Serving all urban consumers - a marketing approach to water services in low- and middle-income countries: Book 3 - PREPP - utility consultation with the urban poor

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Chapter 6

PREPP overview

6.1 Introduction and overview

PREPP — Participation-Ranking-Experience-Perception-Partnership is a consumer consultation process primarily developed for use with low-income residents in informal settlements. PREPP provides a rapid means of getting information about these consumers’ experience and perceptions about their water services, together with an expression of their preferences for new or alternative service options.

The PREPP menu

PREPP takes place in focus groups with small groups of consumers. A series of questions are asked to find out what consumers think about various aspects of their existing water supply and the range of future services that the service provider, usually a utility, wishes to introduce. The different topics are discussed with the help of visual and participatory tools. Table 6.1 shows the topics and tools that form the PREPP menu. This menu is the minimum framework for effective PREPP work. The menu can be adapted to suit different situations and consumer groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic area</th>
<th>Tool used to facilitate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of local low-income area(s)</td>
<td>Observation walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing experiences (sources, supply and coping strategies)</td>
<td>Water ladder, group probing and discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing preferences (exploration by type)</td>
<td>Household voting, group probing and discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer perceptions (of the utility)</td>
<td>Questions and probing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service option preferences (existing options compared to new)</td>
<td>Costed option ranking Pocket chart voting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PREPP and marketing

The market segment that PREPP is developed for is the urban poor. As discussed earlier, PREPP can assist the development of the right marketing mix for this customer group. Here the 7Ps marketing tool is useful and Table 6.2 provides an overview of possible outputs.
6.2 PREPP techniques

Focus groups
A focus group is a small group of individuals (8-10) with a similar social, cultural or economic background. They are brought together to work with a trained facilitator to explore a particular issue. The facilitator asks about attitudes, experiences and perceptions. The technique is inexpensive and relatively quick, lasting between one and two hours.

The facilitator probes the group based on their initial answers to semi-structured questions that have been worked out beforehand. This allows the facilitator to gain an insight into the participants' preferences, knowledge and understanding. Specific reasons why a utility should consider using focus groups are given in Box 6.1.

As with all participatory approaches focus groups have benefits and limitations (see Table 6.3). However with good planning and preparation a focus group is a positive way to conduct consumer consultation. A good facilitator can minimize the limitations.

Focus group composition
Ideally each PREPP focus group should involve two concurrent groups: one of women and one of men. Each group should have no more than 8 or 10 members. The women and men should be picked randomly, usually on a first come, first served basis, amongst people who live within the area under consideration. However a men’s group that is
heavily dominated by younger males may not be as successful in generating relevant information as one that has a mixed age range. This is not necessarily the case in a female group as women, the main users of water regardless of age, are more able to express demand.
The reason male and female groups are used in PREPP is to enable women in particular to express their opinions and preferences free from cultural and social norms that often inhibit participation. This does not prohibit the use of mixed gender groups in PREPP, however the decision to do so should be based on knowledge of the likely participation rates of women.

**Drawings**
Drawings to show different aspects of water supply are used throughout PREPP. Drawings are an unthreatening way of focusing group interest in a specific topic. When a group of people collectively looks at a drawing there is not a concentration on one speaker. People are less intimidated and more likely to contribute to the discussion and are generally more relaxed and less inhibited. Drawings do not require literacy skills, are cheap to produce and easily made relevant to different situations. They can also be adapted on the spot if necessary.

The use of drawings should be approached carefully. Visual literacy (how we see things) is different from one group, one culture and one society to the next. A picture of a woman lifting the keystone plug from a Sanplat squat hole in a VIP latrine in Zimbabwe may be interpreted as a woman lifting a heavy iron in another country!

Drawings should always be pre-tested. For advice on how to work with an artist and conduct pre-testing see Annex 1.

**Guided questioning and probing**
During a PREPP focus group the facilitator uses a prepared list of questions and topic areas to ensure that the discussion retains a useful structure. This is important to:

- enable the discussion to be systematically recorded;
- make best use of limited time;
- keep the participants focused on the issues;
- help the facilitator to keep the discussion going;
- make sure all the main topics are adequately covered;
- ensure that the information generated in one focus group can be meaningfully compared with others; and
- enable easy analysis.

In addition to the questions the facilitator also 'probes' the group. This involves exploring in more depth interesting issues or asking for the clarification of statements that are either unclear or which do not agree with the general consensus expressed by the group.
**Multi-disciplinary facilitation**
A small team of people with different skills and professional backgrounds facilitates PREPP. The typical PREPP team comprises:

- one or two engineers
- two social scientist or community development workers
- one local artist
- two assistants

Each team member has a different role to play in PREPP facilitation. The engineer is responsible for the presentation of technology and management choices and for explaining the form these service options may take, including the predicted cost. The social scientist or community development worker is responsible for managing the whole process, facilitating the discussion and interpreting the results. The local artist is useful for on-the-spot material development and refining the use of drawings. The assistants are responsible for recording the discussion in a format that can be easily understood and analysed. In addition to having clear roles and responsibilities there are a number of other reasons for bringing this team together, including:

- Providing engineers with the opportunity to understand water supply from the perspective of the users. This can have significant benefit on the future design of technical options, the management and operation of community schemes and ultimately service sustainability.
- Providing social scientists and community development workers with an opportunity to apply their skills to a utility-led process. This enables them to see community issues from a different perspective - that of a commercial asset.
- Allowing key professions to pool their expertise and experience, share skills and understand each other's perspective so that effective problem solving can take place and ultimately a more demand-responsive service can be delivered.

**Facilitation logistics**
As stated it is usual that two focus groups, one male and one female, will run concurrently. It is advisable to plan for each group to have a main facilitator, usually the social scientist or community development worker and one assistant to record the proceedings. The engineer, if only one is available, and artist can work between the groups.