



## Participatory self assessment of watsan projects

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IN 1976, HELVETAS started to support the Community Water Supply and Sanitation Programme (CWSS) by providing technical and material assistance to His Majesty's Government of Nepal. Gradually CWSS emphasised the participation of communities, integrated hygiene and sanitation education in the drinking water project activities and encouraged women's involvement in the project activities. Helvetas evaluated the CWSS Programme in 1989, and concluded that still the ownership feeling in the community was not adequately achieved, and effective community management was not seen at the field level. Some modification in approach as well as in working procedures was, therefore, felt necessary. As a result, CWSS phased out in 1994, and Self-Reliant Drinking Water Support Programme (SRWSP) evolved. Basically, SRWSP was transformed from CWSS by adding a strong social component to support the already better technical component of the programme.

Although all community level water programmes broadly look similar, SRWSP has some distinct features. It adopts rolling planning, which means activities are planned according to community preparedness. In order to strengthen the community preparedness aspect, SRWSP provides intensive social mobilisation support, through its step by step approach. It has developed participatory monitoring chart of programme activities, which facilitates the beneficiaries to know about their project status and pending activities at any moment. By sensitising some male dominant communities on gender issues, SRWSP strives for maximising participation.

After five years of work, the SRWSP team was interested to make an evaluation of its programme. Instead of going for a conventional type of evaluation with pre established models, SRWSP decided to undertake an internal Participatory Self Assessment (PSA) due to its very nature of a learning programme. Until then, the programme had no structured monitoring system, and thus, required a qualitative analysis with a participatory<sup>1</sup> approach.

The objectives of the PSA were:

- to assess in a participatory way the impact of the programme in various fields;
- to formulate recommendations for improvement of the programme; and
- to provide information and relevant learning questions to the External Evaluation (EE) team. It would hence be a pre-exercise for the EE.

### Methodology

The PSA had a duration of half a year (January to July 1997), in which the main participatory activities were conducted. Some other activities and studies, that were important for the PSA, had taken place earlier, but the outcome was incorporated in the PSA. The Management Team of SRWSP prepared the concept for the PSA and guided the process until it was accomplished. Similarly, Section leaders of the Social Development Section, Training Section and the Technical Section facilitated the process with respect to their concerned issues, and integrated with each other on common issues. Field staff were involved in field related activities.

The PSA covered the following issues:

- Community Management
- Sanitation related activities at the field level
- Training to the beneficiaries and Partners
- Technicalities
- Gender awareness at the programme level and within the organisation
- Monitoring Mechanism
- Partnership
- Programme's response on Decentralisation policy of the government of Nepal
- Institutional placement of the programme
- Coordination with sector Organisations
- Human Resources Development
- Target Area / Coverage

Different types of methodologies were used to look up each issue from different perspectives, and to encourage the variety of stake-holders to participate in the process. The major methodologies were:

- Participatory Field Assessment
- Workshop with Partners
- Issue Focused Study
- Field Observation
- Interviews with Key Persons
- Study of Reports and Documents
- Action Research
- Participatory Team Discussion

Particularly for sustainability aspect of the projects constructed, participatory field assessment was done in six projects completed during different years of implementation. That means, the field work consisted of environmental walk, home visits, interviews with key persons, group

discussions, community meetings and minute books observation. Besides, the assessment consisted of collection of data of 48 projects through various means such as field visit reports, annual reports, etc. For the sustainability<sup>2</sup> aspect of the projects, concentration was made on community management, gender, sanitation, technicalities and effectiveness of the training.

### Major findings

- The PSA found well functioning schemes, except some minor breakdowns, which could be managed with locally available resources and village based expertise. People have learned to work with collective efforts, and unity among villagers was observed. Water Users Committees (WUC) and the beneficiaries were found to be aware about operation and maintenance issues of their respective schemes. The caretakers of the schemes; i.e., Village Maintenance Worker (VMW) and Women Tapstand Caretakers (WTC); were found to have taken more responsibilities for the maintenance. Women were fairly involved in the project activities. All the projects were having O&M fund, deposited in the local banks. Some communities have mobilised the fund in the village also. Some projects have used small amount of fund for maintenance.
- At the time of PSA, SRWSP was already aware on gender issues. Through gender sensitisation training, it was having gender aware staff. Probably due to these reasons, change in men's attitude towards women was also observed. Although not adequate, men were assisting women in household chores, too. Women's work load was found to have decreased significantly, therefore were using their saved time for child care, kitchen gardening, sanitation, and participating in women's group meetings.
- Anecdotal evidences were observed to suggest that the stated aims of the programme with regard to hygiene and sanitation have been met. Household latrines were constructed subsidy free by mobilising local resources. The coverage of latrine in the completed projects was found to be 85%. Habits on latrine use, hand washing, bathing, and, washing cloths and utensils have improved. However, it was found that the latrines once constructed were not well maintained.
- The technical quality of the projects was found very good. The communities were found happy with the quality of work and the material provided. The caretakers have understood the technology and have confidence to repair minor breakdowns. However, still some rooms for further improvement were observed, particularly on keeping polyethylene pipes to deeper depths. The supervision of technical staff during the pipeline digging and during the construction period was found little inadequate to guarantee the desired quality.
- The training inputs provided to the key persons (WUC, and caretakers) by SRWSP were found to have contrib-

uting for sustainability of the schemes. WUCs everywhere, in general, are passive until some breakdown is observed. As the projects were recently made, no significant problems were observed in terms of technicalities. Such situation may lead the key persons to forget the knowledge and skills gained during various trainings of the project cycle. Therefore, the PSA stressed on providing refresher training and motivation campaigns even after the completion of the schemes.

