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Danida and GOTN Water and Sanitation Demand Project - WASDEP

Rural Water Supply Rehabilitation, Sustainable Maintenance and Sanitation in Cuddalore and
Villupuram Districts of the State of Tamil Nadu, India.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS: LESSONS LEARNT

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INTRODUCTION:

This paper concentrates on some of the socio-economic aspects and issues encountered by the Project team during implementation of the Project and particularly in relation to the preparation of the Village Water Plans.

A factor-actor model is applied as a basic and simple model for the force-field analysis with the intention to identify:

1. Critical areas of concern;
2. Possibilities of room for manoeuvre at all levels from the individual user and VPP (Village Panchayat President) to the Field Organizer and Project Director.

Before listing the constraining and facilitating forces in Project implementation, - which illustrates some of the important lessons learnt at present, - attention should be drawn to one of the activity level assumptions mentioned in the Project Document, namely : "That a significant (about 50%) part of the selected and eligible VP's are willing to receive Project support under the offered conditions".

The risk related to this assumption is also outlined in the Project Document, which states that: " The Government still has a declared free of charge policy for rural water supply development and maintenance".

This assumption and risk is the entry point for the discussion of the observations:

I. CONSTRAINING INTERNAL FORCES:

Internal refers to the Village Panchayat (VP) and to the respective stakeholder groups.

I.1. FACTORS:

Factors refer to GOTN policies and procedures for VP governance, finance, technology and socio-economic setting.

Accordingly, the main factors identified are:

- There is resistance to pay for public water supply. Access to water is usually free of charge.

- There is resistance to the Project conditions such as:

1. The request for disconnection of illegal household connections. In many VP's household connections are not considered illegal. In addition, some of the household connections are paid for by the owners. Furthermore, disconnection of household connections may seem as a step backwards rather than forward in the process of development.

2. The refusal of permission to allow the VPP to be contractor in his/her own VP. This is against usual practice within the VP's.

I.2. ACTORS:

Actors refer to all male and female stakeholders within the VP.

- The VPP's have, in their election campaigns, promised access to free and nearby water supply. Asking for payment is therefore regarded as politically incorrect.
- There are conflicts between VPP's and traditional leaders and/or other political leaders. The respective formal and informal leaders have different priorities, e.g. water, a temple, a road. In addition, some of them may not have sufficient knowledge about the Project, which leads to lack of trust and confidence in the Project.

II. CONSTRAINING EXTERNAL FORCES:

External refers to the Project and to the GOTN.

II.1. FACTORS:

- The GOTN procedures are only partially in place. At present it takes a minimum of two weeks at the District Project Office for administration of subsidy release and for payment to the contractors.
- The Project decentralisation process is only partially in place. This applies to tendering and accounting procedures.

II.2. ACTORS:

- There is interference from other agencies in Project villages. Various supply-driven water schemes are implemented by TWAD, NGO's, politicians, e.g. MLA's and MP's.
- The field staff lack sufficient participatory training skills and attitudes to facilitate the process of empowerment, which is a Project objective.
- The NGO's are still not mobilized to facilitate the Project activities. Cooperation with NGO's are hampered by the fact that there are several NGO's in the Project area, and they often only cover a rather small geographical area. Likewise, some of the NGO's will need extensive training in order to be able to facilitate genuine participatory Project planning and implementation.
- The PMG gives contradicting messages, which creates confusion amongst field staff. This applies to various aspects such as the Project conditions, e.g. household connections, and to the design criteria of, e.g. institutional latrines and to the cooperation with contractors.

III. FACILITATING INTERNAL FORCES:

III.1. FACTORS:

- In several VP's a substantial number of villagers have chosen the high-quality household latrine design. The latrines are constructed and in use. Many villagers have also constructed a bathroom.
- Several school headmasters have forwarded applications and deposits for construction of high-quality institutional latrines. School latrine have been constructed and are in use.
- In a few VP's villagers have access to new and/or rejuvenated water supply facilities provided by the Project.
- In some VP's the VPP's and other village leaders have gained experience with decentralisation of government procedures through administration of the Project fourth account and through participation in the tendering process of Village Water Plans.

