
Building capacity for decentralization: case study from India

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Abstract

When the Government of India developed its strategies and programmes to decentralize the water and sanitation sectors, it soon became obvious that capacity was not always sufficient at the district and community levels for effective implementation. For the two national programmes respectively called *sector reform* for water and *total sanitation campaign*, UNICEF worked together with the Ministry of Rural Development in a district-based planning and capacity-building programme. This was organized through district multi-institutional and participatory workshops. The focus was on scoping, which in this case meant that representatives of many stakeholder groups were involved in a multi-step process: visualizing the ideal, examining the current situation, identifying gaps/challenges/problems, identifying institutional and experiential resources to address those gaps and challenges. From this, district (and community-oriented) capacity building plans were developed. Concurrently briefing sessions and meetings were held with district leaders who, at the end, were asked to approve these plans. The scoping workshops were carried out with a voluntary team of senior professionals from throughout the country. Beginning with two districts, the scoping expanded to 8 and then 20 districts. This case study examines the strategies, techniques and lessons learned from this capacity building programme. A scoping workbook will also be made available in electronic form.

Introduction: decentralization

The 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution, enacted in 1992, mandates that responsibility for drinking water and sanitation services should be with local governments. This led to a major re-organization of the sector. The Government committed itself in 1998 through the Ministry of Rural Development (Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Supply Mission) to reforming the rural water supply sector through a process of decentralization to the community level in a programme known as ***Sector Reform***. At about the same time, a district and community-based programme for sanitation was initiated aiming at high and sustainable coverage. This is the ***Total Sanitation Campaign***. Thus, the two ambitious reforms work to put in place a decentralized framework throughout India to ensure sustainable, safe drinking water supply and effectively used sanitation facilities. The scope of the reforms is enormous, given that there are currently 612 districts in India most having roughly one to four million people and the largest being more populous than many countries².

These reforms were based on the belief by some groups that a transformation was urgently required from the supply-driven approach of the past to a demand-based approach. The basic theme of the reforms was community management with participation in the planning, implementation, operation and maintenance of the schemes of its choice. Implementation of a participatory, demand-driven approach was expected to ensure that the public obtained the level of service they desired and could afford, paying part of the capital cost and full operation and maintenance costs for water and most costs for sanitation.

The reforms were initiated through pilot districts. By 2002, the year in which the capacity-building programme described in this paper took place, there were 75 districts in the sector reform for water supply, and 250 districts entering the total sanitation campaign.

The water reform supported a range of technologies, such as point sources (wells with handpumps), rainwater catchment, small dams and, in some cases, piped water. Operation and maintenance is the full

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² There are 612 districts in India, most having populations from about 1 to 4 million, with the mountainous districts in the north having less. The district is the top tier of local government. The block is the intermediate tier in local administration usually having 100,000 to 150,000 people. At the local levels, gram panchayats are the lowest tier in the local administration and may have one or more villages.

responsibility of users and local government. The sanitation programme includes construction of household latrines, construction of sanitary complexes for women, toilets for schools as well as demand creation, education and hygiene. The bulk of the financial support for the reforms was transferred in instalments from the central government directly to the districts with some smaller counterpart funding required from the state and local governments/user groups. Specific local proposals were sanctioned by the District Water and Sanitation Committee (DWSC) which was responsible for managing the reforms and finance.

New roles

This shift toward decentralisation and demand-responsiveness also implied changing the role of the Government from that of a service provider to a facilitator. This has challenged the traditional model of planning and construction directed by the State-owned engineering departments and agencies. Thus the implementers of the past are called on to become facilitators today. The recipients of the past are called on to become actors of change.

