

Section 3c

Consensus Building

Who should read this

- Senior local officials at town/city level, including: programme directors; programme component managers who are responsible for developing and implementing action plans for improving services for the poor in towns and cities.
- Senior technical support staff on attachment to the programme including NGOs and local/international consultants.
- Managers of other concerned line departments and their staff.

Objectives of this section

To describe why we need to bring key people (stakeholders) together to achieve a consensus on Local Action Plans and Action Plans for Networked Services, to propose what needs to be done and suggest possible ways of going about it in order to agree a way forward which leads to implementation of service improvements in poor areas.

What this section tells you

Arguably the most crucial issue in action planning is the need to bring people together to **negotiate the way forwards** and agree what is possible in the local context. The outcome is an agreed allocation of resources to implement particular aspects of the action plans.

Consensus building between user groups, local politicians and municipal and line agency officials has frequently been missing from technically driven planning processes in the past.

The following **activities** are amongst those requiring consensus:

- review current institutional priorities of service providers;

- review Area Network Service Plans;
- review the Co-ordinated Network Service Plan for the town/city;
- identify possible sources for capital financing;
- identify possible sources for financing improvements to O&M;
- agree criteria for prioritising proposals;
- prioritise the proposals using agreed criteria;
- review strategy for implementation;
- review detailed workplans: new capital works;
- review detailed workplans: service improvements through O&M; and
- evaluate the impact of these decisions on the Local Action Plans.

Consensus building for achieving **improved O&M** is a central issue.

The greatest challenge is to develop mechanisms for consensus building which ensure that **stakeholders meet on an equal basis**.

There are many potential **problems and pitfalls** to be overcome:

- vested/delegated authority of committees and forums;
- need for strong positive leadership to bring together those who previously had no reason to meet;
- incentives to participate: stakeholders need to see that this will make a real difference;
- information sharing between professional and non-professional groups;
- dispute resolution; and
- increasing public awareness is an important wider role for consensus building.

Possible **mechanisms for consensus building** include Ward Committees, a Municipal Committee and forums open to the public at the Ward and Town levels.

Consensus building and the local context

We have stated previously that these action planning guidelines are most appropriate in a local context where:

- there is a commitment within municipal government to improve services for the poor which has higher level policy support from state/central government; and
- this policy supports a more decentralised approach to planning which accepts the importance of involving users in the process.

The extent to which these conditions exist is highly variable, yet without these ‘policy drivers’ it is very unlikely that the potential benefits from improved planning of services will be realised. There exist many situations in which a lot of preparatory work including local workshops will be required in order to convince local officials firstly of the importance of involving users in local planning and secondly in developing a more integrated approach to city wide planning. This is beyond the scope of this manual and we make reference to other work which deals with these issues. This section assumes that there is a higher level commitment to these overall aims and it focuses on looking for possible mechanisms which are workable given this policy support.

Consensus building: why we need to bring key people together

Sections 3a and 3b provided guidelines for developing:

- Local Action Plans for improvements to neighbourhood services; and
- Area Network Service Plans for improvements to the wider town/city level networked services which are required in order to support the Local Action Plans.

Again, we emphasise that planning involves more than a set of technically based activities; the success of any planning process is judged by evaluating what is actually done on the ground as a result of the planning. Having developed the above Action Plans, we now have to negotiate and agree what is possible with all of the concerned people (‘stakeholders’). We use the term ‘consensus building’ to describe this process.

Consensus building has often been missing from technically-driven planning approaches in the past. The reason for bringing stakeholders together is that the Local Action Plans and the Area Network Service Plans are very closely linked. Wherever there are networked services, the success of the Local Plans depends upon which parts of the town/city level Network Service Plans are actually implemented. This applies to both construction of new works and improved operation and maintenance of existing infrastructure. To recap, networked services include:

- piped water supply;
- drainage;
- solid waste collection;

- power supply; and
- sewerage sanitation.

Non-networked services at the neighbourhood and household level can be developed independently of municipal services through local action alone; these include:

- wells and handpumps;
- unsewered sanitation;
- local drainage to soakpits or ponds; and
- solid waste disposal in pits.

In practice it is rarely possible to deliver all of the required improvements to networked services at the town/city level to satisfy the demands expressed through the local plans. The costs of improving the primary and secondary infrastructure networks can be high and will benefit all of the citizens of the area, not just the urban poor.

Section 3b describes how plans are prepared for networked services at the Municipal Ward level. These are then co-ordinated to identify actions needed to improve the primary infrastructure networks for the town as a whole. Therefore, there is a need for consensus building at two levels:

- the Ward level, to prepare the Area Network Service Plans and agree which works will have priority; and
- the town/city level, where the specialist line agencies and municipal departments responsible for specific services prioritize which works to undertake in order to improve primary networks.

