complement the size and nature of their development programme.
- The involvement of NGOs should be encouraged even if they are not suited for a major role initially. This will build confidence between NGOs and the Government Departments and lead to a better understanding and improved relationships.

There have been very few instances where changing the attitudes and approach of a Government Department has been undertaken on such a large scale. Naturally progress is slow but as the programme gathers momentum it is clear that funding could become a constraint. Consequently good management and planning by PHED will become essential to ensure the CP process does not raise the expectations of the community too far in advance of physical implementation.