



Gender and poverty sensitive community management

Raju Khadka, Nepal

THIS PAPER IS AN output of a four-year Participatory Action Research (PAR) project on community water management. The paper is one of the multiple ways in which lessons from this research project are being disseminated and put to use. Following the research phase, the Dutch government is now also financing the dissemination phase.

The paper starts by providing a description of the present conditions and the challenges in the global scenario and the relevance of action research. The other part describes how research insights are changing the working methodologies of NEWAH¹.

The challenge: management by communities

Everywhere people in rural communities face broken-down water supply systems and agencies that do not have the time, staff or the money to repair the systems. Governments and development agencies embrace community management as a way out. Let communities operate, maintain and manage their own water supply systems. Make them responsible, make them owners of their systems!

That looks good on paper. But in practice it is hard. Can we force communities to be the owners of their systems? Does it make sense? What are the existing capacities of communities to manage their systems and how to improve these capacities? There are many more questions to be answered, a major one being: what is a community?

Seldom a nice homogeneous groups of people. More often melting pots of conflicting interests of rich and poor people, of men and women, of low and high caste, of political factions etc. And...no community is alike. *Although general principles can be applied, each situation, each culture, and each community needs its own specific arrangements.*

Experiences have clearly revealed that approaches, with centralised decision-making about service allocations, do not lead to management taken up by the community and therefore do not produce efficient and sustainable services. There are many weaknesses preventing communities from managing and hence fully benefiting from their water supply systems, such as the lack of management capacity, the partial coverage of user populations, the lack of effective and equitable financing systems, lack of integrated programming including hygiene education and income generation for poor women and men, and the absence of gender-sensitive planning for contributions to and control over the established water and sanitation services. Examples of such approaches include:

- the selection of communities to be served by planners on the basis of an external determination of 'need', rather than on 'demand' for services of women, men from all socio-economic groups of the communities;
- the selection of service levels to be provided and the technologies to be employed based on an external perception of 'affordability', rather than on the 'desire' or 'willingness' to manage and pay of men and women from all socio-economic groups in the communities.

In addition extensive research in various regions of the world shows that there is a positive link between sustained and effective water supply services, and the use of demand responsive, participatory, gender and poverty sensitive approaches that benefit both men and women, rich and poor (World Bank/IRC, 2000)

Management of the water supply system by the community itself is often a necessity to secure a reliable and sustainable water supply, but requires concerted efforts to be brought about. Governments, donors and communities realise that. Different institutions and legal settings, different social patterns and cultural traditions will shape a wide variety of community management practices, with different partnerships between communities and agencies. Learning from different experiences, documenting and exchanging practices, creating platforms for debate, will strengthen the community management concept and make it a feasible strategy both for communities and agencies.

Research and development: trial and error to gain experience

The International Water & Sanitation Centre (IRC), The Netherlands in conjunction with six partner organisations² carried out a Participatory Action Research in 22 selected communities in Asia, Africa, and Latin America to develop a flexible approach to enhance water supply management by communities, that can be used by a variety of support organisations.

For four years (1994-1998) project partners worked together with rural communities to strengthen their capacities to manage their own water supply schemes through **Participatory Action Research**. The communities themselves directed the process of change. They diagnosed the problems related to the management of their water supply, they analysed the causes of these problems, and they negotiated and defined possible solutions and tested and evaluated them. Project staff served as facilitators, but the communities were the owners of the process of change (IRC, 1999).

Some successes were achieved: good functioning and legalised committees, involvement of women and poor groups that fostered income generating activities, payment systems, transparent rules and regulations, trained and paid caretakers. In short: better water supply through better management, better management through ownership.

The research was an effort to foster learning by doing and making links, creating meeting places for reflection and debate and providing opportunities for telling stories. We are now moving away from the laboratory of action research. In the next few years, we will work on dissemination of experiences and develop numerous materials, from manuals, videos and training programmes, to discussion lists on Internet. Most importantly, we will work on the integration of action research experiences and findings into a wider institutional framework.

NEWAH's concerted effort towards community management

NEWAH implements between 50 to 60 projects in a year. The technical quality of water systems constructed by NEWAH is very high. Also of note is that, all the people covered by a project, irrespective of gender, caste or class have access to clean water. However, they may not all have equal access to all the benefits which are part of the work. Many important decisions made during project implementation are made by well-off and influential men in the village. Women and poor men are not equally involved and both are poorly represented in project management committees. NEWAH recognises that its current project approach has maintained existing gender, caste or class disparities, which hampered community management and hence the long-term sustainability of the water supply and sanitation systems. Those who probably have the most to gain from these water supplies and sanitation systems, mainly poor women and men are the least involved in management of these systems.

Given the above considerations, NEWAH has realised steps for integrating gender, poverty and community management initiatives into its operations. This has happened following many internal debates, workshops and research to understand gender and poverty in relation to community-managed water supply and sanitation. These processes have ensured that there is a common understanding within the organisation to address gender, poverty and community management issues and that a GAP³-unit was established. The process of building a GAP Approach into the organisation began as of 1998 and still going on.

