

Innovative Strategies and Institutional Arrangements for Ensuring of Sustainability of Rural Water Supply Programme in Sri Lanka

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Capacity building, Ownership, Sustainability, Decision-making, Stakeholders

ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka is a small country in the Indian Ocean extending to approx. 64,000 km. It has a population of 2.1 million and out of this population, 72% represent as rural communities. At present, safe drinking water coverage in the country is 80% while the rural coverage is approximately 42%. Rural communities depended mainly on shallow ground water extracted from dug wells, streams, rain water harvesting and other natural sources for a long time. But the main issue in some dry zone areas now is the high content of fluoride and iron in ground water and the scarcity due to seasonal variations in water levels during the dry seasons. Therefore, the demand for safe drinking water continuously increased and to address this growing demand the National Water Supply and Drainage Board (NWSDB) initiate various actions as well as innovative approaches with sector pertness to provide water to them. NWSDB is presently the pioneer organization to supply drinking water for both urban and rural communities.

The supply driven concept was used in the water sector up to Water Decade but afterwards priority had been shifted to community participation with demand responsive approach. Thereafter, the Rural Water Supply (RWS) strategy shifted towards application of beneficiary contribution, participation in decision-making and management of their small scale water supply systems too. Through this context, the NWSDB has introduced as well as applied innovative institutional, capacity building and legislative arrangements with community empowerment for sustainable RWS programme together with sector partners since year 2000. The programme goals are sustainable and efficient management of the community manage water supply schemes, increased the water supply coverage, strengthening the CBO and to improve the health and well being people living in the rural area who are lacking basic amenities as well as decision making power for the beneficiary communities too. The programme has introduced as well as applied innovative and important methods aiming at sustainability of the RWS systems.

Innovative Institutional Arrangements

- Establishment of National Community Water Trust
- Establishment of RWS technical units;

Capacity building for Sector Pertness

Also we introduced capacity building to the sector, especially to CBO with the Consolidation programme. Some activities were planned as training, seminars and workshops but also directed towards achieving sustainable systems too. Most of trainings were focused to develop and strengthen the CBO. The NWSDB initiated to set up CBO federations as an umbrella organization, affiliated with village level CBO, which have been established to work collectively towards the sustainability of RWS projects.

Policy and Legislative Arrangements

- RWS policy;
- Establishment of By laws

Sustainability depends on the ownership to a very large extent. In order to ensure their sustainable management innovative and out of the box thinking is important. Therefore, these innovative institutional, capacity building and legislative arrangements will empower these communities to manage their facilities in a more sustainable manner. However, the Government and other sector actors need to continue their facilitation role in this process and innovation has to be continued.

1. BACKGROUND

Sri Lanka is a small country in the Indian Ocean extending to approx. 64,000 km. It has a population of 2.1 million according to the Census done in 2012 and out of this population, 72% represent as rural communities. At present, safe drinking water coverage in the country is 80% while the rural coverage

is approximately 42%. Rural communities depended mainly on shallow ground water extracted from dug wells, streams, rain water harvesting and other natural sources for a long time. But the main issue in some dry zone areas now is the high content of fluoride and iron in ground water and the scarcity due to seasonal variations in water levels during the dry seasons. Therefore, the demand for safe drinking water continuously increased and to address this growing demand the National Water Supply and Drainage Board (NWSDB) initiate various actions as well as innovative approaches with sector partners to provide water to them. NWSDB is presently the pioneer organization to supply drinking water for both urban and rural communities.

The supply driven concept was used in the water sector up to Water Decade but afterwards priority had been shifted to community participation with demand responsive approach. Thereafter, the Rural Water Supply (RWS) strategy shifted towards application of beneficiary contribution, participation in decision-making and management of their small scale water supply systems too. Through this context, the NWSDB has introduced as well as applied innovative institutional, capacity building and legislative arrangements with community empowerment for sustainable RWS programme together with sector partners since year 2000. This programme is ongoing and at the moment more than 4000 RWS schemes owned and managed by the Community Based Organizations (CBO) in the country.

2. OBJECTIVES

The programme goals are sustainable and efficient management of the community manage water supply schemes, increased the water supply coverage, strengthening the CBO and to improve the health and well-being people living in the rural area who are lacking basic amenities as well as decision making power for the beneficiary communities too.

3. METHODS

The programme has introduced as well as applied innovative and important methods aiming at sustainability of the RWS systems.

