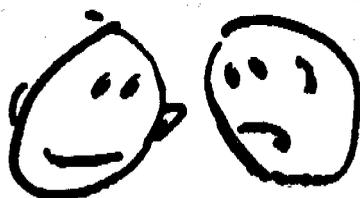


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Communication: Why?

Thomas and his five-year old daughter Sandra, in the village of Xumbi, Sierra Leone, know that they need water - to quench thirst, to cook food and to wash - and that they need to get rid of their daily excreta. They treasure life, and do not want to be sick. But they have no access to safe water and proper sanitation facilities.

Thomas has bilharzia and is anaemic. Dehydrated, Sandra is near death after a week of diarrhoea. Her prognosis is grim.

Mary and her seven-year-old son John, in a neighbouring village, had similar problems a year ago. Thanks to the visiting health team, they recovered. Then, with fanfare and little or no consultation with the community a well was dug and several latrines built, but these installations have not been used by most of the villagers, and the ills of Mary and John have returned. The chances for John to become a productive adult are slim.

This daily confrontation with debilitating diseases and death is unconscionable, when existing knowledge and technology has made such suffering unnecessary. It also leads inevitably to the loss of productivity that no community or nation can afford for economic growth and social progress, especially in the 1990s where most developing countries are undergoing structural adjustment programmes.

The sector has to go all out and use everything it's got to end such tragedies.

This paper argues that effective communication that entails two-way interaction between the sector and its various partners will make a critical difference. It recommends a communication strategy to enhance partnership and participation and to maximize efforts and resources.

New Challenges

Linked to water resources development, the environment movement and primary health care initiatives, the sector meets a basic need, and offers a natural and ready entry point for other aspects of development. But those concerned with the Water and Sanitation Decade's mission beyond 1990 realize that the seriousness of the current state of water and sanitation provision has not been presented persuasively enough to those who make key decisions. They know that resources allotted fall woefully short of what is needed and that new challenges demand more creative utilization of available resources. They also recognize that the effective use of improved water supplies and latrines must be based on participation and understanding.

A common thread running through these issues is the process of communication as an essential ingredient of all sector work. *Communication is an instrument for partnership and participation based on a two-way dialogue, where the senders and receivers of information interact on an equal footing leading to interchange and mutual discovery.*

Social mobilization: the success of immunization

*"The public health success story of the last decade in which communication played the decisive role", that is how many people describe UNICEF's **Universal Child Immunization** social mobilization campaign. The goal was to bring vaccination to even the most remote area and motivate parents to bring their children for the full course of vaccines. In many countries large elements of society were engaged in the campaign: decision and policy makers, service providers, the media, the education system, religious leaders, other non-governmental partners.*

The latest figures show that since 1977 for most diseases 82 percent of the people in the developing world have been immunized. For certain diseases that is more than in the United States!

UNICEF's Deputy Executive Director of Programmes, Mr. Richard Jolly, in a recent meeting of the Core group on Information, Education and Communication advised the water sector to learn from the successful UNICEF/WHO immunization campaign. He termed communication and social mobilization essential to successful action in programming.

New Delhi Statement

The need for enhanced communication was recognized at various regional meetings as well as at the New Delhi Global Consultation held during 1990, where field experiences and issues were analyzed to find ways to accelerate progress and enhance sustainability. The New Delhi Statement asked for "intensive efforts to raise awareness through communication and mobilization of all sections of society". Participants at these meetings specifically requested strengthening political commitment, optimizing the use of resources, decentralizing planning and implementation, and involving communities by intensive mobilization through sharply focused communication and education efforts at all levels of operation.

There is now general acceptance that most water and sanitation-related problems must be tackled by the people in the villages and urban slums, who must be properly empowered and equipped to take actions themselves. Field workers must communicate more effectively with women as well as men in order to involve communities in planning and management of their own facilities and to facilitate hygiene education. Technical support must respond to the real needs in the communities. Moreover, environmental and urbanization concerns pose new challenges, which require innovative participatory approaches.

Each of these issues requires effective communication as a solid base for action.

In several countries, such as Brazil, Ghana, India and Indonesia, initial steps are being taken to address these communication issues. In many others, individual efforts at different levels have been made through campaigns at the policy level and education programmes in the communities. In spite of their good intention and their value as first attempts, not all of these actions were truly effective; they were often isolated endeavours and worked like fireworks that have finite periods of illumination.

Collaborative Council Action

In order to take up the communication challenges of the 1990s, the Core Group on Information, Education and Communication (IEC), following the recommendations of the earlier Temporary Working Group on Communication of Information, reviewed communication issues at length in a series of meetings both before and after the New Delhi Consultation. These included sessions in which a large number of developing countries participated. Their deliberations have led to a call for a coherent, integrated and multidimensional communication strategy as an underlying thrust of all sector work, directed at mobilizing all societal elements and maximizing effectiveness of efforts.

The Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council in its Oslo meeting in September 1991, reconfirmed the need for intensified action on communication/promotion activities at the global, national and local level. The Council delegated the mandate to decide on a strategy to a Working Group which will continue the work of a Core Group. It also expressed the need to establish an appropriate workforce and to raise resources to undertake specific activities.

Continuum of activities

The strategy calls for a continuum of communication activities. At one end are efforts that generate political will, change policy and mobilize resources. At the other are community dialogue and feedback to enhance community management, cost recovery and participatory hygiene education. In between, they include internalization of all available experience within the sector, fostering intersectoral support, and the use of monitoring and evaluation results for advocacy.

Decentralization is a guiding principle for the strategy. Every segment and sub-segment of audience is different, and each has its own order of priorities and economic, social and cultural perspective on water and sanitation. A decentralized approach to communication activities is better positioned to address the needs of the community and affords a closer aim at the problems.

The concept of dialogue and interpersonal communication should apply throughout the continuum. This is as important for advocacy work with legislators as for hygiene education efforts with villagers.

The involvement of the community - in issue identification, message design, dissemination, monitoring and impact evaluation - will provide the vital feedback needed. More important, such involvement will enhance a true sense of partnership in the effort, a critical ingredient for the strategy to become successful.

Each activity in the continuum can affect, and be affected by, the others; they should be mutually supportive, and their synergistic impact should lead to better results.

Communication Strategy in India

The Government of India is showing a good example of a communication strategy to help implement its ambitious water supply and sanitation programme in the country. Since the inception of National Drinking Water Mission for Rural Water Supply in India in 1986, communication has occupied the centre stage of planning as an important tool to achieve a broader and sustainable coverage with safe drinking water.

Building on communication the Indian government, with active support of UNICEF, has developed and adopted the strategy in support of community participation and management and hygiene education. Women were identified as the prime movers in the strategy.

Recently this strategy has been accepted by the Government of India for the next five years. Rather than a centralized approach, a decentralized development of skills is emphasized. Communication methodologies are being based on local conditions.

Audience Segmentation

Segmentation of audiences and their communication needs is essential for effective communication. Without understanding the differences among various segments or sub-segments, it is difficult to design productive messages that call for change.

While basic themes remain essentially the same, the fine-tuning of the message content, the choice of media mix, and the designing and packaging of the messages will vary. The variation will depend on audience and circumstances in each case.

The communication strategy should in the long run encompass all sections of society. But in the short term the priority target segments should be those who make and influence decisions: sector people, policy people and users.

The Sector People The sector includes all those who work in the water and sanitation field, from planners to field implementers in governments, voluntary agencies, and ESAs. By and large, the water and sanitation sector has not been very effective in communicating with the policy people, nor with the communities they serve. Many in the sector assume support from the top and participation from below as given, since the need for their work is so obvious. Yet it is they who, more than the others, must recognize the need for communication and apply it in their work.

In order to face the challenges ahead, sector people must first internalize the lessons of the Decade and make the necessary changes in their outlook. They should also improve their ability to communicate effectively with other levels and beyond the sector. Everyone in the sector can and should play a role in communication on an interpersonal basis. Hence, an intensive and persistent orientation and training effort is required.

Members of the Council and other leaders can be effective advocates for the sector at the highest policy level in their respective country or agency, and can help persuade others in the sector to accept communication as a key component in their work. Managers should be able to articulate, with data, the benefits of their projects more forcefully. Field workers must communicate with the communities they serve in order to provoke feedback and to bring about involvement and action. *If a critical mass of concern and interest is generated within the sector, communication will become a new and powerful thrust.*

The Policy People Those who make policy decisions and influence development priorities include political leaders, legislators, top civil servants, economic planners. Given finite resources, they are hard pressed from all sides to choose one sector over the others. Frequently, the most active, the loudest and most persuasive group gets the most attention in an increasingly competitive environment, and obtains a larger share of scarce resources.

The policy people also need to appreciate the importance of new challenges ahead, and the role of community management and decentralization, and should encourage such developments. To mobilize the policy people, it is important to have the data and information they need to discharge their respective responsibilities. They include data on why water and sanitation needs constitute:

- a) a politically viable priority with a broad base, supported electorally or otherwise,
- b) a sound investment in human development that is cost-effective and yields health and economic benefits, and
- c) a social imperative that can no longer be ignored.

Assigning the sector the necessary resources and obtaining the commitment to sustainability, require effective communication activities on a broad-scale and continuing basis. Included in this segment of audience are opinion makers and influential personages, and those in the mass media who help set the public agenda and those of politicians and public servants.

The Users The users are the people the sector is all about. Their circumstances - economic, social and cultural - must be first taken into account in designing any intervention.

Communication with communities is needed for situation analysis, identification of problems, mobilization and management of resources, and constant feedback.

