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Community self survey

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· STS, objectives and expectations

This article describes the use of community self surveys in the *Small Towns Sanitation - West Java* (Indonesia) project in 1989-90. A community self survey can be seen as a variant of participatory rural appraisal, which we discuss at the end.

The Small Towns Sanitation - West Java project (STS) was a project of the Indonesian Government, with partial funding by the Dutch Government and with implementation assistance by a consortium of Indonesian and Dutch consultants and NGOs.

STS had two objectives. At a macro level, it assisted provincial and district governments in the planning of sanitation improvements[1] and the construction of facilities which serve more than one community[2]. At a micro level it aimed to increase the number of sanitary facilities at household and neighbourhood level and improve sanitation related behaviour. Planning at the macro level covered 18 districts of West Java Province, while micro level activities were limited to two demonstration towns, Cibadak and Majalengka.

Community action approach

For the micro level improvements, the project opted for a community action approach, with the community members, and in particular the women as the main actors and the government in a supporting role. The project staff were convinced that with a high degree of 'community action' more toilets could be constructed, at lower costs (to the government and per toilet) with a better chance of proper use and maintenance. The project staff felt that the 'dormant' need for toilets (etc) could, with the proper stimulus, be translated by the community into action. The best stimulus is one by someone known and esteemed, i.e. someone from within the community.

Included in the community actions was a survey carried out by the community members themselves. This was undertaken for several reasons.

With community members as surveyors, the survey would be more reliable. Surveyors from within the community have little difficulty establishing the needed rapport and are more likely to receive the full cooperation and trust of the people being surveyed. STS accepted that the surveyor influences the person interviewed. Scientific research was not the aim in STS and the presence of the researcher could even be seen as 'contamination' of the study. Such influence could be used to increase the willingness of the interviewee to participate in the project. The interviewers carried pamphlets explaining the basic facts on sanitation.

Traditional surveys attempting to measure *willingness-to-pay* are likely to be very inaccurate predictors of actual payments, or in STS's case participation. If the informant says, for example, that s/he is willing to make certain contributions, the possibility is very real that at the time of delivery, that person opts out for different reasons. If the interviewer is a neighbour, not only is the chance greater that a truthful answer is given,

[1] Sanitation in STS encompassed toilets, sewerage, solid waste, drainage and health education as related to hygiene.

[2] Included in the macro level activities was the overall planning, financing and backstopping of the community and household activities.

Source: RRA Notes (1993), Issue 18, pp.15–20, IIED London

but also the interviewee feels more committed to act up when the time comes.

Finally, it was expected that starting community action in the data collection phase would set the stage for further community action with planning, construction, operation and maintenance, and repayment of credits. This last reason was the most important for choosing a self survey method. The other objectives could have been reached with a survey, fully supervised by an outsider, using local people as interviewers. If, however, one aims at increasing the responsibility of the individual households and communities for improving their conditions, then it is only logical that they should also be given the responsibility for such activities as data collection.

Actual proceedings and results

Before the community self survey, *dasa wisma* women at the lowest organizational rank of the national women's organization (each woman responsible to guide some ten households) were trained by project staff. In some neighbourhoods this was the first activity by the *dasa wisma* and interest was extra high there. The training, lasting a few hours covered both their task as surveyors and as community motivators. A simple one-page questionnaire was distributed with the pamphlets.

