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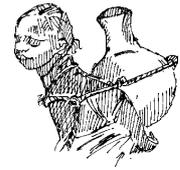
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Capacity building for community management

Kweku E.E. Thompson, Ghana

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION HAS become the sine qua non for many developmental efforts in developing countries. In Ghana, the huge capital outlay coupled with dwindling Government funding in the face of ever-growing population and increasing demand for potable water/decent sanitation facilities make it imperative to involve beneficiaries in the delivery process.

This is necessary not only to ensure sustainability through effective operation and maintenance (O&M) but also to minimize investment cost through the use of local resources /knowledge and skills while maximising health benefits and ultimately building local capacity for further community development in other sectors.

Traditionally, water facilities have been centrally owned and managed by Government. The role of communities was limited to that of passive users.

To change that situation, a National Strategy, the Community Water and Sanitation Programme (CWSP) was adopted in 1994 for rural water and sanitation delivery. The new strategy, which is demand responsive hinges on community management, places responsibility for Operation and Maintenance (O&M) at community level and limits the Governments role to facilitating, monitoring and quality control.

Evidence however points to the fact that most communities do not have the capacity to manage Water and Sanitation (WATSAN) facilities unaided and efforts at developing that capability are woefully inadequate due to limited capacity of the other actors to play their designated roles in a satisfactory manner.

This paper discusses the challenges to community management under a Government of Japan/Ghana co-funded Rural Water Supply Project in the Eastern Region of Ghana (1997–1999) and examines capacity building strategies based on project interventions implemented by CWSA. The 2-year project was code named “JICA Project”.

The JICA project

The project started in February 1997 under a Japanese grant aid scheme, for the provision of 450 boreholes (BHs) to 295 rural communities in the Greater Accra and Eastern Regions. In the Eastern Region, it aimed at increasing water supply coverage through the provision of 400 bore holes (later reduced to 380) to 249 pre-selected communities in 7 out of the 15 Administrative districts. As at the commissioning in April 1999, 329 BHs had been provided to 258 communities in the region.

Designed in the wake of the adoption of the National Strategy, the project offered a good opportunity for testing most of the tenets of the CWSP in the region viz. the principles of demand responsiveness, community ownership and management, cost sharing, public sector promotion, private sector provision of services as well as behavioural change. The single most important challenge to the success of the project was developing the capacity of the beneficiary communities to take up O&M and this was largely dependent on the ability of the public and private sectors in playing their assigned roles effectively. A major thrust of the project has thus been the institutional strengthening at all levels of implementation.

Regional level

At the commencement of the project in February 1997, an eight-member multi-disciplinary Regional Water and Sanitation Team (RWST) with supporting staff was in place to facilitate the implementation. Ghana Government (GOG) provided training and logistics support to the Team. JICA assisted with 3 vehicles for monitoring and other equipment (TV, Video Camera/desk, generators, loud speaker etc) to support animation work in the communities.

A Regional Project Steering Committee (RPSC), made up of heads of relevant departments and chaired by the administrative head of the region was constituted in January 1997 to give direction, focus and necessary political guidance to project management. The committee meets quarterly.

A Regional start-up workshop was organized to sensitize the RPSC on the CWSP and the roles/responsibilities of all the stakeholders.

District level

In line with the GOGs decentralisation program, and to facilitate the envisaged district ownership and management (DOM) of projects, Start-up workshops were organised in all 7 beneficiary districts to sensitize key District Assembly (DA) officials on the CWSP, project purpose and responsibilities of all Actors. Follow-up meetings targeted at the general DA ensured that members of Parliament, Assembly members and other opinion leaders understood the National Strategy and promoted it in their constituencies, electoral areas and communities.

The DAs were assisted to form and resource (provide office space, salaries, allowances, fuel etc) three-member District Water and Sanitation Teams (DWSTs) as focal points for all water and sanitation activities within the districts particularly for project implementation.

The Project provided support in the form of means of transport (3 motor bikes per team), office equipment/furniture and start-up stationery to the Teams (made up of a Hygiene Officer, Community Mobiliser and a Technician). In addition, the DWSTs were taken through series of training and coaching to build their capacity.

Community level

Since beneficiary communities were pre-selected as part of the basic design study and technology choice limited to BHs with hand pumps, efforts at this level were principally geared towards awareness-raising on the benefits of potable water, communities roles/responsibilities in the CWSP and the acquisition of knowledge and skills for O&M.

Nine Partner Organizations (mainly small private consultancy Firms and NGOs) working in rural communities and districts were contracted and trained for the animation of communities under the supervision of DWSTs/RWST. The PO developed the capacity of the beneficiary communities through:

- Sensitisation on project purpose.
- The establishment of 7 to 11-member (average of 3 women) Water and Sanitation (WATSAN) committees to organise community inputs and take full responsibility for O&M.
- 3 tier training of the WATSAN committees in their Individual/collective roles, fund mobilisation options, record keeping, health/hygiene/user education, maintenance issues and collaboration with other stakeholders. The workshops were structured to coincide with the mobilisation, planning and follow-up phases of the project cycle.
- Opening and Operation of Bank Accounts.
- Fund mobilization toward payment of 5 per cent capital cost contribution of ₡650,000 (260 USD) and a minimum of ₡200,000 (80 USD) per year per bore hole with hand pump for O&M.
- Signing of a Facility (ies) Management Plan (FMP) between the community and CWSA that spells out Action Plans for O&M.
- Selection of 2 pump caretakers per Borehole to be trained for routine above ground pump repairs/maintenance.
- Hygiene education campaign establishing linkages between water, sanitation and health and the causes, mode of transmission and prevention of Water and Sanitation related diseases.
- User education and pump site maintenance

The Project provided each community with stationery for record keeping, Illustrative WATSAN Hand book and participatory tools for Hygiene education.