Implementing a reform consists not only of sending guidelines to various stakeholders down the line. This extraordinary undertaking demands strong capacity and commitment to transform the water supply and sanitation sector, at all levels, for which as Indian leaders observed, capacity building is essential:



In India the critical challenge is to develop effective decentralization below the State level and build capacity in them (M. Govinda Rao, Member, National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, 2003)

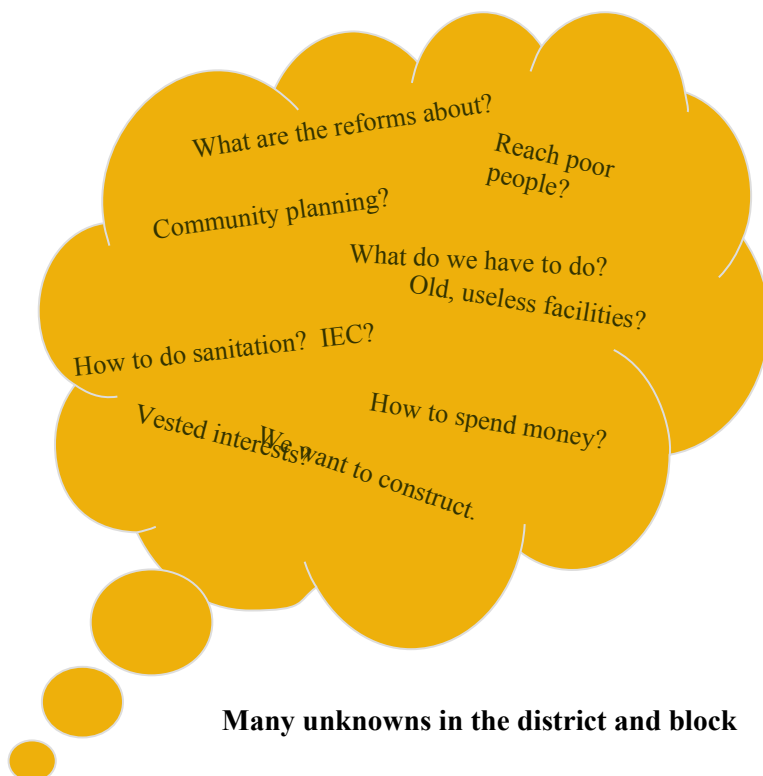
Therefore the decentralisation process will necessarily have to involve considerable organisational work and capacity building so that the fruits of our efforts actually accrue to those for whom they are intended (N.C. Saxena, Secretary of the Indian Planning Commission)

Community management is heavily reliant on a supportive framework. Many communities lack the capacity to provide necessary support for technical design and supervision, facilitation and management, long-term training, legal issues, auditing, monitoring and evaluation. (Planning Commission, Government of India, 2002)

The need to build capacity and provide support to the community puts substantial demands on the intermediate level, that is, the sub-district (block) and the district to ensure a regulatory framework, supervision and provide training and other capacity development. Thus this intermediate level-- district and block officials and also staff of civil society organizations, NGOs and semi-governmentals—themselves need knowledge and skills. Several states set up state-level human resource development (HRD) cells and information-education-communication (IEC) cells for planning, designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating HRD/capacity development programmes. However, these cells with only a few staff members proved to be too small and under-resourced for the task at hand.

A pre-requisite for successful decentralization is that sub-national governments possess the administrative and technical capacity required to effectively carry out their assigned responsibilities. (IMF position paper, Dabla-Norris and Wade, 2002).

Some districts had difficulty in executing the programme, particularly the management and software aspects. The districts received funding directly from the central government. Some districts hardly knew how to spend their funds, particularly those ear-marked IEC and local planning. In some cases these funds were not very effectively used or remained unused for years³. Districts used a small portion of their water and sanitation decentralization funds to support the scoping activities.



Challenge is one of scaling up capacity building... with relatively limited financial and manpower resources... in districts whose population numbers in the millions. How to build capacities that will be used in decentralized water and sanitation services?

Scoping for capacity development

The Core Group

At the end of 2001, the recognition that support at the intermediate level was urgently required led leaders of the Ministry of Rural Development to work with UNICEF in developing and implementing a district-based programme for planning for capacity-building while, in itself, building skills and motivation of district leaders.

The programme began with a two-week planning workshop in early 2002 supported by UNICEF and facilitated by IRC and WEDC. A very heterogeneous group of participants was invited to the workshop: 15 in all including ministry leaders from Delhi, senior UNICEF staff, professionals from with training institutes, universities, rural development institutes, public health engineering departments and NGOs. This unusual combination of colleagues, representing all faces of the sector, worked together intensively for two weeks. They defined an innovative strategy for capacity development and planning at the district level.