A mechanism is needed within which these negotiations can take place, involving: the various Municipal Departments; specialist line agencies; Councillors and other local politicians; representatives of service user groups and other key target groups. The outcome of the negotiations needs to be an agreement on allocation of resources, which will in turn affect what can be done in the Local Action Plans. This then requires both service providers and service users to modify their plans accordingly or explore other options. It is important to realise that the scope for upgrading bulk supply capacity may turn out to be very limited; this will limit options and choices for the Local Action Plans. Not everybody can or will be satisfied and compromises have to be made in order to move ahead.

What needs to be done

The consensus building process has two important components:

- information sharing between the various stakeholders; and
- advising the individuals and/or committees which have decision making authority.

Table 3c.1 proposes activities which need to be carried out as part of the consensus building process in order to arrive at a shared view amongst the various stakeholders about the best way forward for implementing Action Plans.

| Table 3c.1. Activities requiring consensus | |
|--|--|
| Activity | Brief description |
| Review current institutional priorities of service providers | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ establish the priority currently assigned by the concerned Departments and line agencies to particular network improvements including O&M■ review their workplans for the coming years |
| Review Area Network Service Plans | <p>These define the secondary infrastructure network needs including O&M at the Ward level for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ water distribution■ power distribution■ storm water collection■ solid waste collection and transfer■ sewerage |
| Review the Co-ordinated Network Service Plan for the town/city | <p>This defines primary infrastructure network needs including O&M across the town as a whole looking at the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ bulk water supply and distribution to zones of the town■ bulk power supply and distribution to zones of the town■ main stormwater drainage■ main sewerage and treatment■ haulage and disposal of solid waste |

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Table 3c.1. (continued)

| Activity | Brief description |
|---|---|
| Identify possible sources for capital financing | <p>Based on the estimated cost of the works, identify different sources of financing for capital works; for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ existing budgets for capital works programmes ■ funds assigned to local, regional and national politicians for service improvements ■ special programme funds available at the state or national level including infrastructure funds and banks ■ donor funding through bilateral aid and/or international lending banks ■ private sector lending agencies |
| Identify possible sources for financing improvements to O&M | <p>Based on the estimated costs and staff requirements, identify different sources of financing; for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ increase efficiency of revenue collection through billing more service users and collecting more of the bills already issued ■ potential to increase revenue for service delivery through increased property tax, cesses, service charges, betterment levies, and other means prescribed by local Statutes and Government Orders ■ more effective and efficient deployment of agency staff ■ potential role of the Mayor or other senior municipal officials in rationalising the distribution of local funds to optimise improvements |
| Agree criteria for prioritising proposals | <p>These depend on the specific objectives of the upgrading programme and need to be established locally. The following are examples: for each particular proposed service improvement investigate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ how many of the target group of primary stakeholders stand to benefit ■ relative priority assigned by service users to improvements in a particular service sector ■ the cost per beneficiary ■ availability of and cost of finance ■ ease of undertaking works, e.g. problems of land ownership and acquisition ■ the probability of funds being available and the flexibility which agencies have to reallocate future finance |

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Table 3c.1. (continued)

| Activity | Brief description |
|--|--|
| Prioritise the proposals using agreed criteria | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ use these criteria to establish the priority list for the proposals ■ compare this with the current investment and service improvement priorities of the departments and agencies ■ negotiate changes to some of these current priorities in view of the priority list for works ■ the extent to which this can be done may be constrained by proposed sources of finance and the flexibility to reallocate planned funding for capital investment works ■ there is likely to be much more flexibility for service improvements which can be achieved through better O&M |
| Review strategy for implementation | <p>Identify for both new capital works and improvements to O&M:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ what can be done in the immediate future ■ what is medium term and what requirements need to be met in order to move ahead ■ what is long term because it is expensive/difficult and what requirements need to be met in order to move ahead |
| Review detailed workplans: new capital works | <p>Request the concerned departments and agencies to prepare detailed workplans for schemes including time schedules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ technical survey and planning ■ drawing up detailed proposals ■ preparation of contract packages ■ letting of contracts or assignment of direct labour force ■ completion of contract |

