

This article will look at:

1. The evolution of development structures responsible for nutrition and water supply
2. How community participation operates within these structures at different phases of the project cycle
3. Lessons learnt and problems encountered

1 Development Structures

During the civil war of the 1970s in Zimbabwe, community development activities were limited and characterised by divisions between the nationalist freedom fighters, who mobilised communities to aid them in provision of food, shelter and logistical assistance, and the traditional chiefs, who generally maintained alignment to the colonial government for their own survival. At independence in 1980, communities found themselves working on their own while the bureaucracy was split – between the old one which was suspicious of a population that had supported ‘terrorists’, and the new which was uncertain of how to act. The chiefs were caught in a transition as they and other traditional leadership found themselves in competition with new civic leaders. In particular, the post-colonial government promoted the election of ward councillors, giving them responsibility for community mobilisation.

1.1 Health workers

In 1980, the Ministry of Health (MoH) expanded and improved an existing Village Health Worker (VHW) programme. It developed a three-month training curriculum, set out clear guidelines on the selection of VHWs by communities through local elections, and gave them an allowance channelled through district councils. VHWs were responsible for educating communities (primarily women) on water-related hygiene, improved child care, cleanliness around the home, dressing of wounds, the making of home oral rehydration solutions, and distributing anti-malaria tablets. The programme became very successful in a relatively short period, and in the period 1980–84, over 7,000 VHWs were trained and deployed in the rural areas, with additional ones deployed on commercial farming areas as Farm Health Workers (FHWs). They worked hand-in-hand with a revamped cadre of Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) – a common

Testing Community Empowerment Strategies in Zimbabwe

*Examples from
Nutrition
Supplementation,
and Water Supply
and Sanitation
Programmes*

Mungai Lenneiye

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feature between all of them being that they were women and well-respected in their communities.

1.2 Extension workers

In 1983, the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs (MCDWA) carried out a review of extension staff because there had been complaints that, with independence, extension staff from the many new central government ministries were bringing different development messages to villages. In particular, the Community Development Workers (CDWs) and Home Economics Demonstrators (HEDs) inherited from the colonial Ministry of Internal Affairs were now outnumbered by the health-based VHWs.

To address this problem, the MCDWA first developed a new concept under which communities would be responsible for their own development and only expect support from a single 'agent for development', or Village Development Agent, who would replace HEDs, CDWs, VHWs, and Farmer Extension Agents from the Ministry of Agriculture. This agent later came to be known as the Village Community Worker (VCW).

1.3 Development Committees

In 1984–85, the government tried to reconcile communities with state agencies by formulating Village, Ward, District, and Provincial Development Committees (VIDCO, WADCO, DDC and PDC). The Ministry of Local Government took the leadership in the formulation of a 'provincialisation' strategy that became the 1985 Prime Minister's Directive on Decentralisation. The state was still suspicious of the chiefs and traditional leadership that had operated prior to independence, and power was consolidated around elected bodies (up to the district level) and ward councillors, many drawn from liberation war leadership. There had been an idea that District Councils could elect Provincial Village Assemblies, who would in turn elect a National Village Assembly to ensure that national plans reflected village-level concerns. These assemblies were finally dropped in favour of a Provincial Council, and it was further considered that parliament was adequate for national-level representation.

The final assembly of structures to facilitate development was adopted in 1985 at a series of meetings

where ministers presented to the nation how they would promote development in the new environment created by the Directive on Decentralisation. The outcome was a hierarchy of Democratic Development Structures (DDS) mirrored by administrative structures (Figure 1). A number of directly-elected DDS were given the mandate to spearhead development, supported by indirectly-elected DDS (usually made up of delegates from the directly elected structures). The indirectly-elected DDS provided the coordination mechanism between popular bodies and central government structures set up to coordinate development (at national, provincial, district, and ward levels).

Below is a summary of strategies that were developed and implemented by the Nutrition and Water Supply and Sanitation Programmes.

