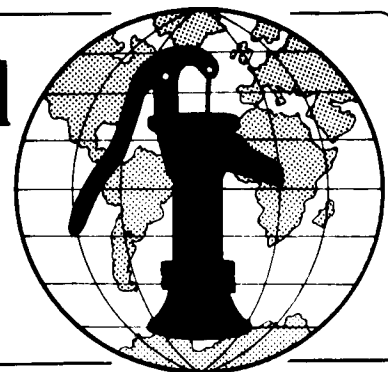


# Water for the World

**Methods of Initiating Community  
Participation in Water Supply and  
Sanitation Programs**  
Technical Note No. HR. 2.M



The development of good water and sanitation systems involves many factors. The technical, environmental, economic and cultural aspects of such projects must be well-coordinated if the projects are to succeed. Such a balance depends on the interest and participation of the people who will be using the water or sanitation facilities. No system, however well designed and constructed, will benefit its users if it will not last, cannot be paid for, is improperly operated and maintained, or is socially unacceptable and so is not used. A full exchange of information between the action agency and the community during all project phases is very important for successful water and sanitation system development.

This technical note reviews the roles and responsibilities of the action agency and the community in preparing to select solutions to local water supply and sanitation problems. Refer to "Overview of Water and Sanitation Systems Development," HR.1, for background information on community participation in water and sanitation projects.

## Starting a Project

The initial contact between the action agency and the community may be made by either group. The contact may be a request from the community to the action agency for assistance, based on local concern for better health, desire for convenience, or awareness of alternatives to the current water system. Or, the initial contact may be an invitation from the action agency to the community to work together to improve the community water and sanitation system as part of a regional or national campaign. If the community does not have a water and sanitation

committee, the project planner should help form one to represent the village and work directly with the action agency.

The action agency's project planner and project designer should act as a liaison between the village committee and the agency. Initial discussions between the village committee and the project planner should clarify the priorities of each group. In the early meetings try to:

1. Specifically identify the water and sanitation problems. Is the current water supply reliable, accessible, of good quality, of sufficient quantity? Are sanitation conditions likely to cause health problems?
2. Identify community priorities and goals for water and sanitation improvement and community willingness and capability to participate in the project.
3. Identify action agency priorities and goals for water improvement and its willingness and capability to participate.
4. Compare the current water supply with community water needs, including future needs. Refer to "Determining the Need for Water Storage," RWS.5.P.1, for information on how to specify community water needs. Relate this information to water use patterns for drinking, bathing, laundry, agriculture, and livestock.
5. Consider current excreta disposal practices.
6. Organize local feasibility studies to identify technical and economic resources specifically for water and sanitation projects.

## The Village Water and Sanitation Committee

The community committee represents the village and works directly with the project planner and project designer. Often an existing local organization, such as a rural development committee or village council, can best act as the village water and sanitation committee. If no appropriate local organization exists, the project planner should assist the community in organizing a locally selected committee to oversee the community's contributions to the project.

The project planner should gather the support of community leaders in organizing a committee that will operate according to the community's own customs. Ideally, members of the committee should come from all the groups in the village so that the committee is representative of the entire village's needs. Committee members should be interested in community development, health, and water and sanitation improvements, should be well respected by the community, and should have special knowledge, experience, or resources to offer the committee.

Committee members should be able to work with community leaders, health workers, teachers, extension agents, those familiar with local economic conditions, and the various ethnic and age groups in the community. It is very important that members of the committee be both men and women, so that information on improved hygiene practices related to sanitation and water supply can be effectively communicated through traditional cultural channels. Women usually teach other family members these practices, so they play an especially important role in water and sanitation education and practice.

The committee should be set up legally so that it can sign contracts for village participation, collect funds, arrange for local material and labor for a special project, and be

responsible for the operation and maintenance of the systems. Duties of the community water and sanitation committee include:

- presenting the community's view of its own needs and priorities to the agency,
- assisting in feasibility studies and gathering field data with technicians from the action agency,
- reporting to the community at public meetings and explaining the current status of the project, technical alternatives and decision-making factors,
- organizing community education on the benefits of water supply and sanitation systems, especially health education,
- organizing support for the project from individuals in the community, and generating the active community involvement in the project that is essential for its success,
- presenting outside project personnel to the community and explaining their activities and responsibilities,
- explaining system options to the community, including community responsibilities associated with each alternative,
- establishing and enforcing sanctions for any misuse of the water supply and sanitation system.

