



Immediate results as entry point for community participation

Dr. Andreas G. Koestler, Manfred Arlt and Anne Signe Horstad, Norway

TO APPROACH THE Millennium Development Goals in the water and sanitation sector, alternative ways of thinking and creative development strategies have to be discussed. While working with development programs in both rural and urban areas of Africa, we observe an immense fatigue of the population as a reaction on too many assessments by people and organisations, too many promises, too many plans, but still only few results and small visible changes.

During many project activities, we became aware of the fact that the population is almost hindering a development based on its negative experience with new project ideas, concepts and approaches. Therefore, an immediate negative reaction of the population – very often expressed in anger – has to be converted to a new starting point. They express the feeling of being misused in terms of becoming a **study-object** and becoming a **case** for organisations and donors. This is often due to the fact that assessments have to be carried out to define projects and to apply for funding. It is rare that implementation can start with supporting donors and funds already at hand when the population is approached.

Within our project strategy, we try to start projects with an immediate impact on the situation, while following up with proper health education and community mobilization. E.g. The cooperation of a rural population which is suffering from diseases related to a poor and polluted water source can easily be encouraged into education when a water treatment station and distribution system is installed during a single day. Appropriate equipment for this type of installation is easily available on the market from different suppliers at a reasonable price. After having installed the system, training and health education becomes a natural part of the interaction with the population. The technical installation, although a very simple one, provokes interest in the population. The delivery of safe water after a very short time gives a positive impact on their daily life. Distribution of water closer to the homes releases women and children from their daily burden.

Sustainable development

The support for development is frequently focused strongly on sustainability. Often, this would mean not only a demand driven process, but also a process, which is guided through the development potential and the capacity of a population. The development potential comprises all aspects of the local both natural and human resources. Sustainability is achieved through a continuous process of self-development

within the frame of a given environment. Capacity building is the key for supporters from the outside, because sustainability can only be maintained if both infrastructure and human activities become part of the economic potentials within a given setting. In the water and sanitation sector this would mean that health education should guide the formulation of demands. The understanding of needs and potential solutions becomes the driving force to improve water and sanitation installations. However, this is only possible if there is an economic backbone allowing the population to pay for additional costs to install, operate and maintain the infrastructure. In the diagram (Fig. 1), this is indicated by the lower curve, which tries to approach the potential development line.

In the optimal case of development small impacts in cooperation have to approach the development capacity for a given population (Fig. 1, lower curve and line). This may represent sustainable development, but it is likely that the community will never reach a fairly high standard of infrastructure. A great external impact may push a community beyond its self-development capacity but can give a motivating start which could approach a higher level of standard (Fig. 1, upper curve and dotted line).

During an ordinary development approach, where focus is on sustainability from the very beginning, the community participation and the partnership understanding is often hindered through the attitude of the population as the result of earlier disappointments. This often manifests itself as a great frustration, which makes it difficult to mobilize a population for new attempts. In addition, a sustainable development combined with frustration is often felt to be a

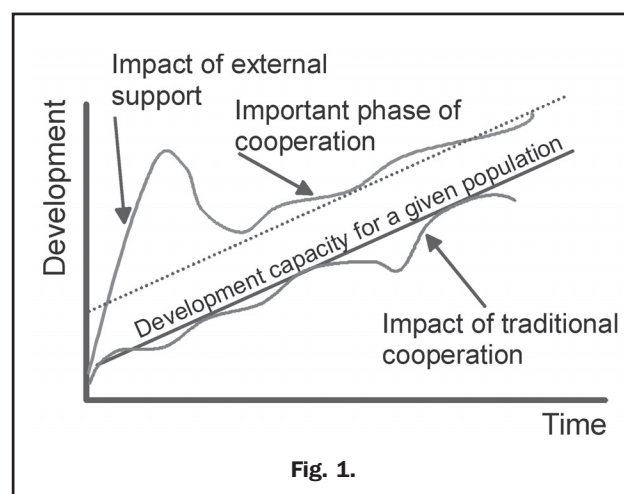


Fig. 1.

very slow process, which loses its dynamics both for the receiving community and for implementing NGOs and donors. The increments of development being reported are often so small, that the general focus is switching to the negative aspects of projects, which reduce the availability and motivation of any support.

The millenium development goals as driving force

If we are really considering trying to attain the development goals of halving the population without access to safe water and proper sanitation by 2015, we have to accelerate our thinking, our creativity and the pace of implementation. For Africa alone, to follow up the goals would mean to connect daily about 10 000 households to safe water, and many more to proper sanitation. What an immense task! To fulfil this daily task, both donors and implementers have to join forces and be willing to try new approaches. The international community has to take some risks to follow up the self-imposed goals, and probably has to discuss sustainability within new contexts. The approach presented here is mainly thought to initiate discussion about these topics and to present some constructive proposals based on field experience.

An alternative way of reaching sustainability

When discussing sustainable development, we assume that a population has a limited capacity to follow up projects and community structuring processes (Fig. 1). This capacity has to be developed either through changes and support from their own government and authorities or through external sources. Obviously, this capacity is a result of potential education, available natural and human resources, and with a large component of the cultural setting. It is important not to forget in this context the personal engagement of individuals. While the discussion about an increasing rate of sustainable development, which would result in an upwards curved line in the fig 1, is beyond the scope of this paper, the focus is on the question of how to motivate is initiated to reach the maximum possible development rate and standard within the given framework.