2 Programming Community Mobilisation

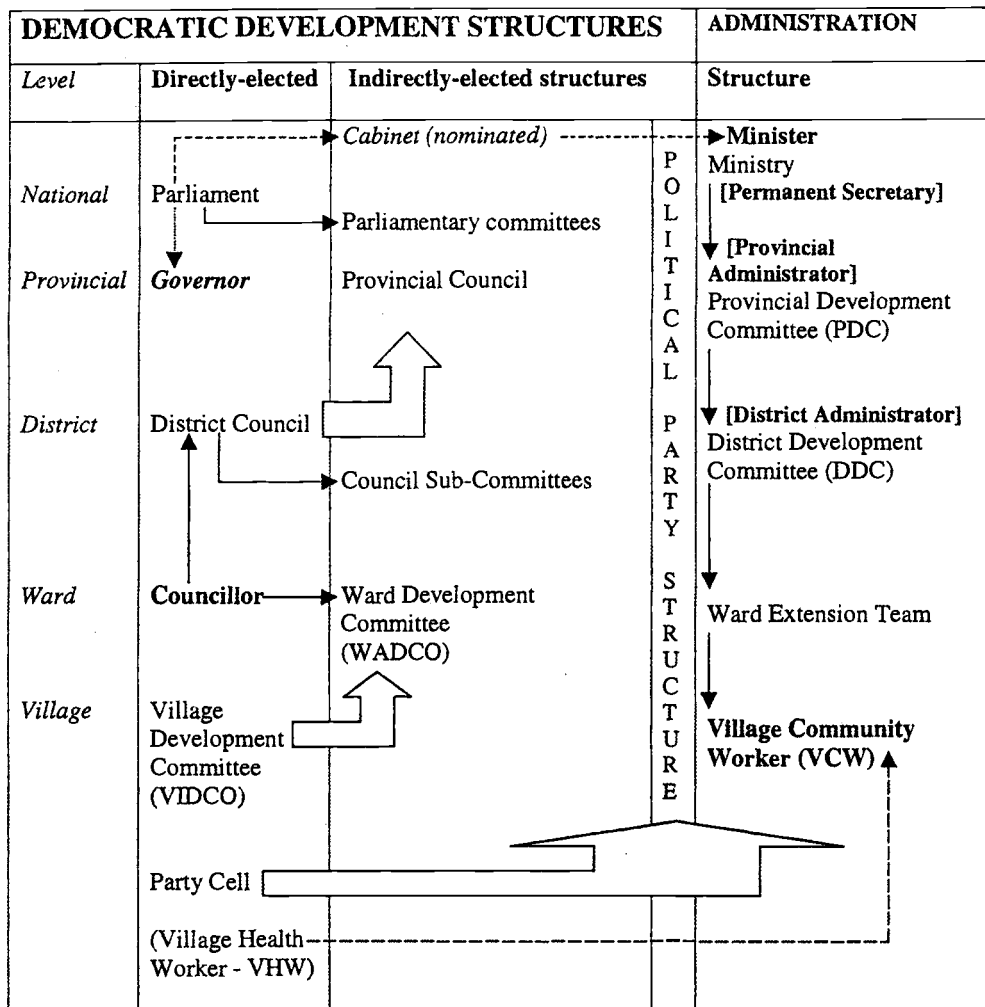
2.1 Evolution

In 1986, the Integrated Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Programme (IRWSSP) took the decentralisation directive and gave it operational procedures in the water programme (defining roles for VIDCOs, WADCOs, district and other structures).

In 1986–87, the Supplementary Food Production Programme (SFPP) completed and adopted its intersectoral management strategies, again operationalising the Prime Minister's Directive on Decentralisation from village to national levels.

Both the water supply and sanitation programme, and the nutrition programme, were managed by intersectoral teams of technical persons: the National Steering Committee (NSC), and the Provincial and District Food and Nutrition Management Teams (FNMTs). In both the SFPP and IRWSSP, the lack of a national coordinator equivalent to PDC was felt, and the National Action Committee (NAC) and NSC played this role. Provincial and district development sub-committees for IRWSS and the attachment of FNMTs to these bodies were formalised. At the same time, village and ward-level coordination strategies for health activities were implemented in line with the 1985 Nyanga workshop recommendations.

Figure 1: Structures to promote development in Zimbabwe



In 1988–91, structures set up in health, nutrition, and water supply and sanitation programmes implemented community-based activities and gained valuable experience. Lessons were learnt, and in the case of nutrition, the SFPP became a Community Food and Nutrition Programme (CFNP) to reflect the success of the new management system. In Mashonaland West Province, this success was marked by the production of *Kuguta Kushanda* guidelines for community projects. Community mobilisation had been hindered by the

rigidity of financial procedures issued by the Ministry of Finance, and these were modified to suit the needs of CFNP. The gradual strengthening of community mobilisation had thus continued throughout the 1980s.

