The demand for human resources by the community: the implications of a community participation approach

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INTRODUCTION

The greater emphasis on community participation in projects carried out in the Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (1981-1990) has definite implications for national planning procedures and for manpower needs and training. With the call for greater local involvement has come a demand for closer integration between water supply schemes, sanitation projects, health education, and primary health care. This integration is primarily to be achieved at the local level of the district office of the executive agency, and in the community itself.

While there are pressing national reasons for urging that communities take on greater financial and organizational responsibility for their development, there are also recognized benefits to the communities in the form of enhanced capacity for self-reliance, local initiative and management, closer accountability for revenues raised, and more reliable services.

The greatest demand for manpower and training is likely to be at the local level, but community participation cannot work without support from national agencies. Community participation really means a partnership arrangement between local, regional, and national levels in which some adjustment is required on all sides. One aspect of this adjustment on the part of national agencies is the need to design a national plan and support system which fully recognizes the needs and potential of community participation.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION?

Community participation is so frequently mentioned now in association with water supply and sanitation that it is in danger of becoming

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2 The terms "self-help," "self-reliance," and "popular participation" are also common and are closely related.
merely fashionable rather than centrally relevant to program planning. Community participation means different things to different people. It is clearly not an absolute value but a sliding scale of the extent to which things are being done for people by others or by people for themselves.

In its broadest sense, therefore, community participation means that people are making the decisions and taking the actions that directly affect their lives in the community. For some people and countries, community participation is an ideology or developmental goal. For others, it is a means to an end, or a tool for project planning and management.

In the Decade, community participation is being emphasized as a key process for implementing the greater numbers of projects implied by the Decade goals, and for evaluating whether or not projects are successful. Thus the idea is not only to get local people more involved in constructing and operating systems, but to allow them to judge whether the project fulfills their basic needs. In turn, this means that local people’s perceptions and priorities need to be taken into account at the earliest stages of project planning.

Furthermore, the Decade approach to drinking water supply and sanitation emphasizes that for national projects to be acceptable for external funding, some degree of community participation must be demonstrated in:

- planning programs and projects;
- implementing projects;
- sharing benefits; and
- evaluating projects.

There are several ways to measure the degree of community participation in a project. The first is to consider the phases of project development and to ask how much the community is involved in each phase. For example, in initial project allocation, will community-related criteria be used, such as community enthusiasm for the project, local need, or willingness to pay? Will the community share in the detailed project planning, such as choice of technology, level of service, or location of installations? In what ways will the community help in construction? Usually they provide unskilled labor and some local materials. What responsibilities will the community have for operation, maintenance, and local administration? And finally, what will they contribute to the financing of the project, both to the capital costs and the operating and maintenance costs?

Considering the project in this way allows the type and scale of community participation to be specified. There are other criteria which can
also be applied. One of the most common is to ask: who in the community participates? In the Decade, more emphasis is being put on expanding participation within and between communities. The aim is to reach the "poorest of the poor" whether that means individuals, communities, regions, or countries.

In some countries, experience has shown that by including other criteria such as "progressiveness" and "capacity to pay," or even proximity to a paved highway in project allocation, some communities clearly prosper at the expense of others. Within communities, there are also disadvantaged groups which are identified by their religion, ethnic origin, low social and economic status, age, or sex. How far community participation extends the benefits of projects to all these groups and communities is another important way to measure its success.

A third measure of community participation is to look at the range of options the community has at different levels. Is it offered only one level of service (or technology), or a range of alternatives, together with the information about their costs and benefits on which to base their decision? Are the community contributions to construction or the capital costs negotiable or fixed? Can the community arrive at its own water rate structure? Is the community only offered a water scheme, or can it set its own priorities among sector development projects such as a road, school, clinic, water scheme, and so forth?

There is, so far, no agreed way to measure the degree of community participation. The need remains, therefore, to describe, for each project or program, the type of community involvement, according to one or more of the frameworks discussed above:

- by project phase;
- by equality of access for individuals, groups, or communities; and
- by the range of options the community really has.

EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY POTENTIAL FOR PARTICIPATION

Some experienced project personnel say that when they enter a village, they can tell by the "feel" of the place whether a project is likely to be successful or not. The enthusiasm or apathy of the people and the level of their local organization and degree of consensus can be detected by a sensitive observer. While this may be true, national planning requires a more
structured and formal approach in order to determine the community potential for participation.

Community potential has two aspects: capacity to participate and willingness to participate. There should be some evidence of the community’s potential in both areas before projects are implemented.