Then about 10 people in this group-- those most committed to the reforms -- decided to form a "Core Group" dedicated to developing and implementing this programme. They formed small sub-groups that focused on different states in India. For the committed Core Group members, who worked largely voluntarily, they saw their own participation as a way of direct input into a major national programme, helping to bring the sector decentralization and local management on-track. Perhaps another reason for their strong commitment to action was that some of them hoped to continue work for the scoping and capacity-building programme as leaders in their state or region of India. These sub-groups subsequently grew by drawing in additional, committed state and district personnel during the subsequent piloting of the scoping programme. Thus, the core group developed a capacity building approach which was called **scoping** by substantially modifying a strategy initially developed around environmental concerns in North America. The remainder of this paper focuses on the scoping concept and activities developed in India.

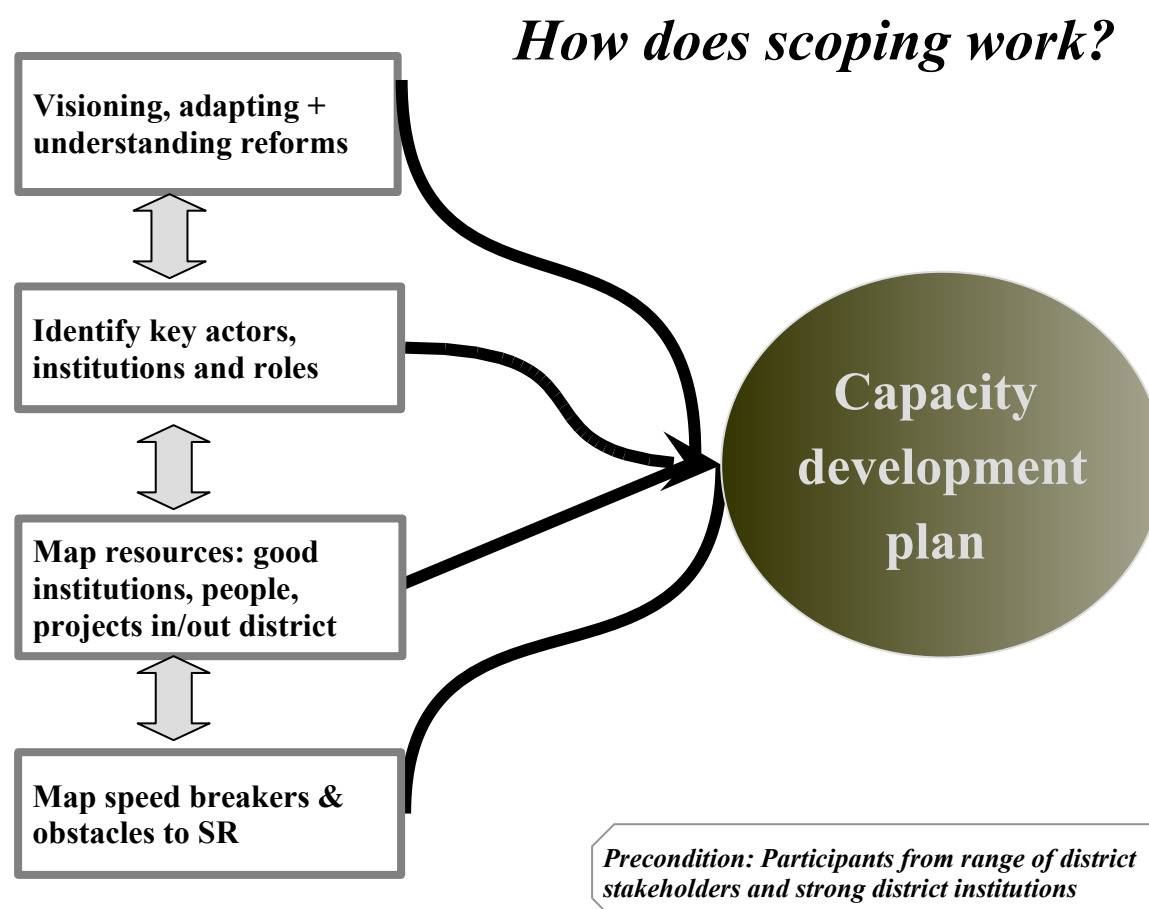
³ For water, this has changed as funds for the Swjaldhara programme now flow first to the state level.

