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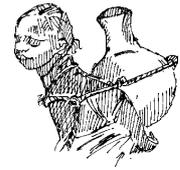
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The rural water strategy for Lesotho

Albert Bürgi, Zurich

THE FOLLOWING PRESENTATION will focus on the process by which the rural water supply sector in Lesotho achieved a new strategic approach to fulfilling its mandate. The explanations will concentrate on the area of *institutional development* while recognising the importance of village level participation.

History/background

Lesotho has been one of the countries benefitting substantially from the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade: the quantity of support by ESAs (financial and technical assistance) increased dramatically. The number of people, provided with new water supply systems, has grown accordingly: In the rural area, the coverage increased from 2 per cent in 1978 to 45 per cent in 1988 and to 60 per cent in 1998.

The agency, responsible for the rural water sector, is the Department of Rural Water Supply (DRWS) in the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR).

One of the main ESAs cooperating with DRWS, has been Helvetas (Swiss Association for International Cooperation), executing agency on behalf of SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) since 1978. In 1988, an external evaluation of the rural water supply programme observed, that output maximization - though highly successfully practiced - has to shift to sustainability orientation. In particular, a policy and strategy for DRWS was recommended. A second evaluation in 1996 made clear that the maintenance capacity should be quadrupled in order to cover the whole country.

The rationale of the strategy

The need for a strategy

The change of the political context and its implications for the W+S sector

In 1993, after many years of military rule, Lesotho adopted a multi-party democratic system. In keeping with the development paradigms current at the time, the Government of Lesotho came to the realisation that some fundamental changes were due in the area of roles and relationships.

- Government: Change from implementor to facilitator; concentration on regulatory and supervisory role.
- Communities/private persons: Change from beneficiaries to clients and owners of infrastructure, being responsible for O+M.

- Service providers: Private sector; covering activities beyond the capacity of the communities/private persons.

Key issues: Demand responsive approach, decentralisation, privatisation.

The rural water sector in Lesotho

- Towards the end of the 80s, the production rate started to decrease for several reasons (construction sites moved to less accessible areas in the mountains, funding in terms of hard currency declined, etc.).
- Maintenance turned out to be a big problem (no sense of ownership on the part of the villagers, and therefore no O+M and limited reporting of breakdowns was made; reported cases took increasingly more and too much time to attend to).

The launch of the strategy process

A variety of reasons led, eventually, to the launch of the strategy process, in particular:

- A loss of donor support, leaving only a few donors to DRWS.
- The 1996 evaluation, taking into special account the results of a nation wide (!) inspection of the existing water supply systems, brought to light a number of critical aspects regarding sustainability. The main donor (SDC) expressed serious concern and requested DRWS to come up with a plan which would justify further investments.
- DRWS' first experiences in involving the private sector highlighted the enormous potential of the new approach, but also showed up the limitations. Moreover, the capacity of the private sector turned out to be very limited, as well.
- The performance of DRWS was increasingly criticised by members of parliament.

The debate, provoked by these problems/deficiencies, resulted in the decision to look for a fundamental solution: The need to develop a strategy was commonly recognised, particularly by the senior management of DRWS, SDC and Helvetas. The relevant Ministry also indicated interest and commitment: the awareness of the political decision-makers, too, had obviously remarkably grown during the preceding decade.

The driving forces of the strategy

The core element of the "machinery" is definitely DRWS with its motivated and committed staff. The DRWS personnel

have, therefore, always been the focus of attention. They have, undoubtedly, played the most determinant role during the whole strategy process.

In addition, three external pre-conditions had to be and have been fulfilled for launching, giving impetus to and steering the process:

- *Funds*: Readiness of SDC to go for and support financially a last phase of cooperation between Helvetas and DRWS; acceptance of a 5-year plan (1998 - 2002) for development and implementation of the strategy.
- *Technical Assistance for organisation and overall coordination*: Readiness of Helvetas to continue the cooperation with DRWS and to take over a leading function in the strategy process.
- *Consultant for facilitation, coaching and management training*: P-E Corporate Services SA (Pty) Ltd., Johannesburg, employed by Helvetas; recruitment and decision for employment done in close cooperation with DRWS.