### Action Agency Responsibilities

The action agency is responsible for using its technical expertise and economic advice to guide and train the community. The agency should appoint one or more representatives to coordinate community and agency efforts on the project. These representatives may be project planners, project designers, or field workers who will oversee or assist in the construction of the project. Ideally, these representatives

will have training or experience in community organization and public health, as well as a technical background in water supply and sanitation. The project planners, designers, and field workers should be sensitive to the community's political structure decision-making process, sanitary practices and attitudes toward the existing water source. They should be familiar with the community's water and sanitation priorities and goals and should work closely with the village water and sanitation committee. Many village committee members will not be familiar with program administration. The project planner should consider providing special training for them.

The agency representatives' duties include:

- helping to organize a village committee if none exists,

- explaining the action agency's priorities and goals in water supply and sanitation improvements,

- explaining what the action agency expects of the community in the project,

- explaining community benefits of water and sanitation improvement,

- helping the village committee organize a local health education program,

- stressing the importance of community participation in the water and sanitation projects, especially to community leaders, the village committee and health workers,

- leading the local water and sanitation committee in performing local feasibility studies and gathering field data,

- coordinating water supply and sanitation with other agencies' local development programs by contacting those agencies for data and support,

- arranging training for system construction, operation, maintenance and health education for other community members.

### Preliminary Studies

A field investigation gathers local technical, socio-cultural and economic information to help determine what kind of water supply and sanitation systems are appropriate for the community. It is an important educational process both for the community and the action agency. Community members learn data-gathering techniques and become more aware of water and sanitation problems. Action agency personnel become oriented to the community and community attitudes toward technical alternatives. A thorough field investigation is a very effective way to establish a good working relationship between community members and action agency personnel. It stimulates community involvement in the project and diminishes future problems in the design, construction, operation and maintenance phases.

Field data can be gathered from existing records, surveys, and special field testing. See the technical notes on planning in the sanitation and rural water supply series for further suggestions.

Data should be collected in the following areas:

1. Existing water supply and sanitation situation. Include:

- comparison of water needs and supply,

- type, number and location of all drinking water sources and sanitation facilities,

- quality, quantity, accessibility and reliability of water sources,

- water collection information (who, when, how, how much, how transported, time spent per day),

- present methods of washwater, excreta and refuse disposal,

- various uses for water (drinking, bathing, laundering, agriculture and livestock).

2. Social and cultural aspects of the community. Include:

- map of community showing households, roads, schools, markets,

- attitude of community members to health education, preferences for water supplies, beliefs, and taboos on sanitation and drinking water and water sources,

- community members' perceptions of benefits of improved systems,

- past development project "histories" involving community participation projects and self-help projects,

- community's willingness to pay or contribute in kind for improvements,

- community's willingness to continue to maintain a facility.

3. Resources. Include:

- sources of funding, including government grants or loans, aid from international organizations, local taxes and community cash contributions,

- amounts of money available from above sources,

- community incomes, willingness and ability to pay, preference for payment methods, and seasonal distribution of incomes,

- affiliations with extension workers in other fields,

- types and quantities of available tools and equipment,

- types and quantities of available local building materials (sand, gravel, stone and wood),

- names and special skills of available workers (both men and women, including masons, carpenters, well-diggers and accountants),

- people who will be available for training for construction, operation and maintenance of water systems,

- when labor will be available,

- whether laborers will contribute their time or whether an incentive will be necessary.

4. Environmental and geological data. Include:

- records of soil conditions for excreta disposal suitability, pipe routes or well suitability,

- groundwater levels:

- in the wettest season (necessary for excreta and washwater disposal)

- in the driest season (necessary for wells),

- topographic information and maps,

- physical size of village,

- population, estimate of future growth rates and water demands,

- rainfall information, including drought and flood periods,

- temperature ranges,

- stream and river flow rates and spring yields,

- data on evaporation and run-off.

5. Health statistics. Include:

- water-related diseases,

- sanitation-related diseases,

- disease patterns,

- primary health care facilities,

- health education in area.

## Summary

Community involvement in a water project is an important way for people to become aware of and select solutions to their own water and sanitation problems. It is essential that a community itself believes in the importance of improved water supply and sanitation systems. It is equally important that the governing agency recognizes the importance of community involvement so that effective cooperation is developed.

Initiating community participation in a water or sanitation project is the collective responsibility of the community leaders, the village water and sanitation committee, and the action agency representative. There is no one model for successful community participation in developing water and sanitation system improvements because each community situation is unique. Once the roles and responsibilities of the action agency and community are established and basic data is gathered, selecting and planning a specific system can begin.