Table 3c.1. (continued)

| Activity | Brief description |
|--|---|
| Review detailed workplans: service improvements through O&M | <p>Request the concerned departments and agencies to prepare detailed workplans for the schemes including time schedules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ changes and improvements to supply hours for water and power ■ technical survey and planning for major tasks ■ drawing up detailed proposals for major tasks ■ re-assignment of direct labour for routine work ■ use of external contractors ■ ensure plans link to the agreed roles and responsibilities at the tertiary level as defined in the local Memorandums of Understanding |
| Evaluate the impact of these decisions on the Local Action Plans | <p>The decisions on priorities have important 'knock-on' effects on the networked service components of Local Action Plans.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ use the priority list of proposals to identify which Local Action Plans are adversely affected by the priorities ■ review with the local user groups how their Local Action Plans can be modified in this light ■ agree modifications to Local Action Plans |

How to do it: potential problems to be addressed

We now need to consider what possible mechanisms could be used to help achieve consensus. The basic aim in developing mechanisms is to ensure that all the stakeholders from service providers, local politicians and service user groups **meet on an equal basis**. This will always be the major constraint given that different groups are not of equal status in one another's eyes.

It is not possible to give detailed guidelines because the local institutional and political context determines what is workable. However, it is useful to identify the sorts of problems which are almost certain to arise. We can then try to make sure that these issues are taken into consideration in the actual mechanisms which are developed for consensus building in a particular place.

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We do assume that the most likely mechanism will be based on some form of local committees and forums which will have representation from all stakeholders. This will include: the concerned Municipal Departments; specialist line agencies; Councillors and other local politicians; representatives of service user groups and other key target groups.

Table 3c.2. Potential problems faced by mechanisms for consensus building

| Problem to be addressed | Description |
|----------------------------|--|
| Vested/delegated authority | <p>The Terms of Reference for a committee or forum for consensus building have to establish the authority which that group has to take decisions. The first exercise in consensus building may therefore be to obtain the consent of all parties that they will abide by the collective decision of the group. There are several approaches.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Authority is vested in the committee through the issuance of a Government Order; this implies high level support from regional or national government which is a pre-requisite if major changes to current operating procedures are envisaged. ■ The members of the committee voluntarily agree to accept the findings and rulings of the committee without recourse to enforcement. This means that the departments and line agencies agree to reflect the consensus decision in drawing up workplans and using their powers of administrative and technical sanction. This attitude is highly desirable even if the committee is supported by Government Order. ■ Delegation of financial powers; some governments, e.g. the State Government of Kerala in India, have opted for a truly decentralised approach which delegates financial authority to the local committee structure. |
| Leadership | <p>Any activity which requires groups and agencies to be brought together, when they previously had no reason to talk to one another, requires strong, positive leadership. This individual needs to have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ sufficient authority within the town and within departments and agencies ■ respect of the various stakeholder groups involved ■ a commitment to progress, which may involve 'banging heads together' |

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Table 3c.2. (continued)

| Problem to be addressed | Description |
|---------------------------|--|
| Incentives to participate | <p>It is important to demonstrate that there will be tangible benefits to town services as a whole if departments and agencies are expected to alter their priorities and plans.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ this needs high level agreement of both officials and councillors/local politicians who are also in a position to advocate the approach; otherwise nobody will listen ■ this is closely related to the leadership issue and the extent to which the approach is backed either by Government Order or through voluntary agreement ■ delegation of financial powers provides a compulsive incentive |
| Information sharing | <p>A lot of information is required in order for members of committees, forums etc to make informed decisions on priorities; for example, everyone needs access to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ details of the proposals contained in the plans ■ Agency and Departmental workplans and investment proposals for the coming years ■ current priorities assigned by the concerned Departments and line agencies to particular network improvements through new works and improved O&M ■ most of this information is or should be in the public domain and there has to be a willingness to share it, particularly with representatives of user groups |
| Dispute resolution | <p>Disputes arise when priorities are being discussed and defined and there need to be mechanisms for resolving these disputes. The spirit in which the committee or forum operates is critical; key issues include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ members from the different interest groups of service providers and service users have an equal voice; the main difficulty from past experience is that the views of the users are likely to be ignored ■ the possibility of appealing to a higher authority for arbitration on certain decisions; given the overall objective of consensus building, ideally this should be done informally by agreement rather than having to resort to statutory powers |

Table 3c.2. continued

| Problem to be addressed | Description |
|----------------------------|---|
| Increased public awareness | Increasing general awareness and interest in service planning is an important wider role for consensus building. Public service agencies rarely make known to the general public what are the roles and responsibilities of different departments and organisations; the public tend to view 'the government' in general as being responsible for services. <i>Citizens guides</i> to particular services have been successfully used to create awareness of programmes and could be used to promote the positive things (for example, the Network Service Plans) which the town is doing on behalf of its residents. |

How to do it: some examples

It is not possible to prescribe guaranteed ways or mechanisms for the process of consensus building. The following suggestions are based around the need to develop consensus at both the Ward and Municipal levels. The example described suggests:

- committees which have representation of the various stakeholder groups; and
- forums which are open to the general public; this could split down into a number of discussion groups around specific issues.