Current status of the gender and poverty-sensitivity community management (GAP) approach within NEWAH

In 1998, NEWAH decided to more closely examine gender, poverty and community management issues. NEWAH increasingly saw the need to address gender and poverty

disparities and to improve and enhance management capacities of communities in the rural areas in which it works. NEWAH was not only concerned with issues related to long term sustainability of project benefits, but also with how to use its work as an entry point for dealing with some of the larger inequalities which exists both between men and women as well as between well-off and poor people in Nepal. NEWAH's counterpart, WaterAid/Nepal, also promoted such thinking and action. Experiences gained through the Participatory Action Research on community management and interaction with local and international gender and poverty experts also helped NEWAH understand the relevance of building a GAP Approach within NEWAH as well as into its WS&S work. The GAP-Approach draws heavily on this Action Research as well as on Participatory Learning and Action, Participatory Technology Development and Participatory Rural Appraisal developed by practitioners.

Key elements of the GAP approach

- supporting women to be more actively involved in all the work of the project- e.g. decision on tap-stand/tubewells location and structure
- supporting ways to increase women numbers in the PMC⁴
- exploring ways to use women's leadership qualities and decision-making capacities
- enhancing management capacities of communities for them to become managers and owners of their water supply and sanitation system and attention will be given to legal issues, transparency in decision-making and money handling and conflict management
- providing women the opportunity to carry out paid work and basic maintenance training
- providing gender awareness training to both men and women in the community
- providing health education to both men and women and boys and girls
- arranging exposure/observation visits for both men and women
- providing training and education so that also better off women, who are currently often not allowed to participate in public events, can claim the right to participate more in community activities
- providing training and education to women and men on income generation, kitchen gardening and savings and credit
- exploring ways to increase latrine construction by providing sanitation loans and subsidies to the poorest households
- exploring ways to motivate the community to adopt graded system of maintenance fund collection on the basis of social justice
- analysing household and community activities by women and men
- identifying and making links between partners, communities, other government line agencies and NGOs/

**Table 1. Key events in MAINSTREAMING A GAP approach in NEWAH
(1999 to 2003)**

Date	EVENTS
Dec. 1998	Full time Gender Consultant Recruited
Jan. 1999	A five days Gender Analysis for Poverty Alleviation Workshop was held for all management staff (7 women and 12 men). Purpose of the workshop was to increase awareness on gender and to introduce a gender responsive planning approach. A set of recommendations for mainstreaming gender was defined. Data from 3 completed projects was collected, with 2 all women PMCs (Project Management and Maintenance Committee) and with 1 mixed PMC, to identify GAP issues to address in the new approach.
Feb. 1999	Recommendations for mainstreaming gender, which included a description of the responsibilities for GAP units, are agreed by NEWAH's senior management team.
March - April 1999	Consultations with various parts of the organisation on setting up a GAP unit. Working groups are set up to review and revise the Personnel Policy and NEWAH's Strategic Plan.
May 1999	Gender and Poverty Unit established with a 7-member team at Headquarters and 5 member teams in each of the 5 regions, a total of 32 staff (26 men and 6 women). A series of staff visits to HELVETAS are set up. This is an INGO which uses a gender sensitive approach.
June 1999	Consultation and liaison with staff involved in Action Research on community management to integrate a GAP approach into NEWAH's work.
July 1999	Seven days gender awareness training of trainers' course run for all 32 GAP staff, followed by a three day GAP unit planning workshop. During the workshop NEWAH's five-year strategy was reviewed from a GAP perspective and proposed changes sent to the group working on the strategic plan.
August - Sept. 1999	The five regional GAP teams conducted gender awareness-training workshops for all other NEWAH staff at Regional level. Thus, 125/146 of NEWAH's staffs is trained in gender awareness.
October 1999	Rapid survey on skilled paid and unskilled voluntary work for NEWAH's water projects found that men perform all the skilled paid jobs and receive training for such work while around 50% men and 50% women perform the unskilled voluntary or unpaid jobs. NEWAH staffs received training from an NGO on creating gender-sensitive saving and credit organisations.
Nov. - Dec. 1999	Orientation to NEWAH HQ GAP unit staffs (3 member) by HELVETAS on its gender and caste approach, which included a field visit.
Jan. 2000	Eight days workshop of the 32 GAP staff on GAP project survey and design work. During training existing forms and PRA methods used at this stage of the project cycle are revised, the actual process to follow in the field was planned and tested and one new project in each region was selected for piloting of the new GAP approach.
Feb. 2000	A two days workshop was held for Executive members of each of the 5 GAP pilot programme partner organisations (CBO's) who are indeed responsible to carry out a GAP pilot project. The workshop covered NEWAH's new working principles, its rationale for piloting a GAP approach and training in the purpose and use of various PRA tools to use at project survey and design stage. NEWAH's Council approved the revised version of the strategic plan with the new sections on gender, poverty and community management.
March 2000	Proposals were screened and the regional GAP unit member staff completed newly revised pre-feasibility study form with the 5 partners piloting GAP. NEWAH's new working principles and personnel policies are approved by its Board. A two days workshop for management staff (Senior management, Regional Co-ordinators and section heads-22 staff) was held to obtain more clarity on gender and development.
April - May 2000	Detailed surveys using the new GAP approach are carried out with the 5 partners. The survey included community meetings to discuss GAP policies and principles, social mapping to verify number of households and agree location of tap-stands or tube-wells with men and women, well-being ranking to verify differences between households, focus group discussions to assess GAP issues in relation to project implementation, activity calendar for use in planning of work, health PRA to assess hygiene practices and disease prevalence, and a technical survey to review current water systems and potential for implementing a new one. At the end of the survey, all findings are presented back to the community following which NEWAH staff writes the project proposal. NEWAH senior management staff in consultation with GAP unit member staff appointed a GAP Co-ordinator at Headquarters. NEWAH recruited an external advisor for developing GAP