The turning point came in 1991 when government started the implementation of an Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) and Rural District Councils (RDCs) created by the 1988 Amalgamation of Rural and District Councils Act. It

Table 1: Operationalisation experiences in different phases of community-level developments

Phase	Involvement	Participation	Empowerment
1. Needs identification	Consultants and government employees	Jointly by government employees and individual community leaders	Community members and their directly elected DDS
2. Planning	Technical experts (consultants and NGO staff)	Government extension staff and some individual community leaders	Indirectly elected DDS with inputs from technical experts
3. Coordination	Weak and by technical experts	Government structures (dominated by administration)	DDS and government structures (administration)
4. Implementation	Strongly influenced by commercial considerations	Jointly by community leaders and government personnel	Primarily DDS and community groups
5. Advocacy	External agencies	Extension staff	Directly-elected DDS
6. Monitoring and evaluation	External experts	External experts and local administration	Participatory (with implementers, extension staff and external experts)

can be argued that for community empowerment and development, the structural changes brought about by RDCs and ESAP lie at the heart of what is going on within the development field in Zimbabwe today. Poverty and its consequences are more manifest today than they have ever been in the lives of most Zimbabweans, and the state–community partnership developed in the 1980s is under severe strain.

2.2 Phases in community participation

The 1986 community participation strategy for IRWSSP identified six phases for programme implementation using community mobilisation strategies, and these in turn influenced the 1987 SFPP guidelines (Table 1). The experience of both the nutrition programme and the water supply and sanitation programmes will be discussed in terms of these phases.

(1) Needs identification

In 1980, only the NGOs could respond to the crisis of hunger facing returning refugees in a situation where neither the old nor the new bureaucracy

could act. By 1982, the newly established Department of National Nutrition took over the NGO-run child supplementary feeding programme, because drought had placed demands on the programme that were beyond the capacity of NGOs. For needs identification, the programme relied on structures developed during the liberation war in the communal areas, and the main actors were individual political leaders, some chiefs, NGOs, and private citizens. After 1985, needs identification became a joint responsibility of VHWs/VCWs, clinic-based nurses, and VIDCO members. They measured the mid-upper arm circumference for under-fives, took their weight, and plotted these on a master child-health card to determine vulnerable communities. The Ministry of Labour and Social Services was responsible for coordinating all drought activities and used the administration arm (Figure 1) to distribute fifteen kilograms of maize per person per month in the rural areas under a National Drought Relief Programme.

In the case of IRWSSP, needs identification was initially carried out by technical persons – usually

consultants working with government officials. Communities complained that the siting of water points was too much influenced by technical considerations (ease of drilling, for instance) and not enough by social needs (e.g. closeness to homes and away from farming and grazing lands). After 1987, needs identification became the responsibility of district councils through the councillor working with members of WADCOs and VIDCOs (the DDS).

(2) Planning

Within community programmes, planning translates into prioritisation – making choices between competing requests and needs. This function was given to the indirectly-elected DDS where it was possible for representatives of various bodies to negotiate where water points, nutrition gardens, and feeding points could be sited (with information supplied by administration staff present at these meetings). Sub-committees of the District Council were in several instances able to work with representatives from the District Development Committees (DDCs) in allocating bore holes to wards with high rates of diarrhoea, and gardening plots to those with high rates of malnutrition.

For the DDS to make decisions, they used technical guidelines from the nutrition programme which would specify how much maize meal, beans, cooking oil and salt were needed to feed a child per day, and guided the distribution of food packs, food preparation, and monitoring.

In the case of IRWSSP, there were guidelines on household entitlements (cement, vent pipes, and fly screens) for the building of toilets; and criteria for giving one community a bore hole while another got a deep well. Guidelines on this programme failed to fully provide technical specifications for effective use by the indirectly-elected DDS, which became over-dependent on the administration for implementation. There were nevertheless clear guidelines on the composition and functions of Water Point Committees (WPCs) (with majority women members) and this contributed to the effective construction and maintenance of water points under the programme.

