



## Consumer education and participation in WSS Services

*Basanta C. Marahatta, Nepal*



FOR ALL KINDS of service improvement activities, the Consumer Education and Community Participation Program (CECP) has its own importance. This program will create the sense of social responsibility in conserving scarce natural resources among the community members and motivate to participate in all kind of improvement activities aimed at benefiting community.

### Objectives

The following are the objectives of the program to:

- improve Nepal Water Supply Corporation (NWSC) - consumer rapport;
- enhance awareness and educate the community on rational use of water;
- persuade and motivate community participation in WSS improvement activities of the NWSC.

### Strategy

The strategy of the program is based on the principles of Public Relations and Community Organizing. Enhancement of the theoretical knowledge of the NWSC staff on Public Relations techniques, Communication Skills and Consumer Complaints Processing are the key on Public Relations strategy. If NWSC Branch Office will have separate unit with the minimum required staff with the knowledge and skill on "How to deal with the Consumer or General Public", it could play vital role in the initiation and improvement of NWSC Consumer rapport.

Another strategy adopted by the program is based on the principles, stages, steps and method of Community Organizing. By organizing the community in targeted areas and conducting the training programs for the members of the new organization it is expected that more participation from the community members in all kind of NWSC improvement activities will be fostered and the organization could act the proper medium through which all kind of community education program could be launched.

### Program

Two different programs has been developed and launched in achieving mandated objectives of the program. They are:

#### Two level CECP program

The first level focuses in the establishment of Consumer Relations Unit (CRU) in each of the Branch Operational Units of the NWSC. This level is based on the strategy of

Public Relations. Separate staff with the knowledge of public relations, communication skills, consumer's complaint processing/handling are being appointed in this unit and made them responsible to take and register each and every kind of consumer complaints and quires and promptly respond them. By this new arrangement the consumer will satisfied with the service provided by NWSC, which will lead to the timely collection of the water revenue and in result financial situation of the NWSC will improved. As the financial situation improved, NWSC will be able to implement WSS improvement activities easily.

The second level emphasizes in the formation of Ward's User's Committee (WUC) in each ward (grassroots level political boundary) under the jurisdiction of the NWSC. It is based on the principles of Community Organizing. The members of the WUC are trained on Community Organizing and Participation. This will lead the community members in participating in all kind of NWSC activities and in turn the NWSC investment in WSS operation and maintenance and improvement activities will be decreased. NWSC financial situation will again be strengthened and in result NWSC will be able to launch its improvement activities frequently.

#### Two level communication program

The first level of the communication program is the launching of the mass media campaign which is aimed at creating public awareness on WSS related issues and motivate public acceptance of the key messages.

The following are the major steps involved in launching mass media campaign:

- Identification of major target audience.
- Identification and finalization of key messages for mass media.
- Identification of media channels for dissemination.
- Development, Pretesting and Finalization of the messages.
- Production of communication materials.
- Scheduling and launching mass media campaign.
- Monitor and Evaluate the media campaign impact.

To launch this program, TV spots, Radio spots, Newspaper ads and articles have been prepared, pretested and disseminated from relevant media channels.

The second level of the Communication Program is CECP Community Information and Education Campaign. This has aimed to enhance level of community understand-

ing of the key messages that encapsulate basic issues. The expected output is to achieve consumer's, solid and qualitative behavioural changes towards proper use, care and maintenance of WSS systems, minimize consumer's illegal activities and act of vandalism, controlling water source pollution, and deforestation. Another objective is to motivate active community participation by tapping community based group in WSS services improvement of NWSC. It has three major sub-programs.

#### *CECP program for school children*

This has targeted behavioural change towards proper water usage and conservation and proper sanitation and hygiene practices. Substantial amount of water is wasted daily through children's misuse and carelessness. These attitudes also make children more susceptible to water-borne diseases.

Educating and training children at an early age on WSS issues will mold them to become good water savers and practitioners of proper sanitation and hygiene. Well informed children could play the role of "daily reminders as teaser" to elders and other members in the family. The following the steps involved in launching the program:

- Select the schools; coordinate agreement with selected school management.
- Arrange and conduct school teachers workshop to develop CECP Program for school children.
- Develop and finalize the program, produce supporting educational materials.
- Launch/Implement the program.
- Monitor and evaluate program implementation.

#### *CECP Supplementary Course in Adult Literacy Classes*

CECP Supplementary Course on WSS has been implemented through the adult literacy programs of NGOs and INGOs being implemented, targeting women members of the communities. WSS related topics currently integrated and discussed through the program's teaching aids, prescribed textbooks and other materials will be supplemented by communication support materials like hand-outs/brochures, posters and audio visual materials developed and produced by CECP Program Unit.

A detailed CECP Supplementary Course on WSS for the adult literacy program have been developed and implemented. The step involved in launching this program is as below:

- Identify NGOs/INGOs involved in conducting Adult Literacy Classes.
- Develop and finalize coordination agreement between the project and concerning NGOs/INGOs.
- Develop/Finalize CECP Program for Adult Literacy Classes.
- Produce supporting materials.
- Implementation and Monitor and evaluate program implementation.

#### *CECP Community Talk Program*

The water crisis is more severe each dry season. During this period when NWSC - consumer relations are strained to the extreme tense. Delegations from the various consumer communities are common to almost every NWSC operational branches, but most critical to the NWSC Head Office in Kathmandu, filing their complaints and demanding responses to the no water, among others.

To address the situation, together with the user committee of each pilot ward has been developed and implemented the CECP Community Talk Program. The Program is a one-day community information and education campaign program that aims to make the community aware to the need to use water rationally, stop consumer illegal activities and motivate community members for active participation in NWSC's WSS services improvement program. Primarily it is a forum for NWSC/Consumer interaction and finding solutions in the spot to maintain good rapport between two.

The target participants are the members of the WUC, the municipal mayors and other local government leaders, community members and the NWSC top management and NWSC operational branch managers as respondents. The program will also be the forum for the NWSC to aware the communities on efforts being done to improve its WSS services to the satisfaction of the communities and the constraints that currently facing by the NWSC during the course of improvement efforts. The following are the steps involved in launching this program:

- Identify the sites for program implementation.
- Finalize the Program.
- Inform Community members and NWSC staff, involved in O/M and improvement activities about the date, time and venue of the program.
- Implement, Monitor and Evaluate the Program.

### **Outputs**

The major outputs of the program implementation are summarized below:

- 70 per cent of the consumer of target areas are aware about the mass media campaign and 85 per cent of them is taking some steps in their households towards conserving water.
- About 2000 school children had been reached under the CECP program for school children. About 75 per cent of them are adopting some steps to conserve water. More than half of the total students are involved in disseminating message about water conservation.
- About 1500 housewives/women had participated in CECP Supplementary Course in Adult Literacy Classes. All participants are aware about the importance of water and ways and means of water saving. Almost all of them are adopting steps in conserving water.
- About 3000 people were presented in different Community Talk Program. All of them are well aware about

the problem of NWSC and almost all of them are well convinced in participating NWSC's activities.

### **Conclusion**

The produced materials are unable to meet the present demand of the consumer in all over the world due to the "Scarce natural resources" and "Environmental degradation". In this situation community education and participation program is the only way which could make the people socially responsible in scarce resource (water) conservation and motivate them to participate in the management and improvement of the already developed huge WSS system.

---

BASANTA C. MARAHATTA, Chief, Consumer Education and Community Participation Project.

---