

Rural water supply development in the context of economic crisis and structural adjustment

by Ingvar Andersson

The first part of this thoughtful piece appeared in October's *Waterlines*. In it the author warns against development that is preoccupied with the donor's role. Instead some good could come from economic crisis if donors start to see development targets as actors in the process.

THE HESAWA PROGRAMME (health through sanitation and water) in Tanzania is part of the Swedish International Development Agency's search for alternative strategies. It developed out of a dissatisfaction with the lack of impact of past efforts, and the increasing awareness that the initiatives and skills of the local communities must be used to ensure development.

The programme is carried out within the existing government structure. As water, sanitation, community mobilization and health each fall under the responsibility of three different ministries, the organization and administration of the programme is complex. The fact that the respective authorities at national, regional and district level all have to be involved further complicates the process. A specific human resources development programme has been required to make co-operation possible and to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the various actors.

The programme is based on the concept of the utilization of available local resources — human and physical — and is developed according to the policies of the local government acts.

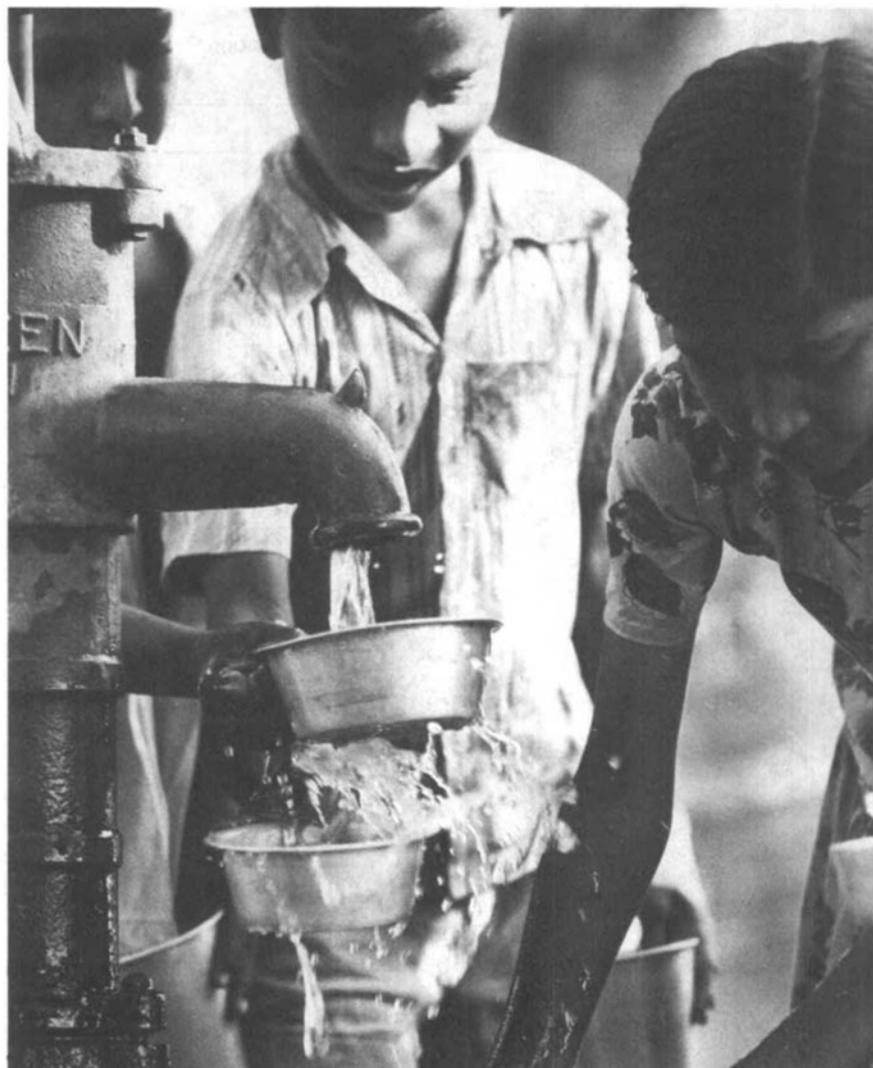
A very obvious local physical resource in the village is the existing traditional water source — often used for generations. The programme gives priority to basic improvements to traditional sources if these are

conveniently located and considered suitable for consumption. The handpump is one alternative for protecting the well from pollution, but open wells are also acceptable.

Using local skills

Efforts are made to utilize existing skills at community-level. Skills such as carpentry, masonry and many repair skills, such as those needed for mending bicycles, exist in rural communities and are a great asset in a water supply programme.