Developing the scoping concept

The Core Group had a shared understanding that district and sub-district capacity was not strong enough to carry out these participatory reforms without management support and improved capacity. However, time and resources were limited and thus it would be impossible to provide continuing external technical support for capacity development in India's 600 districts. Therefore, it was decided that it would be most practical to have an initial capacity building workshop in each district with follow-up support for the district to be provided by the state government in consultation with the institutions of the core group members from that State.

The group also decided not to use the traditional cascade training model in which master-trainers are trained who train others at the state or district level who in turn give local training programmes. The cascade approach, it was felt, would dilute the quality of capacity development. Thus the approach was to reach out with small committed teams of the core group from key institutions in each state.

The application of scoping procedures in participatory workshops for improving capacities is unique to India. The idea was based on the assumption that there are already many institutional resources in the district – and if not always there in the district, then in the state— and that these can be deployed to ensure effective capacity development among district and block personnel and the community. Too often, new programmes do not draw on these talented individuals or institutions. Too often communities and



government personnel are unaware of useful experiences or available technical support that could be provided by local institutions. The decentralization should be developed by maximizing the use of own district institutions and experience. Thus, this began the pilot scoping in 2 very different districts, one in

the south and one in the north of India. Then the scoping was done in 4 more districts and finally, the core team members on their own applied the scoping in about 14 more districts.

The *Scoping* concept as developed by the Core Team basically means identifying and matching obstacles and resources to make plans for capacity development at all levels (community, block, and district). It combines planning with capacity development. Scoping involves joint planning and, at the same time, builds the capacity of those involved. It requires thinking, planning and acting together. Scoping is carried out as a participatory learning and planning process which aims at developing a capacity development plan for the implementation of the Water Supply and Sanitation Reforms, drawing on resources of the district. It should be understood that scoping, as developed here, is not a magic formula nor a blueprint for capacity development; however, it is an effective way of kick-starting a capacity development process, suitable for a district.

Example of resource:

Trainers from Women's savings groups and cooperative



Example of problem:

What to do about drainage?



The scoping programme in the district

The **specific objectives** were to improve the implementation of the water and sanitation sector reforms through scoping. Scoping, in this case meant that representatives of many stakeholder groups were involved in a multi-step process. The scoping exercise is done in a participatory workshop that focused on the production of a scoping (capacity development) plan for water and sanitation for the district. To make a scoping plan:

- Participants from different groups from the community, block, district and NGOs come together in a workshop
- They learn about sector reform, developing an agreed vision for their district and a common understanding of who the stakeholders are
- They identify the main obstacles and bottlenecks operating against sector reform.
- They identify good resources: the successful examples, useful experience, the people and institutions that can help
- Finally, they make a plan that matches the resources to the needs to the obstacles and bottlenecks

Scoping outputs

- A district capacity building plan which has some costing in it and will be carried out
- Identification of bottlenecks and needs
- Clearly stated capacity building priorities: who, what, when
- Identified resources to support capacity building
- How to do it: training, exchange visits, follow-up activities, plans for pilots and experiments with costs

The scoping workshops lasted five to eight days in a district. It was not possible to reduce the number of days of the workshop below 5 or 5½ days, because of the complexity of the plans and the lack of knowledge about the water and sanitation reforms among the participants. The participatory scoping workshops were carried out with at least two members from the core team of senior professionals together with at least 2 local facilitators.

District leaders: District leaders—such as the health of education in a district of 1 million people -- did not participate in these long and technical workshops. Thus, at the same time as the scoping workshops, two to four meetings are held, usually in the evenings, with leaders of district government line departments, during which the main aspects of the capacity development plans were discussed and agreed upon. District leaders need to have regular input into this capacity development and planning activity, if they are to be committed to carrying out the results. These district level meetings were originally meant to advocate for the implementation of capacity development programme that was being planned. However, the meetings additionally served to orient district leaders on the objectives and procedures of sector reforms while also seeking their input into the scoping exercise.

