"There is a positive link between sustained and effective WSS services and the use of demand-responsive, participatory, gender and poverty-sensitive approaches that benefit both men and women, rich and poor."

This communication aims to share the methodology and indicators used for a series of participatory learning assessments as part of a global Initiative on gender and participation. The findings of this Initiative will contribute towards evolving guidelines on social assessments in ongoing projects to allow demands of consumers to guide key investments and manage services.
Although ‘gender’ and ‘participation’ frequently feature in project documents, they are rarely translated into the actual design, implementation, monitoring or evaluation strategies. A growing body of empirical evidence, however, suggests that both the sustainability and impact of projects can be positively affected by proper attention to a gender perspective in user participation. Gender must be perceived as a specific parameter of socio-economic analysis. Women and men have different roles and responsibilities in society and, consequently, their demands for goods and services also differ. A particular concern is that women continue to be excluded from decision-making. Often their involvement is limited to mandatory representation, for example on user committees, with the inherent danger of increasing demands on women’s time without actually giving them a voice.

Recognizing the significance of gender differentials in the demand for and access to services as well as economic behavior, the Water and Sanitation Program\(^1\) launched a global Participatory Learning for Action (PLA) Initiative in October 1997. The Initiative seeks to examine the relationship between the application of demand-responsive principles using participatory, gender and poverty-sensitive approaches and sustainability, focusing particularly on the institutional and organizational factors that support use of these approaches.

The PLA Initiative aims to test a novel methodology for social assessment. It draws extensively on two methods currently in use: (i) the participatory evaluation methods developed within the Bank and (ii) the Systematized Minimum Evaluation Procedures (MEP) developed by WHO, as well as the global RWSS study of the WSP\(^2\). The PLA framework adds gender and self scoring at all stakeholder levels — household, community, executing agencies, policy makers, and ESAs (External Support Agencies).

Phase I of the Initiative (October 1997–June 1999) includes a series of learning assessments conducted in partnership with the International Water and Sanitation Center (IRC), The Hague. The assessments are being carried out in collaboration with the main stakeholders in 14 WSS projects in the five world regions in which the WSP operates\(^3\). The Phase I activities are supported by Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) and the Dutch Government. Based on the synthesized lessons from Phase I, the WSP plans to implement a four year Phase II (1999–2003). Phase II shall include a range of capacity building activities at all levels in the stakeholder groups to address the emerging issues and contribute to design and implementation of projects that are sustainable.

**The Assessments**

The assessments adopt a systems approach emphasizing the relatedness of outcomes at the community level to the responsiveness of the service

