



## Community training for successful management in rural water supply

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THERE HAVE BEEN recently approved National Policy guides implementing Rural Water Supply (RWS) projects in Sri Lanka. All the RWS implementers – whether the Government, NGO or private sector – have to follow this Policy. According to the Policy, the role of the government is transformed from a provider to a facilitator. Implementation of RWS should associate with other features such as the adoption of low cost appropriate technologies, sanitation and hygiene education, environmental management leading to water source protection, community involvement in decision-making through community institutions such as Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and managing finances at the community level. Management of completed facilities should be at the lowest appropriate level with the adoption of scheme specific tariff.

All above activities need thorough understanding on the technical, sociological, financial, environmental and managerial aspects by the communities in order to sustain and manage the provided water facilities. It is evident that most of the communities do not possess any knowledge in the above subject areas. However under the policy with a participatory approach they had to engaged and perform in those domains if these water supply schemes were to operate viably and successfully. Therefore it was found that training of human resources to cater for the demand for knowledge in a multi disciplinary environment has become a major challenge. Even though the rural communities in Sri Lanka are literate to a great extent, most of them do not have the equal opportunities to undergo diverse learning options. It was found in the rural areas people did not have the opportunity to learn the subjects such as construction and sociology. Local knowledge, however, in environmental aspects and some managerial functions is somewhat useful and could be meaningfully utilized to manage RWS systems. Knowledge on health related aspects was not often found among communities and varies depending on the type of communities and among different age groups within a particular community. In the RWS environment, community institutions are formed to plan, implement and manage the water services. These Community Based Organizations (CBOs) comprise of various people with different skills and diverse educational backgrounds representing different age groups. Therefore a systematic training programmes is formulated to suit the requirements of the rural inhabitants who are of a diverse nature in order to arm and equip them with the required knowledge and skills to plan, implement and operate the RWS systems.

At present, a large RWS project is being implemented in Sri Lanka covering six districts. The project is funded by the ADB and NORAD and is planned to cater for a rural population of one million. As the approach requires effective interaction among the implementers, users and other stakeholders, a separate component has been established for training and capacity building to meet the requirements for the implementation and to guarantee the sustainability of the facilities constructed even after project support is withdrawn.

The main responsibility of the component established for training and capacity building is enhancing the capacities, competencies and skills of the implementing officers representing the Government, NGOs, CBOs and also users of RWS systems.

### Training needs assessment (TNA)

#### Training needs assessment of partners of the programme

RWS programmes are implemented with the involvement of NGOs as a main partner whose primary intention is to mobilize and organize communities to implement RWS activities. Training requirements of these NGOs were catered for with special care and a separate programme has been formulated to train the NGOs in following fields under the training component of the project.

- Technical and sociological aspects
- Environmental aspects
- Sanitation & health education
- Financial aspects.

Unlike the direct beneficiaries of RWS facilities, officers of NGOs do not carry out a voluntary service. Some of the community workers are professionals in their chosen discipline and demand for training is always there as it links with their career development. This training is to prepare the Training of Trainers (TOT) programmes, in which the officers of the NGOs who operate as partners of RWS projects would be the trainers of the communities through the community institutions such as CBOs in the future. RWS projects have considered this trend a progressive development for the community water sector as such a system would update and enhance the knowledge of the communities through out, and guarantee the sustainability of the facilities. Therefore in the project training is given to all the NGOs who worked as partners, generally considered

TOT programmes, as the project expected them to deliver the same training to the CBOs and to beneficiaries via CBOs in sociological, environmental and health education fields.

However while delivering training, most of secondary training requirements for NGOs have been identified by project consultants. It was identified that in order to ensure the subject specific training developed by the project was meaningful, the secondary training needs of the NGOs also needed to be addressed. These training requirements basically cover the management of water supply schemes, water metering and tariff and application of low cost technologies.

### Training needs assessment of CBOs and beneficiaries

Training needs of communities and CBO officials were also identified when planning the project implementation. As the project to be implemented centers around finding water sources for the rural water schemes and following up with community mobilization and construction activities and so on, community training also needs to be shaped so that it can be carry out parallel to those activities. The training component of the project formulated different training packages to deliver the community training in order to facilitate implementation and proposed to follow up with a training package on sustainability. Adult training techniques, training outside the classroom at the location of the working environment, participatory training measures and on the job training were required to deliver the community training to fulfill the expected achievements.

### Delivery of community training

#### Delivery mechanisms

The delivery mechanisms of community training have a great impact on its success. This became important as the communities that expected training under the project were not identical and homogeneous. They were different in age, educational background, aspirations and expectations etc. In the project different techniques were adopted in order to make community training a success. They can be named as follows;

1. Utilizing **adult training techniques** and provide the training at the **closest venue** to the communities.
2. Utilize the **resources persons from the area**. (Eg. Public Health Officer, Forest Officers etc. of the respective area, or an appropriate officer relevant to the subject). Under this approach resource people were not aliens to them and communities could clarify their doubts and uncertainties easily. Project officers were also given the opportunity to perform as resource persons.
3. Deliver the training in **local language** in village style.
4. Adopt **on the job training** exercises wherever possible, mostly in the subjects related to implementation at the

field, such as low cost constructions, rain water harvesting etc.

