Participation in the Water and Sanitation Sector

The participation of users—in designing and implementing projects and managing water and sanitation (W&S) services—is now being built into Bank-funded projects with the aim of increasing efficiency, equity and cost recovery and facilitating the extension of service coverage to poor communities. Success depends on establishing the necessary institutional arrangements for participation and project delivery. In addition, task managers (TMs) have to spend more time in the field, and adapt Bank procedures to support appropriate models for financing and procurement.

Challenges for the Sector

Prior to the last decade, the business practices of water and sanitation utilities hardly ever involved consumers in decision making or management. More recently, with concern that agencies are still failing to reach more than a billion of the poorest in developing countries, moving people center stage in W&S projects has become an important theme.

Despite massive investments between 1980 and 1990—the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade—the needs of the rural and urban poor are still largely unmet by formal public services while, in many areas, private vendors charge 10 to 1,000 times the official tariff rates. Pervasive inefficiency on the part of overstaffed agencies providing subsidized urban services has resulted in financially unsustainable services that benefit only a small portion of the population.

At the same time, competing user needs have not been well balanced and many water resource interventions—large dams and irrigation projects in particular—have misallocated water resources, and caused social and environmental disruption.

To increase responsiveness to user needs, improve cost recovery and service management, and to incorporate financial, environmental and social concerns into project design and management, services should be based on demand.

The Role of Participation

Participation plays a central role in meeting these challenges. An example from Kenya (Box 1) shows how involving users in the design and management of W&S services provides a means of revealing demand, and of ensuring that services match what people want, are willing to pay for and will strive to maintain. The rationale for user participation is summarized as follows:

- user participation makes services and service providers more responsive and accountable to beneficiaries;
- cost recovery and the sustainability of services improves when technology choices and services correspond with what users want and are willing to pay for; and
- management of services is more effective when institutional arrangements are tailored to local practices.

Demand based approaches can also help resolve conflicts over water resource allocation between competing sectoral uses. Increased participation by primary stakeholders—whether

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Community Mobilization for Sanitation in Kenya

The village of Mairia is an informal settlement within the boundaries of Nyahururu town in Kenya, where DANIDA executed a Sewerage House Connection project between 1988 and 1991. In the first year of the project, a trunk sewer and a few lateral sewers were constructed, without any participation by the residents. The consequences were predictable: villagers did not understand the project motives and resisted collaborating with project teams when the plans indicated that the layout of some plots would be altered to make room for roads, storm drains and toilet units. Villager apprehensions were based on a valid concern that engineers' plans would result in large-scale alterations to existing houses and structures.

A DANIDA review mission in 1989 recommended that, before any further investments were made, the physical plan be revised with community participation. A site committee was formed, involving residents in the process of determining what the project components would be. Extension workers with government ministries, and staff from a leading Kenyan NGO, were selected as facilitators. The results were striking. Communities began mobilizing labor and materials for construction, and also began participating in the operation and maintenance of constructed facilities.

By the time the project came to an end, the community groups, with support from the NGO, had charted a completely different course for the project and were able to engage the Municipal Council in a productive dialogue on where and when other infrastructural facilities—such as roads, a police station and a post office—should be located within the village.

Working with Governments and Sector Agencies

Support from higher levels of government is essential to the success of demand driven projects. It was crucial, for example, in overcoming line agency resistance to plans for beneficiary participation through an autonomous fund for rural W&S projects in Nepal. Cultivating national level support for participation in W&S can be

Conditions for Success

Promoting the participation of water users is not equally appropriate and feasible in all W&S projects. It is better suited to the provision of feeder than trunk infrastructure. Adverse political and institutional conditions may make it very difficult to establish participatory processes. And in the poorest countries where capacity is very weak, the cost of expatriate facilitators to promote institutional intermediation may be very high.

The critical question is to understand what rules and institutional arrangements are useful in supporting stakeholder participation in the sector, and under what circumstances they are appropriate.

In a rural water project in a country in Asia, the central government did not provide adequate resources to the Department of Local Government which was the agency responsible for setting up rural water associations with community involvement. The Public Works Department, on the other hand, received its budget allocations on schedule and went ahead procuring well drilling projects. It is better suited to the provision of materials before communities had been consulted on what types of facilities they wanted and were willing to pay for. In response to political pressure from provincial politicians, the Public Works Department distributed budget allocations evenly over all the provinces, spreading project investments too thinly. The project was driven by drilling companies and politicians rather than, as envisaged in the project, by the community based Rural Water Associations. These pitfalls could probably have been avoided if community participation had been established before the hardware was procured.
tackled from two ends: by country economic and sector work, through which support is generated before projects are begun; or through individual participatory projects whose lessons change sectoral policies at the national level. Where consensus or political support at the national level is weak, it may be easier to begin by demonstrating the move from projects to policy work. Most of the demand driven projects reviewed in this paper, however, emerged from earlier sector work that laid the basis for, and created the interest in, trying this new approach.

Finding agencies capable of carrying out participatory projects may be difficult. Several strategies have been used in cases where the sector agency is not qualified or interested in involving primary stakeholders more actively: using multiple agencies in project implementation; cultivating reformers within the larger resistant agencies; bypassing the agency by creating a new agency or fund; and designing the project to include an expanded range of secondary stakeholders as partner organizations, to prevent capture of project benefits by water utility staff and contractors.

