

Can Community Empowerment Help the Poor to Get What they Need?

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The basic contention is that empowering the poor to make key decisions over water management is the most effective, sustainable and efficient way to improve access to water resources and provide water services that meet the specific needs and priorities of the poor.

Empowering the poor is essential

- They can negotiate with politicians, government agencies and service providers.
- Their financial contribution is collected and used appropriately.
- They can collectively plan and manage water resources and services.
- Full and effective participation of women and minorities is present in decision making.
- They can take advantage of the opportunities better water resources management and service delivery create.

Many case studies, from the ADB and elsewhere, confirm these points

- In Gujarat, India, poor women manage watersheds and develop income-generating activities.
- In Bangladesh, poor communities manage their own water supply and sanitation and build bridges to water supply authorities.
- In South Africa, providing adequate water supplies to poor families can double the income from home-based livelihood activities.

Further Case Studies Have Shown

- Creating market channels for small-scale irrigation diversifies livelihoods and increases income in India and Bangladesh;
- Water supply and sanitation to the poor is improved through ensuring that service providers hear and respond to needs;
- A demand-responsive approach leads to cheaper, more appropriate water services with higher community contributions.

Success Is not always Guaranteed

- Government and service providers have to listen and respond to the poor communities.
- Mobilizing the poor must be by agencies that are trusted and are pro-poor in their culture;
- The poor are willing to pay, but for good and reliable services;
- Partnerships between government and civil society were often critical to success;
- Strong political support is essential: effective advocacy campaigns can build this support.

Partnerships Should be Built to Empower the Poor in Water Management

- Governments should ensure the legal, policy and regulatory environment supports empowerment;
- Government agencies need to be responsive to consumers, putting the needs of the poor first;
- Donors and MDBs should ensure that empowerment of the poor is built into programs they support;
- NGOs and civil society organizations must act as advocates for the poor and provide a bridge with service providers and regulatory authorities.

Conclusion

- *Make sure the poor have a voice – and listen to what they say!*