These link the different levels of planning: Local Action Plans are developed in a participatory way at the neighbourhood level: these then feed into the Ward level Area Network Services Plans; these in turn are coordinated at the municipal level.

There is experience of this approach in a number of places: in particular the state of Kerala in South India has pioneered a highly decentralised approach known as the Peoples' Planning Campaign from which many other states and governments could learn useful lessons. City forums facilitated by local NGOs have also been used in Karachi as a means of engendering more widespread ownership of important ideas related to city services.

The crucial point in any structure for consensus building is where the final authority for decision making actually lies, either with the committee, or the forum or with officials in line departments. This, and the actual roles and responsibilities, have to be worked out locally in the context of municipal, regional and national government policy and support.

Table 3c.3. Some suggestions for local structures

| Structure | Possible Activities | Participation |
|-----------------|--|---|
| Ward Committees | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ review the Area Network Service Plans ■ identify finance for improvements to O&M of local services ■ discussion of draft criteria for prioritising proposals in Area Network Service Plans ■ ensure that different local sources of finance are used in an optimum way to avoid piecemeal improvements i.e. ensure convergence of different sources of finance ■ review strategy for implementation of Area Network Service Plans ■ review workplans for new works and improved O&M ■ evaluate the likely impact of decisions on individual Local Action Plans and feedback the outcome to local user groups ■ negotiate Memorandum of Understanding for local Operation and Maintenance for each Local Action Plan (See Section 6) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ representatives of the neighbourhoods including all those areas having Local Action Plans ■ locally elected leaders, Councillors and politicians ■ officials from municipal departments and line agencies ■ representatives of particular target groups e.g. women, poor, castes/tribes/religions ■ representatives of other interest groups including the private sector |

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Table 3c.3. continued

| Structure | Possible Activities | Participation |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Municipal Committee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ review the co-ordinated plans for networked services at the town/city level ■ identify finance for new capital works ■ the Mayor may also have an important role in relation to councillor-based budgets, in that money needs to be brought back to the municipal centre in order to deal with 'lumpy' investments which benefit the city as a whole ■ identify finance for improvements to O&M of local services ■ discussion of draft criteria for prioritising proposals for networked services at the town/city level ■ review current institutional priorities of service providers ■ review strategy for implementation of Municipal Action Plan ■ review workplans for new works and improved O&M ■ evaluate the likely impact of decisions on Area Service Plans for each Ward | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ representatives chosen from the Ward Committees to include participants from the different groups. ■ senior officials from each municipal department ■ senior officials from both the Planning and Capital Works sections of line agencies ■ senior officials from the O&M section of line agencies |

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Table 3c.3. continued

| Structure | Possible Activities | Participation |
|------------|---|--|
| Ward Forum | <p>Forum for presentation discussion and feedback to the Ward Committee of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Area Network Service Plans ■ criteria for prioritising proposals for Area Network Service Plans ■ impact of priorities for Area Network Service Plans on Local Action Plans ■ implementation strategy ■ input to development of information such as 'citizens guides' to services operating from the Ward Offices ■ accountability of officials and politicians | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ open meeting for the general public ■ Ward Committee members |
| Town Forum | <p>Forum for presentation discussion and feedback to the Municipal Committee of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ co-ordinated plans for networked services at the town/city level ■ criteria for prioritising proposals for co-ordinated plans for networked services at the town/city level ■ impact of priorities for co-ordinated plans for networked services at the town/city level on Area Service Plans ■ implementation strategy ■ input to development of information such as 'citizens guides' to central municipal services ■ accountability of officials and politicians | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ open meeting for the general public ■ Municipal Committee members |

What if all this does not work?

We have to face the possibility, even the likelihood, that this complicated interlocking of local and municipal level planning will not work effectively. This will clearly have a major impact on the delivery of networked services and the extent to which the local improvements in the Local Action Plans can be implemented. We are then looking at local non-networked solutions which are by their nature limited in overall impact.

There are many successful examples of local initiatives; this is not in dispute. However, without bringing in the links with the wider infrastructure networks, many of the opportunities which are generated by peoples' action at the neighbourhood level will be lost.

See Tool 3 *The role of NGOs* for further information on the potential for and limitations of concerted local action.