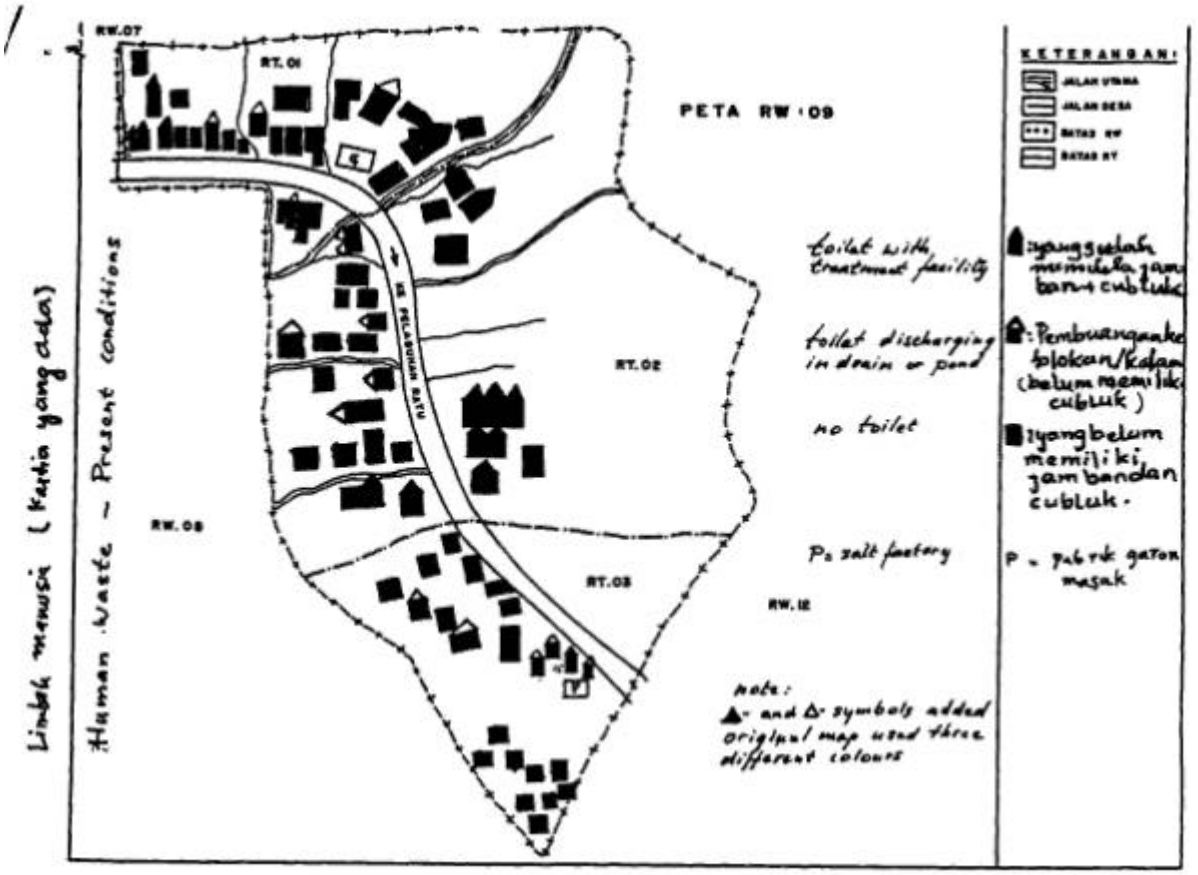
In some neighbourhoods the women changed the wording and style of the questions. They also adapted the interview procedures to the local circumstances, including the selection of respondents within a household and the procedures to organize group interviews within their *dasa wisma* groups. Such changes made the survey even more their own survey. Actual data collection took two days and covered 100% of households.

Assisted by youngsters from the community, the women tabulated data, calculated simple frequency distributions and aggregates per neighbourhood and typed a simple report about actual sanitary conditions and the needs and wishes to add or improve sanitary facilities.

In each neighbourhood one set of maps were prepared by the communities to show the existing drainage, solid waste disposal and toilet facilities and practices (see Fig 1). On another set they marked where they wanted to construct or rehabilitate a drain, to build a private or shared toilet facility and where a private or communal garbage container would be needed. In Indonesia in many villages and urban neighbourhoods, people are used to preparing maps. Almost each neighbourhood has a map, usually hanging in the office of the neighbourhood head, but sometimes also hanging at the entrance gate of the neighbourhood. On these maps the main roads and rivers are marked and usually also all houses. Such maps were used as base maps to mark existing and needed facilities.