In the capacity to participate area, among the most important criteria to be considered are the capacity to:

- make cash contributions;
- contribute labor, materials, transport;
- organize themselves;
- change their attitudes and behavior; and
- provide leaders, change agents, community level workers, and operators.

Each of these criteria can be expanded into a series of questions which need to be addressed through an investigation in the community itself. For example, an evaluation of the capacity to make cash contributions will require information about cash producing economic activities, household income and expenditure, and the seasonal nature of cash availability. The capacity for organization may be demonstrated by already existing committees and local associations, or it may need to be interpreted from social indicators such as the degree of cultural, ethnic, and religious homogeneity, and the presence of information social support networks (Table 1).

Even if the indications are that a community has the socioeconomic capacity to participate, it must also show that it is willing to do so. The project must therefore be seen as valuable by the people for whom it is intended. One of the reasons given for the failure of many projects throughout the world has been that the schemes were not perceived as useful or desirable by communities. This has been reflected in poor attendance at working party duty during construction, lack of use or even vandalism of installations, and failure to maintain systems in good working order.

Willingness to participate can be best evaluated on the basis of a demonstrated commitment to the project. This can take the form of:

- a formal written request from the community;
- a legal agreement to contribute cash, labor, materials, transport, land, etc.; and
- a formal acceptance of an agency invitation or positive response to a national survey.

Less formal commitment can be shown through intended willingness to participate as deduced from interviews and questionnaire surveys with
Table 1. Examples of information needs in evaluating community potential for participation

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<th>Capacity to pay cash</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Amount and reliability of cash income</td>
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<td>• Required and optional cash expenditures</td>
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<td>• Seasonality of income</td>
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<td>• Variability between households in income and expenditure</td>
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<td>• Credit availability within and beyond community</td>
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<tr>
<th>Capacity to contribute labor</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Health status and numbers of able people</td>
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<td>• Seasonal migrations</td>
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<td>• Other demands on labor (e.g., harvest time)</td>
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<td>• Religious ceremonies/social obligations</td>
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<td>• Effect of fasting on ability to work</td>
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<td>• Distance of work site from homes</td>
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<th>Capacity to organize themselves</th>
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<td>• Settlement pattern—nucleated or dispersed, permanent or nomadic</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Existing local organizations, committees, associations</td>
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<td>• How is their membership, leadership chosen</td>
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<td>• Responsibilities successfully carried out/failed at</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How far is whole community involved</td>
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<td>• Cultural homogeneity and social harmony</td>
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<td>• Traditional self-help and social support networks</td>
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<tr>
<th>Capacity to change attitudes and behavior</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Degree of education</td>
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<td>• Experience of other projects, educational campaigns</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Presence of suitable leaders, change agents</td>
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<td>• Positive initial response, especially from women</td>
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community members. These will reveal the areas where there is enthusiasm for or a negative reaction to the project.

The methods for evaluating capacity to participate require a community study, which may be more or less detailed as required. The community study should include:

• a basic household survey to measure health status, socioeconomic characteristics, and land ownership and water rights;
• a behavior and perception study to measure attitudes to the project, willingness to participate, and significant behavior in relation to the project objectives; and
• the identification of key individuals and groups to take a leading role in community participation.

The techniques employed in the community study will include informal interviewing, questionnaire survey, observation of behavior, and group
discussions. In some countries, such as Colombia and Malawi, larger
meetings of community members may be called as the community study
gets underway. These allow differing views to be brought out into the
open and discussed before they cause major conflicts, or before the project
is constructed.

Another basis for evaluating community potential for participation is to
look at their past history in all sector projects—both those which origi-
nated from external agencies and national governments and those from
locally developed initiatives. The projects can include school buildings,
agricultural cooperatives, road improvement, irrigation schemes, health
education, and so forth. Information on past experience of working with
the community can be sought within the community itself, and from
agency offices at regional, national, and international levels.

Ultimately, there is no good alternative to the individual study of each
community for assessing its potential. However, from the experience
 gained in many countries, there are some general indications of the kind
of projects in which communities are most likely to be willing to partici-
pate.

First, communities are generally more enthusiastic about water schemes
than about sanitation projects, especially about latrinization. Second, wa-
ter schemes which primarily improve water quality rather than the user’s
convenience are less valued by communities. Experience in Tunisia, for
example, showed that in a simple well protection scheme, more than half
the installations were deliberately broken because improved water quality
was less important to users than was convenience. It is interesting to note
that in the Colombian promotional literature for rural water schemes,
convenience, improved social status, increased property value, and peace
of mind for the mother of young children are all emphasized, in addition
to health benefits.

