29th WEDC International Conference Abuja, Nigeria, 2003

TOWARDS THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Post project strategy for sustainability of RWSS

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THIRD WATER SUPPLY and Sanitation (Sector) Project (TWSSP) assisted by ADB and NORAD is aiming at providing safe drinking water and sanitation facilities for one million of rural population in Sri Lanka. TWSSP is focusing its implementation activities on several important factors such as technical soundness and appropriateness of the technology, existence of strong Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and reliable backup support system. In order to make sure that these aspects are addressed, project activities are being carried out in par with the national policy for rural water supply and sanitation sector. The underlying principles of the rural policy highlights the importance of the sustainability of the facilities provided along with the value of water, hygiene education and environmental considerations. This paper discusses the innovative post project strategies adopted to ensure the sustainability of the facilities provided through establishing strong CBOs and backup systems.

Post project strategies

Development of CBOs

Formation of the CBOs within the beneficiary groups at the initial stage of the sub project cycle to give the opportunity for the community to involve in decision making throughout the process is mandatory in project implementation. It has been considered that the capacity building of CBOs in all aspects of the project implementation and management was very important as they play the most important role of stakeholder in the process. The Project enhanced the capacity of the CBO to perform their tasks effectively during the implementation, and more importantly, their capacity in managing the completed facilities. Weak groups of communities who were rather living in dependency syndrome had transformed in to active, independent organization with a high motivation as a result of the extensive training and capacity building arranged through a special package.

Training

In addition to the basic training required to create awareness to involve actively in the implementation tasks, due considerations were given to develop skills and attitudes of the community towards the sustainability of the systems to be developed along with them. As a result of this valuable training they are now able not only to manage facilities by themselves for the internal benefit but also to create a strong voice and stand against the external forces and threats such as political interests and government bureaucratic. There had been certain instances where the local political authorities tried to influence the beneficiaries to hand over the facilities completed for the maintenance either to National Institutions or to local authorities which were badly turned down by the CBOs.

Coordination set-up

A proper background was set to get all the stakeholders involved for the implementation of the each sub project by forming several coordination committees at various levels who will meet at predetermined intervals to discuss the issues related. Issues which could not be solved at lower level were to refer to the higher level committees. In addition to the National Steering Committee, two coordination committees were formed at Provincial and Divisional levels where all the key government sector institutions who are supposed to be involved in important decision making on sub projects within their authority areas. In this way, they were kept aware of the project policies and to which extent their involvement is anticipated during planning, design, construction and operation stages. Although these committees were originally formed to address the issues related to the implementation, all the members now have voluntarily agreed to continue the meetings to assist the CBOs in their post project activities thereby assuring the support of the sector agencies for the sustainability of the facilities commissioned. In addition to the above it was arranged to sign a tri-party Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) by CBO, Local Authority (Pradeshiya Sbha) and the National Water Supply and Drainage Board(NWSDB). In this memorandum, the responsibility of each party and the coordination mechanism to obtain post project assistance are clearly defined. This MoU is in place in all the sub projects commissioned under the Project. In order to carry out the tasks agreed under MoU, small units have already been established at Pradeshiya Sabhas and District Offices of the NWSDB and linked with CBOs. Some of the Pradeshiya Sabhas have further agreed that they will provide all the necessary assistance if needed, to reform a new CBO or take over the facilities for operations with the consent of the beneficiary community in case the existing CBO becomes a dead organization.

Legal recognition of CBOs

As the rural water policy stipulates that the community should be encouraged to bear the full responsibility of the sustainable operation and maintenance of the facilities, it

was mandatory that the CBOs be vested with adequate authority to manage the facilities built. It has been recognized that the best way of achieving this is through the formulation and adaptation of By-Laws by the local Pradeshiya Sabhas so that some of the powers are vested to the CBOs. This legal recognition will facilitate CBOs to operate even out side their initial project boundaries in case of a subsequent augmentation to serve the adjoining areas. With this legal status, they will also be in a position to file a case and take legal action against a party who has caused damages to their facilities or discontinue the services who violate the conditions stipulated in the constitution.

Promotion of cross-subsidies

Communities were encouraged in building up their image and self confidence so that they organized themselves to address their very poor neighbors who were unable to make their cash contribution required in the implementation. They were given a concession while the rich section of the community came forward to compensate the deficit. This type of cross subsidies helped the project to move ahead within the policies established. In some occasions, just like in any other project there had been community sections who did not actively participate in the process due to lack of understanding or having conventional wrong attitudes towards new concepts. Instead of eliminating such sections completely CBOs were prepared to address them during the post project phase subject to a form of compensation or fine. These passive parties had to pay the CBO a sum equivalent to the total contributions made by the others plus a fixed sum as a fine if they want the service from the facilities. If the party concerned was from a low-income group they were allowed to pay the compensation in installments. None of the external pressures however powerful could arrange a concession in this respect.

Appropriate tariff setting

A special assistance was arranged by the Project when the tariff settings are finalized through a Community Action Plan for O&M of the system. The community was made to understand that the revenue shall not only cover the formal operation costs but also some additional charges in a form of a profit to meet the future replacement costs and breakdowns. It was noted that most of the tariff settings consist of a fixed sum plus a charge depending on the water consumption. The fixed sum will cover the future replacement costs and investments needed for system breakdowns. Most of the tariff settings are found to be higher than those of local authorities and in par with the national tariff implemented by the National Water Supply and Drainage Board. Almost all the CBOs who are running pumping systems are already found to be having excess revenue in their accounts as they are the most vulnerable to unexpected breakdowns. However, the implementation of tariff systems on gravity systems are found to be comparatively weak. Unlike in pumping systems where a firm commitment is required to pay their monthly electricity bill, the gravity systems has only an internal commitment for personal salaries. The main reason for poor efforts on revenue collection in gravity systems is believed to be this fact.