Description of the scoping workshop in a district

Preparation in a District

One key factor of success of scoping is to work with districts that want to do this exercise. A preliminary visit at state and district level by a facilitator is highly advisable. The District Water and Sanitation Mission approved the workshop and development of the plan. It was responsible for organizing (and paying for) the venue, lodging, logistics, transportation for a field trip and cost for the scoping activity (for which they have resources for capacity development)

As with most planning efforts, it is essential to have the right participants. This received special emphasis. Thus, the district leadership were asked to select 30 to 60 participants (called *scopers*) from different stakeholder institutions at district, block, community and SO levels. Districts were asked to select scopers represent all the main stakeholders involved in the water and sanitation sector in the district and have experience in the sector. The agencies which these people represent should have good track records. Participants should be well experienced in the sector, willing to innovate, and able to spare time for post-scoping activities. It was useful if at least some had knowledge/experience in participatory methodologies like participatory rural assessment. For example, participants in one district were: 5 engineers from public health engineering, 2 staff of early childcare programmes, at least one supervisor of these, 3 education staff, (example: district level manager, head-teacher, teacher), 3 local government staff from community and sub-district levels, 1 geologist, 5 or more from NGO support organisations, at least 2 rural development staff, 2 from district training institutions, 2 from women's self-help group training centres, 2 from water and sanitation committees, 2 private contractors.

The workshop is described in greater detail below.

Day 1: Introduction to scoping, capacity development and sector reforms

Contents: scoping, capacity development, water sector reform and total sanitation programme.

Some key points: Training is only one form of capacity building. Other include: study visits, working with experts locally, carrying out pilots or experiments as well as joint planning programmes such as the scoping.

The water and sanitation reforms are described in government publications that are usually too long to read conveniently or are not usually available in the district or are not available in the right language. Therefore, in the workshop the water and sanitation reform issues and procedures were presented in a one-page overview plus 4 to 5 page summary of procedures and rules. These papers discussed by participants in small groups to learn about the reforms and their relevance. The scoping groups could modify the some of the rules/procedures of the reforms to suit their district better... Interestingly at the time of these workshops most participants were not familiar with sector reform. The one-page synopsis of water and sanitation reforms was divided into 10 indicators and was a very useful paper to provide a general understanding of the reforms.

Summary: Expected outcomes from Reforms
People participate in decision-making
Committees function well
Good use and control of money
Water supply functions well
Stronger sanitation demand
Consistent hygiene behaviours
School and anganwadi programmes
Effective IEC, demand creation
Local government is responsive
Effective support organizations

Day 2 Stakeholder analysis, start to identify obstacles and resources

Key points: A stakeholder analysis helped determine how the reform worked or would be carried out in the district. It is important to discuss the issue of whose capacity needs to be developed. Is this only the community? No, sector reform means new roles and new ways of working from the district, block, support organization and community levels. The group would identify stakeholders and then addressed the more difficult task of learning about or deciding about their roles in sector reform. In some cases, where these roles were unclear, they asked district leaders. Example of stakeholders whose need capacity building inputs were, according to one district scoping group:

- User groups, Women's groups, NGOs, Schools + anganwadis; water and sanitation committees; local government (panchayat and village)
- District officers, District Water and Sanitation Mission, District engineers, NGO/CBO support organization field staff, private contractors
- Above district level: block officers, other projects; State officers, support organizations



On this day participants would also begin to identify main constraints or obstacles in the implementation of the reforms according to the expected outputs. They also did a first identification of local and district resources useful for capacity development. About resources, it was necessary to remind participants that a “resource” is something that could help with building capacity for the water and sanitation reforms. For example, a resource could be: a good field activity of a department in a block; an interesting water project; a community that works well; an institution for design, research, water testing and so on; very good trainers and training institutions in any subject area;

community-based organizations which operate well; good NGOs.

Day 3 Field visit

This field visit is a reality check. The objectives are to validate the stakeholder’s analysis, to identify constraints/problems working against the implementation of the decentralization reforms and to identify the resources that can help address these constraints. These resources, that is, institutions, individuals, villages/blocks and experiences, can be used to increase the local-intermediate capacity for water and sanitation reform. The field trip also helps the scoping participants to develop the same set of values, and similar recognition of needs at the local level.



