THEME 3: AWARENESS

Theme 3, which is entitled 'Awareness' covers the complex and broad ranging issues of advocacy, political will, community participation, environmental awareness and gender. The following summary covers some of the issues, which will be raised in the draft Overview paper. A final draft of the Overview will be developed when input has been received from the Country Delegates and other participants during the Regional Meeting in Fiji at the end of July 2002.

INTRODUCTION

A three-pronged strategy of advocacy, social mobilisation and program communication can help to achieve an effective and sustainable water and sanitation sector in small island countries.

'**Advocacy**' includes work undertaken by development agencies, civil society groups and individuals to bring about change. This has been described as 'the process of using information strategically to change policies that affect the lives of disadvantaged people'. Another definition of advocacy could be 'advocating on behalf of the voiceless' or 'assisting the voiceless to develop and use their voice'.

Advocacy therefore encompasses working for change in any of the following areas.

Who makes the decisions: participation of civil society, representation of community

What is decided: legislation, policies, budgets, programs, practices

How decisions are made: accountability and transparency; participation of local communities to be affected

How decisions are enforced or implemented: accountability, awareness raising.

'**Social mobilisation**' is the process of bringing together all feasible inter-sectoral social allies to raise people's awareness of, and demand for, a particular program or behaviour, to assist in the delivery of services and reinforcement of behaviour, and to strengthen community participation for sustainability and self-reliance.

'**Program communication**' is the process of identifying, segmenting and targeting specific groups/audiences with particular strategies, messages, or training through various mass media, and traditional and non traditional inter-personal channels.

'**Sustainable**' when applied to water supply and sanitation should include the protection and support of human health livelihood and well being, while contributing to the preservation and productivity of biological systems. Sustainability is also intended to include the socio-cultural acceptance and long term use and capacity for maintenance of appropriate water supply and sanitation systems. Creating sustainable systems will, in many cases, require significant behaviour changes on the part of individuals and communities. Proposals that promise to deliver environmentally sustainable strategies, without altering current behaviour related to resource and energy consumption or environmentally destructive practices, are either dishonest or uninformed.

ISSUES, CONCERNS AND CONSTRAINTS

There are many inter-related factors that impact on the development of a sustainable water and sanitation sector in small island countries. As this overview covers 18 countries with significant differences in physical conditions such as rainfall patterns, geology, vegetation, hydrology, and in

socio-economic conditions, the issues raised are general and will be more relevant to some communities than others.

There has been a preoccupation with 'coverage' and technical solutions without understanding the need for equal investment in behaviour change. The number of people who theoretically have access to water supply or sanitation system is not the only measure of success: water may have been supplied with no indication of improvement in health or poverty reduction; or toilets have been built but are not being used; waste water is transported and/or treated but not sufficiently to control pollution or system not adequately maintained. People have reasons for not using a service provided or misusing a resource. These need to be understood

Environmental and health education often focus on increasing knowledge, assuming that when people receive information, they will stop undesirable behaviour. Information may not be relevant, complete or realistic if it fails to take account of local insights, circumstances and priorities. People need to understand/experience why the new behaviour has more benefits than the old one (easier life, increased or protected income generation, more status, approval from respected persons). Many environment and health related messages are given in the form of lectures or one-way mass media. People are told 'what to do' without opportunity to identify their own concerns, so do not remember or apply the message.

Capacity and control is required for behaviour change. Even if people aspire to new behaviour they make lack possibility for doing so because of insufficient time, skills, flexibility, viable alternatives Also, Government personnel who are inspired by training can become demoralised if no resources or encouragement for initiative. This lack of opportunity can contribute to 'brain drain' from PICs to more interesting and better paid jobs overseas.

There are cultural and structural barriers to information exchange which require attention. This could include: inter-personal and communication training of field workers; Government personnel who have been trained in specific skills or participated in workshops/conferences/monitoring programs encouraged to pass on information to colleagues; donor agencies should maintain accessible networks/database to avoid duplication of programs; facilitation of inter-sector and inter-department communications.

Stakeholders should be involved in decision making and management even though this process can be time consuming, difficult and expensive. For example 90% of PIC population use on-site sanitation systems therefore they should be represented at Water & Sanitation fora, discussions and decision making. Often delegates only represent the 10% of the population who use reticulated systems and these delegates are usually men, even though women are often responsible for water and sanitation in the home. Training in implementation of W&S technology should include users of on-site water and sanitation systems eg to properly build/maintain septic tanks, private wells, raintanks, composting toilets. 'Communities' are differentiated and do not have one voice, therefore time and patience is needed to use traditional and non-traditional methods of communication, conflict resolution and decision making. Donors may have to adjust funding mechanisms to these time frames. Communal ownership and scarcity of land in PICs requires agreement for facilities such as centralised sewage treatment works, and water reserves. This sometimes results in mutually unsatisfactory rental arrangements, therefore community 'ownership' of these facilities could replace conflict with empowerment.

The political will required to support water and sanitation depends on many factors. While water resource development can be popular with politicians, sanitation is often encumbered with taboo and avoidance. There are many competitive demands on the government purse. Should government be enabler or provider? Children are the most vulnerable to poor water quality, inadequate sanitation and solid waste disposal, and poor hygiene, yet they do not have a political voice. Where conservation legislation does exist, enforcement can be weak in PIC communities were many people are related or interference in the private domain is not welcomed. Donor agencies, lending institutions and investors can stimulate dialogue on policies for sustainable resource management and set constructive funding conditions. The essential role of NGOs in advocacy, mobilisation and communication, requires support and recognition.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Fur further information, please contact the Theme 3 Resource Person, **Ms. Leonie Crennan**

E-mail: l.s.crennan@bigpond.com or Fax: +61 2 4928 4082.