The DWSTs and RWST under took routine monitoring and supervisory trips to the communities.

Private sector level

The private sector constitute Partner Organisations (POs), Area Mechanics (AMs), Spare part dealers, Latrine Artisans (LAs) and Contractors. Drilling was undertaken by a Japanese firm which subcontracted 3 local contractors. Latrine Artisans were left out since project had no sanitation component. As provision was not also made for Area Mechanics and Spare parts suppliers, Private Sector capacity building was limited to beefing-up the capacity of the POs.

Consequently Nine POs, mainly NGOs or Private Companies were identified and trained to animate beneficiary communities under a one year contract. Training Workshops were organised in the areas of community Entry approaches, facilitation skills, participatory methodologies, fund raising options, field practice, roles of Actors and Hygiene Education for POs by CWSA and Training Consultants. Monthly meetings were also organised between the RWST and PO management to discuss work progress, critical issues and chart the way forward.

Due to its initial unprofitability to the private sector, plans are afoot for GOG/Donors to provide one million USD seed money to prop up spare part distribution outlets. Plans are also underway to identify and train AMs under on-going DANIDA and KfW assisted projects.

Challenges

Some major constraints to capacity building were:

- The Rigid Project Design viz.; Short time frame leading to the pre-selection of beneficiary communities' impacted negatively on capacity building efforts.
- The generation of demand and demonstration of commitment necessary to engender community ownership and management were thus compromised and stifled.

Financial constraints

The inadequacy and delayed release of government counterpart funds threatened implementation capacity of CWSA. Under phase Two of the project, the 3 phased PO and WATSAN Committees training workshops were lumped into one workshop. DWSTs training had to be roped into the POs workshop. The RWST could not visit any of the communities to monitor implementation. There was thus reliance on the donor for assistance in capacity building. However JICAs main success criterion was to complete the agreed number of wells within the tight time frame. To achieve this they tended to dictate the pace of work leaving little room for software interventions to take root.

At the District level the success of the project came to depend on the goodwill of the key officials in committing the necessary funds to support the DWSTs in the discharge of their duties. DWSTs were handicapped in the performance of their duties.

Similarly, progress at community level rested on the willingness or ability of beneficiaries in meeting their financial commitments to the project.

The low capacity of the private sector

Responsive private operators within the water and sanitation sector are now emerging due to the demand created by donors. The few existing ones were established for the occasion. Their financial base, trained/experienced staff, business exposure and equipment holding is thus limited. The greatest challenge has been for the private sector to respond to demand for goods and services beyond the initial project horizon. This is because presently the environment is not competitive enough for them. This poses a great threat to the sustenance of the facilities since Area Mechanics have not been selected let alone trained and no spare parts distribution shops are in place.

Other challenges relate to:

- Unfavourable Hydrogeological conditions in certain Districts (Yilo and Manya Krobo) resulting in many negative/dry wells in some areas and poor water quality (high iron content up to 4.5 mg/l) in others. This resulted in low level of responsiveness of some communities to project interventions especially to meetings and training sessions.
- The voluntary nature of community management. This resulted in a high attrition rate of trained WATSAN committee members.
- Socio-economic factors viz. language barrier, illiteracy, poverty/misplaced priorities, the settlement pattern, low status of women, inaccessible roads, unreliable public transport system all combined to impede the effective mobilisation of the communities.
- Slow response of District Assemblies to project interventions shortened the already limited time for animation.
- Politicization of WATSAN issues by incumbent and aspiring Politicians i.e. promises of paying capital cost contribution for communities or providing gratis facilities that killed the self-help spirit of communities.
- Availability of alternative sources i.e. rivers; dugouts etc made some communities apathetic to the project.

Lessons learnt

Useful lessons from the two- year experience can be summarized as follows:

- Capacity building efforts should be targeted at all stakeholders.

- The Project cycle should be flexible to allow software interventions (demand creation, mobilisation, training, funds generation) to take root before physical construction.
- Capacity building is not a one- time activity. It evolves over time and must build on existing indigenous knowledge and institutions.
- One year covering mobilization, planning implementation and follow-up is too short a time to equip beneficiary communities for O&M using only POs as social intermediaries. I would recommend between 18 and 24 months with support from line Agency Staff to sustain interventions beyond project environment.
- Community management depends on ensuring the capacity of local communities to find innovative financing on continuous basis or when the need arises.
- Involvement of both women and men in all stages of the project cycle is necessary to ensure effective O&M
- Integration of water, sanitation and hygiene education is necessary to sustain Community ownership and management.
- District Assemblies should be more pro-active in project implementation.
- Political/financial commitment of DAs in resourcing and motivating the DWSTs is crucial for project success.
- Regular monitoring/supervision by DWSTs and RWST is needed to sustain achievements.

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