Phase I of the strategy: development and formulation (6/96 - 12/97)

The development process took, all in all, 1.5 years. The main results were documented in a set of 3 volumes, entitled: "A Strategy for the Future".

Key elements

- Elaboration of a mission statement, including a business statement, a list of primary goals and an overall corporate philosophy.

BUSINESS STATEMENT OF DRWS

The DRWS is in the service of provision of sustainable and adequate potable water to rural communities. We intend to remain in this business and work in partnership with other departments, the private sector, non-governmental organisations and communities to improve quality of life of our people.

- Definition of the *project life cycle* as the basis for all planning. The cycle indicates the different steps of a project (*project* related to planning, constructing, operating, maintaining, repairing, rehabilitating, and upgrading a water supply system). Distinction is made between the hard side of the cycle (the technical activities) and the soft side (consultation, explanation, information exchange with the communities, training, etc.). The basic idea is that "we are never finished with a project": After the physical completion the phase of after-care will start, and the whole process will start again as rehabilitation is required.
- Formulation of four main sub-strategies, covering the business of DRWS: Village affairs strategy, production strategy, technical strategy, maintenance strategy.
- Study of coverage scenarios (full coverage assumed by 2010); identification of needed capacities, assessment of risks etc.

- Elaboration of an implementation plan, consisting of 37 projects, which divide the overall task (implementation of the strategy) into manageable elements. (Examples: Village Affairs Process, Promotion of Small Contractors, Field Quality Control Procedures, Maintenance Organisation, Human Resource Strategy).

The draft strategy was presented to and discussed with the *stakeholders* (donor agencies, DRWS staff, Ministry of Natural Resources, other ministries in the sector, other organisations in the sector, in particular NGOs) with the objective to inform them and to get their agreement and commitment/ownership.

Phase II of the strategy: implementation (1/98 - 12/00)

Some key elements and steps of the implementation process:

- Each of the 37 projects has got a designated project manager (members of the senior staff of DRWS). Their job has been to form a team, and to lead, control and report on the progress of the project.
- The 37 projects were ranked in order of priority, and the scope of each was defined. The available software allowed to make an overall implementation plan, taking into consideration the linkages between the different projects, and to adapt it according to progress and need.
- All project managers form the steering group whose role is to ensure communication to all levels of the organisation and to provide a forum for group problem solving. It discusses and approves strategy implementation plans, monitors progress etc.
- As the implementation of the projects has to go in parallel with the day-to-day business, a three year implementation period was assumed to be reasonable.
- Strategy implementation means not only the development of the business process - hard side of the transformation - i.e. implementing the 37 projects) but also changes in human attitude and behaviour - soft side of the transformation. Special emphasis, therefore, has been laid on training in managing people.
- The change is also facilitated by providing extensive managerial technique and skills training. This manpower development programme is phased in to coincide with the introduction of the new business processes and focussing on the 4 (future) core competencies of DRWS:
 - Design and construction of water supply schemes (competencies already available).
 - Project Management.
 - Maintenance Management.
 - Influencing Community Behaviour / Empowerment of Communities.
- For the coaching of the process there are regular meetings, visits, contacts etc.

The private sector

Privatisation is definitely a core issue of the strategy process. It is the consequence of the basic assumptions that the role

of government is that of a facilitator rather than that of an implementor, and that the private sector can perform certain activities better and more efficiently than the government. The communities for their part are to become owners of the infrastructure.

