

Experiences from a Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Programme, Vietnam

Supported by Danida

Presentation 1:

National rural water supply and sanitation strategy to 2020

The Prime Minister approved the National RWSS Strategy in August 2000. The Centre of Rural Clean Water and Environmental Sanitation (CERWASS) under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) is the main coordinator for the implementation of the Strategy.

The Danish Government has provided support to the preparation of the Strategy and since 2001 to the implementation of the Strategy, through assistance at central level and in the three pilot provinces of Dak Lak, Ha Tinh and Nghe An.

Objectives

By year 2010:

- 85% of rural population will use clean water with 60 litres/capita/day
- 70% of rural households will have approved hygienic latrines and have good personal hygienic practices.

By year 2020:

- All rural people will use clean water of national quality standards with at least 60 litres/capita/day and use approved hygienic latrines through the active promotion of community participation and demand responsive approach.
- Universal good personal hygiene practice of rural people and good environmental sanitation of communes and villages through focused IEC

General approach

The Strategy uses a demand responsive approach, replacing the former supply-driven approach. This means that users, after being provided with necessary advice, will:

- Decide on what type of RWSS facilities they want, how they will organise this and how they will pay for them
- Either construct facilities themselves or arrange and pay for a contractor to build the facilities
- Manage the operation and maintenance of all the facilities

Information, Education and Communication (IEC)

The Strategy puts much emphasis on Information, Education and Communication (IEC) activities and on community participation. IEC activities are seen as vital for the success of the Strategy.

Five main IEC topics have been identified for the National RWSS Strategy:

- Key principles and contents of the National RWSS Strategy
- Health and hygiene issues related to sanitation and water supply
- Different water supply and latrine technology options, including O&M requirements and construction and O&M costs
- The conditions and application procedures for loans and grants for improved RWSS facilities
- Establishment of water user groups for construction and management of piped water schemes

Central CERWASS plays a key role in raising the awareness and acceptance of the National RWSS Strategy among stakeholders at different levels. The focus in the first 2-3 years was on organisation of workshops and meetings to present and discuss the Strategy. The focus has changed a little so there now is more focus on dissemination of lessons learnt from implementation of the Strategy. This is done through the production of Newsletters, the CERWASS web-site, lessons-learnt publications and the mass media.

CERWASS has developed several guidelines and other publications over the last 2-3 years in order to make the National RWSS Strategy operational. They have been distributed to all 64 provinces in Vietnam and to other RWSS programmes.

Cooperation and integration

It is our experience that IEC groups at different levels are important to make the IEC activities as efficient as possible. Many institutions are involved in RWSS-related IEC activities, but at the start of the programme there was insufficient

integration and cooperation between these institutions. This made it difficult to ensure that the same overall IEC approach was followed and people provided with correct and consistent information.

The IEC guidelines for RWSS were therefore one of the first guidelines prepared. CERWASS cooperated with other ministries and mass organisations at central level and received comments during workshops with many provinces. Many institutions have mentioned that the IEC guidelines made it easier to ensure that different ministries and mass organisations follow the same overall approach and provide consistent information. There is, however, also general agreement that the guidelines are not detailed and practical enough for staff that work more directly at grass-root level. CERWASS is therefore cooperating with different RWSS programmes to prepare a handbook for district and commune IEC staff.

Recently there has also been more focus on the exchange of IEC material prepared by different RWSS programmes and regular exchange of experience for example through workshops, visits and e-mail contacts.

In the three pilot provinces there has been much focus on integrating the activities into the ongoing activities of different institutions. This is an attempt to ensuring that the IEC activities will continue after the end of the Danida-supported programme and will be replicated in other districts in the provinces. This has been particularly successful in Ha Tinh province, where activities have been integrated into the ongoing activities of the health system and the Women's Union. It is our experience that the strength of the different institutions varies considerably and that it is essential the IEC groups consider this when they allocate tasks among their members. It is also essential that the institutions allocate sufficient time for their members of the IEC groups and other staff to work with RWSS-related IEC activities.

Presentation 2

Information Education and Communication (IEC) at Grass-root Level

Village motivators/communicators

At commune level there is normally a RWSS committee, which includes staff working with IEC activities.

At village level there is a volunteer motivator network, with normally 2-4 motivators per village. The villagers elect their own motivators, who often include the village leader, the village Women's Union representative, the village health worker and/or other well-respected persons in the village.

Village motivators have proved to be very important to ensure that village women and men receive sufficient information. The motivators need, however, good training, materials and support from the commune and district levels. It is also very important that well-respected and enthusiastic motivators are elected and that they know the tasks and conditions before they accept to become volunteer motivators.

The number of motivators elected in each village was relatively large in the beginning (often 5-7 motivators per village), but has been reduced in order to provide them with more training and support than would otherwise have been possible. It is a problem in some areas that the village motivators are not so active any more. There are several reasons for this, but one of them is clearly that they receive no allowances and that some of them have expected this. It has been suggested to local authorities that they should provide some incentives to the motivators, e.g. by exempting them from community labour, providing them with free treatment at health stations etc.

