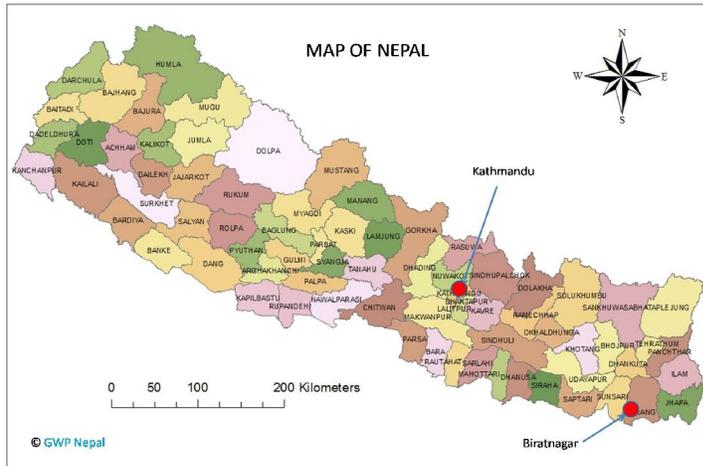


IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF BIRATNAGAR WATER SUPPLY THROUGH STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Background



Nepal receives abundant precipitation annually, but its occurrence is mostly limited to a short monsoon period. In addition, the terrain of Nepal causes water storage problems as well. Therefore, providing adequate, reliable and good quality water supply to the people is a daunting task in Nepal. It has been realized that community mobilization is an important tool to support the efforts of the Government to address this challenge.

Nepal Water Supply Corporation - Biratnagar (NWSCB) is located in the second largest town in the Eastern Development Region of Nepal. It is the oldest Nepal Water

Supply Corporation branch outside Kathmandu and serves more than 10,000 households. A project was implemented by GWP Nepal/JVS in association with the Water Integrity Network, Berlin, to improve the quality of water services by enabling interaction between consumers and the service provider and ensuring transparency and accountability of the NWSCB.

Objectives of the Project

The objective of the project was to improve the standards of water services by enhancing the social accountability of the service provider and facilitating closer interaction between consumers and service provider on a pilot basis. The study carried out under the project explored the satisfaction levels of the consumers regarding the service provided by the NWSCB, including adequacy, reliability, accountability and transparency of the service, and the quality of water. The study conducted by GWP Nepal/JVS provided an interface for the user and the service provider to conduct an open discussion regarding the level of service.

The process: conducting the study

Data for the study was collected through a month-long field work process. The study area comprised 18 wards which were further divided into several clusters. In the first stage of the study, complete household listing and mapping was carried out in all the wards and clusters. In the second stage, 500 respondent households (5 percent of the total NWSCB clients) were randomly selected through a two-stage stratified selection process, ensuring representation from each ward /cluster.

Two sets of questionnaires were administered to the selected respondents. One questionnaire measured the consumers' satisfaction with the service, based on indicators such as; reliability and adequacy of water supply, responsiveness of service provider to consumer demands, hidden costs involved and willingness to pay. Information on the characteristics of the respondents was also collected. A separate questionnaire was given to the NWSCB management to collect information on the issues faced by the management.

Findings: consumer level of satisfaction

Over 92 percent of the consumers expressed satisfaction regarding the adequacy, reliability and regularity of the water supply. Hidden costs such as payments made to junior technical staffs and wage laborers who carried out connection works, repairs, and minor maintenance were considered acceptable and the consumers were willing to

make such payments in order to be provided with a better service. Transparency did not seem to be an issue for the client households as they trusted the accounting systems of the corporation.

However, doubts were expressed regarding the quality of water. Other major concerns and complaints were; delays in attending to grievances, breakdown of pipelines and stealing of water meters. The study highlighted the need for better maintenance, more efficient repair services and upgrading of pipelines and other facilities. The problems experienced by the service provider included inadequate resources such as insufficient technical staff and inadequate number of vehicles.

An important realization was that even though there was willingness expressed by both the service provider and the consumers to co-operate with each other to ensure a better service, the mechanisms for such co-operation were lacking. These findings were shared at a forum mediated by GWP Nepal/JVS which provided a valuable platform for the consumers and service provider to interact. The consumers were educated about their rights and responsibilities in relation to the service, and the service provider received an opportunity to explain the factors that impeded the quality of service.

Lessons learnt and the way forward

This process of stakeholder consultation carried out with GWP Nepal/JVS as the catalyst, resulted in positive interaction between the service provider and consumers, thus paving the way for better provision of services. A Joint Co-ordination Committee "Samyukta Tole Nagar Samanwaya Samiti" was



Mr. Ratna Prasad Rajbanshi, Assistant Officer, NWSCB addressing the participants



Dr. Vijaya Shrestha, lead researcher, sharing the major findings of the study at the discussion

established comprising representatives from all parties (1 from NWSCB, 1 from Biratnagar sub-metropolis and 3 from the users) to jointly monitor the service, share problems, and make joint plans for improvement and regular follow up. The Committee is a permanent body which will act to ensure regular follow up and continuing interaction to improve the service. The inclusion of members from the municipality has improved co-ordination with the municipality as well.

Participatory approach to water management is a key IWRM concept. Guided by such principles, GWP Nepal/ JVS will carry out follow up dialogue with the members of the Committee to stay informed regarding its efforts to work towards a better service, and plans to replicate the process in other water supply systems. For instance, this approach will be used in a project on "Program for Accountability in Nepal (PRAN)" which has been launched in co- operation with the World Bank for introducing Citizen Report Cards (CRC) in six water supply systems. An important lesson learnt from this project is that the participation of stakeholders in the management of water services improves the quality of the service and transparency of the management, but the process requires a catalyst to be mobilized. It is anticipated that the lessons learnt from this project will have a lasting impact on the future work of GWP Nepal/JVS especially with regard to its activities with the "Sector Efficiency Improvement Unit", Ministry of Physical Planning and Works, which plays an active role in improving the functionality of water supply systems.

Further information can be obtained from:

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