The respective goal of the DRWS mission statement, therefore, reads: *In order to accelerate sustained coverage and contribute towards national job creation, we will work towards outsourcing our activities by involving consultants, private contractors and other organisations, in the design, construction, operation and maintenance of water supply systems.*

DRWS already had some experience with the private sector before the strategy process started (drilling of boreholes, supply of handpumps, design of water supply systems). These experiences, however, have been exceptions rather than a rule.

The outsourcing concept has called for four main areas of activities:

- Developing a strategy for DRWS interaction with the private sector, in particular introduction and implementation of tendering and contract management procedures;
- Human resource planning and development, in particular training of the staff who have to co-operate with the private sector (tendering, contract management, supervision etc.);
- Design and implementation of a special two-step outsourcing programme for the DRWS employed masons. First step: The masons are placed under performance based labour contract. Second step: They are fully “independent” from DRWS (no labour contract anymore); and
- Establishing a data base with information on the private sector for classification and qualification and for identifying possible needs of support.

First lessons learned and some conclusions

In general

- In Lesotho as in many other countries, a comprehensive reshaping of the whole water sector has been necessary or overdue, respectively, for various reasons:
 - The dramatic changes in the socio-political and economic context of Lesotho;
 - Emphasis on sustainability, calling for a holistic understanding and a balanced development of the 5 interlinked strategies related to the social field, the institutional field, the economic field, the technological field, and the field of rules and regulations and knowledge and skills;
 - Problems of the responsible organisation DRWS.
- It took, however, about 10 years from the first mentioning of the demand for a strategy (external evaluation in 88) until the process was ready *to start!* It was time well spent, as there was need for enough time for preparation

(activities like a coverage scenario study, an inspection of the existing water supply systems etc. and efforts related to awareness raising of stakeholders).

- To develop and implement a strategy for DRWS means to do it for the whole rural water supply sector: The roles of all players in the game have to be redefined. And the actors must get a reasonable chance (time, training, etc.) to learn the new role.
- For the DRWS staff, development and implementation of the strategy has been and is an additional job to “business as usual”. Thus, motivation and commitment of personnel need to be carefully looked at.
- The process has been highly participative. It is the senior staff of DRWS who developed the strategy and have implemented it. Thus, *they* have become owner of the process which is absolutely indispensable in view of sustainability.
- The “soft” side of the strategy implementation process, the change of human attitudes and behaviour, often turns out to be “hard” for the people concerned. It is of utmost importance that adequate training, support and coaching is provided.
- The strategy process is ambitious and complex. Up to now, it has gone, however, successfully and quite according to plan because the „engine“ has been strong enough, “fuel” have been provided, and there have been competent “drivers”. In particular:
 - The necessary funds have been made available (by a donor agency).
 - There is a professional and highly competent and committed team (support agency and consultant) for leading, coordinating, coaching, facilitating, etc.
- There are a number of key external stakeholders who have claims on DRWS. Therefore, they have been integrated into the process at various stages to get their support. This refers in particular to the Ministry of Natural Resources: Its consent is, of course, absolutely vital. - Special attention had to be given to the fact that the “new” DRWS is still in the “old” context, for the political and institutional environment has not yet experienced the (big) structural and organisational changes of DRWS.

Related to private sector/outsourcing:

- Tailor-made programme for the masons (contract labour approach): The aim has been to give the masons a fair chance to become entrepreneurs. The 2-step approach has allowed DRWS to conserve the capacity and skill, to keep options for small contractor development open, to learn over the next years, etc.
- Capacity: Small contractors very often have liquidity problems, and banks, unfortunately, are not very supportive.
- Market: It, obviously, takes quite a while and needs some efforts until the (smaller) contractors gain trust and confidence.

- Community Liaison/Involvement: The contracts with the private sector were, in the beginning, centrally managed by the DRWS Headquarter. The experiences brought to light a number of weak points, particularly at the the private sector/community interface. The main consequences have been: to bind the districts more into the strategy process; to decentralise as much authority

as possible to the districts; and to emphasize the village affairs component in the project life cycle.

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