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Pakora in Pakistan: moving towards democratic management

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• Introduction

Pakora is situated in the Ghizer District of Northern Pakistan, 36 km from the district headquarters. The village's water supply was given to the community by the Local Bodies and Rural Development Department (LB&RDD) for political reasons. One of the community members, Aman Ali, was elected as a member of the Union Council. After he had won the elections, he arranged for his village to receive a water supply scheme from the LB&RDD. However, the community did not accept the donated water supply. This was because they did not want to provide free land and labour for the water scheme, and as Hakeem Alishah, one of Community Research Team (CRT) members explained: *'At that time, water was not a big problem for us, so we didn't accept the water supply'*.

However, the District Council Chairman, through regular visits, eventually persuaded 20 people to start the scheme on a piece of land for the water supply tank from one of the villagers. In return he was to be appointed as the caretaker of the system from the LB&RDD. The chairman also arranged for Rs.40,000 (US\$ 1200) to be provided from the Northern Area Administration, in addition to the pipes and cement provided by the LB&RDD. The Rs.40,000 were used on the labour for the construction of the water tank. The community demanded household connections instead of the planned public standposts. Their demand was accepted by the LB&RDD and the community took part in the installation of the pipelines.

Apart from this, the participation of the community in this 'one-man show' was totally negligible. The site for the water tank was on the property of one of the villagers who was asking money for it. The channel down hill was built through a steep sliding place, which regularly collapsed. Not all the households were connected. Mistakes in construction and failure to introduce a payment system for maintenance resulted in a disfunctioning water system for most of the time since it was completed.

This was the conclusion of the community in Pakora, when the PAR team stepped in at the start of the research project to analyse what had gone wrong and what, and how, improvements could be achieved.

An improved committee

The PAR team had approached the community through the *Numberdar*, a local leader, and also solicited the help of the political leaders. They explained the purpose and scope of the project. Having discussed organisational issues and the status of the water supply system, the community indicated that it wanted to have a co-ordinating body, which represented all interest groups. So they selected the 9 male and 4 female members of a 13 member Community Research Team (CRT) (see Box 1). The PAR team took this idea of CRT membership to other villages where the PAR team was also working. The idea was applied in each of the other PAR villages; Hasis, Hoto and Ghaziabad. These Committees have been useful in the villages.

BOX 1
AN ANGRY MAN BECOMES PRESIDENT

In the early stage of the research process in Pakora, a town meeting was going on near the Jamat Khana. The PAR team noticed a man sitting on his roof and looking at the gathering. In the middle of the meeting the man appeared in the gathering and started shouting, *'What are you doing? You are having this meeting near my house. I am also interested to come, but as I am very poor that is why you are ignoring me. I am not informed about the village meeting, why? As I am the poorest'*.

Some of the community tried to stop him but the PAR team let him speak out his anger to see the reason behind the shouting. Later on, the PAR team learnt that he was a retired army man and was very disappointed that he had not been informed about the meeting. He ended up attending the meeting and the community selected him to be a member of the CRT. He worked as a member for some time and was very active in the committee. By seeing his interest and good performance as a member, he was selected as the president for the CRT. Although he gave up the presidency of the CRT in 1997, he is still a very important social activist in the community. He has even represented his community during the regional exchange visit to the other PAR communities in Nepal.

Previously in the village there was a Falahi committee, a general village development committee, which managed village issues, but when the CRT was formed, the villagers found this to be more effective than the old committee, because it focuses exclusively on water supply. The members of the Falahi committee tried to transfer all their responsibilities to the CRT members, but the CRT members explained that the purpose of forming the CRT was not to resolve all the other outstanding issues in the community. Following an exchange visit to Ghaziabad, one of the other PAR villages, the community started to organise other committees, such as a Natural Resource Committee and Health Committee and even a Wedding Committee.

Mechanisms like these reflect a more communal way of thinking about solving problems in the village. The CRT members,

the CRT supporters, the local *Numberdars*, the Union Councillors and Mr. Syed Muhammad Shah, the member of the District Council all share the following sentiment: *'before, we were not able to discuss problems and solve our problems. Now we sit together and discuss these things.'*

Transparency and record keeping

'We did not know how much money was given to the Union Council member in the name of the village', Akeem, the secretary of the CRT said when there was a discussion about the past water supply scheme. The PAR team helped set up a transparent management system with the community, who were involved in each step of the research phase. They also participated in the budget planning of the scheme.