Similar findings were found in other issues as well. However, till that time, the programme was not having a structured monitoring system. Though the programme activities were monitored by the particular sections and sharing of information was also practised, no specific indicators per programme activity were formally developed in a logical frame work approach. A lot of interesting information was gathered and reported but without clear stated indicators. Just before the PSA, the programme logics were re-stated in a participatory way, which are very much in line with the former ones, but are expressed in a more structured manner. Monitoring indicators are developed for each objective and activity. The PSA therefore recommended implementation of recently developed monitoring system in a participatory way.

### Documentation of the PSA

The outcome of the PSA has been documented issue-wise in various reports. A summary of the main learning questions, the methodology followed, the findings, recommendations, and questions to the evaluation team are documented in fact-sheets. In this way, one fact-sheet has covered one whole issue. The fact sheets on each issue were felt to be a very strong tool that can summarise and understand the outcome of a particular issue in a short time.

After all the fact sheets were completed, a one day workshop was held with SRWSP management team, section heads and section representatives. Special attention was given to the findings, recommendations and the questions raised to the external evaluation team. When felt necessary the recommendations were adjusted and the questions to the evaluation team re-formulated. In this way, documentation of the PSA was done to prepare the setting for the external evaluation, and to ease the process of evaluation.

### Lessons learned from the process

- It was a completely new exercise for the programme. All staff members showed a positive and learning attitude. The period of this assessment was also marked with rapid learning for the programme.
- One of the special advantage of the PSA was that, the impact of the programme was assessed by accepting qualitative as well as quantitative information provided from intended beneficiaries. People on the receiving end are ultimately the best judges of impact, whether benefits have been produced or not.

- The opinions of all the partners, particularly, the NGOs and consultants, in the programme have also been heard. In this way views of all the partners were respected, which have enabled strengthening of Helvetas' partnership approach.
- While conducting the Participatory Field Assessment, beneficiaries and the NGO partners were very enthusiastic. Such Assessments were coupled with motivational campaigns. Therefore such field assessments had a motivational and educational effect, too.
- The beneficiaries are capable of contributing more than just their labour. They have ideas, a sense of responsibility and management skills that are worth for mobilising for project success. When people perceive such conviction, this itself is an incentive and encouragement for the programme.
- The PSA was an additional task over the regular works. It was learnt that major exercises, such as PSA can almost not be done as a side activity. It was a major extra task to all. Staff members had to sacrifice their free time in order to complete the planning, implementation and documentation work. However, altogether the time and energy investment were rewarding. Good guidance of the whole process is felt a pre-condition for this type of exercise.
- Some issues, such as Monitoring, Decentralisation and Human Resources Development could not be covered as good as was planned. The programme strongly feels that participatory assessment should be done in only those issues in which people involved have both confidence and time. These issues still had high importance for SRWSP, and therefore were brought forward to the evaluation team.

### Conclusion

Overall the PSA exercise was a good opportunity to have the experiences and the impact as seen by the programme itself and its partners. The PSA was a good preparation

exercise for the external evaluation as well. Moreover, the exercise opened the programme's eyes to the weaker and hidden parts of the programme. Some questions were already answered and did not need much work for the evaluation team except verifications. Already with the outcome of the PSA, the programme was able to find the recommendations for betterment of the programme. However, still many questions and open issues were put forward for the EE team in order to have an outsider's opinion and recommendations.

SRWSP felt confidence with the outcome of the PSA, which in combination with the outside view of the external evaluation team would lead to good recommendations for the future of SRWSP and Helvetas' involvement in the drinking water and sanitation sector. Later, PSA was found to be a successful exercise as most of its recommendations were endorsed by the External Evaluation as well. It is felt as an exercise to be carried out in future, too.

### References

- SRWSP (1997), "Participatory Self Assessment", Document prepared by the Self Reliant Drinking Water Support Programme of Helvetas/Nepal
- Whiteside, G and Shrestha, V (1997), "An External Evaluation of the Self Reliant Drinking Water Support Programme: Final Report", Kathmandu, Nepal

- 1 "Participatory" was understood to have all the stake-holders involved in the assessment including SRWSP's own staff, partners and beneficiaries.
- 2 The term sustainability in this paper is limited to "the long term management of the completed drinking water system by user community in providing safe and adequate water".

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