



Techniques in improving project sustainability

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WITH THE CURRENT focus on major water and sanitation capital development programmes in Southern Africa, headline issues have often centred on levels of service, labour intensive construction, use of emerging contractors and various aspects of community participation. However, a key aspect affecting ongoing development sustainability is that of mobilising dependable community support for capital programmes.

The primary dilemma that faces most projects when seeking to involve communities is the fact that it is difficult to identify precisely what or who, the community is that should be involved.

A variety of papers and documents have been written pertaining to integrated project planning and development, which is a legitimate focus. However, community participation in such instances often only refers to dealings with representative community structures and superbodies. A naive and often condescending assumption

is that, in spite of the current volatility and lack of societal fabric in previously marginalised communities, the "development committee" holds sway over the behaviours of the wider community it represents. One only has to consider the vast number of rehabilitation projects that have been launched in South Africa to realise this is a fallacious assumption, and cannot solely be blamed on inappropriate intervention methodologies.

Thus, a sustainable and fundable approach to changing hostile or misinformed community attitudes and behaviour patterns *on a mass basis* is required.

The broad approach

Figure 1 provides an illustrative understanding of the integrated project cycle, and the role and placing a broad community awareness ("Lifeskills") programme would enjoy within such a context.

Figure 2 provides an overview of the Awareness Programme cycle itself. This cycle is initiated through identification of stakeholders and the introduction of the programme by the technical project team to the community stakeholders in particular. A critical aspect of this programme is that it is not a one way communication, wherein an institutional client is attempting to change behaviour patterns of a community (i.e. increasing proper use of water and sanitation facilities, as well as payment for such services) - it is rather a two way programme which also acts as an information feedback in terms of where the client, such as a local authority, is failing in its role as a service provider.

As well as conducting standard research (community profiling, participation analysis and datascan), this process also involves the collection of photographic material and the conducting of a perceptions survey. Such perceptions survey follows a unique technology which is designed in a benign manner to uncover potentially sensitive issues within communities that are generally averse to divulging information. All such base information is then used as input into the development of tools and materials for the conducting of the programme.

Such materials center on high impact, full colour visual posters, backed up by leaflets, pamphlets, competitions and other interest generating tools (refer to following section). The programme is run by facilitators selected from the target communities, in a workshop format. Workshops are highly interactive, and can last up to 3 hours due to the interest and enthusiasm generated. One technique used is the twinning of negative

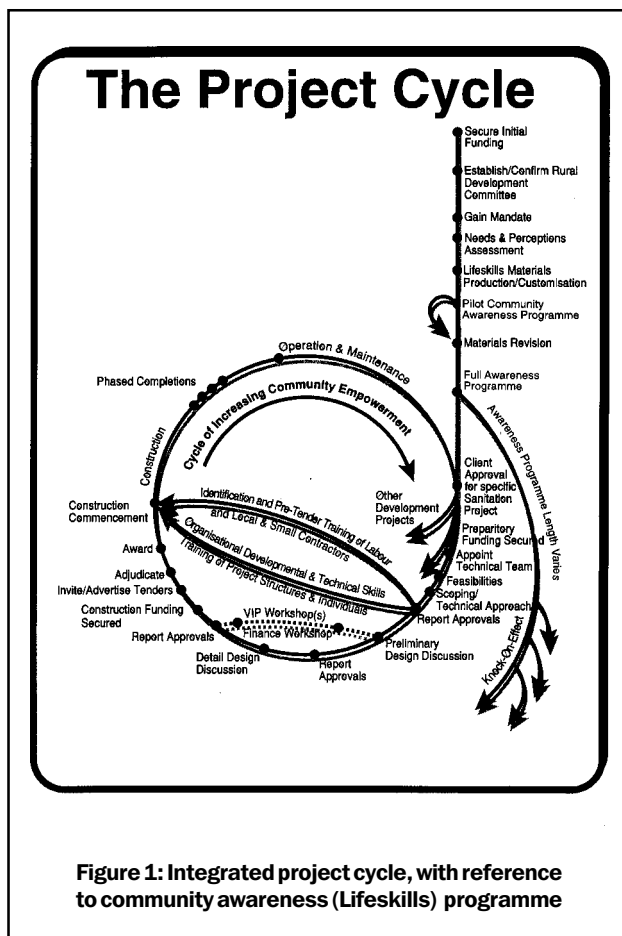


Figure 1: Integrated project cycle, with reference to community awareness (Lifeskills) programme

(existing) and positive (preferred) poster scenarios - whereby the facilitator merely stimulates discussion. Because the diagrams and other supplementary information are based on the real perceptions and current frame of reference of the audience, a high level of interest is stimulated via such "triggers".