To improve accountability, the secretary of the CRT was taught how to keep records of meetings and the money. Any money that comes into the community is recorded and annually accounted for in a presentation to the community. Whilst the CRT secretary is very sharp and the most qualified (educated) individual in the village, he is very busy and is often away. Due to his frequent absences, he was not properly documenting the progress of the CRT. The solution for this was to have the CRT women document the progress and the decisions taken. The female CRT members are also responsible for keeping records of the CRT meetings, tariffs and the collection of fines. Record keeping has helped the committee members in answering the complaints of the community.

A system of fines has also been introduced on water usage. Those households who keep their taps open are fined and the female CRT members in their *mohallahs* (wards) check the taps. The CRT also has a clear and transparent relationship with the community. Before making decisions, a community level meeting is called to inform the whole community and to hear their opinion (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. A community research team meeting (Photo: A. Hussain)



• **Improvements to the water supply**

The physical rehabilitation of the scheme was very important for the community and the PAR team in Pakora. The improved management and problem-solving capacity of the community has meant that the rehabilitation has now been completed, and most of the community are now able to receive water piped directly to their homes for 11 months of the year. The remaining month the pipe between the inlet chamber and the storage tank is frozen.

A work plan was made with the help of the CRT that suited the community, and the seasons were also considered while planning the construction work.

The PAR project was responsible for the provision of cement and other construction materials that are not available in the community, while the labour and all the local construction materials e.g. sand and stone, were provided by the community. The CRT supervised the construction work. The water storage tank was repaired and the tank was connected with the inlet chamber. The wall

was repaired, the over flow and the feeding pipe were changed and the tank was covered with Galvanised Iron sheet.

Sustaining the process

The completion of the water supply scheme, however necessary, did not mean that all of the water-related problems would cease. The Community Research Team realised that they needed mechanisms in place to enable them to cope with continuous and future problems. This is an on-going process, which requires the committee members to be flexible and to listen to the concerns of all community members in order to achieve a sustainable water system. Three major problems have been left for the CRT to tackle.

- Ten households still do not have access to the new water supply, because there was not enough distribution pipe to cover their area. These families first realised the severity of this problem during the winter months after the scheme was implemented, when they found themselves totally cut off from any safe and reliable water supply.
- In another of the *mohallahs*, the main water supply pipe is a smaller diameter

than the branch lines. This creates a pressure problem in the *mohallah*.

- The inlet chamber was not constructed in the proper place, as there were no other alternatives for the engineers. But the community people think differently. *'The engineers were wrong, they have designed the scheme improperly'*, the president of the CRT says. He thinks that the best solution is to connect the reservoir tank to the spring, which is almost 300 feet away from the tank. The amount of water has also been found to be insufficient for the number of people in the community. However, the CRT members believe that the solution lies in connecting the tank with the spring.

All these construction problems have resulted in management problems in the community. The households without the water connection are obviously not co-operating with the other community members and conflicts arise. For example, the residents of the *mohallah* with the improper pipe diameter are not ready to pay the tariff (Rs.50 per year), as they are facing the problem concerning the water pressure.

In addition to this problem the committee members identified the need for an operation and maintenance fund, which could be used to cover additional expenses for repairs. But how can an Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Fund be started in this village, when people are so poor? The female CRT members are doing a lot to help. They have started collecting five rupees every month and are depositing this in a separate account.

'We get the money from the women of the house, the men are never ready to give money', they explain. The women get this money by selling eggs. The female CRT members also use the Women Organisation (WO) for the collection of the O&M fund.

'We are also members of the WO so we talk about the importance of the O&M fund and about the importance of closing taps after use. The women are always ready to pay as they think that five rupees is nothing as compared to the maintenance of the system', Bibi Nargis, a young and enthusiastic CRT member says.

Some construction problems are due to harsh climatic and geological conditions and are difficult to solve without financial investments. However, better management could solve other problems.

• Conclusion

Thus although the community continues to face considerable problems in the improvement and on-going maintenance of the water supply, their capacity to resolve many of these problems is clearly growing, leading to a much more sustainable system than existed in the past.

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