Community Contracting in Rural Water and Sanitation Swajal, Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal

Background

Many areas of Uttar Pradesh suffer from water scarcity. The rural water supply system includes traditional open wells, hand pumps, piped water supply schemes with treatment plants and private connections. Over one-third of these are out of order at any given time due to lack of maintenance. The process of decentralisation of rural water supply systems has been confined to handing over of hand pumps to village panchayats, which are responsible for repairs as well. Further, sanitation level in the state is considerably lower than the national average, with only about 2.5 per cent of the total population using latrines.

Objectives

The main objectives of the project were to identify and implement an appropriate policy framework to promote long-term sustainability of the rural water supply and environmental sanitation sector and deliver sustainable health and hygiene benefits to the rural population through improvements in water supply and environmental sanitation services.

The specific objectives of the project are to:

- Identifying and implementing an appropriate policy framework to promote long-term sustainability of the rural water supply and environmental sanitation sector
- Delivering sustainable health and hygiene benefits to the rural population through improvements in water supply and environmental sanitation services
- Improving rural economy through income-generating opportunities for women
- Testing alternatives to current supply-driven delivery mechanism
- Promote sanitation and gender awareness

The Thrust

The project has been planned to support investments and policy reforms to deliver sustainable health and hygiene benefits to the rural population. The investments are designed to improve knowledge, attitude and practices in the linkages between health and hygiene, improve water supply service levels and improve the environment through safe disposal of human waste. The project is demand-responsive and community-driven. It ensures the active participation of community, especially women, in all aspects of the project.

The Strategy

The Swajal Project pivots upon a three-pronged strategy:

1. In Swajal Project, communities are supposed to share the capital cost of the facilities.
2. The second strategy of the project is community contracting, whereby the project has to facilitate community procurement of goods, works and services.
3. Another vital strategy is the appropriate selection of technology. The rural water supply and sanitary components of the project provide choices to consumers in terms of type of technology and service level.

The Project

Swajal was initiated in 1996 as a six-year project in 26 districts of Uttar Pradesh and 12 districts of Uttaranchal. The Swajal approach of integrating rural water supply and environmental sanitation is implemented jointly by the Government of Uttar Pradesh and the World Bank. This six-year project (1996-2002) represents a paradigm shift in terms of delivery of sustainable water supply and environmental sanitation facilities. The project is being implemented in 1000 villages in seven districts of the Bundelkhand region, 19 districts across the rest of Uttar Pradesh, as well as 12 districts of the Kumaon and Garhwal region in Uttaranchal state. The project cycle is for a period of 33 months, and consists of three distinct phases: pre-planning, planning and implementation, each overlapping the other.

Pre-planning Phase

The project starts with a pre-planning phase that lasts a year, and includes the selection of villages and support organisations (SOs), i.e. the shortlisted NGOs who act as social intermediaries, and mobilise the community. Field visits are undertaken by the DPMUs to ensure that each SO (1) is legally registered; (2) has a constitutional provision to engage in rural water supply and environmental sanitation service delivery and related activities; (3) has audited and certified accounts; (4) has a proven track record of at least three years' experience in rural water supply and environmental sanitation or community development activities evidenced by the satisfactory completion of a participatory and demand-driven project; and (5) has demonstrated staffing capacity to carry out the proposed services or ability to procure such staffing capacity.

To promote sustainability of rural water supply and sanitation systems, the project has involved the rural communities in planning, constructing and maintaining these facilities. Panchayats provide assistance both for community development and engineering support to the communities at all stages of the project.

Planning Phase

Community mobilisation activities form an essential part of the project planning phase and are expedient to the formation of the village water and sanitation committee (VWSC), which consists of 7-12 members. The committee is democratically elected and is representative of the user community, with a minimum of 20 per cent reservation for scheduled caste/ scheduled tribes and a 30 per cent reservation for women. Another feature in the community participation process is the formulation of three community action plans (CAPs). These outline the process by which communities would implement the project, based entirely on their needs.

The Technical Plan incorporates the construction of the water supply scheme, latrines and drainage, and the Village Environmental Action Plan (VEAP). The Contribution and Management Plan includes monitoring and evaluation, operation and maintenance, and cash and labour contribution plans. And, the Community Empowerment Plan involves hygiene & environmental sanitation awareness, women's development initiatives and non-formal education plans.

During community mobilisation, an important tool used for gender sensitisation is SARAR (self-esteem, associative strength, resourcefulness, action planning and responsibility), where the communities engage in games based on problem analysis, investigation, sensitisation and community decision-making.

The community empowerment plan (CEP) accords greater decision-making powers to communities in the management of their water supply and sanitation schemes. Components of the CEP are outlined below:

Non-formal education (NFE) provides the community with information and functional literacy according to the needs expressed by them. The SOs generally use this as an entry tool in the planning phase. Hygiene & environmental sanitation awareness (HESA) aims to reduce morbidity levels in the village by increasing awareness about disease and its prevention and

by generating a demand for safe water and sanitation. Women's development initiatives (WDI) aim at empowering women by enhancing their capacities through the formation of representative grassroots bodies like self-help groups (SHGs) and Swajal Saheli Samoohs. These organisations support the VWSC in incorporating a gender perspective into water supply schemes.