Essentially, the programme arms an individual with the capacity to want to change, to see the relevance of that change, to make decisions affecting lifestyle and priorities and to at least foresee the impact.

The workshops are run on a saturation basis, where usually a minimum of 25 per cent of the population are reached directly through the workshops. Clearly, the take-home material expands the coverage significantly. Schools are often a key target, due to the greater openness of juveniles. However, both the process and the materials package selected for any given programme are tailored specifically towards the unique circumstances of such a programme, as well as the desired impact.

Such community awareness programmes, taken within the context of an integrated approach to training and human resource development (HRD), have proved highly successful in various locations throughout South Africa.



Figure 3. Examples of reduced materials

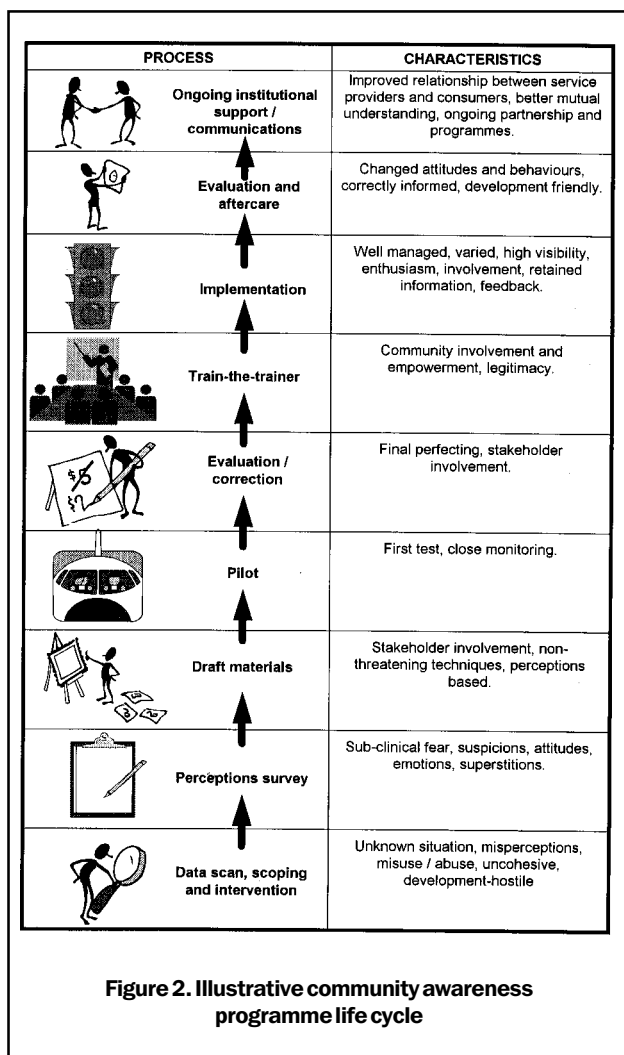
They have been implemented in both rural and urban settings, and amongst both homogeneous and heterogeneous societies.

Materials focus

All visual material developed must reflect the structures and lifestyle of that community. Subtle differences, nuances, omissions etc, can detach a programme. An example would be to visually depict the use of sanitation products to a relatively poor community who do not have the capacity to purchase such products.

It is often better to have a message that is indirect and does not overtly try and convince the target audience. People tend to use analogies to communicate difficult or sensitive concepts. However this very often will lead to confusion and difficulties relating to the subtleties involved. We should never lose sight of the fact that there are culturally different modes of thought. The starting and conclusion may be common, but the process for achieving the goal may differ. The aim therefore is to be understood by broadest possible spectrum of the communities, through simple and direct presentation.

People are best motivated when they themselves are able to articulate the benefit and costs of taking action.



The use of a direct visual approach enables us to challenge individuals at their level. The visual technique and portrayals are carefully orchestrated so as not to depict reality in that it could be identified as an actual existing structure or person, but in such a way that the individuals would still relate. Thus, a person would see a scene, know the feelings, emotions and actions and experiences associated with - but be distanced enough to view it objectively. Thereby, the impact of the action on the environment and surrounding people can be understood, and the crossroad to change within the individual's mind can be faced.

As has been mentioned, the use of a negative and positive scenarios has proved effective. The ideal is to depict the same scene setting in both the positive and negative visuals. The same participants are involved in both posters. The message through comparison is clear, that people can commit themselves to change attitudes and habits. There is no stereotyping of any individual in terms of his or her actions. This enables the participant to unreservedly identify with an action because in the positive scenario, there is change and success.