The issue of water point maintenance was quite critical, and the NAC borrowed the three-tier maintenance system developed in India. In this system,

preventative maintenance work was done by members of the WPC, the Environmental Health Technician (EHT) would come from the ward for more difficult work, and a district team would undertake complex technical work. This system, like the use of technical guidelines on construction, proved too difficult for communities and their representatives to implement, and various evaluations indicate limited successes. Nevertheless, there is evidence that many of the water points constructed under this programme have been maintained, often by use of DDF personnel, and WPCs have remained active in the programme.

(3) Coordination

A 1984 evaluation of the Child Supplementary Feeding Programme (CSFP) implemented during the 1982–83 drought found that the main actors in this programme were the Village Health Workers supported by NGOs. The later definition of roles for councillors, other ward-level extension staff, district and provincial nursing officers, CSFP district supervisors, provincial CSFP logistics officers, and national level staff greatly improved the coordination of the CSFP during the drought of 1987 and 1992. Coordination was defined in the context of NSC, FNMTs, WADCOs and VIDCOs. The main problem identified was the lack of adequate transport for supervision and poor communication between villages and the higher levels. Coordinators often used bicycles and buses, and this limited their ability to visit many feeding points in a month.

The IRWSSP was coordinated by a number of agencies depending on the complexity of the task (VIPs and family shallow wells by MoH, deep wells by the District Development Fund, and bore holes by the water department). These agencies liaised with DDS in ensuring that communities were able to work together with government technical arms. While coordination between government agencies and NGOs was reported to be going quite well, there were often major breakdowns in the coordination of community inputs for the IRWSSP. This programme was well funded by donors, with sufficient vehicles for supervision and technical expertise to monitor it in the districts. The downside was the overall high unit cost of putting up any of these water points, due to the rather top-heavy central government-driven management system.

(4) Implementation

Once the nutrition status of children in a community had been determined, government extension staff, councillors and VCWs would operate the feeding programme, working with an elected Feeding Point Committee who would receive the food, store it, distribute it, and organise a cooking rosta so that children could be fed in groups at designated feeding points (e.g. someone's home). In the 1987 drought, over half a million children were given a supplementary meal a day, and this number rose to over a million in the 1992 drought period (in a country of less than ten million people).

The constitution and briefing of WPCs was similar to that for the CSFP, except that the committee of five had to have at least three women. FPCs were always women, but men became involved when the CSFP gave way to gardening plots and fowl runs under the Supplementary Food Protection Programme (SFPP). The IRWSSP used the EHTs to train builders for the programme and to distribute materials for the VIP construction programme. The dominance of mature women in these programmes (and in the ranks of VCWs and Ward Community Coordinators, who were formerly the CDWs) created stability as men and young people tended to move to urban areas in search of employment and thus abandon community work.

The EHT was given the responsibility of promoting shallow wells, while deep wells were made the responsibility of staff from the District Development Fund (DDF), which had the skills to use dynamite to blast rocks. The DDF was also responsible for organising the siting of wells and bore holes (using community pre-siting meetings convened by councillors, VCWs and Ward Community Coordinators). Due to the importance of water in communities and the ability of this programme to provide employment opportunities (especially to village-level builders and well-diggers), IRWSSP implementation was quite successful. There was less success in accounting for the use of resources following the breakdown of communications between some departments at a specific level (e.g. district) and between various levels (e.g. district, province, and national). While a variety of agencies were mobilised to participate in the IRWSSP, keeping them together and with equal commitment proved quite difficult.

Problems of implementation became obvious when the IRWSSP was reviewed in terms of its original targets (of water points and VIPs to be constructed). It had been planned that it would take three years to provide each district with a VIP per two households and to meet the water point per population targets given under 'planning' above. In many districts, these targets had not been met after ten years – even after adjusting for population growth.

There were a few attempts to improve on implementation by using the Land Use Planning (LUP) component of the IRWSSP, where Agricultural Extension Workers and personnel from the Department of Physical Planning zoned village lands in terms of their suitability for housing, grazing, and cultivation. Initially, the programme had relied on 'technical mobilisation', where the technical merits of the programme were explained to the target population in the hope that communities would move into villages and consolidate land for production. When this phase did not lead to a movement of people away from *kraals* to villages, 'persuasion through the carrot' was used – promising the target population services such as water points, VIPs, schools, clinics, building materials, and other inputs in the hope that they would move into these villages. Although this second strategy did not have much success, there was little of the third strategy of 'implementation through the stick' – where force is used to make the target population comply, in the hope that they will soon see that changes are for their own good. Only in a few areas did some party stalwarts advocate for the third strategy, but it was never considered an important government policy (as happened in the Tanzanian villagisation programme of the 1970s). Table 2 tries to summarise the relationship between these three strategies and the three phases of community mobilisation.

