



Community participation in Qadi-Nyuswa project

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THE IMPORTANCE OF community participation in rural water projects has been widely acknowledged. It is believed that community participation will enable communities to contribute towards designing of acceptable and user friendly designs and make communities to develop an interest in the operation and maintenance of projects.

To date there is adequate information describing community participation in the water projects. However an accurate assessment of community participation has rarely been undertaken. This is despite the fact that there is uncertainty with regard to the success of community participation as Oakley 1991 says participation is stronger in rhetoric than in practical reality. What is therefore required is an in-depth analysis of specific projects in order to find out what went wrong and what lessons could be learned. It was in this context that the assessment of the Qadi-Nyuswa Water Pipeline Project was undertaken.

The Qadi-Nyuswa Water project was a joint venture between The Valley Trust, an NGO promoting health and development in the Valley of Thousand Hills in KwaZulu-Natal, the World Vision, a church organisation and the community. Between 1981 and 1985 The Valley Trust was actively involved as a catalyst, trainer and monitor of the project. Towards the end of 1985 Umgeni Water, a parastatal in Kwazulu-Natal also became involved to provide technical support and financial assistance. This project was established around 1985, preproject work commenced in 1981. It started with a 12km pipeline having 30 standpipes supplying water to about 10000 people (The Valley Trust, 1985). Currently the project has grown and has yard connections of about 1355 individuals. There has been a move from communal standpipes to privately owned community metered standpipes. Figure 1 depicts the organisational structure of the project as in 1985.

Methodology

The methodological difficulties for measuring community participation are already known. This is probably because the definition of community participation is a matter on which there is considerable disagreement among development scholars and practitioners. Rifkin, 1986 stated that it is not possible or even useful to have a universal definition of community participation. The reasons attributed to this were associated with the fact that communities are composed of people, knowledge about why people, as individuals and as groups, choose certain actions over others is still in the pioneering stage.

Because community participation is a dynamic process which is in a constant state of change its assessment should include both qualitative and quantitative aspects. A lot of literature agrees that assessment of community participation should not be based exclusively on the measurement of material, but social effects or processes of development are useful as well' Oakley, 1991 Hence this assessment looked at both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of community participation.

Conceptual framework for measuring community participation

A conceptual framework for assessing community participation developed by the researcher with components from the World Bank, 1987 and Rifkin's et al., 1988 was used. This framework has the following components:

- *Definition of community participation:* assesses understanding of community participation by all stakeholders in the project.
- *Assessment of objectives of community participation in the project:* looks at what was aimed to be achieved with community participation
- *Who participated in the project:* this is a definition of who participates in the project.
- *Intensity and levels of community participation:* intensity of community participation is about establishing how do people participate and the levels at which they participate.
- *Instruments of participation:* instruments refers to the institutional devices used by a project to organise and sustain community participation. Instruments of participation may be grouped into three categories (World Bank, 1987).
- *Impact of community participation on the project:* the outcome of participation in relation to the project.

Results and Discussion

Understanding of community participation by stakeholders

Stakeholders had different understanding of community participation. It was interesting to note that The Valley Trust definition of community participation was related to empowerment. Empowerment was seen as the development of skills and abilities to enable communities to manage better and to be able to start other development initiatives. It was stressed that community participation

should have a multiplier effect. Umgeni Water emphasised that community participation should be an internal process which means local people should take a lead. The community representatives were satisfied with the role they had played in the project in particular their relationship with The Valley Trust. They felt external assistance was important for communities to participate. Of particular importance was the issue of provision of resources which is difficult for communities to provide.

Objectives of community participation in the project

It was found that there were no explicit stated measurable objectives on what was intended with community participation. The idea of community participation was shared by all stakeholders. There were only two objectives common and shared by all stakeholders. That was building beneficiary capacity and cost sharing. It was felt that these objectives would lead to the sustainability of the project.