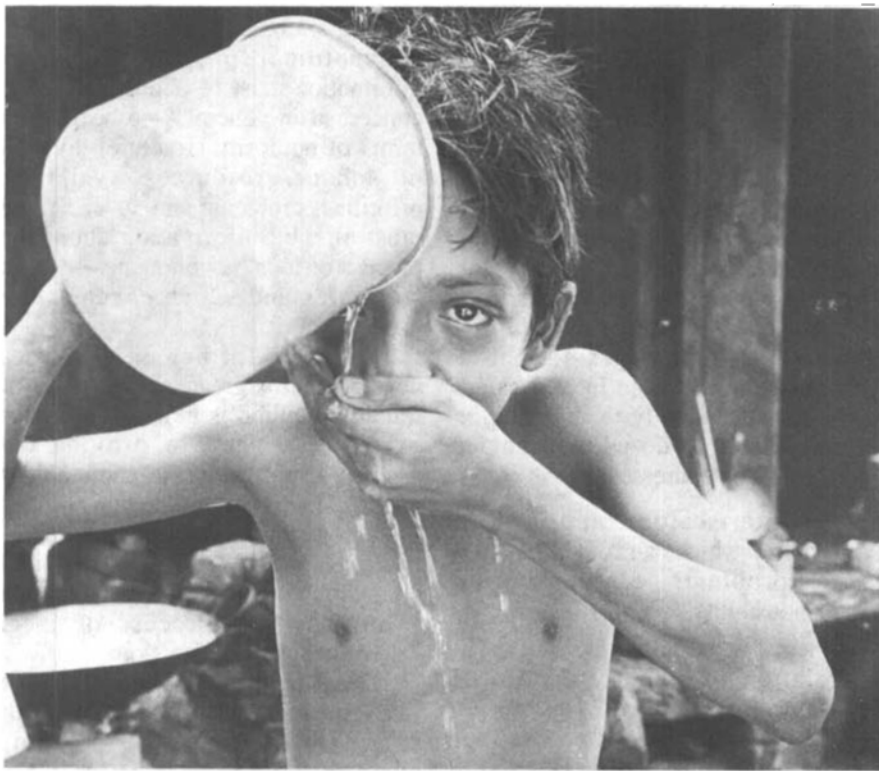
Human resource development (HRD) is a major priority of the programme. HRD activities include the training of village health workers, training in management, and planning and budgeting for staff at district level and below. Workshops and seminars are designed to make the communities conscious about how they can be involved and can benefit from the programme. A large number of study



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The community must be involved from the start in planning and decisions.

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Procedures must be instituted to collect money for maintenance from customers.

groups have been established in the villages. Various ways of improving the old wells are discussed, as well as primary health care and environmental sanitation.

The community is involved in the initial planning and decision making, and has a real choice whether to participate or not after being informed about its rights and responsibilities. The village has the right to the following services:

- advisory services from local government staff and consultants on methods of community mobilization, planning and budgeting;
- construction of improved wells and household latrines;
- access to material for construction of improved water supplies and latrines;
- training of two village health workers (one male, one female);
- provision of bicycles for the health workers and a kit with basic equipment;
- participation in the village study-group programme including study material and training of the teacher/supervisor.

The responsibilities of the village include the following.

- Ownership, operation and maintenance of the water supply system and public latrines.
- Establishment of a village water committee (five members, of which two must be women) for the

management of the planning, implementation, operation and maintenance.

- Financial contribution for hardware like handpumps.
- Provision and transport of locally available material.
- Selection of village health workers and pump attendants according to agreed criteria.
- Compensation of the village health

workers and pump attendants.

- Establishment of procedures to collect funds for maintenance from the consumers.

All local costs are to be met by a combination of the communities, local government or central government if necessary. SIDA's contribution is restricted to the cover of external costs like procurement abroad and advisory services provided through a Swedish consultancy company. Special support is given to human resource development.

Some lessons and problems

The Hesawa experience provides a feasible alternative to earlier approaches to rural water supply programmes. The programme is new and progress has been slow, as many bottle-necks and problems have been encountered. However some general implications can be drawn which could be applied if similar approaches were to be tried in other parts of Africa. One problem that has had to be faced is the slow acceptance of new concepts and ideas. There is certainly an initial problem of the status of low-technology alternatives such as shallow wells and handpumps, but there is a notable lack of enthusiasm for simple but effective improvements to traditional supplies. Another problem is that of political prestige which is at stake when promises for



Traditional water sources must be evaluated to judge their suitability for continued use.

free services have been made. A third problem is how to begin, the initial crucial step — an admittance of the negative state of progress in the water supply sector — is often politically difficult to take.