Communities welcomed the LUP, but resisted villagisation because it would take them further away from their agricultural land and the graves of their ancestors. Some community members further argued that it would create over-crowding and therefore promote 'crime and other social ills' if there was no happy compromise between 'the geographical/economic advantages of villagisation with the social disadvantages associated with urbanisation'. In the end, the programme settled for a

Table 2: Relative importance of different strategies in community mobilisation

	Involvement	Participation	Empowerment
Technical mobilisation	+	++	+++
Persuasion through the carrot	+	+++	++
Implementation through the stick	++++	+	+

community participation strategy and this affected the rate of implementation for activities under the IRWSSP.

(5) Advocacy and training

The elaborate management systems and structures for these programmes demanded that extensive training programmes be developed and implemented. This was relatively easy for the CSFP, because it was in response to emergencies when little other development work was being undertaken. In the case of IRWSSP, it was more important to integrate training activities into regular in-service programmes for the various government departments (health, local government, community development, agriculture, water resources, and the DDF) and communities. NGOs were particularly involved in training activities for both programmes, although there was often implicit competition between certain government departments and these NGOs. Health education in both programmes turned out to be rather *ad hoc* and not as effective as had been hoped by those who implemented the programmes. On the positive side, there were many manuals and guidelines produced, and these made it possible for these programmes to have continuity, even in the face of high staff turnover and time-breaks (especially for CSFP between drought periods), in the implementation of these programmes.

The element of advocacy was very weak in both programmes, with most of this taking the form of posters and long reports that were not easy for communities to access and use. National media rarely reported on positive developments (except when donors made contributions to the programmes or when problems of transparency and inefficiency arose). The need for a national communication strategy had been recognised in the CSFP during the 1992 drought, but government agencies proved poor actors in this area.

(6) Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring was primarily left to local administration (Figure 1) and their reports were used to brief the indirectly elected DDS. The directly elected DDS were less well-informed because there were few formal mechanisms established to facilitate such briefings. Furthermore, the complexity of these monitoring reports (especially in the case of IRWSSP) meant that administration staff had to make the presentations. Nevertheless, the national goal to implement integrated programmes had forced administration to provide information to the DDS and to move beyond inter-ministerial projects towards community-based programmes.

Evaluations were mainly undertaken with support from the funding agencies, and it was then that critical lessons from these programmes were drawn. Some of these lessons are discussed in the next section.

3 Critical Issues and Lessons Learnt

The lessons learnt are presented in terms of the three phases of community mobilisation and accountability: involvement, participation, and empowerment. Community involvement is defined as where external agencies primarily drive development initiatives and invite communities to become involved. The term community participation is appropriate where external agencies seek a partnership with communities, but retain control over resources. By community empowerment, it is understood that resources are controlled by communities through their elected structures, and it is these that define the terms under which external agencies can become involved. In such an inversion of the development triangle implied by empowerment, there is need for legally-binding distribution of power between DDS and local administration

(be it representatives of central government or employees of local authorities) for efficient programme implementation.

In the CSFP and IRWSSP, a *clear definition of roles* between DDS (both directly and indirectly elected) and the administration proved to be a precondition for successful community-level accountability, as this protected local autonomy and authority over resources in programmes. In both programmes, developments towards this goal facilitated the successful implementation of activities, but fell short of achieving sustainable accountability for these programmes to communities and their structures.

Accountability to communities was enhanced by ensuring that there was *information on the entitlements and obligations* of those communities within a programme. This ensured that there were standards and measures for effective monitoring by both communities and external agencies. In the case of CSFP, communities had information on what they were entitled to and what was expected of them, which made it possible for this programme to be quite dependent on community efforts. In the case of water supply and sanitation, both available technical information and distribution systems for materials were too dependent on the administrative structures and not sufficiently accessible to the DDS and to communities.