III.2. ACTORS:

- Individual owners and users of household latrines expresses genuine proudness and happiness of ownership of and access to use of a household latrine.
- School headmasters, male and female teachers and pupils expresses genuine proudness and happiness over their access to use of school latrines.
- Villagers in some VP's, generally with a homogeneous and conflict free population group, i.e. one caste group, are enthusiastic about the Project approach and have shown commitment through immediate fund collection and bank deposit.
- In a few villages members and animators of well-functioning women sangram groups have facilitated the mobilization process and understanding of the Project approach and strategies. The same villages have a strong NGO influence.

IV. FACILITATING EXTERNAL FORCES:

IV.1. FACTORS:

- The Project is paving the way for the GOTN decentralisation process and may as such contribute with valuable lessons learnt for the future decentralisation strategies and activities.
- The Project, through the PLA-exercises is gaining valuable insights into the local democratisation process. The Project principle is to re-introduce the human dimension through consultation and participation of ordinary villagers in the planning process, i.e. create ownership. The focus is directly on the needs and interests of the respective male and female stakeholder groups.

IV.2. ACTORS:

- The GOTN deputed staff, i.e. the TWAD engineers find that the PLA-exercises, i.e. mapping and transect are highly relevant and useful in their follow-up technical activities with finalizing the Village Water Plans.
- The GOTN deputed staff, i.e. the TWAD engineers have, due to their exposure to the participatory Project strategies and activities, started to view technical engineering problems in a wider perspective including both poverty eradication and gender equality aspects.
- Several VPP's and villagers indicates that the district and field teams are highly committed to their work as they often, - in order to reach the target groups,- have to work during evenings and week-ends. The visibility of field staff and district staff through the many follow-up visits to the villages has created trust and confidence in the Project team.

V. SLOW PHYSICAL PROGRESS AND ITS MAIN REASONS:

The main emphasis from Embassy to GOTN levels is on physical progress measured in Village Water Plans implemented and Household and Institutional Latrines constructed, rather than on the process of capacity building through a participatory approach.

The factual rather slow physical progress with respect to the Village Water Plans, with one plan completed and ten in progress, is mainly due to following interaction between several factors at the VP level:

1. The lack of balance fund collection. The condition of 1/7 VP contribution is not fully understood and accepted as a condition to be met prior to construction work. The VPP's and other leaders prefer to see some physical action before they pay the total balance amount.
2. The unacceptable Project condition of disconnection of private household connections. This condition is generally completely unacceptable to a majority of villagers.
3. The lack of willingness from elders and other informal leaders. The influence of elders and informal leaders in the VP decision-making process is not fully recognized and considered in Project activities such as village meetings and PLA exercises.
4. The non-affordability of marginalized, poor male and female villagers in respect of other basic needs such as food.

VI. IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS:

In order to ensure Project implementation in line with the approach and strategies, it is necessary to apply a more flexible praxis at the respective levels. Thus, room for manoeuvre should be created and allowed for the various stakeholder groups at village level and for the Project staff from field level to PMG level.

At Project level, the human resources could be more efficiently utilized through decentralization of rigid structures of command and appropriate use of available technical skills.

At VP level, the Project demand-driven approach with decentralisation of decision-making and creation of VP ownership implies that the Project conditions should be negotiable.

It is essential that the VP's are involved in establishing the conditions in practical terms such as these related to private household connections and employment of contractors. Likewise with balance payment. Resource poor users should be exempted from payment in accordance with both Danida- and OECD/DAC policy guidelines on user-payment. The Project management should also show trust and confidence in the VP's by allowing physical construction work to be initiated before the full balance payment is deposited. The trust and confidence should be equally visible from both the VP's and the Project.

It is suggested that the 1/7 community contribution is paid and deposited in phases as follows:

Step 1:

Simultaneously with the Application the VPP agree to deposit 1/3 of the expected community contribution to the Village Water Plan.