Having wells and latrines located at the right places for convenient use and proper maintenance requires a process of communication and consultation that leads to decisions shared by the community about the planning, building and management of these facilities. If field workers do not know how to communicate effectively with the community, they cannot seek out the underlying causes that block community actions. Nor can they support villagers in learning about bacteria in polluted water and human excreta, so that they can make informed choices.

Community management represents involvement, which leads to sustainability. Since facilities are new to many communities, communication is needed to acquaint the people with their management. Cost recovery, too, may be a new element, and effective communication can help them understand the reasons for payment for services.

The Water Utilization Project in Ghana

Ghana provides an illustrative example of the difference communication can make at project level. Since 1973 the Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation with the help of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has worked in the Upper Regions to make a significant improvement in the health and productive capacity of the residents there.

To improve on the limited results from the earlier phases the project added a massive water/health education programme in late 1985. The new programme combined adult educational strategies with radio learning groups in a mass training and village education drive. The programme concentrated its efforts on a few carefully chosen topics and messages.

An evaluation in June 1990 of the Water Utilization Project, well described in an attractive document (available at the Oslo Global Forum), pointed to some notable achievements:

- » a high proportion of pumps were delivering safe water; compared to other projects the percentage was remarkably high;*
- » the project had built a network of 5,000 Community Water Organizers (50 % women) at more than 2,500 pump sites;*
- » the knowledge of the linkage between safe water and water-borne disease had increased and there was some evidence of health improvement;*
- » a start had been made on effective inter-agency cooperation in water and health promotion activities.*

Effective sector work means: effective communication

Support for Action

The locus of action is predominantly at the country level, in the field, near the villages and in the slums of urban centres. All implementation efforts must focus on support for country-based action. This is a point that deserves reiteration.

In promoting and supporting the integrated communication approach, countries need to develop their own capacity at the local, provincial and national level. Orientation and training are therefore among the first steps of the communication strategy. To start if off, responsibility for initiating action needs to be assigned. Operational activities may be assumed by one of the more active and centrally located national units of the water and sanitation sector.

Governments as well as ESAs need to review their policies, reorient priorities, assign responsibilities, build capacities and set communication objectives. Evaluating existing programmes vis a vis the communication continuum should reveal the gaps pointing to activities that need to be undertaken.

At the global level, a variety of support activities are needed, such as advocacy and promotion, resource identification, compilation of successes and lessons for adaptation and replication, coordination of initiatives, technical support to the countries on communication

programme planning, information exchange, and training and orientation activities. Some central arrangement to provide supportive services is essential, especially during the initial stage.

These crucial communication inputs at various levels obviously require financial resources. It is justifiable to earmark a percentage of the sector's resources to activities at all levels in the communication continuum. Investing in the continuum pays off in improved results in many areas: it will strengthen political will, generate more resources, involve communities, promote community management and cost recovery, and ensure better maintenance of facilities. Effective communication will facilitate behavioral change at the grassroots level through hygiene education for proper usage of facilities. *Indeed, communication may make or break the movement toward water and sanitation for all.*

**Country action:
a simplified communication development
approach**

- » Briefing session with senior colleagues on potential of communication strategy
- » Promotion of communication as essential element of sector work, and working towards introduction of communication in sector policies
- » Review of communication needs and opportunities
- » Assignment of responsibility for implementation of communication strategy, including authority and budget
- » Prioritization of needed action
- » Discussion of forthcoming action in session with senior sector officers and ESAs
- » Orientation and training workshops
- » Design of specific communication inputs, based on operation research, in selected priority areas
- » Implementation

**Central support unit:
four scenarios**

In support of country actions, four scenarios for a service-oriented central unit are possible, each with their own budgetary implications. In sequence of decreasing effectiveness they are:

- » a separate unit with three full-time officers, operating from an office located at one of the agencies active in this area, with a budget provided by partners on a shared basis;
- » a decentralized unit, operating through full-time officers working from different organizations active in this area, with one of these as lead agency, and with a budget provided by partners on a shared basis;
- » responsibility assigned to one of the agencies active in this area, operating through part-time officers, with a budget provided by partners on a shared basis;
- » continuation of work through a working group with ad-hoc inputs, but with a budget provided by partners on a shared basis.

Alliance Building

During the 1990s, when increasing demands on scarce human and financial resources will be made, the sector needs to strengthen its profile, explain its raison d'etre, and fight for its share of resources. Effective communication will be indispensable in this thrust.

To make the communication strategy work, alliance building at every level to win colleagues and allies for its introduction, is imperative. Water and sanitation is the concern of many sectors. Partners are essential, and the broader the alliance is, the better. Community and grassroots groups, religious and social institutions, media, non-governmental organizations and international agencies, must all be enlisted to back the communication strategy and support it.

The Decade has produced many useful technical instruments as well as lessons for the sector to move forward at an accelerated rate. They form a solid basis for programme success in closing the gap between the served and the un-served. The 1990s will make this possible, only if all technical and social components are fully integrated in all sector work, and if communication will be made the basis of this work.