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**Water and sanitation in Asia and
the Pacific : Singapore : 1984**

**Community organisation in
rural waterworks management**

G E Nepomuceno

RATIONALE

What is a "community organization?" It is a group of people belonging to a defined geographic area who have banded together to pursue a common interest or objective. For the purpose of this paper, this definition has three (3) essential elements, namely:

- A. the people belong to a defined geographic area, which is the community;
- B. they have banded together, or were caused to band together or form a group; and
- C. they pursue a common objective, or attempt to achieve an identified set of goals.

In most cases, a community organization is not the ultimate objective, but the means to realizing a pre-determined aim. It is invariably viewed by agencies involved in development work as a technique for attaining desired socio-economic changes. It is the entry point in introducing a new project to the people; it is the forum for a new training program in the community.

GOVERNMENT SPONSORSHIP

Government agencies operating in the rural areas organize residents of communities, as part of their strategies in program implementation. From the late 1940s to the mid-1970s the various agencies have formed different rural organizations that participated in activities that ranged in purpose from sanitation to cooperatives. In most cases, these organizations were provided goals-related trainings, and many of these ended when the agency concerned terminated its program. The Philippine countryside, nonetheless gained a vast experience in community organization parts of which were successful and others, failures.

FAILURES

In order to know the value of community organization as an institution, it shall be necessary to assess the factors that contribute to failure of such organizations. When the Philippine cooperatives movement

was initiated by the government, several cooperatives grew and went on to administer training activities, transportation enterprises, and other successful businesses, like rural banking. However, many other cooperative societies weakened and eventually disintegrated into oblivion.

Some of the notable factors that lead to the failure of community organizations are the following: A. lack of understanding, by members, of the group's objectives, their roles and responsibilities; B. lack of activities that attract members' interests; C. lack of funds; and D. lack of government support, in terms of incentives. If these factors could be overcome, then community organization could succeed.

WATERWORKS MANAGEMENT

In the 25 years since the early 1950s that rural drinking water supply projects have been undertaken in the Philippines, no effective approach to management and maintenance was found. No government, it seems, can afford to appropriate funds annually for waterworks maintenance, although it has always been the tendency of government to spend money for new facilities. The fact, however, is that without proper management, no waterworks project can continue to provide efficient service beyond 3 to 5 years.

Waterworks management, therefore, is a strategy that allows a drinking water supply facility to provide efficient service to the community concerned, at the least cost. In the Philippine rural areas, or in communities with population of less than 20,000, drinking water supply projects today are operated and managed by associations, composed of the members of the communities who are users of the water systems.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The organization of the waterworks association, within the universally accepted philosophy called "community participation". Adhering to this truism, in implementing the development programs of government, water supply included, community involvement became a necessary element.

In the mid-1950s, rural residents participated in waterworks projects by providing free labor and locally available materials. In several cases, however, the national government shouldered the total project costs. These facilities were left in the care of either the municipal or the village (barangay) government. In the case of the municipal government, the officials hired personnel to run the systems, while the village waterworks were operated by the local official themselves.

In almost all cases, the municipal governments lost money on their waterworks projects, in view of the following reasons: A. the hired personnel are either untrained or insufficiently trained; B. overstaffing (with political appointees, in many instances); C. inefficient billing and collection program; and D. inefficient budgeting and fiscal management. In several cases, because local officials are politician, they avoided setting the appropriate water fees. Many such waterworks facilities eventually went into disrepair, or became virtually unserviceable and ineffective.

Of the water supply projects implemented by the government in the rural areas since the early 1950s, only about five per cent (5%) remained serviceable as of 1978. Majority of the facilities failed because of the following reasons: A. inefficient operation and management; and B. inability to raise funds for maintenance.

This experience illustrate the inadequacy of local political units in the operation and management of water supply projects. A voluntary or non-governmental entity could be trained and instituted, principally to operate a waterworks project.

FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

A community organization can become strong and successful, if the factors that contribute to its failure, can be overcome. Such group, formalized into a nonprofit corporation, can be an effective operator of a water supply project.

When the Philippine rural water resource development efforts was invigorated, it was declared as a policy that associations composed of water users shall be organized, to own and manage drinking water supply projects. These associations shall be duly registered with the appropriate agency.

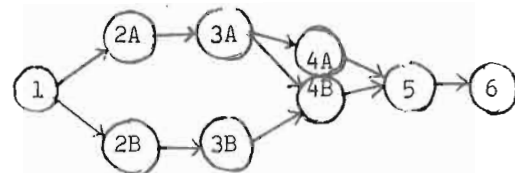
In January, 1980, through Executive Order No. 577, it became a requirement to organize the heads of families within the service area of a rural water supply project into a Rural Waterworks Association. In February, 1983, Executive Order No. 869 renamed this organization the Rural Waterworks and Sanitation Association (RWSA).

Among the techniques to be employed in the formation of the RWSAs are the following:

- A. acquainting the members with the aims of the association, through a series of training activities, as well as the relevant privileges and duties;
- B. installing a technically sound facility that will provide benefits to residents at the least cost, and be within the community's capability to maintain;
- C. encouragement of the adoption of a fiscal management strategy and a billing and collection program that will provide funds for the operation of the facility; and
- D. sustained government support, in terms of incentives and provision of technical assistance.

ORGANIZATION PROCEDURE

The organization of the RWSA starts after the community, where the waterworks project shall be installed, has been identified. Its officers are given the necessary skills, through trainings, and prepared for the management of the water supply project. Below is chart showing the sequence of techniques in the implementation of a rural drinking water supply project.



