



Water and Sanitation Program

An international partnership to help the poor gain sustained access to improved water supply and sanitation services

METHODOLOGY FOR PARTICIPATORY ASSESSMENTS

Helping Communities Achieve More Sustainable and Equitable Services



Sustainable community-managed water supply and sanitation services seem more attainable now than ever before. Agencies know that giving community members a voice in the selection of the nature of their services and training them to manage and maintain them produce better outcomes. Yet, progress is uneven. Gender, poverty, and equity objectives often remain little more than words on paper. Well-intentioned project managers are confronted with resource, time and capacity constraints when they attempt to use more demand-responsive and participatory approaches. Some still question the extent to which these approaches really lead to more sustainable results.

To shed more light on the linkages between sustained services and project approaches that are more demand-responsive and gender and poverty-sensitive, the Water and Sanitation Program (WSP), in collaboration with IRC (International Water and Sanitation Centre), conducted participatory assessments with 88 communities that had managed and sustained their water supply systems for three or more years. The communities came from 18 projects that chose to participate in the assessments, in 15 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The projects were funded by a range of donors, NGOs, and country governments. The assessments involved community members with project staff and policy makers in participatory meetings, to examine the organizational and policy factors that support or constrain sustainability on the ground. Instead of quantitative survey questionnaires and structured interview schedules, the field teams used participatory methods to assess gender and poverty-specific participation and demand-responsiveness with women and men in the communities and agencies. The results were then linked to the extent to which services were effectively sustained and used.

The Methodology for Participatory Assessments (MPA)* that was developed to conduct the assessments is proving to be a valuable tool by which policy makers, program managers and the local people themselves can monitor the sustainability of their services and take actions to enhance it. The methodology reveals how equitably poor households and women participate in, and benefit from the services, as compared to the better-off and the men. It makes visible the key factors for attaining success in community water-sanitation projects, while simultaneously allowing quantitative aggregation of village-level participatory monitoring data for use at program and policy levels.

* Rekha Dayal, Christine van Wijk, and Nilanjana Mukherjee. *Methodology for Participatory Assessments with Communities, Institutions, and Policy makers*. Water and Sanitation Program, March 2000.

Gender, Poverty and Demand: Keys to Sustained and Effectively Used Services

Significant findings from the assessments in 88 communities point strongly in the same direction: approaches that are more demand-responsive, gender- and poverty-sensitive are associated with services that are better sustained and more effectively used. Among the key findings:

- **The more demand-responsive the project, the better the services are sustained.** Projects functioned better over time when they initially offered more choices in technology, service level, management and financing systems, to women as well as men, to the poor as well as the better-off in the community.
- **Services were better sustained when communities participated in establishing the services not just by contributing, but also by exercising influence and control over project implementation.** This was particularly true where women participated with men in monitoring and control of financing and construction. Participation that leads to sustainability confers control to users during the process of establishing services, and it does so not just to the local leaders, but to both men and women from all major potential user groups.
- **Services were better sustained where they were operated and managed with women and the poorer households having a say in management decisions,** and when maintenance responsibilities were equitably shared between women and men, and between the poor and the better-off in the community.
- **Agency policies, objectives, and staff composition and skill sets all affected project outcomes.** The more they were supportive of users' demand, and sensitive to gender and poverty, the better the results on the ground.

What does this mean for agency practices?

Many implications for practice are evident from the 88 community assessments. Among the most pertinent for agency practice:

- Demand-responsive and gender and poverty-sensitive approaches are most effective when they are used at the very beginning, with the very first interactions with communities. To do this, agency staff need to be equipped with the required skills and have options to offer to communities.
- The more projects give "voice and choice" to all major user groups, taking particular care to include poor women and men and other excluded groups like religious or ethnic minorities, the greater the coverage and benefits will be, the more the community as a whole will want to sustain the services, and the more likely the project will actually enhance people's access to improved services to the levels necessary for achieving improvements in health (at least 75% of the households).
- Achieving sustainability requires cooperation at all levels - community, project, agency. Stakeholders at these levels should have the opportunity to meet with one another at the outset and periodically during implementation, to assess progress and adjust implementation as necessary.

Through the assessments in 88 communities across the globe, the MPA has demonstrated that it: a) generates information that can be used by the community, project managers, policy makers, and financing agencies, towards the objective of more equitable and sustainable services, and b) it provides tools to make Demand-Responsive Approaches (DRA) in service delivery a practical reality.