The Assistant Engineer will, based on the Application, be able to indicate a rough cost estimate. After deposit of 1/3 of the expected community contribution, the following Project activities will take place:

- a. Gram Sabha meeting;
- b. Meetings with the various stakeholder groups, e.g. women, elders;
- c. PLA-exercises if relevant;
- d. Formation of Water Supply and Sanitation Committee and accounts training;
- e. Preparation of final cost estimate;
- f. Hydro-geological activities;
- g. Administrative and technical sanction;
- h. Tender notice and selection of contractor.

These activities will be based on lessons learnt and take between 3-6 months.

Step 2:

The second VP instalment, which should equal 2/3 of the community contribution of the final cost estimate should be deposited simultaneously with the tender notice.

After the deposit the following Project activities will take place:

- a. Physical construction work, e.g. drilling of boreholes, trench digging, various rejuvenation work;
- b. Formation of women user maintenance groups;
- c. Training of mechanics (hand pumps and power pumps);

These activities may take up to 6 months depending on the need for physical construction work.

Step 3:

The VPP deposit the balance, maximum 1/3 payment of the community contribution.

After the deposit the following Project activities will take place:

- a. Training of women user maintenance groups;
- b. Completion of physical construction work;
- c. Quality control of hardware - and software Project components;
- d. Handing-over.

These activities may take a couple of weeks.

The experience is that the participatory process from planning a Village Water Plan to handing-over a rejuvenated water scheme may take up to one year.

Secondly, the process of change from passive beneficiary to active participant is long and tedious and requires both time and sufficient resources. The time available to facilitate the PLA planning and training exercises is limited due to the continuous growing request for quantitative results measured in physical target achievements, i.e. completed Village Water Plans, Household Latrines and Institutional Latrines. This in spite of the adherence to the participatory approach.

At present only quantitative indicators are used for measuring Project progress, as the process of participation, change of attitudes and practices is completely ignored in Project monitoring and reporting. Seen in that perspective it seems relevant to question the purpose of following the PLA strategies so strictly when the situation with emphasis on physical implementation does not even allow the PLA activities to be performed in accordance with the minimum requirement of the PLA concept. Again there should be room for manoeuvre.

Since it is impossible to perform PLA activities in accordance with a minimum requirement of participation and sufficient time use, it is suggested that the PLA activities only are performed in VP's where extensive rejuvenation work is required. The purpose of this is to ensure participation of various stakeholder groups and allow the limited time and human resources available to be used in a more efficient way.

Thirdly, sustainability of the water supply facilities can only be measured after Project termination. Sustainability requires capacity building, which includes technical-, organisational- and financial capacitation at the VP level. Capacitation must reach all relevant target groups, e.g. Mechanics, Women VPP's, Water and Sanitation Committee Members, Women User Maintenance Groups. This process is slow and in the case of organisational capacity building requires an empowerment process from confidence-building to informed decision-making in VP management of water supply facilities, as most of the male and female villagers involved are inexperienced with their roles, duties and rights with respect to popular participation in VP decision-making.

It is suggested that the District Teams in their efforts to motivate and mobilize strategic target groups in the VP's for Project planning activities initially concentrate on identifying and facilitate resolution of actual and potential conflicts amongst stakeholder groups. Experiences from Project implementation reveals that the informal leaders, e.g. elders are key target groups in conflict resolution and often holds the actual decision-making authority when it comes to raising funds for Project activities. Therefore, consultation with elders is essential for Project success.

In addition, it is also experienced that women villagers, - since access to water is a women specific issue, - are a facilitating force in creating willingness to participate in the Project. Their willingness should however, not be confused with the fact that they are constrained when it comes to access to and control over financial resources. As an already overburdened stakeholder group women villagers should not be targetted for unnecessary demanding Project activities they may have difficulties in fulfilling, e.g. raising funds from male villagers.

Fourthly, it is observed that internal Project constraints create distortion in:

- Communication of Project messages, e.g. conditions for Project support.
- Project decision-making which is centralised.

- Construction work, e.g. confusion with respect to design criteria.

Finally, it is suggested that the Review Mission, besides collecting primary and secondary data from Project files, makes an effort to consult with all the respective stakeholder groups in order to get accurate and adequate information on Project implementation.