LEGEND: 1. -Identify; 2A. -Training and Formation; 2b. -Design and Estimate; 3A. -Prepare the organization; 3B. -Install; 4A. -Amortise; 4B. -Operate; 5. -Evaluate; and 6. -Expand.

After the project locale has been identified and selected, the engineering unit concerned shall prepare the infrastructure design and cost estimates, while the training or outreach unit shall conduct the training of the community and the formation of the association. While the waterworks system is being constructed, the association shall be prepared for eventual ownership and management of the system. Upon completion of the project, this is turned over to the RWSA; whereupon, if the project is financed by a loan (In the Philippines, virtually all water supply projects are funded by foreign loans.), the association pay amortization, at the same time that it is operating the project, to the agency responsible for the construction of such project. Evaluation of the project is made after a pre-determined number of years, and the facility may be expanded according to the feasibility for doing so as perceived by the association.

The RWSA has virtually all the means at its disposal to manage a drinking water supply facility and operate it successfully. The law has provided the means by which the RWSA shall acquire legal personality. When the water system, is conceptualized and designed, a minimum monthly water fee is determined, taking into consideration the diverse attendant operating costs, like amortization, reserves, repairs, salaries, electric bills, and others. The RWSA may raise the monthly water fee when necessary, and it shall institute its own budget and financial policies.

As an organization, the RWSA is meant to be self-sufficient and autonomous. Its board of directors are elected by the membership and serve for a term of one (1) year. Elective officials of the government are disqualified by law from becoming directors of RWSAs.

TRAINING ACTIVITIES

In preparing the RWSA for the management of its waterworks project, the following training activities are conducted:

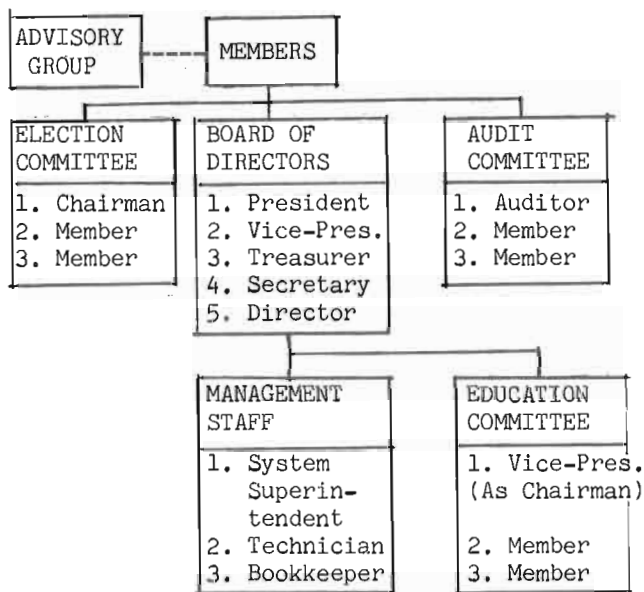
- A. Exploratory briefing - This involves formal and informal leaders of the community, who are given an overview of water supply program and the role of the community in waterworks management;
- B. Information meeting - This is conducted after a feasibility study and preliminary engineering have been conducted, and intended to inform the community the amounts of monthly water fee and loan to be incurred by the community.

This activity is also intended to assess the willingness of the community to accept the management of the waterworks project;

- C. Pre-membership course - This is undertaken when the community has accepted the responsibility of operating the project, and consists of lessons in group development, human relations, cooperatives, and organizational management. During the course, the RWSA is formed and its initial board of directors elected;
- D. Post-design meeting - The officers of the association are briefed on the plans and design of the waterworks project, and their comments and suggestions are solicited before the engineering design is finalized;
- E. Leadership course - This activity is conducted while the construction of the project is under way. The participants are the officers of the RWSA;
- F. Pre-operations workshop - This activity is held about a week before the completion of the project. This trains the RWSA's management staff on general management strategy, records management, bookkeeping and simple accounting. By this time the RWSA shall have been registered and ready to manage the facility;
- G. Post-completion course - The personnel charged with the day to day operations of the water system shall be trained, during this activity, on the technical aspects of operations, trouble-shooting, and simple repairs; and
- H. Various skills training - After some evaluation has been made of project performance and of the capabilities of the association, other training activities may be designed and conducted that shall provide officers of the RWSA the needed skills that shall make waterworks management even more efficient.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

When finally constituted, the RWSA shall have a structure that conforms with the chart below.



An advisory group, composed of elective officials, formal leaders, and retired professional, may be formed which shall be a consultant to the association. The Audit and Election committees shall be voted upon by the entire membership, and shall be responsible to the general assembly. Only the management staff and the Education Committee are under the supervision of the Board of Directors. The Board, however, may create other permanent or special committees, when needed. In the RWSA, the Vice-President is made automatically the chairman of the Education committee. It is also permitted for the elected chairmen of the Audit and Election committees to appoint the other members. The RWSA may federate with other RWSAs.

CONCLUSION

National policy makers believe that no group of people would care for a service facility more than those who benefit from such installation. An indoctrination phase, nevertheless, shall be necessary to make the beneficiaries realize thoroughly the advantages of perpetuating good service. In addition, the association should be equipped with the skills that are equal to the demands of operating and managing a water system. Those responsible for conceiving and developing this approach to rural water supply management believe that, with necessary motivations the same may be adopted in other countries initiating similar programs.

As waterworks projects in the villages proliferate, especially in developing countries, central and local governments will hardly be able to afford to allocate financial resources annually to maintain these facilities. Drinking water supply projects should be made to pay for its own operation, and it can pay for its own operation, and even expansion. In a number of rural communities in the Philippines, functional and viable RWSAs are administering projects to the satisfaction of their constituents.