

MAXIMIZING THE BENEFITS FROM WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION

**Government, NGO and private sector collaboration for the successful implementation of CWSS projects**

*Sunil Silva, Sri Lanka*

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### **Introduction**

The Community Water Supply and Sanitation Project (CWSSP) is an ambitious initiative aimed at establishing a demand-led community-based approach for the development of water supply and sanitation facilities for the poor rural people of Sri Lanka. The CWSSP has introduced an innovative project approach centered on a participatory methodology to develop affordable and sustainable water supply and sanitation facilities for rural communities. It is people-centered where people organize themselves into a CBO, plan, design, build and manage their projects. The overall objective of the proposed project is to improve the living conditions of the rural communities by increasing their effective access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation facilities, and improving their hygiene practices in a sustained and cost effective manner.

The main challenge of the CWSSP is to ensure long-term sustainability of water supply and sanitation facilities constructed under the project. To ensure this, the project has adopted a holistic approach by involving Local Authorities, Local NGOs and the Private Sector for project implementation, facilitation and support. This is a three-way interactive process of Government, NGOs and Private Sector collaboration that supports the CBO to acquire the necessary capacity. The field experience of the project revealed that the sense of ownership, self management capability is strengthened with this three-way capacity development initiative in all aspects of the project. This paper discusses the success of Government, NGOs and Private Sector collaboration in rural water supply and sanitation project implementation.

### **Context of community institutions in the CWSSPs**

The process of mobilizing the community for the CWSSP project is described below. NGOs with a proven track record for institutional building and development work are assigned to guide and assist the communities identified for the CWSSP project. The selected NGOs are experienced in social mobilization methodologies and in institutional development and capacity building. These NGOs interact with the communities and assist the community to carry out needs assessment analysis using Participatory Rural Appraisal tools. Then either an already existing CBO acceptable to the people and with a capacity for the project is selected or a new CBO is formed. In either case a constitution is formulated and adopted by the entire community through consensus. The formation of CBOs is not a difficult exercise in Sri Lanka as a number of members of a community have NGO/ development experience through numerous capacity building programmes of both government and NGOs in the past few decades such as the World Bank funded Poverty Alleviation Programme 1989/1994 (NDTF). Election of office bearers (for which no one is discriminated on any count) is held with the participation of all beneficiary households in the selected sub project area. Annual General Meetings are being held to appoint office bearers for each year. Technical plans are drawn up and formulated with the support of the NGO/ local government authority and approved by the general membership at special meetings. Communication with the general membership is sustained through regular

general meetings, access to minutes of steering committee meetings and financial management books/reports. These procedures ensure democratic control and ensures consensus. Transparency and accountability are ensured through the adoption of good governance principles and sound financial management systems. To ensure transparency in procurement activities, CBOs are guided to appoint separate committees for calling quotations, purchasing, payments and storage. Resource allocation is carried out by the CBO with inputs from the NGO/local authority. When it comes to procurement, CBOs are made aware of quality standards and service norms by NGOs/ private sector/ local government. The private sector here refers to suppliers of PVC pipes, fittings, pumps and building materials at the district or national level. These suppliers are not contracted in a formal way but they are listed on the basis of the quality of their goods and services and CBOs made aware of techniques of procurement, quality control etc. Because of the scale of the CWSSP project, suppliers themselves have begun to offer technical support services and training to the CBOs. In this entire process, the NGO/local government and the private sector guides the CBOs in every way so that they learn and gather experience.

Regular coordination meetings conducted at local government level with the active participation of Local Government and Administrative officers, NGOs, private sector and CBO representatives provide a good platform to discuss field issues and to arrive at consensus. These coordination committee meetings provide the opportunity to share responsibilities in the project decision making process, among the government, NGO, Private sector and the community.

Though the CWSSP's main focus is on water and sanitation, wider impacts are created in the community. Its broad objective is to improve the total living standards of the poor through the provision of water and sanitation as an entry point. The environment, community organisation and management and better hygiene and hence impacts on health are value additions of the CWSSP. The key concept of the project is to build the institutional capacity through a community based approach so that the entire community is galvanized for a holistic development.

In order to ensure institutional sustainability of the CBOs, the CWSSP through the NGOs encourage CBOs to undertake other development activities in the community as there are numerous unmet needs. In short, the community institution would be build up as a key development center in the village.

Some criticism is leveled against the quality of ownership of CBOs in the CWSSP, which is due to reported incidence of failure of the participatory process at the village level. If this situation arises, the alternative might be to transfer the ownership to the private sector. This situation may create the opportunity to transfer the ownership to the private sector automatically because of the urgent need of water for the community. In this sense we would have to identify a workable and manageable structure or mechanism to implement

the CWSSP through CBOs at the grass-root level.

### **The role of government, NGOs and private sector in project implementation facilitation**

The phases of the sub project cycle are the Social Mobilization phase, the Planning phase, the Construction Phase and the Operation and Maintenance phase. The Govt. NGOs and the Private sector have been given the opportunity to act strategically as a facilitator or change agent in all phases of the sub project cycle. This situation is compatible with the participatory development aspects in the grass-root level project implementation.