3.1. Innovative Institutional Arrangements

The NWSDB has been implementing RWS programmes since 1970's and then with the initiative of the Water Decade, the facilities were expanded. This initiative had given ample opportunities to NWSDB to experiment with various Strategies and Methodologies for implementing RWS programmes. In 1994, NWSDB established a Rural Water Supply Section and this section could achieve and coordinate with sector actors for policy development, build up Collaborative Group Council for water sector, established RWS research unit and coordinated with international donor agencies etc.

The NWSDB has a strong and a wide spread organizational structure island- wide. Its head office is based close to the capital of the country and regional support centers are established each province. Urban water supply schemes are being managed directly by the NWSDB except for a couple of systems managed by the Municipal councils. Rural schemes, which have been implemented by communities with the assistance of NWSDB, are being managed by communities themselves and owned by them too. NWSDB is held responsible for the facilitation as well as providing technical know-how for these rural systems.

3.1.1. Establishment of RWS technical units

Even from the inception of the Programme, the limitations in technical know-how at the local level in RWS systems were well established. Initially NWSDB proposed two Technical Support Units at two different levels; namely at District office of the NWSDB and within the Local Authority (LA). In order to facilitate these Units, during the project implementation period, a Divisional Implementation Unit (DIU) was formulated and housed within the LA premises. The objective was to transform this DIU, after assisting the LA physically and training their staff using on the job training, as a support unit. But unfortunately, some technical units of the LA are not functioning properly and most of the units are assisting the communities with limited technical guidance. The NWSDB has realized the situation and decided to strengthen District RWS technical units of NWSDB accordingly.



Figure 1. RWS Technical unit at Polonnaruwa district

Main role and responsibilities of these units are;

- On demand water quality monitoring.
- Technical assistance to communities (*In constructing Ferro cement structures, extension of pipe lines and its feasibility, Treatment issues etc*).
- Advice regarding Electrical & Mechanical issues and coordination with recommended agencies.
- Act as coordination body.
- Guidance and advice solving social, financial and technical matters.
- Collection of data on RWS and sanitation and gradual building up of a data base.
- Providing training on community mobilization, leadership, financial & any other areas for staff of CBO. - Assisting CBO for preparation of water safety plans (WSP) and coordinating of implementation of water quality surveillance programme
- Increasing awareness on catchments as well as source protection and acting as a resource centre for all sector holders in the district

Presently, NWSDB District technical units are functioning effectively in 20 districts and in those locations it had helped the sustainable management of the existing rural WSS as well as the new development activities of the rural water sector.

3.1.2. Establishment of National Community Water Trust (NCWT)

The Govt. of Sri Lanka identified importance of RWS new concept and realized the Present situation of the community based RWS issues. Hence, the Government already established the NCWT under the Ministry of Water Supply and Drainage in year 2011. Its main objectives are;

- by assuring sustainability, efficiency, quality and enhancing the capacity of water supply and sanitation facilities of the CBO and their members, by making direct and indirect investments to enhance the trust fund and further developing legal and social environment conducive for the sustainability of CBO.
- by introducing and adopting methodologies, activities and industries to achieve sustainability, self-sufficiency, social enrichment, health standards, scientific competence, economic competence, educational standards, and technical capacity of the CBO and the members of the CBO.
- by promoting unity, interaction, mutual support, giving and culture among CBO and the members of the CBO and by promoting the CBO to extend support to the country through cultural, technical and social activities including women participation.
- By introducing the CBO concept for other communities and provide them with the technical knowhow and organizational support if necessary, and make them new members.

The NCWT consist the trustees, Management committee and few staff attached to the ministry as well as district basis. Main role and responsibilities of the trustees are policy making and there are three trustees represent from CBO too. Presently, all the trustees and Management committee were

appointed and District units are functioning effectively in 13 districts and in those locations it had helped the sustainable management of the existing rural WSS as well as the new development activities of the rural water sector as well. In the meantime, Govt. of Sri Lanka has arranged budget item and allocated funds from this year for the help and assist to the present CBO and implementing new RWS systems too.

3.2. Capacity Building for Sector Pertness

Also we introduced capacity building to the sector, especially to CBO with the Consolidation programme. Some activities were planned as training, seminars and workshops but also directed towards achieving sustainable systems too. Most of trainings were focused to develop and strengthen the CBO. They developed their technical know-how, financial and auditing, book keeping, leadership training, O&M etc.



