

## 11

## Experimenting to solve water management problems: Lele community in Nepal

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### • Introduction

Lele Mahadev Khola village is one of the four communities in Nepal involved in the Participatory Action Research (PAR) project: Lele, Gajedi, Rangapur, and Yampaphant. Lele is a one-hour drive from the capital city, Kathmandu. Since 1995, the local NGO Nepal Water for Health (NEWAH) has been working together with the people of Lele ward No. 4 in the Participatory Action Research process. The process has helped to transform a disorganised water system characterised by lack of maintenance, to a better functioning water system with a regular maintenance fund.

Initial contact between the PAR team and the community in Lele was established through UNICEF Nepal and the government District Water Supply Office. This office is changing from implementing community water management to facilitating it. In a first exploratory visit in early 1995 the PAR team listened to the water history from Lele told by the water technician from a neighbouring village. During a village walk which included members from the existing Water Users Committee they observed the water source at Panighat, the public taps and distribution lines from the break pressure tank.

The PAR team's objective was to provide the community in Lele with a 'fishing technique' rather than 'giving the community a fish'; that is to help the community sustainably manage their water supply system. Therefore a series of activities was carried out in order to make the community capable of management,

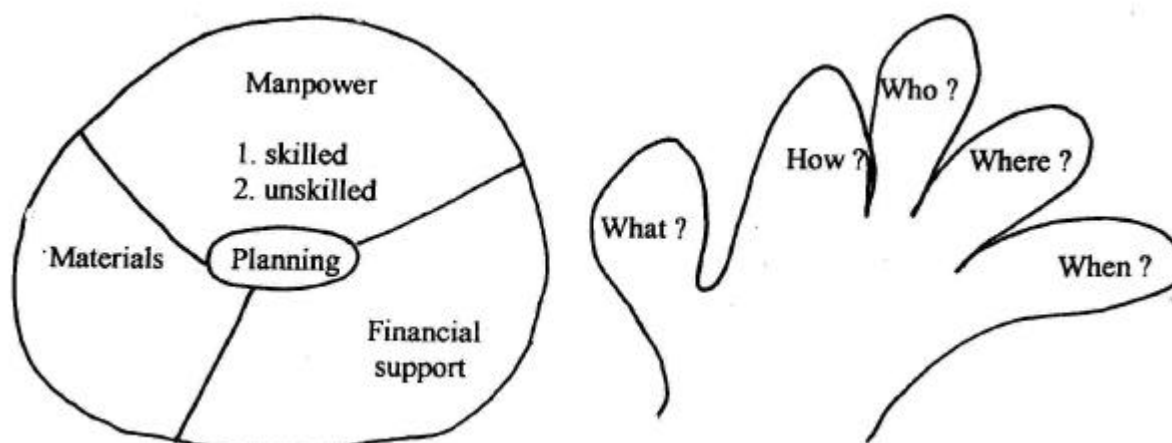
maintaining and sustaining their water supply by themselves. These included:

- training of six PAR volunteers, some of whom were also Water User Committee member;
- involvement of the community in problem identification and analysis, leading to action such as a fining system by the WUC for anybody who cuts the water pipeline;
- PAR volunteers organising community workshops and assisting in training of other WUC members on leadership, communication, group management, financial management and proposal writing. The impact of this training was noticeable when the WUC secretary introduced a payment and receipts system in the community;
- exposure, exchange and observation visits contributing to capacity building of the PAR volunteers and water committee members; and,
- experiences in Lele were also shared with the national water planning and implementing agencies which were guiding the PAR process.

### • Developing a community-based approach to paying water tariffs

Mr. Rajendra was the secretary of the existing Water Users Committee. At the first meeting he informed the PAR team that the DWSO in Lalitpur had written a letter to the Lele WUC asking them to collect Rupees 1,000 per tap to be deposited in the bank as maintenance fund. Through a mass meeting it was agreed that each of the 68 households would pay 10

**Figure 1. Division and planning of work developed in the training of the PAR volunteers in the villages**



Rupees per month. They also appointed a caretaker and decided to pay him 500 Rupees per month. The remaining 180 would be deposited in the maintenance fund at the bank.