The field trip is structured and the scopers work to complete a checklist with closed and open questions. The scoper participants are broken into small groups, each with its own car/jeep. The small groups visit different sites such as communities; block government officers and NGOs; institutions at the district level for training, women, rural development, IEC, ground water. A group may visit a particularly successful community or a success participatory project in another sector.

Summary of field visits

When the groups come back, they should prepare their presentations for the next day. Ten to fifteen minutes are allocated for each group to present (on a poster) and discuss obstacles/hindrances to sector reform and specific resources that could be drawn upon to remove these hindrances.

Days 4 and 5 Making capacity development plans

The analysis of obstacles and resources analysis developed on Day 2 is revised by the group using the results of the field trip. This revision is used to begin making plans that are relevant to different levels (community, block, district, SO). The capacity development plans for water and sanitation reforms are organized, thinking of the needed inputs for the next 1 ½ to 2 years, initially following the expected outputs from sector reform (see the chart in Days 1). It is important to note that the capacity development plans and activities go beyond training and can also include, for example: Short-term orientation at district or block or community levels; and supervision visits or meetings; study visits to other places; pilot programmes and experiments to try out new approaches or technologies and to “learn by doing”. Capacity development activities could include getting advice from a consultant or trying out and comparing interventions in different locations. At this point the small groups should start identifying the most effective capacity development activity that can be carried out with the identified district resources or, if these are not sufficient, with resources and resources groups from other districts or the state level.



The plans are reorganized by activity and stakeholder level (examples: NGO field workers, block engineers, head teachers) for each main output. These draft plans, as they are being produced, are reviewed and revised based on feedback from the plenary. If there is time, participants should provide some cost estimates for the activities.

Here is an example of a plan to improve the capacity of villages and local government in bookkeeping and financial management for the water and sanitation reform. The local communities have sometimes had difficulty in handling the funds they have received for the reforms. The most competent resource group

to do this was found to be the training institution for the women's savings a cooperative programmes called the MACTS in the table below⁴.

ISSUE	FACILITATOR	AUDIENCE	HOW
Step 1 Materials & methods on bookkeeping, financial management	Resource Team (10): DSU, NGO, APO DRDA	---	4 days workshop to collect and prepare training materials and methods from other districts & states
Step 2 Money management & accountability (TOT)	Resource Team (10): DSU, NGO, APO DRDA	G.P. Secretary; Motivator, field staff of MACTS 10 TOTAL: 194	2 days classroom with dummy practice. Visit to MACTS.
Step 3 Implement training	G.P. Secretary. Motivator, Field staff of MACTS	Nominees from HWSC @ 3 (276 members)	2 days. Little class room practices know-how book-keeping, transparency. Role play by SHG.
Step 4 Spot village financial checks, refresher training	As above.	HWSC and communities.	Spot checks of HWSC:of books, payments, receipts with on-site refresher training. Backstopping is needed

⁴ HWSC = hamlet water and sanitation committee; GP = local government; DSU, APO, DRDA = district offices holding information about bookkeeping and financial procedures

Here is an example of the outline for an action plan used in some district:

Constrai nts	Objective/ expected results	activiti es	Stakehold ers by level	Facilitators and resources		time
				From within district	From outside district	

It is important that these tables be quickly typed at the end of the workshop, as they will be the basis for detailed decision-making by the District Water and Sanitation Committee in the coming days. The decision – makers need to give also their input, and it could be that some aspects of the tables need some adjustments. The most important is to reach a situation by which the district has ownership of the plan and has clear activities to start with.

