

SUSTAINABILITY OF ROTARY WASH PROJECTS

HERE'S WHY I'M GOING TO SAY WHAT I HAVE TO SAY. I STARTED FIELD WORK ON ROTARY FUNDED DRINKING WATER PROJECTS IN 2005 AND HAVE SINCE WORKED ON-SITE ON RURAL COMMUNITY WATER AND SANITATION PROJECTS IN MEXICO, GUATEMALA, MALAWI, CAMBODIA, AND A BIT IN BOLIVIA.

EARLIER THIS YEAR, I MADE PERHAPS MY LAST TRIP TO MALAWI WITH THE EXPRESS PURPOSE OF GAINING "LESSONS LEARNED" FROM THE WORK THERE IN 20 RURAL VILLAGES SINCE 2007. I BROUGHT BACK TWO GENERAL CONCLUSIONS:

- 1. AT LEAST IN EAST AFRICA – AND PROBABLY IN ALL AFRICA – ANY NEW WATER WELL IS A GOOD WELL.**
- 2. IT IS CRITICAL THAT THE COMMUNITY HAVE AVAILABLE THE EXPERTISE OR THE RESOURCES TO REPAIR BROKEN PROJECT EQUIPMENT.**

TAKING A LONGER VIEW, I'VE TRIED TO BOIL DOWN MY EXPERIENCE INTO A FEW PRECEPTS OF WATER AND SANITATION PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY, WHICH I WILL SUMMARIZE HERE.

PRINCIPLE ONE: **MAKE THE PROJECT A GOOD FIT**

BY THIS I MEAN, IS IT REALLY A PRIORITY FOR THE COMMUNITY? AS I'VE ALREADY MENTIONED, THIS IS PROBABLY AN EASY CALL IN MUCH OF AFRICA, BECAUSE WATER SOURCES ARE OFTEN SOME DISTANCE FROM WHERE PEOPLE LIVE, AND ALSO SOME WELLS AND PONDS THAT ARE RELIED UPON DRY UP DURING THE DRY SEASON.

ANOTHER WELL ALMOST ALWAYS HELPS.

IN SE ASIA AND LATIN AMERICA, A CLOSER LOOK IS NEEDED. FOR EXAMPLE, IN MEXICO MOST RURAL VILLAGES HAVE A GOVERNMENT SUPPLIED WELL AND A PIPED

WATER SYSTEM. OFTEN – ALMOST ALWAYS REALLY – THOSE SYSTEMS PROVIDE CONTAMINATED WATER, OR THE WELL PUMP IS AGED AND NOT DEPENDABLE, OR THE PIPED WATER SYSTEM IS DEFECTIVE AND SO ON.

IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES AN EFFORT IS NEEDED TO UNDERSTAND: ONE – WHAT THE COMMUNITY WANTS; AND TWO – WHAT WILL WORK BEST IN LOCAL CONDITIONS.

THIS LEADS TO PRINCIPLE TWO:

USE A LOCAL PROJECT MANAGER

MOST OF YOU HERE HAVE FOREIGN TRAVEL EXPERIENCE, AND YOU HAVE ALREADY LEARNED THE SIMPLE TRUTH THAT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT IS GOING ON IN A FOREIGN COMMUNITY. THERE MAY BE LEADERSHIP ISSUES, CONFLICT BETWEEN FAMILIES. ALL OF THE THINGS WE OBSERVE IN OUR OWN COMMUNITIES ARE PROBABLY PRESENT IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER IN THE COMMUNITIES WE SEEK TO SERVE. THE OBVIOUS NEED HERE IS FOR A LOCAL CONSULTANT WHO HAS KNOWLEDGE OF LOCAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND IDEALLY PEOPLE SKILLS AND A CAPACITY FOR PROJECT OVERSIGHT AND MANAGEMENT.

THIS CRITICAL REQUIREMENT FOR A LOCAL PROJECT COORDINATOR IS THE BASIS FOR THE ROTARY FOUNDATION'S RULE THAT THERE MUST BE A HOST ROTARY CLUB INVOLVED IN ANY FOUNDATION FUNDED PROJECT. THE PROBLEM IS THAT IN LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES THERE ARE OFTEN ONLY A FEW ACTIVE ROTARY CLUBS. SOMETIMES, THE FEW CLUBS THAT ARE PRESENT ARE IN MAJOR URBAN AREAS SOME DISTANCE FROM THE AREAS THAT ARE MOST IN NEED.

WHEN IT IS EVIDENT THAT THE HOST ROTARY CLUB CANNOT BE EXPECTED TO UNDERTAKE CLOSE MONITORING OR MANAGEMENT OF AN INTENDED WASH PROJECT, A PARTNERSHIP IS NEEDED WITH AN ORGANIZATION THAT WORKS IN THE PROJECT COMMUNITY OR CLOSE BY.

