

PEOPLE-CENTRED APPROACHES TO WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION

## Capacity building for rural water supply and sanitation in Lao PDR and Thailand

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*Support for integrated capacity building focusing on learning support for government organizations, communities, networks and small business is the most important contribution foreigners can make to local development. Excessive equipment and action assistance with minimal learning support, is more likely to create dependence. However learning support without locally financed working resources and improved motivation is hardly effective. Decentralization of authority requires decentralization of skills. Learning support focusing on specialist and management training without integrated courses for all staff limits organizational effectiveness. Aid/ cooperation should be much better integrated. This can only be achieved through deeper dialogue and better strategies. To seek a reasonable future for the region in a threatened world requires much greater effort from all of us.*

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### Introduction

Experience over about 20 years in numerous aid/cooperation projects in the Lao PDR and Thailand, including those specifically aimed at capacity building and those with other aims, is the basis of this paper. The work has mainly been in the water and related sectors, but also has included agriculture, community development and micro-finance. The author has also worked for about 10 years in Australia in the water sector and in universities.

### Integrated organizational capacity building

Self-reliant, fair and sustainable development, which may be embodied in national goals, requires capacity building of all people and organizations from the top to the bottom. ie capacity building or development of government and private organisations, networks, communities and individuals. The essence of integrated capacity building involves human resource development or learning towards knowledge, skills and understanding, including learning about people management for national development, together with necessary equipment or material support, and structural and cultural change in government. Capacity building components include motivation and appropriate policies or goals, strategies and authority, responsibility and accountability, all of which can be developed through learning, notably at senior levels. Learning is a very wide area.

Apart from learning, building sustainable motivation is probably the other critical part of organizational capacity building. There is much interaction between the areas of building motivation and learning because gaining the ability to fulfill your responsibilities is a boost to self-confidence

and motivation acts to support learning. But motivation is also dependent on leadership, merit based approaches, appropriate salaries and other rewards. Motivation must continue beyond the project lifetime meaning that projects must support the type of motivation development that is not dependent on continuing support.

Staff recruitment and assignment should draw on strengths from throughout the country from all classes and ethnic groups, and from all appropriate faculties of educational institutions. When learning support is not well linked to the rest of appropriate people management major inefficiencies can occur which retard national development.

Government financial flows and materials and equipment management may require attention. Ultimately government revenue must be adequate for the task and that may require capacity building in the revenue taking agencies. Finance as well as learning is required for operations such as salaries and maintenance at decentralized levels.

All of these factors must be considered together in an integrated way. If the total system is supported in a piecemeal fashion change will be sluggish and contradictory. The components should be complementary to one another where at all possible. Deeper dialogue, more cooperation and better strategies are required.

### Learning support

Learning support is more than training. Training is occasional while learning should be continuous.

Key issues in learning support include learning topics, who learns, learning methods, how to relate learning to work and material resources, learning continuity, and learning sustainability.

Leadership is needed to initiate and drive the learning proc-



**Photograph 1. Rural water supply and sanitation staff practising reading**

esses but leadership itself depends on advanced learning in general conditions, processes and systems, especially through reading. Quality national development depends on it.

Learning support ranges from scholarships for degrees and diploma courses to short in-country courses and support for local learning. Rapid, participatory, flexible and practical in-country learning support and appropriate material support for rural water supply and sanitation units or projects and complementary private enterprises can help promote development and poverty alleviation. Such programmes can take place in four main steps: situation analysis, planning, implementation including learning support, and monitoring/evaluation. Note that the situation analysis must be wider than the common 'training needs analysis'. In-country learning support is not only short courses, but on-the-job support including that for group and individual driven learning that can continue after the trainer leaves. Continuous learning for all staff is necessary for organizational self-reliance and sustainable development. Study tours should be integrated into this learning process.

Learning support for government staff in technical areas must start with limited practical topics as well as general work processes to form teams of specialists. General work process/activity learning for all staff can fill the gap between the more common management and technical learning and increase absorption capacity for other assistance.

Support should also be given for courses in a range of general disciplines. Rural sociology, anthropology, rural economics and human geography skills are needed in rural water supply, sanitation and hygiene programmes alongside the more usual hydrogeology, well construction, piped system and sanitation engineering and preventive health.

### **Capacity building of rural communities**

Rural community capacity building to reduce poverty supported by government and other organizations should take place mainly through dialogue, learning support and minimum linked material support. Community learning can take place in community operations/ development,

cultural development, the natural environment, appropriate technology and microfinance, notably initially savings and loans groups, later networking and linking to banks. Local micro-finance development is often important for self-reliant development. Emphasis on material and action support rather than learning support makes communities dependent. Emphasis on learning support can raise communities' self-reliance, allowing them to develop at their own pace in their own way.

### **Learning versus material support**

Too much material support relative to learning support has been offered to governments and communities. Aid/cooperation agencies have tended to import drilling rigs and pumps rather than support local organizations to develop an optimum proportion of their own machines and spares. Imports dominating local development that took place in Thailand in the 1960s through 1980s has taken place in Lao PDR in the 1990s-2000s.

### **Private sector and community**

Enterprising individuals and groups can be helped to set up 'private sector micro-enterprises' for well and latrine construction and repairs. Both Lao PDR and Thailand had/ have small private drilling contractors that could have been supported technically, financially and socially, and could have offered the government regular data in return. The potential remains in Lao PDR. Communities and enterprises can be trained to develop their own dry pit and eco-privies, especially where water is scarce. Open dug wells with easily made and repaired counter-levered buckets are under-rated for isolated villages with poor repair potential.

### **Training centres versus university development**

More and more specialized training centres are being built in Vientiane. Would it not be better if they were not all built in a group at the university so that over the next 5 to 15 years, when government staff have good degrees and a reduced need for short training courses the centres could evolve into a faculty of the university, perhaps a water or a development faculty.

### **Conclusion**

Deeper dialogue, better aid/cooperation strategies and widespread learning are required at all levels in the Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Sector, and indeed in all sectors, to help present and future generations have a reasonable life.

Learning support should replace material or equipment and action assistance where possible to minimize dependence. Locally financed working resources and improved motivation are needed to make assistance effective in the long-term. Decentralization of authority without decentralization of learning is unlikely to work. Integrated work processes

courses for all staff will support organizational effectiveness.  
Aid/ cooperation should be much better integrated.

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