It is imperative that individual and community dignity remains unimpaired, that there are not caricatured depictions based on prejudiced viewpoints or beliefs, and that there are no "labels" attached to one race, culture, or community.

The use of visuals cannot be done in isolation and the use of them as a catalyst for discussion and decision making is effective only in as much as the facilitators believe in the "product". Exciting, stimulating and sincere presentation makes for motivated disciples.

Humour is a powerful weapon against suspicion, hurt, anger and mistrust. Gentle and careful use of simple humour to enliven a programme as well as soften the blow of a difficult challenge is a deliberate ingredient to win hearts and minds.

The importance of the use of truthful, yet emotive visuals using elements such as anger, sadness, laughter, etc. are often under emphasized. Their use establishes the whole message. For example, if one sees an angry individual being portrayed, we seek out the cause of that anger and generate discussion over the issues.

Symbolism can be powerfully used, provided that the symbolism is common to the community. It often occurs that the use of animals, plants, insects or even clothing are interpreted differently by communities.

Leveraging finance for awareness programmes

The largescale infrastructural development programmes implemented initially under the RDP within South Africa, all fall within a policy framework that dictates a minimum percentage (ranging from 5 - 12 per cent) to be dedicated to human resource and institutional development. The authors have been involved in the develop-

ment of a new policy framework, for Education and Training in the Construction Industry within South Africa.

Current national level thinking points towards a more sensible approach than currently implemented, namely the **pooling** of project-linked training monies into a programme kitty. This enables the customisation of training programmes according the specific needs, size, location etc. of projects. For example, the previous paradigm by default implied that it would cost half as much money to train a water committee on a R10 million project as opposed to a R20 million project!

More importantly, such a programmatic approach enables training and HRD interventions at community level, rather than at project level. In general terms, this is critical if one accepts that projects are designed for people and communities, and not the other way around (Where project sustainability used to be measured by water and sanitation engineers in terms of fulfilling the quality specification, this blinkered approach is now being replaced by a greater understanding of what makes for true sustainability).

Specific to this paper, it also releases funding for community awareness programmes. Clearly, the approach outlined is not inexpensive, thus is particularly viable within larger communities and on large scale water and sanitation projects. It would normally require approximately one third of the total training budget. A further one third would normally be dedicated to emerging contractor and labour force training, and the last one third dedicated to institutional development and facilitation / liaison.

A case study : waterborne sanitation in Durban Townships

Durban is a city of 3.5 million people, of whom approximately 80 per cent reside in previously marginalised townships. Many of such townships were reticulated with full waterborne services under the apartheid government. The socio-political reasons for the various development policies of the erstwhile government are too complicated to investigate in this paper, however the fact remains that many township residents benefitted from high level services, but in many instances were unable to properly interact with such, could not afford the services and / or simply saw them as an "apartheid provision".

The community awareness programme philosophy of approach was employed initially in Chatsworth, an Asiatic township in southern Durban. This particular township is characterised by pockets of extreme poverty, as well as a general lack of understanding as to the overall mechanics of the waterborne system. The perceptions study revealed a multitude of critical issues, including major misunderstandings relating to the diameter of sewer connector pipes (confused with the diameter of manholes), as well as widespread dissatisfaction and

resentment towards the local authority service provider. Further, it revealed that many women within Chatsworth were below the poverty line and thus used rags in place of proper sanitary towels, which were beyond their affordability. Such rags were disposed of down the toilet and were in fact the cause of a high percentage of all blockages reported in Chatsworth.

Upon completion of this programme, the number of blockages reported escalated dramatically. This was welcomed as it proved that the first outcome had been achieved - namely that of raising awareness. Thereafter, in the 6 months since this programme was completed, blockage reports declined on a month-by-month basis.

This programme is now being implemented throughout a variety of formally black townships within the Durban Metropolitan area.

The techniques being employed center on the poster methodology, but also include booklets, health leaflets, colouring-in competitions and other social engagement programmes.

Combining such an off-the-line approach with radio interviews and other more formal media techniques added to the effectiveness of the programme.

Conclusion

While many development agencies are aware of the effectiveness of raising awareness, in many instances the approach has been incorrect. In some cases a eurocentric approach has been attempted, while in others clients have confused awareness education with public relations and formal communications. Technical personnel also have had a tendency to assume that social intervention programmes require a lower level of skill and integration than technical interventions. Nothing could be further from the truth. However, the approach outlined in this document is proving that individuals and communities can be mobilised for development, for payment, for self-improvement and for the restoration of normal functioning societies in South Africa.

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