In some districts, it has been a problem that the majority of the motivators elected were men and that it was difficult for them to communicate well with women in the village. It is now generally recognised that it is important to elect both women and men as village motivators, as often women communicate best with other women and men communicate best with other men.

Communication methods

The following are the main communication methods used:

- Face-to-face communication through village RWSS motivators, including village health workers, and also through commune staff
- Distribution of materials, often in connection with face-to-face communication
- Special events like launching days, music performances, competitions and theatre plays
- Use of the mass media, including TV and radio programmes, village loudspeakers, articles in newspapers and magazines

Most of the above activities have focused at the community level, but activities in schools have also been important.

Several commune RWSS committee members and motivators have emphasized that motivators and local leaders should set good examples by having good WSS facilities.

There is also general agreement that public institutions like schools, health stations and people's committee buildings should set good examples by having good WSS facilities and clean surroundings. The programme has supported construction of WSS facilities in schools, which is reported to have had a good demonstration effect for parents and other households around the schools.

PHAST method

The demand-responsive and participatory approach of the National RWSS Strategy is new to many IEC staff and village motivators. It has therefore been important that training on participatory communication methods is one of the first activities when starting - or strengthening - the implementation of the National RWSS Strategy in a province or a district.

When the programme started in 2001, assessments were made of different participatory methods. The Participatory

Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation (PHAST) method was chosen, because there are good experiences of using this in other countries and because it is a further development of methods already applied in Vietnam.

The main purpose of the PHAST method is to encourage community management of water and sanitation facilities, improve hygiene behaviours and prevent diarrhoeal diseases. It consists of activities that assist villagers with their own identification and analysis of problems, selection between different types of water supply and sanitation facilities and different hygiene practices, planning, monitoring and evaluation. The use of picture sets to stimulate community discussions is a very important part of the PHAST method.

A recent internal report on the PHAST experiences in Ha Tinh province concludes that the training of selected commune staff and village motivators has been effective and that the PHAST method and picture sets are easy and very appropriate to use at community level. As a result of the PHAST method, villagers have prepared and implemented their own plans for improving their WSS facilities and hygiene practices. Other internal reviews have reached the same conclusions. Some IEC staff are, however, concerned that it takes a long time to train motivators on the PHAST method and also to use the PHAST method at community level. This will be taken up during a review of the PHAST method in 2005. The PHAST picture sets and the small PHAST manual developed in 2002 will be reviewed at the same time.

Contact persons

Mr. Mai Van Huyen
Centre for Rural Clean Water and Environmental Sanitation,
73 Nguyen Hong Street, Hanoi, Vietnam
E-mail: mvhuyen@cerwass.org.vn

Ms. Nina Ksor
Provincial Centre for Rural Clean Water and Environmental
Sanitation, 32 Phan Chu Trinh Street, Buon Ma Thuot, Dak
Lak Province, Vietnam
E-mail: iecrwssdaklak@dng.vnn.vn

Ms. Helle Stoltz
Centre for Rural Clean Water and Environmental Sanitation,
73 Nguyen Hong Street, Hanoi, Vietnam
E-mail: helle_stoltz@hn.vnn.vn

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PEOPLE-CENTRED APPROACHES TO WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION

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Supported by AusAid

Presentation 3

Agency Cooperation in Implementing Community Development Programs

The project's community development program has developed an innovative degree of town and province-based agency cooperation. Using organisation diagrams, this presentation described the situation before and after the project. Previously, most community activities were selected by the Town People's Committee and then carried out by town agencies representing Women, Youth, Health, Education, Construction, and Ward/Commune government, through their own systems with little or no inter-sectoral coordination. Water Supply and Urban Environment Companies rarely took part in community activities in towns. The project established Community Advisory Committees which brought together representatives from all town agencies and the Water Supply and Urban Environment Companies to coordinate community development activities. Although changing old ways has been challenging at times, the advantages in terms of coordination, transparency, agency commitment, community confidence and ownership are very significant. The model appears sustainable, with committees meeting on their own initiative without the project involved.

Presentation 4

Microactivities

The environmental health microactivities program supports the construction of small neighbourhood environmental improvements in the three project towns. This presentation showed how funding partnerships between the project and town authorities, with contributions of cash, materials and labour from the community have transformed some problem neighbourhoods. Poor drainage, flooding, poor access, inadequate lighting, inadequate market infrastructure and non-existent solid waste collection have been addressed through community initiatives. Benefits to the community have been immediate and wide ranging including: development of small business especially for women, more friendly neighbourhoods, improved safety, new areas for children to

play, access for disabled, greater community participation, closer relationships of community with local authority, and ownership of the infrastructure by the community.

Contact persons

Nguyen Thanh Nhan
Information, Education and Communication Project Officer,
AusAID, Three Delta Towns Water Supply and Sanitation
Project, Mekong Region, Vietnam

Le Thi Hao
Community Development Project Officer, AusAID Three
Delta Towns Water Supply and Sanitation Project, Mekong
Region, Vietnam