Many countries, including Thailand and Colombia, have found that
water schemes providing individual house connections are the most suc-
cessful for getting community participation. These provide maximum
convenience, status, and health benefits to the users. They also lead to
greater willingness to pay on the part of users and greater commitment to
keep the system in good working order on the part of the community.

Latrine schemes have often failed by simply not being used even when
built. They are not perceived as a big enough improvement over existing
practices or facilities to be desired by rural people in many countries. It
has therefore been argued that water-sealed toilets or water-sealed la-
trines are the minimal levels of service needed to gain community willing-
ness to participate. Without a perceived adequate level of service being offered, no amount of health education is likely to be successful.

NATIONAL PLANNING AND SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

A community participation approach has implications for sector programming which need to be considered in national planning. At the same time, decentralization and local flexibility are often key components in successful national strategies.

National planning for community participation requires, in the first place, discussions with all levels of the responsible agency to solicit their views, to assess their capacities and needs, and to make them aware of the overall organizational structure into which their responsibilities and authorities fit. Discussions may also be desirable with other sector agencies or government departments, particularly those which have a related mandate to the water and sanitation sector.

A successful community participation approach probably demands more, rather than less, from the national and regional offices of the supporting agencies, because they become more directly accountable to the users as well as to their head offices. There is a greater need for coordination between agencies and different levels of government in order to avoid bottlenecks and delays or unreliable service that cause frustration at the community level. One example is the need to streamline bureaucratic operations to reduce the time lag between receiving a request or cash deposit from a community and the allocation of a project or the commencement of construction. Similarly, once a project is operating, national planning must provide an efficient system for repairing breakdowns that are beyond the capacity of the community. This capability is a necessary corollary to expecting the users to pay for water.

A community participation approach cannot really be "added on" to a national plan; it needs to be an integral part of it. Consideration should be given at the highest policy levels to the relative responsibilities of the community and executing agency, to project allocation between communities, and to the legal status of the community-level organization in charge of the scheme. Experience has shown that these and other questions should not be ignored until the implementation phase, but should be anticipated and specified in national planning.  

One important aspect of national planning is to design a policy for forming community level organizations which can provide the mechanism for community participation. These may be in the form of elected committees, groups of elders, users' groups, farmers' associations, etc. The important criteria are that they represent a wide cross-section of users and are respected by the community, have the necessary organizational capacity, and can act for the community (or users) in legal contracts or other formal agreements.

National planning thus needs to be both comprehensive and detailed to make community participation work. It also needs to be realistic in matching program goals with expected support services and finances, or community participation will flag. In particular, sufficient funds should be allocated for operation and maintenance, since these costs are almost always underfinanced. A general financial implication of greater community involvement is that the budgetary chain, as well as the overall communication chain, is greatly increased. At the beginning stages, national planning should also recognize the need for time to develop community capacity, to educate local people, and to study the community.

Finally, national planning should concern itself with process, or how to implement its plans. The success of the Colombia water projects has been attributed to the close linkage of national planning with the provision of the means of implementation—a national support system, practical manuals on community participation and health education, and training.

The Colombian experience has also shown the value of a decentralized and relatively autonomous agency such as its National Institute for Health (INAS), to execute projects and to serve as a liaison with the communities. By allowing community promoters and district level engineers to make most of the decisions regarding project design, level of community contribution, size of loan for capital investment, and repayment terms (within national guidelines), Colombia has managed to reduce the length of the chain of command and the bureaucratic delays and inconsistencies. A key role in this scheme is that of the regional offices of the executing agency which provide the skilled support to the community and promoter and the link between the national and local levels.

For decentralized planning to work well, the support system, communication links, and respective responsibilities and authorities should be made especially clear to all involved. Budget procedures should also be designed with a decentralized system in mind. For example, block grants can provide discretion at the local level, and have worked well in Kenya in primary health care. Similarly, approval and reporting procedures need to be simplified to avoid delays.
IMPLICATIONS FOR MANPOWER NEEDS

Programs which involve more participation do not therefore reduce the need for support from regional and national agency offices. They change the emphasis toward a greater demand for organizational efficiency and for more trained manpower, particularly to work in the communities. It is important to remember that the more freedom to make independent decisions that is given to field staff and regional offices, the better trained the personnel should be.

