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## Lessons learned by communities and the PAR team – Nepal

Raju Khadka and Laxmi Paudyal

### • Introduction

Article number 11 has already explained the process taken and some of the outcomes of the Nepal Water for Health organisation (NEWAH) PAR team in Lele community.

At the end of the four years of participatory action research, it was important for NEWAH<sup>1</sup>, IRC and the funding agency Directorate General for International Cooperation (DGIS) to find out how the communities evaluate the progress in achieving a sustainable water supply management system. For this purpose, a final participatory community evaluation at Yampaphant, one of the four communities involved in the PAR project, took place on the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> of October 1998. Two NEWAH staff members evaluated the PAR communities Yampaphant and Lele. Two others evaluated the other communities Rangapur and Gajedi.

The team arrived in Yampaphant and met the Chairman of the Water Users' Committee (WUC), Khil Prasad Lamichhane, and the Secretary of WUC/PAR volunteer, Rameshwor Lamichhane. They were briefed about the objectives of the evaluation. As almost all villagers were busy with harvesting, it was decided to conduct the mass meeting in the evening after dinner. Mr. K. Lamichhane started to walk through the village to let the community know about the meeting.

That evening 32 people, including nine women, came to the meeting. At first NEWAH staff explained the objectives of the meeting and requested them to share their opinion and feelings openly without hesitation. The responses and opinions of the WUC members, PAR volunteers and water users are given below.

### 1. What is the history of the water supply system and what sorts of activities have been implemented?

A focus group discussion was used to recall the history of the water supply system. The community chose Mr. R. Lamichhane to write the historical trend of the water supply system. During this discussion the women group said to the PAR team:

*'We couldn't finish describing our water problems even within ten days. We used to spend two hours to get one Gagr<sup>2</sup> of water. You need to stay more than ten days to listen to the previous problems which we had to face to get water'.*

After a half-hour exercise, Mr. R. Lamichhane presented the historical trend (see Box 1).

<sup>1</sup> Nepal Water for Health (NEWAH) is an NGO in Nepal assisting community-based organisations in the implementation of water supply and sanitation programmes.

<sup>2</sup> Nepali water pot, made out of clay, copper or brass.

## 2. What were your objectives in participating in the PAR? And did you achieve these objectives?

The community people explained that they participated in the PAR in the hope that they would get safe drinking water and have a regular, safe and sustainable drinking water supply. Regarding the achievement of these objectives, the villagers said: *'We have achieved 75% of our objectives. We aren't able to regularly supply water from the newly added water source so far. Therefore we haven't been able to achieve 25% of our objectives'*.

## 3. What were the main problems you identified during the community diagnosis at the start of the PAR process?

This question was mainly asked to PAR volunteers and Water Committee members by using focus group discussions. Mr. Kil Prasad Lamichhane (chairman of the WUC) said that they had identified 12 problems. Of these, the community identified two major problems<sup>3</sup>: the inadequate drinking water supply for the total population and the absence of rules and regulations regarding the water supply system in the village.

## 4. What were the problem-solving strategies you developed?

Again Mr. Kil Prasad Lamichhane answered that the community found a new water source and constructed the water supply system. Since they did not have a legal Water Users Committee, discussions were held with a lawyer and he advised the villagers to prepare a constitution. They prepared the constitution of the WUC and registered it. Regular follow up during four months was needed to register the WUC. After a lengthy bureaucratic process, the WUC constitution was registered on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 1998.

<sup>3</sup>At the time of the diagnosis, the community actually identified a third major problem, which they did not mention here: this was the lack of trained maintenance workers.

### BOX 1 HISTORICAL TREND OF THE WATER SUPPLY SYSTEM

- In 1992/93 the water supply system was completed by Nepal Red Cross Society, which provided materials and technical advice.
- Water at the source decreased and in 1993/94, we started to search for alternative water sources.
- In September 1995 we made contact with NEWAH and started the Participatory Action Research process.
- We experimented with various means and alternatives for a sustainable water supply programme.
- We decided to add a new water source to improve the water supply system in March 1996.
- The construction of the new source was completed in June 1996.
- The Water Users' Committee (WUC), a permanent body, was formed.
- We participated in various training activities and exchange & observation visits with other villages, and implemented what we observed and learned.
- We appointed a regular male caretaker in 1998.
- We decided to regularly collect Rs. 10/month for each household.
- We bought the land for a reservoir tank, cost Rs 4,000.
- We registered the constitution of the WUC at the District Administrative Office and we renewed it in 1998.
- We distributed user cards for regular collection of the water tariff.
- In 1998 we provided a number of taps and selected a co-ordinator for each tap to regularly collect the water tariff for their tap.
- In 1997/98 we constructed five additional taps through the effort of the users.
- In May 1998 we repaired the intake of the new water source.
- In 1998 we installed a regulating valve in each tap.

**Figure 1. Monitoring the activities of the community** (Photo: H. Subba)

### 5. Lessons learned?

When asked about the lessons learned, the villagers mentioned again the registration of the WUC. They felt that they were now in a stronger position and were satisfied about it. But on the other hand they considered that only using laws is not effective. The WUC should work more on creating public awareness among others about the need to contribute to the maintenance fund.

