

INVOLVEMENT OF CBOS IN MANAGING RURAL WATER SUPPLY SCHEMES LESSON FOR THE IMPLEMENT OF COMMUNITY WATER SUPPLY

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Abstract

During past decades, lack of access to potable drinking water in rural areas has prompted the World Bank and other donors to increase user involvement. Users were encouraged to participate in the planning, implementation, and operation and maintenance of rural water supply schemes .However, experience shows that Community Based Organizations (CBOs) are constrained in maintaining the system. To understand the challenges facing CBOs a study was undertaken in Sri Lanka where six rural water supply schemes were compared. The research had two main interests: 1) to compare CBO management with local authority and National Water board management and 2) whether a CBO can manage over a thousand connections. Results shows that community can manage water supply schemes if provide support to them.

Introduction

First, decentralizing management to the lowest appropriate level, coupled with close community involvement in planning, financing, implementation, and operations provides a good foundation for sustainable services. However, some critics against decentralisation says that it is a bureaucratic exercise carried out only in order to fulfil procedural requirements or a public relation exercise design to sell government policy. Since donor funding is the only option to most of the developing countries to develop rural water supply; the only option is to follow the donors' guidelines although they may change rapidly and may also be not relevant to them. For example, due to some cultural aspects in some countries, ladies who are not willing to move with other men than their husbands' may be forced to move with other men, to obtain the water services according to the agreed Gender Policy. Implementing Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (RWSS) within a development context allows institutions to respond to and support a range of community needs in a cost-effective and holistic manner. Accordingly, the main objective of the study is to assess the capacities of CBOs to manage Rural Water Supply Schemes in comparison to Local Authority/National Water Supply and Drainage Board (NWSDB) and recommend lessons learned to achieve sustainable rural water supply schemes.

Methods

The purpose of the study is to contribute to knowledge to develop an appropriate System of CBOs to manage water supply schemes. Hence based on theoretical frame work developed,

operationalisation frame work was also developed to test selected indicators of sustainable RWSS. This requires a variety of qualitative and quantitative data. Secondary and primary data were collected from six water supply schemes maintained by CBOs , NWSDB and Local Authority. Accordingly, the methodology used in this study was mainly three fold and they are; (i) Literature survey (ii) Generation of first hand data through collecting primary and secondary data (iii) Using available data from rural water project implementation documents in Sri Lanka

Results and discussion

The main objective of the study is to assess the capacities of CBOs to Operate and Maintain Rural Water Supply Schemes in comparison to Local Authority/NWSDB and recommend lessons learned to achieve sustainable rural water supply schemes. To achieve the main objective the following three areas were studied in detail;

1. To assess how decisions made during the construction phase impact the capacity of CBO for (Operation and Maintenance)O&M of the system
 2. To assess the existing support service mechanisms in place for effective O & M
 3. To assess the trajectory of community mobilization training delivered from planning to O & M stage
- It is required to achieve construction standards before handing over the schemes to CBOs and Local Authorities as those institutions lack the capacities to rectify defects during the O&M. From the results analyzed it was observed that construction of treatment plants, metering of service connections and quality control by independent body are the main areas needing attention.
 - Mobilization of community using proper training and awareness were the main tools of community development. The following important outputs, mainly related to mobilization process, were noticed from data analysis. Many different activities were undertaken during mobilization and influence of each of those activities is not discussed separately. But this section will discuss positive and negative outputs of the mobilization in respect of sense of ownership, financial transparency, technical knowledge, managerial capacity, women participation, water resource management and hygiene education
 - CBOs are capable in many O& M activities when compared with Local Authority and NWSDB. However, they do not engage in water quality monitoring, they do not have continuous training and development and they do not have a regular feed back of their work. Results show that CBOs as well as Local Authorities are not attending to water quality monitoring. CBOs showed their willingness to monitor water quality if they have support from an agency. Assistance for continuous development are needed to refresh present knowledge and to acquire new techniques. Monitoring and feed back is required for CBOs as well as Local Authority for development

- CBOs are capable of managing over 1,000 service connections even though they are not capable of implementing water quality monitoring programs. The CBO in Haliela has performed much better (see table 6.1) than Passara small town in terms of the technical, managerial and financial aspects and is also competitive with NWSDB. Haliela CBO also advocated for more legal rights for their CBO to act as a legal body in managing rural water supply schemes. It is justifiable as this CBO is capable than the legally established local authority in most management areas. In Haliela, not a single illegal connections was reported for the last five years. The main strength of the CBO is the support they receive from the General Meetings. CBO officers adhere to the decisions taken at the General Meetings and the agreements reached by the constitution. There were no complains on violation of General Meeting decision or constitution by CBO officers
- Where CBOs are not the maintaining authority, it is recommended to involve them as a pressure group for O&M authority. During handing over of the Passara scheme, it was decided to continue the CBO who were involved for construction as a pressure group. The model failed after commissioning. A set back in the model was lack of responsibilities assigned to CBOs. If they had defined work assigned then it would lead to coordination with Local Authority. In Okkampitiya, the CBO was providing skill labour service and CBO is still involving in activities and helping NWSDB to maintain standards

Conclusions

Providing a treatment plant is recommended. If a treatment plant is not viable due to cost-sharing mechanism, it is recommended to reduce household design water quantity to a reasonable and community acceptable range, to produce the desired quality water. Since, quality is the main cause of water related diseases in rural areas and rural community has access for other water sources for other usage; reduction of quantity of water will not have a negative influence to rural households like in urban areas. Further, using alternative water sources for bathing, washing etc. is a common phenomenon of the rural folk. They also use this opportunity to meet with each other and share information among them too, which in turn helps them to establish their social links.

Metering of RWS ensures equitable distribution, reduction of NRW, mitigation of illegal connections and enhances the confidence within the community. Therefore, it is recommended that operation and maintenance should commence only after the house connections are metered. Community can repay the meter cost on instalment basis commencing from implementation stage. A loan system can also be introduced to poor people to purchase water meters.

Due to narrow focusing on financial and physical targets, basic construction standards as provision of proper electricity requirements for pumps etc. are often omitted. Hence, it is recommended to have a Quality Assurance and Quality Audit service from an independent body or team, prior to handing over schemes to CBOs. However, the independent body should be comprise of confident and experienced experts to give such recommendations.

It is also recommended to give good awareness to CBOs and to other stakeholders regarding the need to maintain quality during implementation. The main drive of CBOs in managing water supply scheme is the sense of ownership. Involvement of community from the planning stage will enhance the sense of ownership. If schemes are handed over to other institutions, the community should also be a part of the O&M authority

Providing training and guidelines on financial transactions during implementation is recommended as it works well during O&M phase. For this training delivery, the services of well-experienced trainers are necessary irrespective of its cost. Billing and collection is also related to demand. Therefore, it is recommended to analyze demand and need before implementing water supply schemes as high collection has been reported from schemes where the water scarcity was high before the intervention. It is recommended not to implement schemes without a demand and a need analysis as they are also related to willingness to pay.

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