5. Formation of **pool of resources persons** to carry out community training. It was realized that experts in the subject not the best trainer regard to the community training.
6. As the project implements under **participatory back ground**, community training also to follow this **participatory manner** with discussions, observations and brain storming with which the communities are familiar, and to use class room type sessions only when it is required to introduce a theory or unknown principles etc.

It was found after completion of the first phase of implementation of the project, in which more than 400 village water supply schemes and several small town schemes were completed, that adult learning techniques, utilization of village language and participatory training methods achieved better results than confining to traditional class room sessions or teacher centered training.

The most important achievement in the delivery of training is that it should be of a practical and nature for the user communities who own and operate the RWS schemes constructed under participatory approach with their cash and labour contributions. It is noteworthy that most of these villagers who have received only basic formal education, participated in the training enthusiastically, as they felt in need of training for effective operation and management of the schemes. To cater to the identified need for community training, the project had to provide training in different areas other than those required for project implementation. Communities were found to be more enthusiastic when learning subjects related to operation & maintenance of schemes, tariff preparation, repairs for pumps, water meters etc.

All these training requirements are mainly leading to the sustainability of the constructed RWS schemes.

### Evaluation of community training

Evaluation of the training programmes were done:

- To ensure accountability.
- To facilitate improvement.
- To change perceptions of professional development.
- To gain acceptance.
- To promote expansions.

All the above points in the training evaluation were used to improve the quality of training of the trainees as well as trainers. Since the participants of RWS community training programmes did not have the unique educational background, carrying out training evaluation was not an easy task. Therefore several methods had to be adopted to carry out training evaluation. They could be given as follows:

- Reaction evaluation
- Learning evaluation.
- Performance evaluation.
- Impact evaluation.

In the reaction evaluation, trainees are asked to evaluate the trainer (trainers) and other components of the training environment and this method aims to determine trainees' attitudes towards different aspects of training programme.

In the learning evaluation, the trainees are asked to evaluate the quality of what they have learned and this method aims to determine trainees' gains in regard to knowledge, skills and attitudes from the training programme.

Performance evaluation aims to determine the usefulness of what has been learned by examining its application afterwards in the trainees' organization. This is usually conducted after the training has finished, although may be conducted during training.

Impact evaluation aims to determine the overall impact of the training on the community or society served by the trainees.

When the objective of the training was to improve the knowledge, skills and attitudes, reaction evaluation was done and the performance evaluation was made to improve the ability of the trainee in a particular task. However, it was noticed from the evaluations made under phase 1 of the project implementation that the most relevant and suitable evaluation method was the impact evaluation as it dealt with the aspects of the community in which trainees live and work.

In reaction, learning and performance evaluations, participants need to have the knowledge and practice to read and understand evaluation questions and answer to those questions specifically. However under rural setting responses to such questions may not reflect genuine feelings of the participants due to lack of capacity to express the ideas specifically.

In impact evaluation, the evaluators mainly used the participatory methods. In the project, training evaluations were basically done through the discussions, interviews and questioning communities by grouping them. It was an opportunity for the communities to come up with their views and ideas freely and genuinely so that community responses could effectively utilize for further improvement and up dating of training activities.

## Conclusion

In relation to the planners providing a water supply to rural areas in a participatory environment by involving the users

of the facilities from planning to operation & maintenance, is not just delivery of a utility service. The projects empower the user communities to manage their facilities and to earn revenue. It involves the user communities in the decision making process of the development activities of the country and obtains their contribution in enhancing their quality of life and social development.

Continuous training on RWS and associated activities should be provided for the user communities in order to make this imperative development process a success. The six district RWS programmes implemented in rural Sri Lanka with ADB & NORAD assistance proved that rural peasants would be a valuable asset and should be involved in the development process as thinkers, implementers and managers so that burden on the governments could be reduced and there would not be the need lend as much capital fund for investments from external lending institutions. People themselves could share the capital investment among themselves and subsidise implementation with their labour and manage the infrastructure facilities with the local knowledge and skills, provided continuous training on the specific domains such as technical & sociological aspects etc. is given to them systematically to update and refresh their knowledge, develop their skills and refine attitudes.

It was also found that community training on RWS needs to be formalised and linked to the training programmes provided by development projects with the formal vocational or any other relevant educational institutions. This ensures that with the establishment of community institutions, systems would be available to fulfill the training requirements connected to rural infrastructure development without waiting for another project to enable them in obtaining training. This is also a key factor in guaranteeing the availability of human resources to facilitate the development and its sustainability.

Project experience also proved that utilizing adult training techniques and participatory methods would be a helpful tool in delivering the community training successfully in the rural environment. Utilizing local knowledge of villages and respecting to traditional practices of communities also contributed to the success of the programme immensely.

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