	pilot programme monitoring and evaluation system and to advise on GAP issues.
June 2000 ⁵	Project design completed by NEWAH regional teams, costing done and forwarded to Headquarters for approval.
July 2000	10 Days workshop with 32 GAP staff to evaluate the survey process and to set up processes to review and amend current procedures, manuals and agreement documents used during the implementation phase from a GAP perspective.
Aug. 2000	New project agreement forms signed with partners. Initial O&M fund collected from villagers and deposited in bank account. Local health motivators and NGO/CBO co-ordinator selected using an equal opportunities approach at village level, as these are the paid jobs during the implementation phase of the project.
Sept.-Oct. 2000	4 days GAP pilot programme monitoring and evaluation system workshop for GAP unit staff. Health motivators, NGO/CBO co-ordinators and teachers trained particularly on health and sanitation messages as well as provided gender awareness training.
November 2000	Formation of User Groups and PMCs facilitated by partners and NEWAH to ensure balance of men and women and different economic groups are represented, and caretakers and other skilled workers employed on an equal opportunity basis. PMC training carried out. Advanced gender awareness training for GAP unit staff.
Dec. 2000	Gender awareness training to be provided to PMC, community health volunteers, caretakers, and sanitation workers. 5 days GAP pilot programme monitoring workshop for GAP unit staff.
Jan. - May 2001	Construction work carried out with on NEWAH social technician who is resident on site for the duration of the work.
Feb. 2001	Mid-term review of the work. Health Motivator refresher training.
Oct. 2001	Evaluation of the GAP pilot projects. Establishment of gender sensitive savings and credit groups.
Nov. 2001-Oct. 2003	Follow up maintenance reviews every six months, which include a review of key indicators, related to GAP issues.
Oct. 2003	Final evaluation to verify results and impacts of a GAP approach and deciding if this approach should be used for all NEWAH projects in future.

Please note all activities as of June 2000 are future plans. They may be adjusted based on experience.

INGOs for poverty alleviation and collaboration with other sector agencies to share lessons learned, training resources and compatible approach

To provide an understanding about how NEWAH went about integrating research findings as well as gender and poverty elements, some of the key events since 1998 are presented in Table 1. What is noteworthy is that most of the work on GAP during 1999 has focused on internal organisational processes. This is because NEWAH strongly believes that it must start with itself and clarify its position on GAP before taking this issue up with sector agencies, partners and communities. It required much work to make staff understand these issues and how NEWAH, through its work with people in communities, can reinforce or change existing situations. Field workers need to learn how to communicate more effectively with women, as well as men, in order to eliminate gender and poverty disparities and help them to adapt facilities and community management strategies to best suit the local conditions.

Work on the programme has already been started from 2000 by piloting a GAP Approach in at least one project in each of Nepal's 5 development regions. An evaluation of the pilot programme is planned for 2003. Based on the findings in these pilot projects, NEWAH's project approach will be adapted to incorporate a GAP Approach in all its projects.

Conclusion

Community management of WS&S system is often needed but also very complicated. Different groups in the community may have different perceptions of what good manage-

ment of WS&S should involve. What is important is change in attitude is at the heart of accepting and implementing approaches to enhance community management. It is therefore often needed to see the women and men in a community really as equal and to learn, to listen to them.

Should you be interested in obtaining more information, please do not hesitate to contact us at e-mail: tarnewah@mos.com.np or at NEWAH, POBox 4231, Kathmandu, Nepal.

References

Community Managers for Tomorrow (IRC, 1999, draft)
Voice and choice (World Bank/IRC, 2000)

- ¹ NEWAH, Nepal Water For Health is a non-government, non-political and non-profit making organization working throughout rural Nepal to provide clean safe drinking water, hygiene education and sanitation. It aims to improve the living standard of the poor by providing community development initiatives.
- ² NEWAH in Nepal; WASEP, in Pakistan; NETWAS in Kenya; PAID in Cameroon; CINARA in Colombia and SER in Guatemala.
- ³ GAP is referred to as Gender and Poverty-Sensitive Community Management Approach.
- ⁴ PMC is Project Management & Maintenance Committee.

RAJUKHADKA, Gender and Poverty (GAP), Coordinator,
Nepal Water for Health, Nepal.