The Methodology for Participatory Assessments (MPA):

What is new about the MPA?

The MPA draws upon participatory approaches such as PRA^{1/} and SARAR^{2/} for tools and methods that have proven their effectiveness in involving communities over the years. It adds important new features:

- The MPA is a methodology aimed at helping both project agencies and communities achieve more equitable and sustainable services. It is designed to involve all major stakeholders and analyze the community situation with four major user groups - poor men, poor women, better-off men, better-off women. In doing so it operationalizes a **gender and poverty analysis framework** for assessing the sustainability of water and sanitation services.
- The MPA uses a set of sector-specific **indicators for sustainability, demand, gender and poverty-sensitivity**. It measures them using a **sequence of participatory tools** with communities, project agencies and policy makers. After assessments in the community, the results are used by representatives of users and agencies in "stakeholder meetings", to jointly evaluate institutional factors that are affecting the project's impact and sustainability at community level. Results of institutional assessments are then used to review policies at the program or country level.

^{1/} Participatory Rural Appraisal.

^{2/} Self esteem, Associative strength, Resourcefulness, Action Planning, Responsibility.

- The MPA generates large amounts of village-level qualitative data, some of which is quantified using an **ordinal scoring system**, by villagers themselves. The quantitative data that results can be statistically analyzed. This feature enables analysis across communities, projects and time, and at the program level, so the MPA can be used to generate management information for large-scale projects and data suitable for program analysis.

Who can use the MPA? For what?

The MPA lends itself to many potential uses. The qualitative information generated visually at community level allows easy conversion to both numeric processes as well as graphic representations. Community level graphics are produced immediately following applications of participatory tools with women and men, both poor and the better-off groups, allowing for presentation to and verification of results with the rest of the community. Consolidation of the same information across time and communities helps project implementors and managers see trends and analyze causes. Assessments from several projects can be quickly consolidated at program or country level for policy analysis.

What does it take to use the MPA?

The MPA is designed to be an integral part of a project, not an add-on or a stand-alone. Using the MPA thus requires either a funding agency committed to designing a new project or an on-going participatory project wishing to undertake participatory assessments.

While many countries have pools of facilitators experienced in using participatory methods, specific training in the MPA is essential because the MPA comprises a lot more than a set of participatory tools. Firstly, the MPA adds an analytical framework that drives towards sustainability and permits participatory data to be coded quantitatively for the

analysis of sustainability. Secondly, because it is participatory throughout, it encourages learning on the part of participants. Skilled facilitators sensitive to gender and poverty issues are key to fostering the cycle of learning and action, at the community, stakeholder meeting, and policy levels.

A comprehensive training program that combines workshop learning with supervised field experience is essential to build the necessary skills.

What do MPA assessments cost?

Typically, using the MPA for a sustainability assessment requires two facilitators that spend a minimum of five days in a village, and at least one day in a stakeholder meeting at the district or province level. This does not include time for planning, data analysis, and reporting, which would vary with the size of the project, objectives of assessment and therefore the required sample. Generally, MPA assessments for project design may require a sample of only a few communities which together represent the major design-influencing variables for a new project, e.g. geo-hydrological conditions or relative poverty and diarrheal morbidity rates. Using the MPA for micro-planning community interventions implies assessments in every project community, and their costs should be built into routine project implementation procedures. Monitoring and evaluation applications are likely to use stratified or purposive sampling of 5-10% communities at similar points in the project cycle.

Following the global assessments, the MPA is now being applied on a larger scale. Budgets prepared for its application for planning and monitoring in a large-scale project in Indonesia suggest that costs of the MPA can be comparable to those of other community-based approaches, when MPA is integrated in project implementation. MPA seems to best fit projects aiming at community-driven development, which typically allocate between 20 - 30% of total project cost to software investments.

Who can use the MPA?	For what?
Community Members and Community Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To elicit and express demands for service from all segments of the community. - To identify actions for enhancing sustainability. - To reduce gender and poverty inequities. - For planning, self-monitoring and assessment. - To collect baseline data on existing services, the socio-economic make-up of a community and an indication of existing demand for services. - For assessments from the user's perspective at all project stages.
Project Managers and Project Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To compare communities for sustainability and equity. - To assess progress, specially on qualitative aspects of project implementation (e.g., capacity building) which are more difficult to measure. - To identify and assess institutional factors influencing project sustainability.
Government planners, External Support Agencies, Project designers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To plan for sustainability*. - To design* equitable (gender- and poverty-sensitive) and sustainable projects. - To monitor sustainability of services and impact.