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1. The Water and Sanitation Program (WSP), an international partnership, began in the late 1970s during the Water and Sanitation Decade. It has evolved into a global program supported by The World Bank, UNDP and 15 bilateral donor agencies in about 42 countries. Since 1992, the Program has influenced the design and performance of investments worth over US$ 2.5 billion, reaching more than 55 million people.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Indicators and sub-indicators</th>
<th>Source of information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Effectively sustained</td>
<td>Functioning System • Level of quality of the works (degree to which they are suited to operation) • Service operation in terms of water quantity, quality and supply reliability</td>
<td>• Technical team members • Local records, operators and service administrators • Users (M/F, R/P)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Effective Financing • Coverage of investment and/or recurrent costs • Universality and timeliness of payments</td>
<td>• Socio-Economic Team Members • Local records • Users (M/F, R/P)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Effective Management • Level and timeliness of repairs • Budgeting and accounting for service</td>
<td>• Local records, service administrators, operator, mechanic etc. • Users (M/F, R/P)</td>
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<tr>
<td>B. Effective use</td>
<td>Hygienic Use by All • Proportion and nature of population using the service • Degree of improvement of family water use habits</td>
<td>• Users (M/F, R/P)</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Demand-responsive service</td>
<td>Meeting User Demands • Range of service characteristics users contribute to, for M/F, R/P • Achieved balance of user-perceived cost-benefit for M/F, R/P</td>
<td>• Users (M/F, R/P)</td>
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<td>D. Division of burdens and benefits</td>
<td>Economic Participation • Division of skilled/unskilled and paid/unpaid labor between M/F, R/P • Cost sharing/contributions sharing between and within households</td>
<td>• Users (M/F, R/P) • Local service administrators and workers (M/F)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Management Participation • Function holding and decision-making by M/F, R/P</td>
<td>• Local service administrators (M/F)</td>
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<td>E. Participation in service establishment</td>
<td>User Voice and Choice in Planning and Design • Degree of informed decision making by M/F, R/P on: service initiation; choice of technologies and service levels; location of facilities; choice of local service management organization; type and size of contributions to service exploitation; and choice of local maintenance system.</td>
<td>• Local service administrators (M/F) at the time of establishment of the service. • Users (M/F)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>User Contributions to Service Establishment • Type and proportion of contribution by M/F, R/P • Local monitoring and control, specifying M/F, R/P</td>
<td>• Local records • Local service administrators (M/F) at the time of establishment of the service. • Users (M/F, R/P)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Management Capacity Created • Type of management skills created among M/F, R/P • Composition, status and areas and tools of control of managing committee, as present and known to M/F, R/P</td>
<td>• Local records • Local service administrators (M/F) at the time of establishment of the service. • Users (M/F, R/P)</td>
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<tr>
<td>F. Institutional support for gender and demand-responsive participation</td>
<td>Enabling Organizational System • Indicative policy as reflected in service objectives, implementation approaches and project performance criteria • Sex and class disaggregated planning and monitoring systems in operation • Required project expertise reflected in type of project agencies, field teams and team approach • Extent and nature of staff training available for new approaches</td>
<td>• Project documents • Staff (M/F) • Manager (M/F) in charge of project at the time of implementation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Supportive Organizational Climate • Understanding and incentives for demand-responsive and gender and class sensitive participatory approaches</td>
<td>• Staff (M/F) and • Manager (M/F) at time of implementation</td>
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<tr>
<td>G. Policy support for gender and demand-responsive participation</td>
<td>Supportive Sector Policy and Strategy • National sector policy for water and sanitation present with sustainable services and equity as explicit goals • Degree to which national sector strategies are present to guide the achievement of the policy goals and lay down community participation and management; gender sensitivity and gender equity; and demand-responsiveness</td>
<td>• Policy documents • Project documents</td>
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It was also conveyed to the policy makers for review of existing regulations.

Another important feature of the analytical framework is the examination of not only project input and output indicators but also the process indicators as determinants of sustainability. Twenty indicators — six each to test demand-responsiveness and gender and poverty-sensitive participation both in the present as well as preceding processes, two each to assess the institutional and policy conditions under which the services were established, and four to test the service sustenance — were chosen. (Refer to the Table on the left). Conceptually, the results of community level variables are seen as a product of the processes through which the services were established and the institutional and policy environment underlying these processes.

The analytical framework reflects the following assumptions:

A. The degree to which the community sustains an installed water supply and/or sanitation service, has an effect on

B. the degree to which the population — male and female, rich and poor uses the service, and is in turn positively associated with

C. the degree to which the services meet the demands of the respective population categories and,

D. the way in which the burdens and benefits of the service are divided between men and women, rich and poor.

The relationships between variables A to D are assessed at the community level and form the basis of analysis of the current status of WSS services. These relationships are also a product of the processes through which the services were established and the institutional and policy environment underlying these processes.
The services will be better sustained and used by the community if the sector institutions and policies enable the communities (men & women, rich & poor) to:
- initiate the service
- take informed decisions about the type of service management and financing systems and
- build capacities to maintain and manage the services so that burdens and benefits are equitably shared.

The assumption is that the degree of gender and poverty-sensitive participation in sustaining WSS services is positively associated with:

E. the degree of gender and poverty-sensitive participation in the establishment of the service,
F. the institutional support for such approaches; and
G. the presence and application of demand-responsive and gender and poverty-sensitive principles and policies in the project and the sector.

Variables E to G are assessed through a historical analysis of the role of the enabling institutions at all levels — community, service delivery and policy — at the time of the establishment of the service.

There are many ‘exogenous factors’ that influence the variables considered in the assessments; not all of these can be spelt out clearly and included in the analytical framework. Consequently such aspects of sustainability (or lack of it) shall be captured through qualitative data.