Building beneficiary capacity

A lot of effort went into building beneficiary capacity. This was in the form of creating community awareness about the project, organisational development and particularly the development of a democratic form of governance, training the Qadi-Nyuswa Board on financial skills and participation of the Board in planning and conceptualisation of the project. This was facilitated by The Valley Trust. The results were as follows:

Building of human and organisational assets

The project generated a core of community members with knowledge and skills on water management systems. The visible skills were those of chairing meetings, preparing and presenting a chairperson's report. During the first AGM and keeping updated financial records. However this was short-lived.

Changing membership

There was a constant change in the membership of the Qadi-Nyuswa Board. This meant the skills gained were never sustained and hence new incoming incumbents did not have the opportunity to learn.

Voluntarism

The project depended on the spirit of voluntarism. When the project started the Board was very strong and active in the project. As the project grew it became weak, heavily involved and overstretched as it was dealing with a range of development issues (electricity, roads, schools). This resulted in exhaustion and failure to cope with all demands of the project.

Lack of organisational support

With the passage of time Valley Trust started to play a minimal role in the project. The Board was left on its own without much support. Hence things were relaxed and the structure collapsed.

Community trust and confidence to the board:

When the project started there was considerable support but currently communities are dissatisfied with the service provided. There has been repeated calls for the Umgeni Water to take over the scheme. This shows lack of trust and confidence in local management of the scheme.

Cost sharing

Community participation was used to facilitate collective understanding and agreement on cost sharing and its enforcement. Initially the community's contribution was meant to be R20 per household towards capital contribution. A majority of households contributed towards this but as the scheme grew it could not be self-sustained. It was reported that financial management was too complex and too huge a task to give to the Board. The management of the coupon system required a lot of work and it was found to be not suitable for the Board. Hence a move towards a privately owned community standpipe. There were other problems related to cost recovery such as the topography of the area is very hilly making it difficult for meter readers to visit all households. There was a perception from the community that water bills did not reflect actual figures hence they did not take these seriously. Staff capacity is also a problem, there are only three metre readers for about 1300 households.

Who participated and intensity of participation

There were three community groups participating in the project. These were the community, the elected Qadi-Nyuswa Board and the Tribal Authority as the local Authority. Their participation varied according to the stages of project growth.

The community

The community participated as beneficiaries (recipients), decision makers and workers in the project. Although community participation was low they managed to have great influence on making decisions with regard to who sits on the Board. During the second AGM they were able to vote out original members of the Board.

The tribal authority

The tribal authority participated highly by virtue of their status. In most cases they were informed of the decisions made as they were not part of the decision making structure. They were required to put their signature on the constitution of the Board. This has become problematic as one of the Tribal Authorities has become too involved in the project. This is problematic for the staff who views him as dominant and uncooperative.

The Qadi-Nyuswa development and services board

The Board was the highest decision making structure about the project. Although most of the decisions were made jointly between the Board and the Advisory Board

the fact that Board members were majority meant they had a lot of influence. Board members felt that their participation was hindered by their lack of understanding of technical issues.

Instruments of community participation

The Valley Trust used their staff to promote community participation. One of the staff members was a Deputy Tribal Inkosi (Chief). This was positive as he managed to bring the local Amakhosi on board.

Impact of community participation on the project

It was difficult to measure the impact of community participation on the project as objectives were not clearly stated. There is therefore no evidence that community participation had a negative or positive impact on the project. However it could be said that the fact that after 10 years the project is still existing although fraught with problems is an indicator of success on the part of community participation. Also members of the Board were able to start other development initiatives.

Lessons learned from the study

Role of external agencies

It is crucial that external agencies assist local committees in the development and management of projects. It is

advisable that they be involved at the project preparation phase and also in monitoring of activities during the operation and maintenance phase. It is hoped that with the recent establishment of Local Government in South Africa this problem will be solved.