Figure 2. Community training at field level

3.2.1. Cost sharing module;

The NWSDB had introduced a cost sharing model accommodating each technical option as a novel concept and presently, it is applied by other sector actors in their programmes too. Its main principles are to limit the government contribution to a maximum of 80%, community contribution to be a minimum of 20% and describe allocation of maximum House Hold cost in each technical option.

3.2.2. Formation of CBO forums;

The NWSDB initiated to set up CBO federations at LA and District levels realizing the importance of the sustainability of the CBO managed rural WSS. The CBO forum as an umbrella organization, affiliated with village level CBO, which have been established to work collectively towards the sustainability of RWS projects. All the CBO formed at village level were motivated to encourage Divisional, District and National level federations for their own interest. This initiative would be primarily beneficial to refresh the CBO and subsequently make impact on the sustainability of the facilities provided. Further they are also expected to act as service centers to coordinate the physical activities related to sustainability of rural WSS by facilitating the services required by the CBO such as providing spare parts, plumbing and mechanical services etc when CBO are in need for such support.

Objectives of the formation of CBO forums are to avoid the isolation of CBO after project implementation and make the CBO more viable and stable entities in issues on management of water supply schemes and guarantee the dynamic and lively involvement to ensure sustainability of community managed rural WSS.

3.3. Policy and Legislative Arrangements

NWSDB had taken measures to provide the legislative background to the rural water supply sector for smooth implementation; operation as well as sustainable management of the water sector and avoid issues and barriers.

3.3.1. Rural water supply policy

The policy for the RWS sector has recognized the value of water, and the need for institutional arrangement for the efficient management of facilities with community participation and the stakeholders. The Government of Sri Lanka had already approved the RWS policy and its main principles are;

- Water is a basic human need, which warrants for equitable allocation
- Water has an economic value and should therefore be recognized as an economic good
- Provision of Water Supply and Sanitation services should be people centred and demand driven.
- Users should bear the responsibility of sustainable operation and maintenance of the facilities etc.
- Women should play a central role in decision making process of the sector.
- The roles of the Government, Provincial Councils and the Local Government Authorities should be to regulate and facilitate in the implementation of the sector activities while the Community Based Organization (CBOs), Private Sector and NGOs should be the providers of services. Local Authorities also may provide services when required.
- Private sector participation in the provision, operation and maintenance of facilities and services should be encouraged.

A rural area for this purpose is defined as any lowest level administrative boundaries called *GramaNiladaree* Division within a LA area and a former Town Council area that has a population over 6,000 should not be considered as a rural area.

3.3.4. Establishment of By laws for Local Authority and CBO

The objective of this Activity is to provide CBO the necessary legal footing through the existing legal frame of local authorities in order to ensure the sustainability of the RWS facilities maintained by them. During the implementation of other community based RWS projects, the CBO formed by the beneficiaries of the facilities were supposed to take over the responsibility of O&M. However, lack of legal recognition of CBO was identified as one of the problems for effective community management of these facilities. In order to find appropriate solutions for this situation, the UNDP assisted National Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Facilitation Programme commence two studies, aiming at formulating a suitable legal framework to provide required recognition to the CBO and also to identify the needs of establishing By Laws and Regulations in the existing sector institutions. Consequent to these studies, it was decided that the standard By Law need to be formulated for the LA for facilitation of effective management of the water supply facilities by the CBO.

In order to proceed with this course of action, arrangements are being made to frame a set of By Laws for LA relating to the management of water supply schemes by CBO recognized by the Government. After the adoption of By Laws by the LA concerned, CBO will be empowered, in terms of such legal provision, to create, carry out maintain and control small semi urban and rural WSS, and extensions into rural areas from urban schemes.

Presently, all PCC have agreed to follow the By Laws within their provinces and the North, East, North Western and North Central Provinces had already approved and followed.

4. CONCLUSION

Sustainability depends on the ownership to a very large extent. At the moment Sri Lanka has more than 4000 RWS schemes owned and managed by CBO. In order to ensure their sustainable management innovative and out of the box thinking is important. Therefore, these innovative institutional, capacity building and legislative arrangements will empower these communities to

manage their facilities in a more sustainable manner. However, the Government and other sector actors need to continue their facilitation role in this process and innovation has to be continued.

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