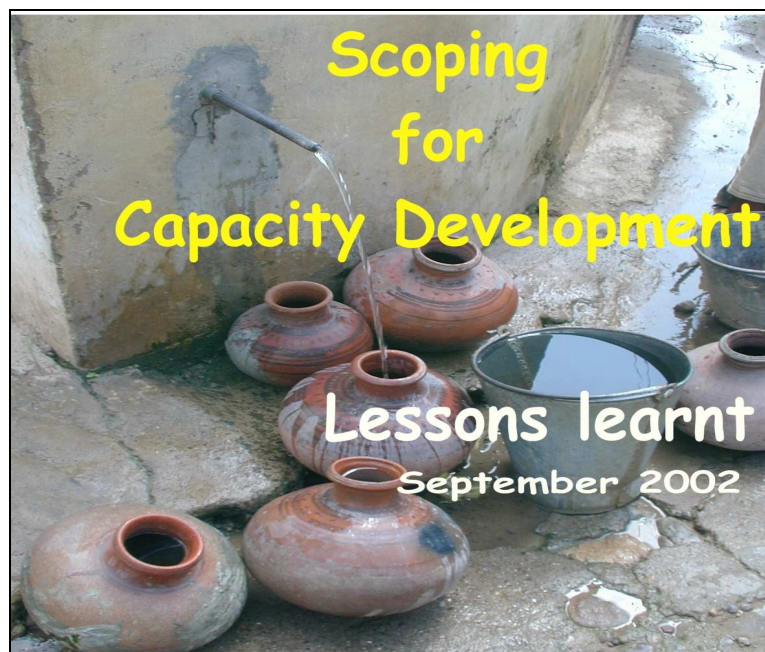
Day 5/6 Presenting the plan

Development of a capacity development plan by expected results. This plan provides an integrated vision and orientation of what is needed for this district.

The facilitators have been meeting two or three times with district leaders during the preparation for and during the workshop itself. On the last day, district leaders are invited to come to the workshop to hear presentations of the plans for capacity building for the water and sanitation decentralization reforms. This is usually done in connection with the official closing of workshop. Participants are also awarded certificates as scopers at this time.

End of the scoping

Just as the scoping was expanding, beyond 6, to 8, 12 and eventually reaching about 20 districts, it stopped. The capacity developing programme was based on the water and sanitation policy. However at the end of November 2002, the national water policy suddenly changed so that it no longer focused on community management with the village and local government, nor was the poverty orientation as clear as it had been. The core team decided to stop its work. This was a difficult decision particularly since the national sanitation policy remained stable. However, district scoping it was felt, would be difficult to carry out for sanitation alone since the initial interest of many of those participating was on water.



Lessons learned

Stability of national policy is crucial for scoping as for any innovative programme seeking to empower local government, private and civil society.

Scoping is a process for **joint planning while learning**. It seeks to optimize the **use of local resources** to realize community management. It is useful for planning capacity development while at the same time improving the skills, **motivation** and willingness of the groups involved to coordinate. It is a framework that enables district people and institutions to develop a shared vision and some specific means to make the vision tangible. The participants reported that they learned, they planned and were inspired. Every district has institutions and individuals who can effectively support the community management and decentralization.

There needs to be a basic understanding and buy-in to key concepts such as:

- Decentralization of the water and sanitation sector can work if there is sufficient capacity and support
- Capacity development takes place through **more than traditional training**. It also can be carried out through orientation, experiments, pilots, group planning, study visits, and so on.
- Capacity building is needed not only for construction but also for **management and software**: community and financial management, hygiene, finance, management, O&M, sanitation and hygiene and behavioural change.
- Whose capacities? District and block leaders, professionals, implementers, civil society leaders and not only local communities and users. It is important to be **inclusive in capacity building**.

Do not use cascade training. Rather use **committed mobile teams**. Skilled facilitation is needed and the facilitator should be a professional (resource person or trainer) who **uses participatory training methodologies**. This is because scoping is based on using facilitation techniques rather than “conventional” teaching techniques. The facilitator should be knowledgeable about current practice but also new developments in the water and sanitation sector.

About the participants:

- It is essential to have enough (a minimum of 4) **women participants**. Sometimes an interlocutor is needed, a man who can help the women express themselves to the group.
- Some groups are initially antagonized by decentralization and scoping. There is sometimes resistance from traditional public health engineering personnel who are used to direct implementation and management of water finance by themselves.
- Some participants suggested that scoping could be better held with people at the block level, where people know each other (populations around 200,000)

Follow up support is needed for the finalization and implementation of the district capacity development plans. The most important element required for the execution of the capacity development plans is a driving force and a motor in the district. This driving force can be an individual – the collector, the district chairperson. It usually needs some support such as a Core Group, and NGO – to help facilitate the execution of the Sector Reforms in the district. The motor keeps the reform vehicle running.

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