### 6. What are the strengths and constraints you experienced whilst experimenting with problem-solving strategies?

A lively discussion started and a number of strengths/positive aspects and constraints were mentioned.

*Strengths/positive aspects;* the villagers now have an alternative water source to improve the situation of the inadequate water supply. All the villagers are united and participated equally in the construction of the new water source. They are able to supply water to all taps by using a regulating valve.

*Constraints;* regarding constraints, the villagers reported they had had a very big problem in registering the constitution of the WUC, due to the new system and the staff of the District Administrative Office, who are not

familiar with the rules and regulations of WUC registration. Transfer of government staff has created another problem. The demand for water is increasing. All households want to build a separate tap in their own house, but the source of water is inadequate for the total population, and the newly added water source is not regular. In the dry season the flow is much more limited than that of the monsoon period.

During the mass meeting, one user commented that the secretary and chairman of the WUC are very active in social activities, but some members of WUC are not so active. He said if the 90 households of Yampa become active, the management system would become sustainable. The women's group further added that if there are opportunities for training, they are ready to go, but for various reasons they are not actively involved in community activities

### 7. What have you achieved after experimenting with the problem-solving strategies?

The people present discussed this for a while and at the end formulated the following achievements:

- We registered the constitution of the WUC, so we can operate legally.

- We are able to collect the water tariff on a regular basis.
- We constructed the new water supply system and are able to supply water to all the taps.
- A watchman has been appointed for regular maintenance of the water supply system.
- The sanitary conditions in the village have improved as well as an increased number of latrines.

**8. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the four-year research programme and what are your suggestions?**

*Strengths: the villagers identified the following strengths.*

- It increased our knowledge of the water supply management system.
- We feel ownership of the programme and we have become attached to the water supply management system that we are doing.
- By regular follow up, the PAR team pushes us and we have become more aware on how to improve our management system.

*Weaknesses: the PAR process was considered to be a time consuming process and required quite some efforts from the community*

members in terms of attending meetings and going through the process of problem identification and thinking of possible solutions. However, the villagers felt that that it was worth their efforts.

*Suggestions:* when asked about suggestions for improvements, the villagers replied that the research programme did not have any disadvantages other than the time involved, but that it had taught them new lessons. Through this programme, people also become more aware about the management aspects of water supply and sanitation. They implemented some problem solving strategies but have not yet had the opportunity to see the full effect of these.

**9. Is your water supply management system improved or not by the help of four years of the research process? How has your management system improved?**

The villagers answered that their water supply management system had improved. A new water source had been added to improve the inadequate water supply. They now use a regulating valve for equal distribution of water to all taps. It is working well. A system of up-to-date record keeping and minutes of meetings is now in place.

**Figure 2. Women discuss future strategies** (photo: H. Subba)



The Water Users Committee has been legalised. A regular watchman has been appointed. The Water Users have cards for regular collection of the water tariff. However, they find it quite difficult to collect only Rupees 10/month for each household. This would only provide them with Rupees 120 per household per year (about US\$2). Once they pay a monthly tariff the villagers may not be willing to also contribute as and when required. Till now villagers were ready to contribute any time more financial support was needed. Although a final decision has not yet been taken, the WUC is considering the collection of the water tariff on a yearly basis, because the villagers are ready to pay.

### What is your future plan?

The villages felt that a big problem will be to supply water regularly from the new source. They reported they are discussing whether a new reservoir should be build below the old one for the new source only, and if it will supply the regular water. So they plan to build a reservoir and will prepare a proposal and ask NEWAH or other organisations for financial and technical support.

### • Lessons learned by the PAR team

At the end of the four years of the Participatory Action Research project 'The role of communities in the management of improved rural water supply in developing countries', the PAR team in Nepal has highlighted the following learning points:

- Having decisions from the majority of the community is essential in community development. To conduct any type of social activities in the community, all the community should be represented on a proportional basis.
- Both women and men have an equal role in carrying out social activities related to community development. Moreover, it is important also to involve those more marginalised groups of the community in the executive board of the water committee.
- If one committee member becomes selfish the work or goal cannot be achieved, or

one should not be selfish to do group work. So the PAR team and Community Research Team should always work towards consensus or majority decision-making.

- Each individual is equally important to help solve group problems.
- Any type of community work should be done on a priority basis set by the community.
- It is the responsibility of the committee members to keep their group on the right track.
- Making people understand the need for their involvement in decision-making and planning is vital in order to mobilise local resources
- By overloading one person with responsibilities, the community cannot attain the desired results. People have to work as a team.

### • Conclusion

Many water projects do not consider sustainability, as they do not involve communities in the planning stage. As a result most of the water programmes are not sustainable, due to the poor management and lack of maintenance. The Participatory Action Development approach applied to water problems in the communities in Nepal has contributed to the strengthening of community management to solve these problems. The common search of communities, researchers, implementing agencies and external support agencies for community management in local water provision has played a vital role in sustaining the programme. Without this participatory learning, investments in water infrastructure development will not have a lasting impact.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mr. Raju Khadka (Team Leader) and Ms. Laxmi Paudyal (Team Member).</b> NEWAH, (Nepal Water for Health), P.O. Box 4231, Baluwatar, Kathmandu, Nepal. Tel: +977 1 417603/418248; Fax: +977 1 414099; Email: newah@mos.com.np</li> </ul> |
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