

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION IN PROJECTS FOR THE SUPPLY OF WATER AND SANITATION IN RURAL AREAS

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Abstract

We present the results of a comparison between three projects with the purpose of supplying water and improving sanitation in rural Mexico. The aim is to understand how they apply or understand the social participation in projects with different characteristics. Two of them were implemented in the framework of a federal program of national scope and the other refers to a community project run by a civil partnership.

We carried out a technical report from each of the projects which identify the main issues: objectives, goals, strategies, among others. Subsequently, interviews were conducted with some of the actors involved in the process of implementation and beneficiaries.

Since it is an ongoing investigation, this report presents the results of the first stage concerning the application of qualitative methods focusing on the actors involved. Preliminary results indicate that the revised draft does not define what they understand and expect from social participation, however, the level of discourse is present in all three cases.

Key words: social participation, technology transfer, water supply and sanitation.

Introduction

Catalogs of alternative technologies, appropriate, non-conventional or as they prefer to call them, for water supply and sanitation in rural areas provide technological proposals that are characterized by being accessible to remote communities scattered; be directed to the family and be easily construction using local materials and have a low cost.

On the other hand, are documented numerous cases of failure, bad function and non-use of technology. The social areas have proposed "participatory" and "self-management" methodologies to involved the

users at a level of decision making at different stages of the implementation of programs or projects for water supply and sanitation.

A widely accepted premise posits that technology by itself do not guarantee the water supply, sanitation, and better health, that is the adoption of these, by the rural population, which will ensure success in technology transfer.

In this paper we reflect on social participation in projects that aim to supply water and improve sanitation in rural areas of Mexico. To this end, we analyze the strategies of three projects, two cases of a national program and implemented by local government agencies and other by an NGO.

Method

At the beginning we developed a framework for defining the core issues: water supply and sanitation in rural and social participation.

Water supply and sanitation is considered a complex problem because its solution involves physical, environmental and social aspects, as users and their organizations, among others. Jerry Eckert (Eckert, 1978) suggests that the technology transfer process involves a set of activities—diagnosis, analysis, field testing, suitability and choice of alternatives, involving experts from various disciplines, because the problems it is intended solve are complex, and highly interactive, requiring a constant flow of communication between all parties involved. For its part, Hogrewe (1993) states that choose and build the right technology is only one task, it is also necessary to take into account public health, environment and social aspects, such as the organization and community participation as well the institutional, legal and financial

Participation, moreover, has been adopted as a discursive premise of much policy. In practice, projects perform a wide variety of actions like consultation to beneficiaries about their interests and needs or involvement of users in decision-making. According to Geilfus (1997), participation is a process that moves from passivity to self-management and identified different stages that we have retaken as categories to characterize the participation in the projects to analyze and that are listed below:

1. Vertical: beneficiaries do not have any involvement.
2. Provision of information: people offers information to those that implement the projects, but do not have direct impact on the decisions made.

3. Participation by consultation. People are consulted about the project or a specific issue and their views may or may not be taken into account.
4. Participation incentives. People participate in return for incentives such as labor or other inputs, but have no impact on policy formulation.
5. Functional. The beneficiaries have no impact on policy formulation, but their contributions permits to adjust the activities during the implementation of the project.
6. Interactive. Recipients are involved in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of policy, gradually and progressively, leaving the project in their hands.
7. Self. Initiatives generated without the intervention of external agents

In order to see whether participation is a definite factor in achieving the objectives two projects were selected from a federal program. One in which the beneficiaries or users were not directly involved in the construction and operation of the technology built to solve the problem of water and other in which participation is required for the construction, operation and maintenance of the technology. The first case involves the drilling of a well and the second the construction of ecological toilets. The third case is a program led by a nongovernmental organization in which priority was given to community and participatory processes as a strategy to strengthen local capacity to ensure water supply and sanitation.

Results

In the case of the federal program, the proposed mechanisms to encourage the participation of the beneficiaries were: participatory assessments, processes of community organization and training, as well as pro and works committees. In the other case, there were various activities, being the most recurring workshops. For each of the projects were carried out three interviews with beneficiaries and two interviews with those that implement the projects. The interview was pursued to identify the stages of the project in applying the tools, the actors involved in decision-making processes and the mechanisms of information exchange and coordination between different actors and, finally, on factors that, in the opinion of respondents, contributed or not to implement the goals and objectives of the programs.

The results in the case of the national program indicate that participatory strategies were used as the operational mechanics of the program suggests, but were not decisive in achieving the objectives of a project, but in the other case they were. In the case of the project in charge of the civil partnership, strategies have strengthened the organization followed a group of people in the population, but do not guarantee the use and appropriation of technology.

Conclusions

Since it is an ongoing investigation, this report presents preliminary results of a first stage involving the application of qualitative methods focusing on the actors involved. So far, the results indicate that the revised draft does not define what they understand and expect from social participation, however, the level of discourse is present in all three cases and is considered a determinant factor for the achievement of objectives. In practice, the participatory strategies help to achieve these objectives, but is not a determining factor.

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