The *accountability* of VCWs to the community was reduced drastically when they became civil servants. The VHW had at least been accountable to the district council, but the new VCW became accountable to central government, a step that reduced accountability and increased community dependence on central government agencies.

There were several complaints among agencies promoting nutrition and water supply and sanitation projects that communities were often apathetic, and traditional leadership often obstructive. In both programmes, there is a recognition now that *traditional leadership and communities had been able to assess the relevance of programmes to their needs* and enthusiastically supported those that suited them. It is in this context that the traditional communal granaries (*zhunde*) have received both community and traditional leadership support, although they are considered 'conservative' by

representatives of some government and non-government agencies. The attempt by government to convert drought relief rations of maize into 'grain loans' ran into problems of community repayments once the drought was over – suggesting that the graduation from stress-related interventions to development programmes needs careful consideration and extensive consultations with communities.

In the *struggle over resources*, Democratic Development Structures were poorly equipped to compete with local administration (which had a streamlined hierarchy with access to national level resources). It is the local administrative system that exercised control over resource distribution and accounting, although many efforts were made to try and make communities responsible.

Under both community involvement and participation, a major problem was the lack of suitable mechanisms to estimate and cost inputs by communities. In the building of VIP toilets under the IRWSSP, the cost of community inputs (even using rural wage rates) was as high as 70% of the total cost of building a toilet. The availability of this information to communities and funding agencies (including government) has the potential to transform a project or programme from one of charity to one of partnership.

Community participation has *facilitated the incorporation of indigenous knowledge* into these programmes. In the CSFP, traditional food preparation and preservation methods were adopted and used by feeding committees – e.g. the combination of beans or groundnuts with maize to produce composite flours. In the IRWSSP, VIPs were modified to create two compartments to overcome the traditional difficulty of women using the same toilet with the father-in-law; and traditional water storage systems (e.g. gourds) were modified and adopted.

The original goal of promoting mass participation in development through VIDCOs was *over-powered by political party considerations* as party cell and branch leaders took over the leadership of VIDCOs and WADCOs and effectively marginalised those who were not members of the ruling party. VIDCOs became a mechanism for the ruling party to take over development programmes in the village, rather than mobilising whole communities (especially the

very poor, female-headed households and the youth) for development activities.

The 1992 CSFP was later extended to schools so that school children could be given a meal supplement. The success of CSFP in times of drought led some national and international agencies to implement a school feeding programme even in non-drought years. The relatively less successful non-drought CSFP points to the capacity of communities and individual households to select what suits them at a given time. A drought-related CSFP is well supported because community members have the time to participate since there is little other economic activity, but not so successful in non-drought years when households look to their own efforts to meet food needs. Similarly, activities related to the IRWSSP are well supported during the winter season, when there is little agricultural work, but not in the rainy season, when families are busy on the land. Expensive project redesigns meant to overcome community resistance in these situations are questionable.

Without devolution, it is difficult to sustain accountability to community structures, and there has been a steady 'taking back' of power over resources by local administration in the highly centralised and deconcentrated governance system in Zimbabwe. It is the need for accountability without devolution in Zimbabwe that led to the design of complex, cumbersome, and expensive structures to promote and support community mobilisation in both the CSFP and the IRWSSP to ensure that

governments and community resources were well utilised. In spite of these difficulties, there is some evidence that community groups involved in the CSFP and IRWSSP were able to gain useful organisational skills that have been extended to other areas. Some women's groups have approached hospitals to buy surplus produce from SFPP gardening plots; while others have used surplus water from bore holes to increase household access to vegetables. Women were also able to use the SFPP to involve men in bush clearing and fencing; and to secure land from chiefs and councillors, where it would have been difficult without support from government agencies involved in this programme.

With ESAP has been a steady growth in the *privatisation of government services and increased non-transparency* in the administration. Community members seem to have responded to this privatisation process by demanding payment for their participation in development projects, unless the control of resources is put in their hands. The experience of School Development Associations (SDAs) taking over and successfully running primary schools, at a time when other programmes are concerned over inadequate community support, seems to be a case for further investigation in this process of increased accountability to communities. This *ad hoc* privatisation in the 1990s is in contrast to the political commitment and intense technical work undertaken in the 1980s, and which proved a key ingredient in the success of working towards community empowerment in the CSFP and IRWSSP.

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