The aim of these community empowerment activities is to build the capacities among village communities, who will then be in a position to take care of their development, not only in the water and sanitation sector but also in all spheres.

Implementation Phase

Project implementation Village water and sanitation committees (VWSCs) are formed through a process of consensus. Clean-up campaigns are organised, along with sensitisation of the community on environmental sanitation issues. Engineering surveys are done and various water supply options are worked out. In a community-wide 'agree-to-do meeting', a water supply option is chosen by the community. A project report detailing the engineering design of the chosen water supply and sanitation systems is prepared by engineers of the SO with full participation of the community at every step.

One of the most innovative and significant features of the Swajal Project is that communities demonstrate their demand for the water and sanitation facilities by sharing the capital cost of the facilities. Cost sharing includes: (i) a 10 per cent share in the capital cost, contributed in the form of cash and labour in varying amounts, depending on the region and type of technology selected; and (ii) operation and maintenance (O&M) financed entirely by the community, of which 50 percent is collected during the planning phase as testimony of their commitment to the scheme.

Another unique feature of the project is community contracting, whereby the project has to come up with innovative methods of facilitating community procurement of goods, works and services. The village community, DPMU and SO engineers arrive at the best possible rates for material and labour based on a market survey. All the materials are procured from authorised dealers or manufacturers to ensure quality and quantity.

The rural water supply (RWS) and latrine components of the project provide choices to consumers in terms of type of technology and service level. In the hilly region, this includes piped water supply schemes, captured springs with hand pumps, rainwater harvesting and spring development (including combinations of technologies most suited to local conditions). In the Bundelkhand region and foothills, water supply choices include piped water schemes

from tubewells, dug wells, surface sources (where required) and hand pumps. A typical choice for latrine technology is twin pit pour flush system. The environmental sanitation component focuses on local behaviour change, personal, domestic and environmental sanitation improvements, including drainage, garbage, soak and compost pits, and catchment protection.

Major Achievements

According to a sample survey conducted by the PMU, Department of Rural Development, Government of UP, the Swajal project has ensured direct benefits to about eight lakh rural inhabitants. It is estimated to cover about 12 lakh inhabitants as populations rise to design levels. The project has also made considerable impact both at the policy and the project level. The following are a few highlights:

- Increased access of women and young children to improved, adequate, and safe water and sanitation facilities, which in turn have had a positive impact on their health and productivity.
- A positive impact on the environment, arising from improved ecological conditions in watershed areas, which has increased the availability and quality of water.
- Reduced bacterial contamination of the environment due to improved hygiene and sanitation practices, controlled disposal of human wastes and better environmental management.
- Improved quality and sustainability of water sources due to catchment protection
- Community capacity for self-reliance and independence for VWSCs developed as a result of training.
- *Changing village dynamics*: Women, as key stakeholders, have begun to express themselves more vociferously. Communities, independent of their headmen, have begun asserting their rights and are more aware of their needs.
- *Transparency and reduction in corruption levels*: The transparency in dealings that characterises the Swajal project has led to unanimous demand that all village dealings be conducted along similar lines, leaving little room for corrupt practices and the misappropriation of village funds.
- *Sensitisation of PMU staff*: The process of dealing with SOs and village committees has inculcated a degree of sensitivity within government units, fostering a demand-driven, people-centric approach.

Lessons Learnt

- The Swajal project represents a paradigm shift in terms of delivery of sustainable water supply and environmental sanitation facilities. Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission of the government of India is designed on similar lines as the Swajal model.
- The success of the Swajal project has prompted the government of India to earmark 20 per cent of funds provided to state governments for implementing projects on similar lines.
- Influence on the Uttar Pradesh Jal Nigam, responsible for the existing delivery of rural water supply in Uttar Pradesh, is making efforts to strengthen its community development activities, as well as to become more responsive to its beneficiaries, as demonstrated by the success of Swaja
- The PMU model is being used as the basis of joint forest management projects in Uttar Pradesh. The use of NGOs as an interface between local communities and the government, formation of village communities and community participation methods are some of the strategies replicated from the Swajal project.

By developing procedures for the public funding of demand-driven, community-based development, the Swajal project will enable wider replication of sustainable rural water and sanitation facilities, which has not been possible through top-down public programmes.

The project has not only improved rural water supply and sanitation facilities, but also empowered village communities, and enhanced community participation through confidence building. It has improved female participation in various economic activities through the formation of women's SHGs. Components of Swajal such as SARAR, integration of the PRI model, and community mobilisation activities have helped generate a sense of ownership in the minds of the villagers and empowered women. The cost-sharing strategy is the most innovative and significant feature of the project, in which communities have to demonstrate the demand for the water and sanitation facilities by sharing the capital cost of the facilities. This generates a sense of ownership of the WSS scheme in the community and enables them to operate and maintain the facilities.
