

DISCUSSION PAPER

Institutional, legal and human constraints to sanitation

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Introduction

It has been observed that the rate of progress in development of sanitation is very low and accessibility to good sanitation is illuding the majority of people in developing countries. Some constraints are identified as the factors hampering development.

Poor national economics and poverty of the rural communities make financial considerations the most obvious constraint to development of sanitation. The choice of technology is closely associated to financial considerations and thereby gains its importance as a major factor in development of sanitation. As important as they are, availability of funding and appropriate technology have not guaranteed sustainability of projects and the enjoyment of their benefits over the expected long periods.

There are many instances where problems of funding and choice of technology have been resolved and projects have been implemented only for these projects to be found unsustainable and prematurely collapsed. Analysis shows that more often than not other potent factors related to the level of socio-economic development have played havoc with the chances of long-term sustainability of the projects. In typical developing countries, institutional building and relevant legislation may not be adequate. Human resource development specifically for sanitation may be woefully neglected. Hence institutional, legal and human resource constraints do assume equal status with funding and choice of technology as major constraints.

It must be quite obvious then that in planning sanitation projects in any developing country, serious consideration should be given to the identification of all major constraints relevant to the condition of the community or country under consideration.

Evaluation of progress

The final evaluation of the achievements of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (1981 - 1990) indicates that the achievement in the sanitation sector in Africa was insignificant, 20 percent (1980) to 22 percent (1990). The state of sanitation in many developing countries remained unsatisfactory at the end of the Decade (1990). The case of Ghana did not differ with respect to the level of achievement as at the end of the Decade sanitation coverage virtually remained the same, 66 percent for urban sanitation and 22 percent for rural sanitation. However, the achievement in water supply was relatively higher and significant in the African region with

an increase in coverage from 22 percent (1980) to 32 percent (1990).

Causes of slow progress

There is a felt urgency to achieve higher coverage for water supply and sanitation. It is therefore imperative that the causes of the low rate of progress are identified and adequately addressed.

Lack of resources for development is the general constraint to be critically examined to identify the relevant components operating in given situations. Specific constraints to be examined includes lack of inadequacy of financial resources, technologies, manpower, institutional arrangements, legislation and public education. In any given situation it is necessary to prioritize these constraints to facilitate rational planning of their removal.

Primary constraints

Generally attention has been focussed on financial considerations and technological options and the constraints related to them. The effect of these constraints related to them. The effect of these constraints are real. However, reasonable success in their removal has not guaranteed equal degree of achievement of higher coverage. For example the availability of external financial aid has met with lack of local expertise to use the funds or lack of appropriate institutional arrangements for implementation of proposed projects. Furthermore, it is observed that presently technological options abound for water supply and sanitation and that technology could no longer be a serious constraint to progress.

The adverse effects of financial and technological constraints on development of water supply and sanitation varies in degree.

While rural sanitation requires lesser support of external aid, rural water supply depends significantly on external funding for machinery and technical manpower expertise.

Therefore the slow rate of development of sanitation may be attributed less to financial and technological constraints and more to the other constraints including lack of manpower and ineffective institutional arrangements among others.

Admittedly urban sanitation, unlike rural sanitation, depends on high technology and therefore high financial requirements. However, it must be noted that concern for rural sanitation must have priority over urban sanitation,

because in all developing countries, a very high percentage of the population is rural. To illustrate this point the case of Ghana is cited here.

The population of Ghana is about 65 percent rural. There are 16,000 rural communities with population ranging between 100 and 5,000. And 10 percent of the rural population live in over 40,000 rural communities with population less than 100. Urban sanitation coverage is 66 percent while rural sanitation coverage is 22 percent.

It may be concluded that for rural sanitation the technological options abound; local construction material can be obtained and local financial resources, with good planning, can be mobilized. Therefore if the record of achievement in sanitation is unsatisfactory, it must be due to inadequate attention being given to the other constraints.

Critical constraints in sanitation

Given that the financial and technological constraints are not critical and are manageable, the concern now is to identify and analyse the other constraints and find measures to deal with them. An attempt has been made here to list components of the major critical constraints.

Legislation as constraint

- Lack of national legislation defining the roles and responsibilities of government and other agencies.
- Lack of local legislation (bye-laws) for enforcing development policies.
- Legislation lacking provisions/resources for enforcement.
- Legislation lacking adequate sanctions.

Institutional constraints

- Ineffective governmental agencies or departments performing statutory roles and responsibilities at central, regional, district and local levels.
- Inappropriate type and inadequate strength of staff.
- Low priority rating of the sanitation sector in resource allocation where the sanitation department is a part of a major development sector (e.g. health sector, public works sector, etc.).

Human resource constraint

- Lack of appropriate mix of professional and non-professional level manpower.
- Lack of competent high level professional expertise.

Public education constraint

- Low level of knowledge of health and hygiene.

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- Lack of information on options for solving national and local sanitation related problems.
- Lack of community demand for improved sanitation facilities and services.

Measures to accelerate progress

Current thinking proposes the demand driven approach to sustainable development in the water and sanitation sector. However, experience in the developing countries indicate that demand generation does not occur naturally but has to be primed by official or semi-official action including public education on all aspect of community-based development. It is therefore proposed that the measures for acceleration of progress be related to the concept of the demand driven approach.

It is proposed that demand creation be predicated on the removal of the identified critical constraints to sanitation development. If the issues of legislation, institutional arrangements, manpower resources and public education are addressed satisfactorily, the conditions, facilities and resources for demand generation would have been provided.

The next step in the development process would be the use of the facilities and resources to promote sanitation development, or to market the concept, knowledge and ideas of good sanitation. Hitherto technology developers have been selling technologies to communities who felt no need for such products and felt they could live without them.

The marketing approach is now proposed. The idea of good sanitation and its technologies must be presented but the recipients must be helped to evaluate and choose, to learn to instal and maintain facilities and appreciate the benefits to be gained. Then would communities be empowered to initiate action on their own to provide for themselves the needed sanitation facilities and services and thereby contribute to the achievement of rapid progress and higher national sanitation coverage.

References

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