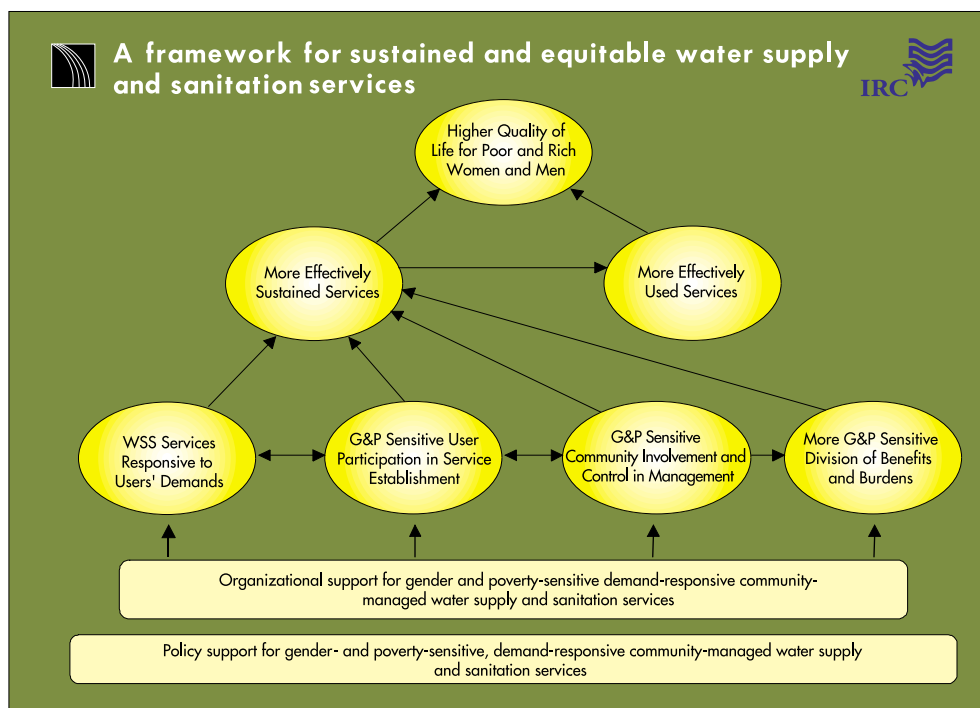
*These applications are currently being developed in collaboration with interested government and donor partners in new projects in the design phase.

Key Characteristics of a Project-Level MPA Training Course

Source of trainees	Existing project staff, or persons being recruited for a planned project.
Type of trainees	Equal numbers of technical (engineering) and social (including hygiene and sanitation) staff, preferably gender balanced; interested in learning or already experienced in applying participatory methods. Up to 16 trainees per batch.
Nature and duration of training	1) 14 days in combination of workshop and community-level practice. 2) 5 days conducting an actual MPA assessment and two days conducting a stakeholder meeting, under supervision.
Trainers	National level MPA trainers, with support from the international MPA core team.
Follow-up	Periodic support from national-level MPA trainers to the trained staff, to assure quality and continue the learning process.
Costs	Trainee's staff time, per diem, travel, etc., but this will vary from country to country. Cost of MPA trainers' time, travel, per diem.

The framework for sustained and equitable services

The findings from the 88 communities suggest strongly that demand-responsive approaches that integrate gender and poverty are the route to sustainability of community-managed water supply and sanitation services. Also, effective use of the services, which is necessary for improved community health, is linked significantly to effectively sustained services, rather than to any other independent variable. The following framework for sustained and equitable services emerges from the findings. The MPA, with its emphasis on helping disadvantaged groups - in particular women and the poor - obtain access to services, is a powerful tool that communities and helping agencies can use to achieve greater equity and higher quality of life, for all.



Where do I get more information?

For more information on the MPA, contact: a) your regional Water and Sanitation Program office, or b) Nilanjana Mukherjee, Regional Community Development Specialist, WSP-EAP, JSEB Building Tower 2, 13th Floor, Jl. Jend. Sudirman Kav. 52-53, Jakarta 12190, Indonesia. E-mail: nmukherjee@worldbank.org, or c) Christine van Wijk, IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, P.O. Box 2869, 2601 CW Delft, The Netherlands. E-mail: wijk@irc.nl