Each of these approaches has its own drawbacks (an example is described in Box 2) and, in all cases, the challenge remains to convince engineers trained in applying industrial country standards to consider alternative technologies, leave their drawing boards and consult with primary stakeholders. Investment in training staff in community participation by itself cannot remedy the situation unless career rewards are linked with success in implementing demand based projects. Lower level staff often have more accepting attitudes toward community involvement and are better equipped to interact with poor beneficiaries. And staff with experience from other agencies involved in extension work can adapt easily to play an intermediary role between consumers and W&S service providers; in a project in Brazil, for example (Box 3), responsibility for rural water has been placed with the public health agency, with good results.

In Bank funded projects where existing sector agencies have had few qualified community mobilization staff, specialists hired as project consultants have added up to ten percent to total investment costs. The best outcome—in terms of community participation, beneficiary satisfaction and per capita costs for water and sewage—resulted from having the detailed engineering design done jointly, under one bid, by consulting teams consisting of engineers and community participation specialists.

Designing Stakeholder Participation
Most projects set up community councils or water users associations through which beneficiaries can influence decisions concerning

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**Box 3**

**Learning about Participation Models**

The PROSANEAR project is being implemented in several states in Brazil. Each state water company has been free to incorporate participation, using its own procedures. In practical terms, what has emerged are models of participation that differ depending on how the water company and the project design consultants worked out the “rules of the game”.

In the *engineer-activist* model, the engineering consultant was also a dedicated social activist. The rules permitted beneficiaries to negotiate a wide range of topics with the state water company, such as levels of service, physical layouts, sequencing between water supply and sanitation investments, prices, billing, etc.

In the *participation specialist* model, professional community participation facilitators work jointly with design teams led by engineers. In one variant of the model, the water company decides on engineering design in advance, and allows communities to negotiate the organization of billing, assignment of operational responsibilities, and group contributions of labor. In the other variant, negotiations are restricted to assigning operation and maintenance responsibilities among the beneficiaries, user groups, and the water company.

In the *hygiene education* model, health educators focus on a more conventional set of interventions aimed at changing knowledge, attitudes and practices, rather than iteratively working out or negotiating any aspect of service provision. The assumption of this model is that there is no need to build any explicit negotiation mechanism into the choice of service level.

The extent of conflict has been greatest in the participation specialist model and nil in the hygiene education model. Per capita investment costs were highest in the hygiene education model. After project construction is completed, it will be possible to evaluate the effect of each of these models on service sustainability.
the type of service to be provided, play a role in project implementation, and channel their contributions of cash, labor and materials. Long term community participation in operation and maintenance of systems may also be sought, although this is more difficult and experience is still limited.

Project design must allow time to discover workable structures. Flexibility in community level project design allows institutional arrangements to be adjusted as needed to match what community members feel comfortable with. It also permits changes to be proposed by beneficiaries during the course of project implementation—in rules and procedures, in management structures, in the assignment of responsibilities between alternative organizations or firms, or in the type of service to be provided.

Demand driven projects allow beneficiary communities choice over the type and level of water and sanitation service they want, based on their needs, priorities and financial situations. To make informed decisions, they must receive sufficient information about options, their respective costs, and other implications. The range of service options may be limited by settlement density, resource availability, hydrological or geographic factors. Typical, however, a number of options exist and the key factor is motivating the engineering staff to be innovative in searching these out.

To limit the influence of local elites, effective beneficiary participation also requires accountable leaders who make decisions on the basis of transparent rules. In Paraguay, the combination of easily understood program rules and clear information about costs and benefits, has produced a very effective rural sanitation program for larger villages. The government’s sanitation agency offers the program to any community that can set up a committee and supply 15 percent of the investment costs. The community repays another 15 percent in cash or labor and materials at the time of implementation, and a further 30 percent over ten years, contributing to 60 percent cost recovery for capital costs. The community is expected to cover 100 percent of operational costs. The success of this program, in terms of cost recovery and the effectiveness of local organizations, owes much to the clear rules for entry and for division of responsibilities.

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**Box 4**

**Tips for Task Managers**

**Financing and Procurement**

Standard bulk procurement procedures are rarely appropriate for demand driven projects. Alternatives include: direct procurement by communities or agencies from prequalified, small construction firms and consulting engineers, using a schedule of standard materials and labor costs; multiple procurement procedures, depending on the size of the project; and geographic clustering of subprojects, to allow limited packaging of specific elements.

**Project Preparation**

Sector work can help clear the way for participatory projects. An essential part of preparation is the time spent by TMs in the field. Especially at this learning stage for the Bank and borrower countries, preparation and supervision of participatory water and sanitation projects require more financial resources and staff time than conventional projects.

**Supervision, Monitoring and Evaluation**

Monitoring, evaluation and fine tuning of project design becomes an iterative, consultative process, involving TMs, sectoral counterparts, project managers and beneficiaries. Personal field visits by TMs are essential. Staff time for supervision in participatory water and sanitation projects has varied from 20-45 weeks a year.

**Mobilizing Additional Resources**

TMs have mobilized extra funding for preparation from the Japanese Trust Fund, Japanese Grant Facility and Project Preparation Fund. Bilaterals, UNICEF, regional development banks, and local and international NGOs working in country have been useful sources of experience, information and innovative approaches.

**The Role of Consultants**

Almost all projects involve consultants promoting participation in some capacity. The key issue is how the community participation specialist and the engineering design specialist can be encouraged to coordinate their efforts. One solution is to invite bids proposing both together, forcing consultants to form consortia of engineers and social activists.