The Role of Government, NGOs and Private Sector in the project implementation facilitation under each phase of the sub project cycle is given in the table 1 below:

The main focus of the formulation of the project is weighted towards a participatory development approach through the in depth social mobilization process. This phase is entrusted to competent NGOs for implementation. The experience is that CBOs involved in CWSSP were capable of undertaking full responsibility for the water supply activity as learning organizations with the facilitation and support of the NGOs, Government and the private Sector institution. The selected NGO undertook the responsibility to establish and prepare the CBOs in line with the participatory development approach. Government and Private Sector Authorities have been facilitated to reach the targets on time. Therefore, the success of the project is due to its being streamlined to a three – way coordination process. The social mobilization training and awareness creation programmes are manned by the NGOs acting as a resource pool with the coordination of Govt. authorities.

In the planning phase, the CBOs coordinate with the private sector to procure quality construction materials. This activity is facilitated by NGOs/local Water Board by involving themselves in purchasing, financial control, water quality monitoring, quality control, construction supervision and technical related training etc. This is a side-by-side activity to uplift the CBO as a fully fledged, technically viable institute as well as a management organization. This phase is comprised of pre- planning, planning and construction in line with the construction of WS activity and CBOs initiate the planning phase undertaking construction with the coordination of central Govt, Local Govt., NGOs and Private sector.

The planning phase is linked with the operation and maintenance (O & M) phase in an independent way but Government Authorities and NGOs are appreciating the responsibility undertaken by the CBOs while they are having ownership of Water Supply facility constructed under the project. The failure of the CBO would be a disaster at the grass-root level, which may affect the community very drastically. On those grounds the private sector or any other authority could influence the participatory system and community ownership. The experience is that the diversification of the activities of a CBO is a vehicle to strengthen the CBO culture and it

**Table 1. Role of key project partners in sub project implementation**

Project Partner	Social Mobilization	Planning	Construction	Operation
CBO	Established as a community organization	Decide Water supply options	Construct Water Supply Facilities	Undertake operation and maintenance responsibility
NGO as Partner Organization	Make aware and mobilize people to establish a CBO	Guide CBO to decide water supply options Water supply project design	Guide and Support CBO for construction Quality Assurance of construction activities	
Government	Identify potential NGOS to work as POs Training and capacity building of POs and CBOs	Technical guidance and training	Technical guidance and training	Establishment of O&M mechanism and continues assistance for O&M Water quality monitoring
Private Sector		Technical assistance for scheme planning	Technical assistance for scheme construction Supply of construction material and services Provision of lending facilities to CBO (by local Banks)	Supply of material and services for O&M activities Technical assistance for O&M activities Water quality testing

would be a dynamic endeavour to fulfill community needs. The CBO should be a development center, which undertakes several development activities throughout their network, and not only water and sanitation. The sustainability of the CBO is based on the diversification of its activities and at this juncture the CBO would have to be facilitated by either the Govt. or the private sector partners for its stability. This should have to be undertaken with good understanding and mutual partnership. If not, Government or the Private sector could have no opportunity to influence the system.

### Lessons learnt on government, NGOs and private sector collaboration

In the Sri Lankan context, there are a number of successful cases illustrating the collaboration and practices of working together in Community Water Supply Projects. This is a native thing embedded in the culture and now it has become a development practice. People are used to working together and collaborating in poor communities with the line agencies for development. In the case of the Gramodaya Mandalaya, which is a development hub of community institutions, Local Government and Private sector jointly undertake village level development activities in a participatory manner.

### The way forward

#### Recommendations for the future

1. To ensure the financial sustainability of CBOs it is essential to diversify the activities undertaken by them as

just one type of activity will not provide them with the required institutional and financial stability.

2. Some of the possible suitable activities for CBOs are micro-credit, micro-insurance, marketing, processing, entrepreneurship, post harvesting technologies.
3. In order to ensure CBOs' Social sustainability an awareness programme at community level is vital.
4. Development of CBO consortia will also enhance their stability and increase peer learning and good governance as happened with NGO consortia.
5. Confidence building of the community, leaders and CBOs
6. Improving leadership qualities and decision making skills of CBOs are also important aspects.

### Conclusion

The sector-wise affiliations and adjustments are needed for effective, efficient and sustainable project implementation and long-term O & M process. The isolation of CBOs as a result of serious political interference would be a disaster for the RWSSP. In this context Govt, NGOs and Private sector should have to play a critical and strategic role to strengthen the institutional capacity of the CBOs. This collaboration should be an effective and efficient one with long-term expectations. The suggested mechanism could be integrated in

the process of three-way communication and responsibilities could be entrusted to relevant sectors with the capacity and mutual understanding. The total development process could be institutionalized through GO-NGO & Private sector coordination to put in place a key development center at the village level to address all community development needs in a sustainable manner.

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### Contact addresses

M G S Sunil Silva, BA (Hons.)Econ,

MA (Women's Studies), Post Grad. (Stats) ANU  
Consultant, Training  
Community Water Supply & Sanitation Project (CWSSP),  
World Bank Funded Project, Urban Development & Ministry of Water Supply, 9th Floor Sethsiripaya, Battaramulla, Sri Lanka  
Address: 380A, Preethipura, Kalalgoda, Pannipitiya, Sri Lanka  
E-mail: [accdc@sltnet.lk](mailto:accdc@sltnet.lk)  
Tel: ++94 11 2 774 843, ++94 11 4 303 809,  
Mobile: ++94 714 776 730  
Fax: ++94 11 4 300 682

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