



## Understanding community management of water

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THE PARTICIPATORY ACTION Research on The Role of Communities in the Management of Improved rural Water Supplies involves the understanding of the dynamics, and the challenges inherent in the decision making process within the social environment in which the improved water supplies are located. The Participatory Action Research is enhancing the understanding of the dynamics challenges and constraints of community management.

The overall project guidance and coordination is provided by International Centre for Water and Sanitation (IRC), The Hague with funding from The Netherlands Government. The collaborating institutions are NGO's in six developing countries Colombia, Guatemala (Latin America); Nepal, Pakistan (Asia); and Cameroon, Kenya (Africa). Network for Water and Sanitation International (NETWAS) is a Regional NGO collaborating in this PAR Project. The overall project components include preparation, community selection, community diagnosis, problem identification, identification of promising solutions, experimentation and monitoring and evaluation.

### Community selection

The primary objective of community selection was to identify communities with demonstrable interest in becoming partners in the proposed action research. The PAR team prepared a situation analysis on the local management of rural water supply systems in Kenya. The team reviewed documents, interviewed staff of agencies working in rural water sector, organised two workshops one for District Water Engineers and a second one for communities' leaders involved in the management of improved water supplies.

The focus of these workshops, discussions, review of documents was to identify what policies, strategies and practices were for community management of rural water systems. This was followed by an in-depth situation analysis in one community in order to help the PAR team gain hands on exposure on community management. Having obtained this overview, the PAR approached various agencies requesting for collaboration in the PAR research and also to establish mutual working relationships with these agencies who assisted in the improving of water supplies in the communities.

The agencies provided brief write ups on various community water projects they supported, but now handed over to communities for operation, use and maintenance. The PAR team then visited some of these promising communities, explained the purpose of the research and

sought the interest of the communities in this rather abstract project. The findings from these community visits were scrutinised in a working group "The National Reference Group" against which four communities were selected based on a predetermined selection criteria.

Commitment from the four partner communities was sought and obtained. Communities that were not selected as partners were informed of the decision. The outcome of the community selection process revealed the following:- That communities are capable of accepting abstract interventions like the PAR project, despite the many years of exposure to physical interventions only. The second revelation in this process was that while external agencies focus on the improved water systems only, communities have a holistic view of water systems both traditional and improved water supplies, thus calling for different management style in that committees are usually selected focusing on the improved systems without taking into account the existing traditional water sources.

### Problem identification

The PAR team having obtained commitment from the four partner communities went on to problem identification. The process of problem identification involved several short visits to the communities where a step wise analysis of the community perspectives and the objectives of the PAR were discussed and clarified. Focused group discussions between the men, the women, the committee and general community meetings were held. Village walk, observations, review of records (accounting books, financial records, stores ledger and minute book), village map and visits to traditional leaders enhanced the problem identification and clarification. Emphasis is placed in identifying problems as seen by the whole community not just the few leaders/elite.

The major obstacle in this regard was the constant fall back to "physical problems" and little regard to management shortfalls and problems as seen in the other communities. In order to overcome this constraint, exchange visits were organised where 10 persons from each of the communities visited the fourth community. From discussions, observations and other PRA tools, the visiting community members were able to reflect on their own management problems as mirrored in those of the host community. The exchange visits were followed by a one week training workshop, where 10 participants from each community attended. In order to optimise on interactions, the criteria for participant selection was that 50 per cent of those

selected must have participated in the Exchange Visits and the other 50 per cent must be community members who did not participate in the Exchange Visits. This mix of participants which included same number of men and women from each community enhanced feedback to the entire community when the participants returned home. The selection of the participants was done by the community in general public meeting for the participants to this workshop and other training workshops must be seen as “ambassadors” for the whole community *not* just, the management committee.

The major problem identified included *poor water distribution within the communities* as many community members are not served. This is particularly notable in gravity schemes where persons living upstream of the source are considered “beneficiaries” even when the technology option (gravity) will never ever serve those people. Yet in the planning, and implementation, these persons contribute in terms of money, time and other resources. The case of Nyakerato Water Project in Kisii district and Kiveetyo in Machakos district testify to this “developmental gap”. The PAR team is attempting together with the communities involved and the support agencies supporting these two water supplies to redefine the various categories of social units e.g. “Community member”, “User/beneficiary” and owners of the water system in order to identify the roles, responsibilities, obligations perceived and tangible benefits accruing to each of the population categories. The hypothesis is that it is not possible for all community members to be users or owners of the systems, and not all users should be owners, but all “owners” must be users. For example children use the water systems but can of necessity be not owners. This glaring discrepancy between intended and actual beneficiaries causes much unwarranted tension in communities that receive improved systems.

In Sigomere Water Project (borehole with electric submersible) all consumers have metered connection users either through individual or communal water points. The individual connections pay Ksh.10 perm<sup>3</sup> while the communal water points users pay twice as much, yet the communal water points are concentrated around the market centre. Those poor community members living a distance from the borehole continue to use traditional water sources, despite fairly developed pipe network serving the rich scattered all over the supply area. As users the rich have to pay for their service time, no provision is made to elect communal water points enroute.