A key role in a community participation approach is played by the community level worker (CLW). He or she may be a public health inspector, nurse, sanitary, health educator, agricultural extension officer, or community participation promoter. The CLW should be both accepted and respected by the community; ideally, the worker will be from the local area, used to rural conditions, and adequately trained to study, organize, motivate, and educate the community.

There are several considerations in planning for community level manpower needs, which include:

- the age, sex, education, and other requirements for the selection of CLWs;
- the number of communities each CLW can handle;
- where CLWs should be based (in district offices, mobile units, or communities);
- the tasks given to the CLW (health education, project planning, rate collection, primary health care, etc.);
- the length of time a CLW will spend in each community;
- the incentives, benefits, and career structure for CLWs (in order to avoid large losses of trained manpower);
- the provisions for evaluating their performance and for their overall supervision; and
- their access to a referral system for problems and decisions beyond their capability.

Experience has shown that community level workers need to have continuing contact with communities after construction is completed. In Colombia, the promoters are often appointed as secretary of the administrative committee which operates and maintains the water system; they are usually asked to work in 10-15 communities on a long-term basis.

A second important manpower need at the local level is for trained mechanics or operators for schemes involving pumps, chlorination, or even pipe inspection and repair. Options include:
- a local mechanic/operator trained by, and responsible to, the executing agency;
- a local mechanic/operator paid by the community;
- mobile operators/repair teams working out of regional or district offices; or
- a local mechanic under contract.

The decision about which option to select will be influenced by the duties the operator is expected to undertake, the availability of suitable people in the community, the feasibility of mobile teams travelling between communities, and the support services available higher up the agency ladder.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING

In the Rapid Assessments done by WHO in preparation for the Decade, 38 out of 58 developing countries placed manpower training among their top four program priorities.4

The additional implications for training needs of a more community-based approach to water and sanitation are that:

- changes are made to the content and scope of training;
- more training is needed, particularly at the level of community workers;
- retraining be given to already trained or experienced personnel in related areas; and
- communities be allowed to select those among their members who are to receive training.

There is a general concern among the international agencies and within some national institutions to expand the areas in which community level and higher level workers are trained so that they become more multipurpose, or at least sensitive to the needs of integrated development. At the level of the community worker, this often means providing additional training to public health workers, sanitarians, or nursing auxiliaries in community organization, health education, and primary health care.

Thus, a sanitarian or sanitary engineer will become better trained in primary health care; a public health inspector will be better able to motivate communities; and a health educator will know how a hand-pump works.

It has also been argued that training in community motivation and education should be given to all project personnel (at any level) who come into direct contact with the community, so that they can effectively communicate with local people.

In addition to training people who work with communities, there is also an expanded need to train selected members of the communities. Prime targets for training in this group are traditional birth attendants, folk healers, mechanics or pump operators, school teachers, and other community leaders. A specialized training program in teaching health education to children can be designed for teachers in order to instill good hygiene practices and understanding in the young. If such a school program is contemplated, it should be accompanied by water and sanitation facilities in schools.

It is often advisable to let communities nominate training candidates from the community. Community leaders, teachers, and others can also be trained to help in information gathering and simple recording of data about the community or its climate, on a continuing basis. Leaders of local organizations and committees can be helped in their operation and maintenance tasks with training in administration and bookkeeping.

Training courses should be primarily practical and ideally take place in or close to the communities in which the workers will operate. Practical exercises, field demonstrations, and experience in tasks such as questionnaire survey, managing large meetings, building latrines, and controlling pests should be an integral and major part of training.

It has been generally found that courses for community level workers should be at least three to four weeks long to be useful, and that retraining or updating training courses are invaluable—preferably on an annual basis. Courses lasting only one week have been reported as inefficient and not cost-effective.

One often neglected part of training lower level workers is to make clear what the career prospects are and how the training program fits into overall career development. For the voluntary worker who is a member of the community, being selected for training is often sufficient reward but consideration should be given to other benefits, such as visits to other communities, meetings with visitors, and certificates of merit.

While the main redirection for training will be at the local level, a community participation approach has implications for manpower training at higher professional and administrative levels, particularly with respect to communication skills and managerial efficiency.
SUMMARY

The author states that community participation needs to be designed at the national level and executed at the local level, which therefore places greater demands on the organizational efficiency and communication skills of national agencies. The ramifications of a community participation approach reach all aspects of national planning, including budget procedures and allocations of responsibility. Above all, the approach requires that authority, responsibility, and procedures be clearly spelled out and understood by all involved.

Only when national strategies have been set for numbers of communities to be served, level of service, and degree of community involvement, can the specific implications for manpower needs, training, and national support services be discussed, evaluated, and quantified.