However, this approach did not work. One fifth of the people paid irregularly, and another fifth refused to pay at all, because they thought the government provided the water supply system free of cost.

Another community workshop was held to discuss the problem, and a new approach was suggested. This time, the community decided to collect *Pani Pathi*, a community contribution for water of four kilograms of corn per year from each household. This approach was based on a traditional practice whereby villagers make an offering of *Lam Pathi* (4 k.g corn/year/household) to a Lama, a Buddhist priest. However, despite being a traditionally-based approach, it did not work either. The reason seems to be that each family has a different appropriate time to use their stored corn. The time set by the committee did not match all the families' appropriate times.

The committee members realised that this decision was not as practical as they thought. In the next meeting they decided to collect Rs.1,000 per tap, which would be deposited in the bank for initial maintenance, and the interest would be used for minor repairs of the system. They introduced this new system, and now they have more than RS 14,000 in the

bank. Most of this money will be used to repair broken down public taps.

### **Building capacity to solve problems**

One of the impacts of the PAR approach was to build the capacity of community members to solve their own problems by trial and error. The above account of developing an approach to collecting a water tariff is one example of how they have been experimenting with one problem solving strategy after another. The success of this activity encouraged the Water Users' Committee to go further. Since they realised that financial independence is one of the most important factors in maintaining and sustaining their water supply system. So in February 1998, in a community workshop, they decided to collect Rs.5/month for regular maintenance. The PAR team provided each household with a user card on which payments of the monthly charges are recorded by the treasurer (see Figure 2).

*'Oh! This is the one that we wanted, it will be very useful to keep records up to date'*, Rajendra, the committee chairman explained.

To maintain the regularity of contributions, the committee also enforced a discount and fine system. If someone pays his/her tariff within 1 to 7 days of every month then 50 Paise will be discounted. If the payments come later, then 25 Paise per day must be paid as a fine. This

system has been adopted to encourage users to pay the water tariff on time. This system, and the transparency of the process, made people enthusiastic. Anyone can see these things from their records. Now they have trained Mr. Kuber Silwal with the help of NEWAH and appointed him as a caretaker.

Figure 2. A user card



• **Main achievements of the PAR approach**

Maintaining community interest in the PAR process was one of the achievements in all the communities involved in Nepal (see Box 1).

In Lele the Water Users Committee now organises every year a mass meeting for financial transparency and to inform and discuss with the villagers the problems, issues and progress. They helped the neighbouring village to get financial support and to buy pipes to improve their defunct water supply.

Training has become another important component in the process, resulting in villagers developing new skills, such as book keeping (see Box 2).

**BOX 1**  
**PAR VOLUNTEERS IN NEPAL IN ACTION**

In Gajedi, the PAR volunteers realised that the activities were not being monitored properly, and so decided to form a monitoring committee of three members including one woman. In Lele the committee realised that the users were losing interest in the PAR activities, so they held a mass meeting to explain the process, the activities carried out so far and the guidance received. This transparency helped to revive the community's interest in improving management of their water supply.

**BOX 2**  
**ACHIEVEMENT OF TRAINING**

Mr Rameswor Lamichane can now keep his financial records up to date. He commented that his book-keeping system 'is an achievement of the training'. In Lele, Mr Rajenura Silwal introduced a receipt and voucher system. In Gajedi a woman was selected as treasurer, because 'women are more loyal and honest than men', according to Mr Paudel.

The water committee is selling part of the spring water to the nearby mineral water company. This is one new solution the community is trying obtain funds to keep their water supply going. Another achievement is the fact that PAR volunteers are getting more and more involved in other community activities. For example, the one female PAR volunteer and WUC member is now president of the women's group, which has been implementing subsidised latrines, a smokeless stove programme and income generating activities. Therefore it is clear that the PAR approach has achieved much in the communities it has been involved with.

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