If there are available resources and the will to take some risks by the supporting organisation there might be ways of beginning the development of a community with a substantial step which is not initially sustainable. This encouragement will overcome the general fatigue towards external interventions. If in addition, the initial step is followed up by a constructive and long-term cooperation, the momentum of the initial phase will last and result in a higher and improved standard, which would probably never have been reached by the continuous sustainable process (see upper curve, fig 1). What would this mean in a water and sanitation project, what do experiences from such approaches show and what are the lessons learnt?

Safe water one day

The areas with poor water supply are usually known both by governmental bodies and NGOs working in a country. The general overviews of the water and sanitation situation are often available based on studies carried out by consultants, NGOs, UN agencies and the authorities. This gives a perfect basis to improve water supply standards without additional assessments.

In the KwaZulu Natal Province of South Africa, water treatment units and related equipment were loaded in the morning on two pick-up trucks and moved to villages where cholera was reported to be a severe problem.

After parking the equipment in the village, discussions began about the type of problems related to water supply in this village, about where they usually get the water, about the willingness to cooperate on establishing a water supply. After having discussed and decided on how to approach the water related problems, equipment was unloaded at the water source. The kit in this case was a small water treatment unit consisting of a sand and coal filter (production 2m³/h), including a flocculation chamber and a chlorine dosing chamber. In addition, tanks for storage and tap stands for water distribution were integrated parts of this system. Similar systems are used in emergencies. While preparing the site and installing the equipment, training in water treatment and related health issues started. During the next few hours, a fully functioning water treatment station was installed, and some key personnel trained in how to run it. After only four hours, safe water could be distributed to the population. It usually took a few days for the local population to get used to the new water supply station. In the days following the installation, training and follow up continued while a community based organization also received additional training to follow up the different water treatment sites.

In Coragem, some 30km to the southeast of Luanda (Angola), a small water purification unit was set up immediately after the pipeline was installed to bring the water over a



Fig. 2 Complete water treatment unit on pick-up car, Kwa Zulu Natal.



Fig. 3 Coragem, Angola. Water treatment with both pressure unit (blue in background) and slow sandfilter and storage (large tank background left)

distance of 4 km (photo below). This small unit producing 4m³/h made it possible to deliver safe drinking water to the internally displaced population of about 15 000 people. However, it was necessary to distribute drinking water and washing water at two different tap stands. Later on, a slow sand filter was installed. Now the mobile filter unit is used as a back-up, if components of to the slow sand filter fail or need maintenance.

Approaches where immediate action initiates an implementation can also be chosen where improvement of springs and shallow wells is the focus. In Angola, at that time still under war, many places were improved after a short assessment, while having at hand concepts for shallow wells, spring protection, latrine construction and washing facilities. Quick solutions do not have to be inappropriate. Quick solutions can also be sustainable in the context they open up for more community participation and educational training.

Water as entry point

Based on the positive experience in both South Africa and Angola, the concept of initiating development through an initial investment has been proposed to the World Bank and discussed for specific sites in several countries. It is hoped that a general acceptance could be achieved and that the fatigue of the population is not only a sign of lack of motivation but also a result of the many assessments carried out by western consultants and NGOs. In addition, pre-qualified implementing partners for the governments and the donors and capacity building at governmental offices for proper supervision could play an important role in approaching the communities while implementing health and education infrastructures.

In general, there is a danger that focus shifts from constructive implementation of infrastructure to softer components, also highly important, such as human rights, gender issues, democratisation etc. It seems to be forgotten that basic needs have to be satisfied before other values can be added. During the implementation of our projects in many African countries, we use a concrete water or sanitation project to establish an atmosphere of understanding and confidence, which allows us to follow up with more personal, political and taboo issues. Through local committees with democratically elected members, the water management can be the starting point for further discussions on much more sensitive issues. Water operation and maintenance teams represent the first bricks of a democratic structure, which allow further communication on democratic values, gender issues, HIV/AIDS, health questions and human rights. The water teams also learn how to link up with other teams and with local and regional authorities. This experience is the basic condition needed for later formulating own needs and potentials to initiate a demand driven development.

Final comment and encouragement

Visible achievement built with cooperation during one day increases confidence in the partnership for starting the slow and long-term process of development through mobilizing of own resources. When a water treatment unit is working after half a day, it is much easier to get acceptance and support from the local people to build and install more permanent solutions, while education becomes a natural part of the process running alongside the whole project implementation. More difficult issues such as sanitation and personal hygiene are easier addressed after having built this fundamental relationship based on basic infrastructure solutions.

Based on these experiences, we would like to encourage the discussion of how to reach more people and how to motivate an originally disappointed and fatigue population into taking more responsibility for reaching the Millennium Development Goals in the water and sanitation sector. We also would like to put the dignity of the population in focus during the process of assessing the needs and collecting data. Studying a population and the functionality of a community should happen after having built a partnership based on visible and concrete results.

DR. ANDREAS G. KOESTLER, Director.
 MANFRED ARLT, Proj.coordinator.
 ANNE SIGNE HORSTAD, Proj. consultant, Yme, Oslo,
 Norway, www.yme.no