Organisational development

Community management of water projects is a huge task. It becomes difficult when the structure responsible for water has other demanding tasks e.g. other development projects. It is preferred that the project be managed by a structure responsible only for water issues and not for other development activities. The roles and linkages with other structures need to be clearly defined.

Gender sensitivity

In the Qadi-Nyuswa project there was minimal participation of women in decision making. Women were not seen as important to serve on the structures despite their heavily involvement in health issues. It is debatable as to whether the collapse of the structures was not related to the lack of women involvement in decision making.

Centralisation of decision making

Community participation was centred around the Board and key stakeholders. Not much effort was put into devolving decision making to local wards committees. This created problems as ordinary community members

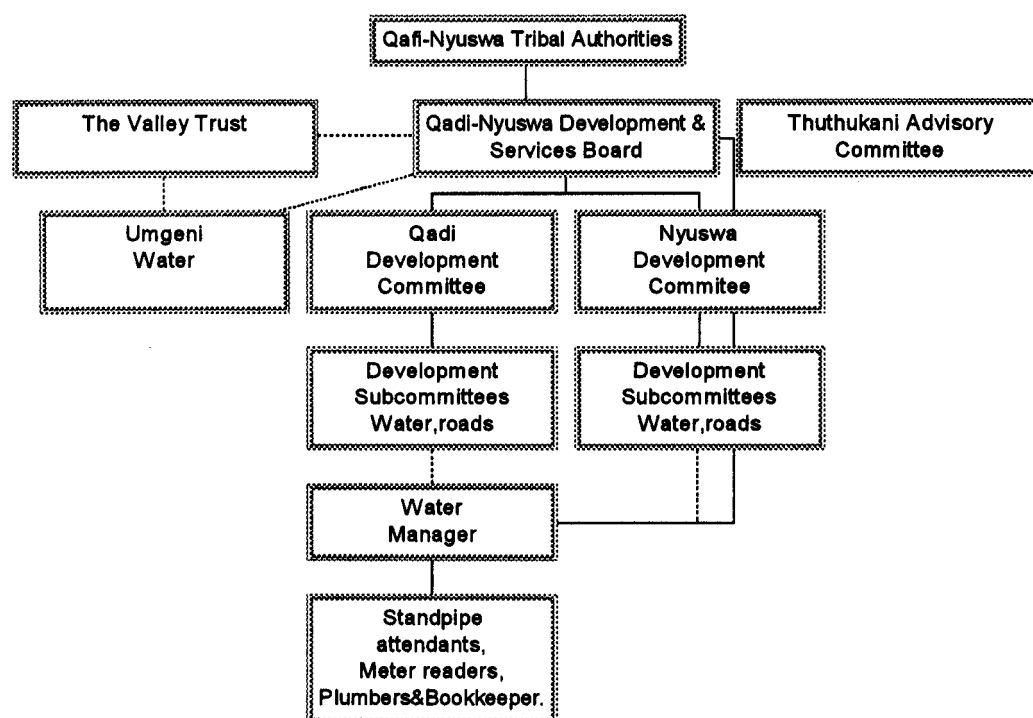


Figure 1. Qadi-Nyuswa pipeline project organisational structure

remained uninformed about issues. Communities become suspicious when they are not informed.

Is there an association between decrease in community participation and increase in number of yard connections?

Although there is no statistically evidence, there seem to be an association between the decrease in community participation on water issues and the increase in the number of yard connections. When the project started community members attended community meetings but in the mid of 1996 this was not the case. Members who initiated the project were no longer participating, in community meetings it was only those still using community standpipes.

Complex financial administration

Management of water projects requires simply methods of tariff collection. It still need to be investigated whether the coupon system is suitable for rural areas.

Privately owned metred community standpipes

The results of this form of tariff collection still need to be seen. Does it promote individualism, profit making in rural schemes?

Conclusion

The Qadi-Nyuswa Water Project presents us with a useful insight into community participation in water project. It shows that community participation is a complex process which requires careful analysis in order for lessons learned to be shared.

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