Social fund

Although the communities are expected to generate revenue to manage their facilities, the revenue collection especially during the initial few years are inadequate to meet major replacement costs and disaster management. In such occasions it has been the practice to seek the financial assistance of national institutions or the local government which are very often not properly responded due to lack of funds. Therefore it has been suggested to established an independent "Social Fund" jointly managed by an independent Board with representatives from key institutions and CBO forum and, exclusively reserved to provide financial assistance through a soft loan system. This proposal has been principally accepted by the project and proposals on it are progressing.

Forum to strengthen the institutional capacity of CBOs

CBOs can not function in isolation due to internal and external issues in management systems. It is a well known fact that a team will perform better than an individual. The project initiated to organize CBO Forum by affiliation all CBOs who benefit from any water supply system at various levels. It is expected that this will enhance skills of CBOs through sharing of experiences, expertise and resources among the forum members. When they are linked together, they are able to help each other in crisis situations without depending on the external supports. These Apexes were formed at various administrative levels such as at Pradeshiya Sabha (Divisional level), Provincial and National levels. It is expected that these forums will play a main role for the interests of rural population in sector development activities and influence the future policy development activities. As an initiative, few CBOs have been invited to send representatives to be a member of the National Steering Committee where very important policy decisions are taken in respect of the on-going project activities. Their active participation in decision making is found to be encouraging.

Provision of tools and equipment

During the initial stages of the project most if not all the inputs were on voluntary basis. Even the infrastructure such as office space, furniture, tools etc were to be found within the community as the project did not provide any assistance on this purposely, as a strategy to measure the need and motivation of the community. However it was very well understood by the project that this would not happen forever. Therefore, assistance was arranged to provide necessary O&M tools and to construct a reasonable office together with essential furniture at the end of the sub project. Some of the CBOs have constructed reasonably good office and stores with some additional contributions

or the savings they found while executing minor contracts. As a policy all the contracts which were not complicated were entrusted to the respective CBOs through a negotiation process. By doing this it was expected to keep the interest of the beneficiary communities for their compulsory and active involvement throughout the construction. Although unwanted profit making was prevented by using standard rates prepared by a special rate committee within the project some of the CBOs were able to earn marginal profits by negotiating cost of services or supplies obtained locally. The profit earned was in certain cases invested back on the post project activities such as buying additional tools and office equipment whereas some CBO.s preferred to keep this savings in their accounts to be utilized in case of an emergency during the operation stage.

Diversification of the CBO activities

Many of the CBOs have diversified their activities in order to establish the stability of the CBO and to perform as an effective village level institution beyond their original scope. They have initiated income generation activities, production centers and service centers etc. For example one of the CBO has paralelly started producing cement masonry blocks on commercial basis with the technical skills acquired during the implementation of the project. Another has started a barber saloon which earns a considerable income for the CBO. By showing this business venture they had been able to obtain loans from local banks on commercial terms to meet a part of the capital investment required for some improvements of their water supply system.

Employment within the Community

All the local managerial services required by CBO during the planning and construction stages were obtained through voluntary basis. Once the system was put in to systematic operations and started collecting revenue, CBOs were encouraged to do away with these voluntary services and pay for the services obtained instead. Some of the skillful and efficient personal earmarked during the implementation were given a chance to be employed in system operations by the CBOs. Employees having a background knowledge on the history and the technology used in the system would definitely perform better than somebody completely from outside. In most of the occasions this had initiated a permanent link between such local people with proven skills and CBO. Otherwise they were to leave the system on completion of their short term inputs as they were unable to provide their services on voluntary basis for a prolonged period. Additional training also were arranged for those who were retained in order for them to perform multidisciplinary tasks to increase the efficiency of the management system. Project also looked in to arranging possible services for which in-house capabilities are inadequate, from the outside experts by inviting them to be registered with CBOs to provide services at a cost when required by the beneficiary communities. These strategies have helped to increase the productivity of the management with minimum number of employees.

Hygiene and health education

A parallel programme was launched in hygiene and environmental education in order to create an awareness on adapting good hygiene practices and environmental conservation during the project implementation. This programme has helped in promoting good hygiene practices in using the facilities while encouraging the community to preserve the immediate surrounding in order to ensure long term sustainability of the water sources in respect of the quality and quantity. One community had been so innovative to provide a live fence around the immediate catchment of their water source which was an irrigation tank, to prevent their own cattle entering the premises while another new small storage tank was built at a downstream location to fulfill the drinking water requirement of the cattle.

Conclusions

Many innovative ideas and thoughts on post project sustainability of community water supply systems developed under the TWSSP were found to be very practicable and appropriate according to the experience gained during the implementation of the phase one. *Developing workable systems to address such ideas and thoughts are found to be the secret of success in the implementation.* It is recommended to carry out a detailed evaluation on the success of the systems developed to address the sustainability issues of the subprojects after few years when all the external driving forces are withdrawn after the formal closure of the TWSSP.

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