Given a clear indication of national policy directions for community participation, sector planners can begin discussions with their regional offices, other agencies, and community leaders on how to implement it. This article reviews some of the major issues about human resources that need to be addressed in the planning process.

LA DEMANDA DE RECURSOS HUMANOS EN LA COMUNIDAD: REPERCUSIONES DEL SISTEMA DE PARTICIPACION DE LA COMUNIDAD (Resumen)

El autor manifiesta que la participación de la comunidad debe ser concebida a nivel nacional y aplicada a nivel local, lo que exige de las entidades nacionales una mayor eficiencia orgánica y conocimientos más amplios en materia de comunicación. Las consecuencias del sistema de participación de la comunidad se dejan sentir en todos los aspectos de la planificación nacional, inclusive en los procedimientos presupuestarios y en la distribución de funciones. En particular, el sistema hace necesario que se especifique claramente, que todos los interesados comprendan la autoridad, las responsabilidades y los procedimientos.

Hasta que no estén establecidas las estrategias nacionales en relación con las comunidades a atender y se hayan determinado el nivel de servicio y el grado de participación de la comunidad, no se podrán examinar, evaluar ni expresar cuantitativamente las repercusiones específicas en lo que respecta a necesidades de personal, adiestramiento y servicios nacionales de apoyo.
Una vez que tengan indicación clara de la política del país respecto a participación de la comunidad, los planificadores del sector podrán entablar contacto con las oficinas regionales, con otros organismos y con los jefes de la comunidad para determinar el modo de aplicación de dicha política. En este artículo se examinan algunos de los principales problemas de recursos humanos que es preciso resolver en ese proceso de planificación.

A DEMANDA COMUNITÁRIA DE RECURSOS HUMANOS: IMPLICAÇÕES DE UMA CRITÉRIO DE PARTICIPAÇÃO COMUNITÁRIA (Resumo)

A autora sustenta a necesidade de planejar a participação comunitária ao nível nacional e executá-la ao nível local, processo que impõe maiores exigências sobre a eficiência organizacional e a capacidade de comunicação de organismos nacionais. As ramificações de um critério de participação comunitária atingem todos os aspectos do planejamento nacional, inclusive procedimentos orçamentários e delegações de responsabilidade. Acima de tudo, esse critério requer uma clara definição do que seja autoridade, responsabilidade e procedimento, e sua compreensão por todos os interessados.

Somente quando houverem sido estabelecidas estratégias nacionais em relação ao número de comunidades a serem servidas, ao nível de serviços e ao grau de participação comunitária poderão ser discutidas, avaliadas e quantificadas as implicações específicas em matéria de necessidades de recursos humanos, treinamento e serviços nacionais de apoio.

Proporcionada uma clara indicação dos rumos da política nacional para a participação comunitária, podem então os planejadores setoriais iniciar, com suas repartições regionais, com outras entidades e com líderes comunitários, as discussões referentes ao modo de sua execução. O artigo passa em revista algumas das questões principais de recursos humanos que cumpre abordar nesse processo de planejamento.

LA DEMANDE DE RESSOURCES HUMAINES PAR LA COMMUNAUTÉ: LES IMPLICATIONS DE L’APPROCHE DE LA PARTICIPATION COMMUNAUTAIRE (Résumé)

L’auteur de l’article indique que la participation communautaire doit être conçue au niveau national et exécutée au niveau local, ce qui suppose de la part des institutions nationales une grande efficacité sur le plan de l’organisation et d’importantes capacités de communication. L’approche de la participation commu-
nautaire met en jeu tous les aspects de la planification nationale, notamment les procédures budgétaires et la répartition des responsabilités. Cette approche exige surtout que l’autorité, la responsabilité et les procédures soient clairement spécifiées et comprises de tous les intéressés.

Ce n’est qu’après avoir défini les stratégies nationales en ce qui concerne le nombre des communautés à desservir, le niveau de service et le degré de participation communautaire que l’on peut examiner, évaluer et chiffrer les implications spécifiques du point de vue des besoins en main-d’œuvre, de la formation et des services de soutien.

Une fois que les orientations nationales en matière de participation communautaire sont clairement définies, les planificateurs sectoriels peuvent entamer le dialogue avec leurs bureaux régionaux, d’autres institutions et les dirigeants communautaires sur la manière de mettre cette approche en œuvre. L’article examine certaines des principales questions concernant les ressources humaines que l’on doit résoudre dans ce processus de planification.