*Poor record keeping both financial and minutes of meetings* is eroding the confidence of the community members. In Yanthooko Women Group record keeping has improved significantly and the accessibility to these records has been made more accountable and transparent. The resultant has been that all members have paid up their annual subscriptions towards other development activities within the group. This women group within four months contributed Kshs.26,000/= to purchase a plot on which to

build a posho mill. (*US Dollar is equivalent to Kshs.55, April 1997*)

*Communication and information* sharing has for a long time been considered the enclave of the leadership in communities. The PAR project has enhanced information sharing within communities and among the various interest groups. In Kiveetyo, Machakos, the chairman never allowed questions and/or views from the younger people with the effect that the youthful population considered the water project the responsibility of the elderly members in the community.

However after a series of meetings, useful intervention is occurring in this community and a large number of the young people now attend meetings, are providing time and labour for the operation; maintenance and extension of the project. With this collaboration among the various interest groups, the community have approached the Children Christian Fund (CCF) who have kindly agreed to donate some materials for the extension of this gravity scheme. The chairman, recently remarked “I am pleased that our young men and women are now interested in the well running of our water project and are keen to support the management”. This statement coming from a man who considered all questions as a threat to his chairmanship is an indication of change of heart as now the chairman sees his role as enhancing better management for posterity and is willing to train other persons to be effective leaders after he retires.

*Inadequate management framework* is another flaw in the community management within the communities. Most ESA have stipulated preconditions to be fulfilled before a community can qualify for support, usually including the formation of a committee with some women representation. However, little is done in the way for formulating management tools and organs. In all the four communities, there exists *no constitution or global guidelines*, but only a few rules specific to the implementation of the project are enacted on the behest of ESA. The institution of Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary, Committee, and community are little understood as they are almost always not expounded. Some type of training on the roles, responsibilities of the various office bearers is done and yet no attempt is made to assist communities assimilate these “newly” introduced organs of management.

In the four communities no attempt is made before hand to articulate the normative demands for each of the offices, their accountability formats and how the community can take recourse (checks and balances). The need for clearly defined cannot be over emphasised. The four partner communities have recognised the need for clearly defined guidelines for the overall management of the water supplies after implementation and have taken steps to prepare the guidelines (constitutions).

*National policies and guidelines* have to be tailored to accommodate the various aspects that are inherent on the management and development of water resources. In Kiveetyo, and Nyakerato the water sources are in adjacent

community over which the water supplies beneficiaries have little control. In this respect the overall water resource management cannot be feasible in the hands of the use community. National guidelines must define how such situations need to be governed. In Kenya the National Water Policy is being formulated by the relevant government departments.

### **Potential solutions**

The PAR team with communities have held a series of workshops to identify suitable solutions to these issues raised above. Together they are developing an agenda for monitoring experimentation including suitable training sessions for each of the various actors in the communities. Indicators for the improved management performance are being developed.

The ESA working with the four partner communities receive feedback on the process and desired interventions. In the case of Nyakerato joint meetings have been held with the local administration to help focus on the management needs of this gravity scheme. This was necessitated as those persons living upstream demand services from the gravity scheme, which is not possible through gravity as they live on the higher elevation.

### **Emerging trends**

As a result of participating on the PAR project, the Nyakerato community have held a series of meetings and decided on the following:- First to delineate the membership (ownership) of the project. They have divided themselves into three groups. The first group are those that will never benefit from the gravity scheme as they live on higher levels. These are to receive refunds of whatever monies they had contributed towards the gravity project. The second group are those living on a main distribution line 'A'. This group noticing that not all persons are served have decided to contribute Kshs.300 per household to extend the pipeline to those unserved. The third group is served by distribution Line C, who have also decided to extend the pipeline to the unserved members in their area. The second and the third group have each a sub-committee, from which a central management committee has been elected.

On the other hand, while the Nyakerato community are raising resources internally, they have approached the

government and the ESA who supported for assistance with materials for the extensions. This community who initially were timid are now enthusiastic about the management of their water system.

In Sigomere, the community have agreed to build more communal water points along the lines serving individual connections, in recognition of the plight facing the poorer members of their community. The funds will be raised from the sale of water.

In Yanthooko, the Women group have realised that they have a potential to undertake certain tasks from internal resources. While the Kiveetyo community have written their own project proposal, approached CCF who have kindly agreed to assist them.

*In conclusion*, the PAR Project is inducing positive changes in the way communities perceive and are willing to take on the responsibility of decision making affecting the management of their respective traditional and improved water supplies. The willingness to mobilise internal resources and access external assistance with a partnership arrangement is indeed encouraging.

The PAR is planned to continue to 1998, and is currently documenting the procedures, tools, process and outcomes that many be shared with others who have an interest in self reliant, enhanced community managed water supplies.

### **References**

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