



MPA: a new methodology for participatory monitoring

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Can the MPA shed light on the best approaches for planning water supply systems? This article includes studies using MPA that demonstrate that community-managed water supplies are significantly better sustained and used when their planning is more demand responsive.

Over the last two decades, the use of participatory methods such as PRA¹ and SARAR² has become increasingly popular in water-related programmes. While the MPA (methodology for participatory assessment) builds on these existing methods, there are also some important differences.³

What is different about the MPA?

- *Disaggregation by gender and socio-economic level.* Local information is disaggregated by gender and socio-economic groups, as defined by the community members themselves. Situations with greater gender or social equality then receive a higher score than situations with less. Finally, poor and better-off women and men identify and analyse their situations in four separate groups,

although they come together afterwards to discuss their outcomes and arrive at joint conclusions and action plans.

- *Different levels of analysis.* Stakeholders at community, institutional and policy levels can visualize, assess and plan the extent to which their actions contribute to the goals of sustainability, equity and effective use.
- *Quantification.* Community members, project staff and external evaluators can quantify qualitative findings from participatory rural appraisal (PRA) work on comparable scales. This makes it possible to compare the findings across and within agency projects and community groups, and statistically analyse the quantitative information. The qualitative information is documented to provide insights into the underlying reasons for the scores. Also recorded are men's and women's perceptions

of the outcomes and their ideas on possible actions.

Global study

The MPA was initially designed for a global study carried out by the World Bank Water and Sanitation Program, IRC and its partners, and women and men of 88 rural communities in 15 countries. The objective of the study was to test whether communities with more participatory, demand-responsive and gender- and poverty-sensitive projects also have better sustained and used water services. The resulting data showed that that this was indeed the case (Figure 1). The level of responsiveness to demand from community men and women, together with the degree of equitability in management explained 41 per cent of the variation insustainability.

A second study, with 63 communities on the island of Flores in Indonesia,

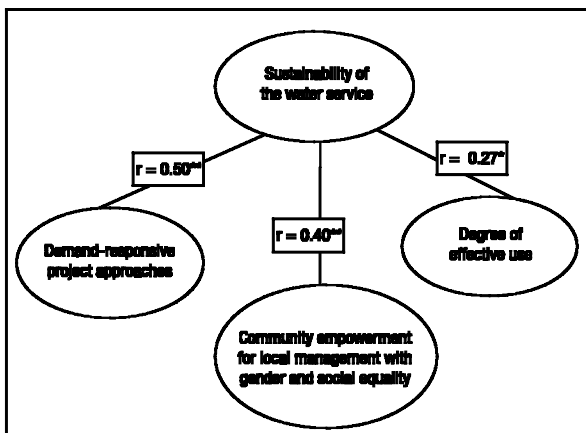


Figure 1 Findings from a global participatory study with 88 communities: how much various project approaches affect sustainability.⁵

* Significant at ≤ 0.05
** Significant at ≤ 0.01

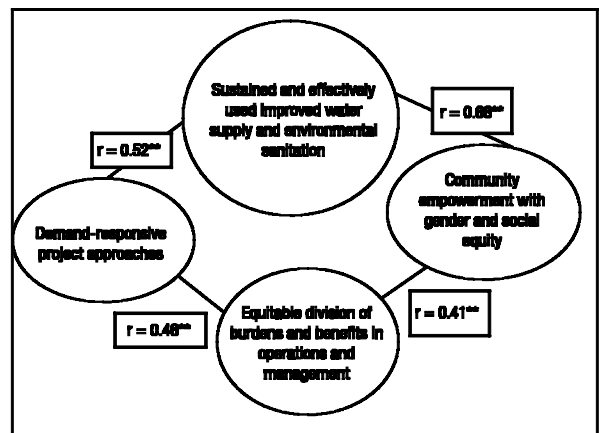


Figure 2 Results from 63 rural communities in Flores, Indonesia: how much various project approaches affect how well services were sustained and used.⁶

* Significant at ≤ 0.05
** Significant at ≤ 0.01

showed even stronger relationships (Figure 2). The level of demand responsiveness together with equitable management rights and capabilities explained 71 per cent of the variation in how well services were sustained and used.

At least three management conditions were associated with the better results. First, the approach must be gender and poverty sensitive. Second, it must be demand responsive for all groups, with participation of the various user groups in the design of the services as well as in responsive management structures. And third, there must be co-operation between expert technical and social staff, with a supportive management that has policies on gender and poverty, and provides suitable staff training.

Key criteria for good-quality data

In order to ensure good-quality data:

- The facilitators should be both women and men, trained in the methodology and experienced in the use of participatory tools.
- Gender and poverty considerations must be incorporated in four ways: local women and men including those from the poorest sections take part in the process, which requires adjustment to their time schedules and arrangements for food and travel; collection of disaggregated information for men, women, poor and rich; the use of tested indicators and scales to reveal gender and poverty divisions; and the analysis of this information to bring out socio-economic and cultural equalities or exclusion.
- All stakeholder groups at the community (including the unserved), implementing agency and policy levels use the system of self-scoring.
- Qualitative findings – which explain the differences between scores – get as much attention as the quantitative scores.
- Triangulation takes place of the data collected between the different community members and between the implementing agencies and the community members.
- Overall outcomes are discussed at synthesis meetings with the community and agency and are linked to action planning. Levels of support and time allowed must be sufficient

Box 1. Handling inequalities with the MPA

When poor and better-off women and men all visualize how they participate in and benefit from existing services, differences and inequalities emerge. In Sewukan, in Java, Indonesia, the evaluation of the existing water supply revealed that women wanted latrines to be added to the new project. They were having to wait until dark and walk quite far, risking their modesty and safety. A difference of opinion arose between them and the men, who had no such problems and wanted only a water project. Probing revealed that the men thought latrines too costly; further probing brought out that they used the toilet at the mosque. This was designed for many users, with flushing and ablution facilities and tiled in blue.

The team then used the 'sanitation ladder' with the groups to discuss different options for latrines.⁷ Confrontation changed to planning, and women and men began to cost the kind of latrine they wanted and could afford. This was the first time women of different strata in the village had got together for a development project. They were surprised to find that they all shared the same problem and vowed not to rest until they all had access to latrines.

Outcomes have not always been so positive. The MPA often reveals that while all households pay the same flat tariff, better-off households and men benefit more from the projects than poor households and women. The success in correcting such inequalities depends on whether disadvantaged people are able to unite and form a counteractive force and on the degree of support from the programme staff and their skills in mediation.

for the varying capabilities of the communities concerned.

MPA beyond evaluative studies

So far the MPA has mainly been used for one-off evaluations. However, preliminary experiences in, for example, Indonesia and Kenya, indicate that the methodology can also be used to empower local people to plan new services and make existing services more sustainable and equitable.⁴ As a planning and monitoring tool, differences of interests and conflicts become more acute and require resolution skills and tools (see Box 1). At programme level, the focus is also on further developing the indicators, tools and scoring for sanitation, hygiene and watershed management.

At the same time, quantifying results and making them comparable across communities should not be at the cost of local action for sustainable and equitable water supply and sanitation.

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