

Nigeria Rural Water Supply Management: Participatory Process as the Best Option

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Abstract : Challenges in the effective management of potable water have attracted global attention in recent years and remain many world regions' major priorities. Scarcity and unavailability of potable water may potentially escalate poverty, obviate democratic expression of views and militate against inter-sectoral development. These challenges contra-indicate the inherent potentials of the resource. Thus, while creation of poverty may be regarded as a broad-based problem, it is capable of reflecting life-span reduction diseases, the friction of interests manifesting in threats and warfare, the relegation of democratic principles for authoritarian definitions and Human Rights abuse. The challenges may be identified as manifestations of ineffective management of potable water resource and therefore, regarded as major problems in environmental protection. In reaction, some nations have re-examined their laws and policies, while others have developed innovative projects, which seek to ameliorate difficulties of providing sustainable potable water. The problems resonate in Nigeria, where the legal framework supporting the supply and management of potable water has been criticized as ineffective. This has impacted more on rural community members, often regarded as 'voiceless'. At that level, the participation of non-state actors has been identified as an effective strategy, which can improve water supply. However, there are indications that there is no pragmatic application of this, resulting in over-centralization and top-down management. Thus, this study focuses on how the participatory process may enable the development of participatory water governance framework, for use in Nigeria rural communities. The Rural Advisory Board (RAB) is proposed as a governing body to promote proximal relationships, institute democratisation borne out of participation, while enabling effective accountability and information. The RAB establishes mechanisms for effectiveness, taking into consideration Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP), advocated as guiding principles of decision-makers. Other tools, which may be explored in achieving these are, Laws and Policies supporting the water sector, under the direction of the Ministries and Law Courts, which ensure non-violation of laws. Community norms and values, consisting of Nigerian traditional belief system, perceptions, attitude and reality (often undermined in favour of legislations), are relied on to pave the way for enforcement. While the Task Forces consist of community members with specific designation of duties, which ensure compliance and enforceability, a cross-section of community members are assigned duties. Thus, the principle of participation is pragmatically reflected. A review of the literature provided information on the potentials of the participatory process, in potable water governance. Qualitative methodology was explored by using the semi-structured interview as strategy for inquiry. The purposive sampling strategy, consisting of homogeneous, heterogeneous and criterion techniques was applied to enable sampling. The samples, sourced from diverse positions of life, were from the study area of Delta State of Nigeria, involving three local governments of Oshimili South, Uvwie and Warri South. From the findings, there are indications that the application of the participatory process is inhered with empowerment of the rural community members to make legitimate demands for TAP. This includes the obviation of mono-decision making for the supply and management of potable water. This is capable of restructuring the top-down management to a top-down/bottom-up system.

Keywords : participation, participatory process, participatory water governance, rural advisory board

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