

Process Documentation



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Process documentation (PD) is an important activity in EMPOWERS that tries to capture the more subtle processes embedding the implementation of the six steps of the project's planning cycle on the governorate, district or village level. Then PD turns the resultant data into analyzable information and disseminates the outcomes among all stakeholders. The following processes are given special attention: decision making, concerted actions, behaviours and attitudes, and empowerment.

The involvement of stakeholders in an open dialogue and concerted activities, and their responsiveness to the capacity building efforts, occupied the major portion of process documentation work. It was so because Stakeholders Dialogue and Concerted Actions (SDCA) and capacity building for IWRM were designed to support the stakeholders' strong influence on the decision-making process related to the use and management of water resources. To EMPOWERS, this influence is exactly the right path to improved governance of local water resources. Thus, documenting progress in SDCA and capacity building stood for an assessment of the stakeholders present position and future needs with regard to the acquisition of such influence.

Investing the output of this documentation necessitated critical carefulness by the EMPOWERS country teams due to the existence of many obstacles related to

diverging or even contradicting interests and perceptions. One of the useful lessons the documentation team learned was the difficulty of citing a permanent single source for accurate and complete information upon which plans can be outlined and implemented. The team came to know how to avoid the temptation of confining their inputs to the feedback obtained from influential groups or individuals that are usually the most self expressive and inclined to participate but not the neediest or the most informative. On the other hand, they did not restrict the identification of water problems to the information provided by the impoverished groups. They realized that such tendency could minimize development to the mere shifting of attention from one side of the village to the other.

The outcome of documentary tasks proved to be very important in directing the project activities and guiding the team. In several occasions the reports produced by these tasks revealed that water problems can be locally managed despite the inadequate infrastructure or the chronically centralized management to which these problems are typically attributed like poverty and illiteracy. It was found that it is the absence of local-level institutional cooperative work due to social, economic or personal factors that worsens the impact of limited water resources. For example, data collection, interviews and comparing and analyzing information made it quite evident that in most cases CBOs lack both the capacity and the willingness to take the initiative of combining the dispersed communal voices as to become heard by the concerned central water authorities. It became also clear that such entities did

not appreciate the importance of starting locally designed, short-term solutions of water problems instead of waiting for governmental interventions.

These findings posed new challenges for EMPOWERS in dealing with local communities that are satisfied with their beliefs about the origin of water problems and the ways to solve them. The team realised that these communities and their CBOs were in need to become aware of the long-term and short-term advantages of lobbying communal efforts to address their water problems. EMPOWERS, therefore, organized various training activities to create the capacity needed for such lobbying. Eventually, with a newly built capacity and raised awareness, the local stakeholders started to see how participatory work would lead to long-term solutions by which they can take the prime responsibility in the management of local water resources. It is an EMPOWERS assumption that in order to be eligible for demanding local management of water resources, the local communities need to present a convincing evidence of their ability to take over this management.

In the governmental part of the stakeholders' platforms, the customary stereotypical view of the rural community as unequal in knowledge and skills had to be replaced by acceptance of the idea of cooperating with community members. Early interviews with many officials showed that the gap came from a long tradition of centralized planning and implementation of natural resources projects on the one hand and personal convictions on the other. The project developed an awareness of the role of these misconceptions in aggravating the water ordeal. This helped directing attention to familiarizing those officials with a major EMPOWERS belief. This belief is: One reason for the persistence of water problems is the failure of national level planning to reach out for the underprivileged groups and believe in their ability to develop and implement water management plans. Similar to the changes in the attitudes of local communities, it took good facilitation efforts before the observations of the process documentation specialists started to depict a behavioural breakthrough. It was an interesting transition in the officials' reactions from an ill-hidden reservedness at the mere presence with the villagers in the same event to working on equal footing with them in developing the village plans.

For more on process documentation, see the paper presented to the IRC & UNESCO-IHE Symposium (Sept. 2006, Delft, the Netherlands), under the title "The Effect of Process Documentation on Building the Capacities of EMPOWERS Stakeholders for Local Water Governance, at: <http://www.irc.nl/page/31141>