There is often initial opposition from 'experts' in the field, for example, engineers may oppose a project — ironically often because of the Western-oriented training they have received with development co-operation assistance. Sometimes this is because there may be little understanding of the new approach, or it may be difficult for these experts to identify new roles in the new approach which are considered compatible with their previous high-status positions. Donors and central governments have to come to terms with completely new roles — as catalysts providing required back-up support—rather than being the prime movers in the planning and implementation process as previously.

Initially such programmes are not necessarily less expensive; sometimes the opposite is true until routines have been established and training programmes devised and implemented. The programmes are very slow moving since a process of social change (mobilization and conscientization) is involved. There are usually problems at all levels in accepting this fact. There are also

many difficulties in attaining the level of real decentralization required for the success of the approach. Unfortunately local governments may simply be given financial responsibility and no real control, or may not have enough back-up resources required to carry out the programmes. Another serious problem is the low morale which results from the effects of economic hardship — and the fact that wages are below subsistence level, or no incentives are provided, etc. Finally there are three last problems to do with strategies which must be addressed.

- An inter-sectoral approach is required which can sometimes lead to problems of conflicting responsibility.
- There can be initial low output in relation to other conventional water projects largely due to the time-consuming process of conscientization and HRD.
- There is no appropriate methodology for assessing the progress of such a non-conventional approach which involves a process of social change.

Special requirements for success

There is a need for another type of

information base than that required for conventional programmes. This information must be about the society concerned in general — especially in terms of authority structure, division of labour, resources available, priorities, problems and so on. There must also be information about the process of local government — which structures and which channels are used.

The need for human resources development is great. And the type of training required is new. There is, for example, a need to provide the necessary information to communities about their rights and responsibilities in such a programme. In some cases there may be a need for 'political education' in the sense of education about how the process of local government should function.

The programmes must be implemented with a minimum of external resources — including money, expertise and equipment — in order to ensure that they are locally based and controlled and to make possible replication in other areas where there is no outside support.

Government agencies at all levels should be involved directly in the process of change, especially in developing the alternatives. In times of economic crisis donors can 'withdraw' to certain regions and projects, and there develop perfect solutions in



Workshops are designed to show community members how they may benefit from the programme.

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Donors must see members of local communities as actors in development.

isolation from the central government. We should not delude ourselves, however, that this is development, even if water supplies are successfully provided.

The imperative for alternative technology

Water supply development must be put in the context of total development in communities. There are many positive aspects of this approach. There are increased possibilities for real involvement of the target groups, in planning and decision making as well as in implementation, operation and maintenance. Potential for the significant involvement of women, who were often completely excluded from past programmes, is increased since the focus is on the whole community and not just its leaders. There is increased potential for development at the community level in a broad sense. This can encompass not just the successful provision of water, but provide an impetus for comprehensive development through mobilization and conscientization. There are real possibilities for basing development on felt needs and local resources.

There is a potential for positive change even within the existing economic situation if the right

approach is used. This is certainly the case in the rural water supply and sanitation sector, but it could be equally true for other social sectors, such as health care and adult education. High-technology solutions, planned and implemented by experts at the central government level and financed by external grants, are no longer feasible. A search for alternatives has been forced upon both donors and governments alike. A real possibility exists to develop another form of development co-operation that could be genuine *co-operation*. For



Choices between competing uses for water must be made locally.

example, at the national level through joint efforts to develop alternatives in terms of technology, institutional organization and human resource development programmes. The most exciting aspect is the increased potential for solutions which are based on local needs and resources and rely upon the mobilization of the local communities.

Global economic crisis

It is ironic that, in a climate of international economic crisis, promising conditions exist for the evolution of programmes which have greatly increased possibilities for meeting the goals development professionals have given so much lip-service to, and have had such problems in achieving: namely, basing development on felt needs; stimulating self-reliance; reaching the poor; ensuring community participation; and integrating women alongside men.

The challenge for the donors is to respond adequately. They should be active in the development of new approaches and new methods. They must be prepared to take some risks and to experiment in initial stages. They need to accept their new role as catalysts rather than 'donors', and to see the target groups, communities and individuals, for they are: *actors* in the development process.

Communities and individuals have given ample proof that they are more than prepared to take on the new roles if given adequate resources and support. It is the dynamism, initiatives and skills at the grass-roots level which are crucial for the success of rural water supply programmes in any context, but especially in the context of economic crisis and structural adjustment. ■