Methodology

The METGUIDE4 provides a broad framework to guide individual country teams to evolve their own field work plans, taking care to retain the comparability between countries. Since the Initiative is planned as a global exercise involving 14 countries, each case will bring its own diversity of economic, social and cultural settings, governance and institutional arrangements, and national/state sector policies. A companion CODE BOOK has been developed to record and codify qualitative as well as quantitative data for scoring and global synthesis of results. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) shall be used to analyze the compiled data, applying both parametric and non-parametric tests.

Participatory Tools

There is considerable experience in the use of participatory tools at the community level, particularly by NGOs, and primarily with illiterate/semi-literate populations. However, the use of these tools with a range of stakeholders including the staff of service delivery agencies, local government and user group representatives, is a novel attempt. The tools and techniques for the institutional level analysis have been developed specifically for the PLA.

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A. Reference /Advisory Group

A group of “movers and shakers” comprising of four to five professionals from the sector.

B. Assessment Team for the Field Study

- Sociologist, Coordinator
- Sanitary/WS Engineer
- Participatory Development Specialist with gender training/orientation/skills
- Field Staff
- Project Officials
- Members of the User Committee (one male and one female).

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THE STAKEHOLDER MEET

On 23rd July 1998, a two day experimental “Stakeholder Meet” was organized at Kochi, Kerala, with the institutions involved in the Dutch assisted WATSAN project, as part of the pilot assessment. Male and female members of the user committees, representatives of the concerned local government, service delivery agency, social intermediary (organization/NGO providing an interface between the community and the formal service delivery agency) and other involved government partners were present. The objective was to test the tools for the assessment of the indicators for gender and poverty sensitive participation in the establishment of the service and the institutional support for such policies (E and F of the framework).

The “Stakeholder Meet” was found to be an interesting and effective tool to measure the institutional level indicators. For instance, a secret voting chart was used to capture data which may not emerge in open discussions or interviews. The “Stakeholder Meet” was conducted in the local language and a combination of tools was used to avoid monotony.

CRITERIA FOR PROJECT SELECTION

- Demand driven projects using participatory development principles.
- Projects initiated at least five years back and completed not less than three years back.
- The implementing agency’s willingness to participate with financial/staff resources.

Finding ‘truly demand-responsive’ and ‘perfectly sustained’ systems and services that can stand up to rigorous scrutiny is not an easy task. ‘Sustainability’, therefore, is a ‘process’ to be strived for rather than an ‘end situation’. The Initiative therefore is not looking for ‘utopias’, but working with projects that are ‘substantially sustainable’.

while those for the community level have evolved from PRA\(^5\) and SARAR\(^6\). The “Stakeholder Meet”, an important component of this methodology is being specifically tested in the field.

A pilot assessment was conducted in Kerala, India, in July-August 1998 to: (i) test the tools in the field (ii) review the validity of the analytical framework, indicators and variables (iii) arrive at a realistic time frame for the assessments and (iv) develop a comprehensive scoring matrix that would capture the richness of the data. The assessment focused on a Dutch assisted WSS project implemented over the period 1987-1996 and was carried out by WSP South Asia in collaboration with a local agency three years after the completion of service and two years after the agency had fully withdrawn from the area.

Global Synthesis and Action

The global and intensive nature of the assessments, carried out within a short time frame could make this a significant learning experience for the sector. The PLA is emerging as an innovative and straight-forward social assessment tool using a common set of tested indicators at various stages of the project cycle — design, review and completion. Assessments are already underway in Bolivia, Cameroon, Colombia, Ecuador, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines, Peru, Sri Lanka and Zambia.

The PLA METGUIDE is also being applied in Bank operations including the Karnataka Rural Water Supply and Environmental Sanitation Program (KRWSES), in India, and the Community Water Supply and Sanitation Project (CWSSP) in Sri Lanka. Outside the Bank, UNICEF has drawn on this methodology for a comprehensive evaluation of its WSS program in India and to plan a project in Colombia while WHO is using the methodology for an evaluation in Mexico.

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\(^5\) Participatory Rural Appraisal.

\(^6\) Self-Esteem, Associative Strengths, Resourcefulness, Action-Planning and Responsibility.