



Application of key sector principles: issues and realities

Rekha Dayal and Peter Lochery, India.

GLOBAL CONSENSUS AT the end of the Water and Sanitation Decade on key principles to guide the sector, has resulted in several initiatives to design and implement project using participatory approaches and a combination of institutional options. In the context of the sociocultural, political and sector policy environment in South Asia, the following three principles pose a particular challenge: (i) demand orientation, using client centred approaches, (ii) treating water as an economic good with inbuilt systems for cost recovery and (iii) management at the lowest appropriate level with implications for strengthening local bodies, NGOs and community-based organization (CBOs).

Based on the emerging experiences from the UNDP-World Bank Regional Water and Sanitation Group for South Asia (RWSG-SA) work program, which supports preparation and implementation of rural and urban water supply and sanitation projects, the authors argue for: (i) use of an adaptive design with mechanisms for frequent internal reviews and corrective actions incorporated in the managerial processes for preparation, implementation and monitoring and evaluation; with the objective of improving project effectiveness by ensuring that accountability and ownership rests with participating organizations and communities; (ii) learning oriented methodologies for implementation, including careful documentation, dissemination and use of lessons learned; and (iii) using intermediation as a strategy for addressing institutional issues and concerns.

Financial resources available from donors and government for water and sanitation projects have always fallen far short of the need. Studies focusing on participation along with emerging experiences from selected projects in the region provide evidence that users are unlikely to finance schemes unless planned facilities meet their needs at a price they can afford. This is more likely to take place in projects in which users participate in decision-making from the very beginning. Financing mechanisms need to be considered in terms of their accessibility to the poor and their cost effectiveness, for recovery of capital costs as well as for provision of recurrent costs. Intermediation by informal institutions in countries like Bangladesh, India and Pakistan may play a role in helping the poor gain access to credit or other opportunities to mobilize the means to pay for the services they want. The key questions being examined are: what is the range of informal institutions and processes involved, and how do they influence the financial stability of projects? What financial level of support is needed for operation and maintenance,

and how is this arranged in community based projects which have demonstrated long-term viability.

While client participation is key to designing projects which identify and meet users' self-perceived needs, findings ways to include users in the design and implementation of water supply and sanitation schemes is not easy for formal institutions. Institutions in the informal sector, such as NGOs and CBOs, have been found to provide essential intermediation services by facilitating the participation of clients, especially the poor and particularly poor women, in the design and implementation of projects. Once a project has been constructed, however, many NGOs move on to other communities. The flow of benefits from a project tends to dwindle if operation and maintenance are not managed in a sustainable way. This is found to hinge on the development of institutions which continue to provide intermediation services, or on the development and evolution of self-regulating systems. These are difficult to identify initially and are more likely to surface through an iterative process. Consequently project designs which are programmatic in nature and make provision for the initial project design to be reviewed and amended through internal mechanisms, offer much greater potential for identifying and implementing successful intermediation processes as well as helping to define the factors governing intermediation.

Modest experiences from the region show that where project designs are in the form of blueprints, there is limited potential for addressing these questions through learning from and feeding back experience. Monitoring and evaluation is often perfunctory due to lack of incentive, and changes in implementation, operation and maintenance procedures are hindered by excessive bureaucracy. Initial steps in developing these internal mechanisms are being taken by RWSG-SA through innovative wss projects in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal as well as more traditional projects elsewhere in the region. Other regional groups of the UNDP-World Bank Water and Sanitation Program are also doing similar work. The Program is in the process of synthesizing global experiences.

The process of learning through an ongoing project has been found to require flexibility in project design and also needs to be adequately structured and resourced. Project staff are often under considerable pressure to provide short term quantitative results and need a framework to assist them in making objective procedural changes. The frameworks developed to date have consisted of series of hypotheses, which the "structured" learning is designed

to validate. Where initial hypotheses are found to be flawed, appropriate changes in implementation, operation and maintenance can be made.

In addition to using conventional forms of dissemination of materials, the Program promotes inter-regional exchange of experiences through workshops. One such forthcoming even is a Regional Workshop for Preparing and Implementing Large Scale Rural Water Supply and Sanitation projects in South and East Asia, for project managers of World Bank-financed projects. The workshop will provide a forum to share experiences, problems and solutions, to establish a support network for information and resource sharing, and to encourage the adoption of a systematic learning and documentation approach in ongoing projects.

Rekha Dayal is Regional Program Advisor and Peter Lochery is Regional Manager for South Asia of the UNDP - World Bank Water and Sanitation Program.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and should not be attributed in any manner to the UNDP - World Bank and Sanitation Program, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank Group or any affiliated organizations.