Source: RRA Notes (1993), Issue 18, pp.15–20, IIED London

Figure 1. Map of existing situation on human disposal. Cibadak, RW 09. (Note: the original map used colours and no symbols. The use of symbols was suggested to retain information after photocopying, but this was not liked in any of the communities)



Both the survey results and the map were used in neighbourhood meetings to continue the sanitation improvement campaign and the planning of actual sanitation improvements. One element which deserves mention is the use of toilet owners as propagators of the construction of toilets. In public meetings they explained, in their own language, what advantages they saw in having a toilet. The advantages they mentioned were mostly related to convenience, such as: short walk in case of illness or bad weather, sitting dry, less risk of meeting a snake, etc.

Benefits and failures

The first benefit of the community self-surveys is the database, including the maps. Another survey would have taken more time, and especially the preparation of a detailed map of all houses, sanitary facilities, desired locations for new facilities, etc.

Part of the expressed needs were the result of the survey (and other project activities at the time of the survey) and provide a true picture of that moment. During the survey many people expressed interest in constructing a sanitary facility and the number of applicants for a sanitation credit was also high. Some people did not want to wait for the credit and started constructing a toilet during the planning period (including some of the village cadres who seem to have been embarrassed that they propagated something they didn't have yet themselves.

Not all facilities 'needed' were actually built. In one typical neighbourhood nearly 75% of all toilets and toilet effluent disposal systems were built but none of the solid waste and drainage elements, whereas in other neighbourhoods the solid waste element was implemented according to plan and fewer planned toilet systems were constructed.

Source: RRA Notes (1993), Issue 18, pp.15–20, IIED London

In one of the two towns adjoining neighbourhoods not yet part of the project came forward with requests for sanitation credits. Although not all persons involved at the initial preparation and training phase continued to participate actively, generally a very strong desire could be observed to make the project a success, both at the community level and at the lower levels of Local Government.

The individual households in the project area were actively involved in the various phases of the improvement of their sanitary conditions. Not only did this lead to higher expressed needs for such improvements and to a more solid database, also the participating households felt very much involved and had a high sense of duty to the proper use, operation and maintenance of the facilities and services. This contrasted highly with many instances of non-acceptance by communities of water supply and sanitation facilities and services elsewhere in the same region, even in the same towns, that were planned and constructed by an outside agency.

In general it can be claimed that the community self survey and other community activities have had positive impacts on community organization. If, as the authors believe, the approach for local development activities should not just be participatory, but also enabling, then both government officials and communities must be prepared for their new roles. For the communities it means that they must gain confidence in their own ability to plan and implement their development and must learn some new skills such as the execution of a needs survey.

The community self survey and the (other elements of the) community self-planning of sanitation improvement resulted in a high number of households and groups of households applying for a credit. However, by the time the first instalments of the credits were to be handed over, the government reversed its earlier decision and decided to use the money for construction of the facilities with contractors. Their work was below standard and only after high-level intervention were some improvements made. Still, the people were expected to pay for the facilities in accordance with the signed applications. It may not be a surprise that the repayment of these 'credits' was very poor.

Essential for community projects is to start implementation (almost) immediately after the community has been activated. The community self-survey should not last long and should be part of a smooth and rapid overall process. In West Java the community self surveys, from training to completion of a first village sanitation plan lasted only a few weeks. In the current 41 1KK Water Supply Sector Project only 14 days (11 working days) are needed to cover in one district concurrently 4 villages, including introductory meetings (3 days), *dasa wisma* training (1 day per village), data collection (1 day per village), tabulations and mapping (1 day per village) and village discussion of the village plan (1 day per village).

STS West Java was not the only project where community self surveys were introduced.Two examples in the field of water supply in Java are OTA 33 and the 41 1KK Water Supply Sector Project. In this last project, one variation is that mapping is based on maps with correct scales provided by the project staff. The community completed these maps by indicating which household occupies which house etc.[3]

Even though at the end the credit scheme did not materialise as hoped and expected, the overall result of using community self surveys was very positive. It showed that communities are able to implement a survey and do their own planning of sanitation improvements with only minimal outside support and that the communities, if given that opportunity, will come up with plans, based on a very solid foundation: their own efforts, their own knowledge of local circumstances and their ability to convince themselves of the need for such a development plan.

[3] Poerbo H. and Shubert, C. 1978. *The Use of Aerial Photographs and Self-Help Surveys in integrated Marginal Settlements Improvement Projects*. Bandung. (The use of base maps supplied by an outside agency but corrected and completed by the community as developed by Ir. Victor Purba at the Institut Teknologi Bandung as early as 1978, e.g. for marking the location of underground networks of water supply, electricity etc.).

Source: RRA Notes (1993), Issue 18, pp.15–20, IIED London

· Community self survey and Participatory Rural Appraisal

For the survey the term *Survai Kampung Bendiri* or community self survey was used.

It was not participatory in the sense that the 'target community' participated in research by an outsider. Generally participation still limits the role of the community or of the woman who participate in some project or programme to that of an assistant and the government often remains the main actor. Within STS an attempt was made to reverse these roles. The term government participation would be a better term but is not likely to be easily accepted by government staff.

A community self survey also has clear drawbacks. There is a great risk of creasing high expectations, even more than in the case of a more traditional survey. If a community is given the responsibility to start a community action project, it expects that it will also get the authority which goes with that responsibility and it may expect that the government or aid agency at least will provide some assistance, such as credits or technical advice.

Similarly, disappointments can be higher if after carrying out the survey (and executing other community actions), the community does not get from the government what it expected to get. In the case of STS, disappointments were very high indeed, when, contrary to warranted expectations, the government appointed contractors to construct the facilities.

Therefore, before setting out on the course of community self surveys, one should be reasonable sure that the project management/the government is willing to hand over the responsibility, and that they will continue to do so until the completion of the project.

The differences between organized communities and communities where poor cohesion and organization is a bottleneck to community action are important for the issue of community self surveys. In Indonesia, especially on the island of Java, the rural villages and most urban neighbourhoods have a high degree of organization and cohesion. Even where vast economic differences exist between the different members of the community, on the whole one may say there is a good cooperation between the rich and the poor. Often the economic top of the community contributes in many way to the level of public facilities of their poor neighbours. In cases where little cooperation exists between the members of the community, it may even by risky to hand over the responsibility for a survey (and indeed a project), as it may be used against some segment of the community. In such cases outside control may still be required to guarantee that the intended people are the beneficiaries.

Many of the classical criteria of research do not apply to the community self surveys in STS and probably also not to the PRA examples given in the literature. Mention has already been made of the issue of 'contamination'. Because the resulting database was certainly very reliable, the issue could be avoided in STS by not calling it research. Although government officials were sceptical about the desirability to hand over responsibilities to the communities, they also were confident about the reliability of the database which resulted from the community self surveys. The database is only one of the desired outcomes of the survey. In the case of STS the active involvement of the community in the implementation of the survey started a process of community actions and the interviews were combined with health education and motivation.

Robert Chambers[4] recently discussed PRA as an alternative to rapid rural appraisal, whereby outsiders extract information from a community. It can be argued that a PRA still is a method of extracting information, unless the community is not only given the stick to explain his conditions etc. but is also given the responsibility to use the results of the study for planning themselves the desired improvements in their environment. While some forms of PRA can be used very well to extract data on actual conditions and behaviour patterns, as well as on needs, wishes and plans, community self-surveys should fit in an

[4] Robert Chambers 1992, *Ibid.*

Source: RRA Notes (1993), Issue 18, pp.15–20, IIED London

overall approach that enables community action for development.

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