IN MALAWI I WORK WITH A HEALTH EDUCATOR FROM AN AIDS RESPONSE GROUP. HE IS A MEDICAL OFFICER WHO HAS CONDUCTED EDUCATION SESSIONS AND CLINICS IN MANY OF THE VILLAGES WHERE THE ROTARY PROJECTS HAVE TAKEN PLACE. HE IS KNOWN LOCALLY, OFTEN IS FAMILIAR WITH VILLAGE LEADERS AS WELL AS REGIONAL TRIBAL AND POLITICAL OFFICIALS.

IN CAMBODIA, I WORK WITH A STAFFER FROM, JESUIT CAMBODIA SERVICES, WHO HAS LONG BEEN INVOLVED WITH PROVIDING FAMILY WELLS AND WHEEL CHAIRS FOR DISABLED PERSONS. HE HAS DIRECT EXPERIENCE WITH THE COMMUNITIES AND THEIR LEADERSHIP WHERE THE ROTARY PROJECTS HAVE TAKEN PLACE AND IS A COMPETENT PROJECT MANAGER WHO PRODUCES SPREADSHEET BUDGET REPORTS AND PICTORIAL REPORTS.

IN MEXICO, A VERY USEFUL PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPED WITH A LOCAL WATER ENGINEER WHO WORKED FOR THE COMMUNITY WATER OFFICE. HERE LOCAL ROTARY CLUBS PLAYED A MORE DIRECT ROLE THAN IN MALAWI AND CAMBODIA, BECAUSE OF THEIR PROXIMITY TO THE PROJECT COMMUNITIES.

I THINK YOU GET THE POINT. THERE MUST BE A LOCAL PROJECT AGENT, BE IT A ROTARIAN OR ANOTHER RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL, WHO CAN BE PRESENT FOR THE LIFE OF THE PROJECT.

PRINCIPLE THREE: RECIPIENTS MUST CONTRIBUTE ACTUAL FUNDS

IT IS CLEAR FROM ROTARY EXPERIENCE AND THROUGHOUT THE DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY THAT GIVE-AWAYS SIMPLY DO NOT WORK. THE FAMILY OR COMMUNITY RECEIVING THE BENEFITS OF A ROTARY WASH PROJECT MUST PAY SOME PORTION OF PROJECT COSTS. LABOR AND MATERIALS WILL OFTEN BE OFFERED AS AN IN-KIND CONTRIBUTION TO PROJECT EXPENSES. EVEN WITH SUCH OFFERS, PROJECT SPONSORS

MUST REQUIRE A CASH CONTRIBUTION. THIS IS THE ONLY WAY TO FOSTER A SENSE OF LOCAL OWNERSHIP OF THE PROJECT'S FACILITIES.

AS YET THERE IS NO GOOD GUIDELINE ON HOW MUCH A POOR FAMILY OR COMMUNITY SHOULD CONTRIBUTE. PROJECT EXPERIENCE IN MALAWI IS SHOWEING THAT COMMUNITIES ARE WILLING TO PROVIDE 15% TO 20% OF THE COST OF A NEW WATER WELL WE ARE ASKING THE COMMUNITY TO PROVIDE 50% OF THE COST OF REPLACEMENT OF A BROKIEN WELL PUMP.

IN CAMBODIA, FAMILIES HAVE CONTRIBUTED FUNDS AMOUNTING TO 25% OF PROJECT COSTS.

PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT KEY TO PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY IS PRINCIPLE FOUR:

MAKE AT LEAST A 5-YEAR COMMITMENT TO THE PROJECT

THINGS ARE GOING TO BREAK. PERHAPS EARLY PROJECT ASSUMPTIONS OR PLANNING MISSED THE MARK. MAYBE COMMUNITY LEADERS OR THE LOCAL WATER COMMITTEE HAVE LOST INTEREST. IN OTHER WORDS, IF THE PROJECT IS GOING TO MEET THE MEANING OF THE TERM, SUSTAINABLE, SOME NEW ATTENTION AND INITIATIVE MAY BE NEEDED SOME TIME AFTER THE PROJECT HAS BEEN COMPLETED.

THERE ARE A LOT OF WAYS AND PERSPECTIVES TO EXPLAIN THE IDEA OF PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY, BUT PERHAPS THE SIMPLEST AND MOST IMPORTANT SUSTAINABILITY TRUTH IS THAT A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT HAS TO BE MADE TO THE PROJECT AND THE COMMUNITY IT SERVES.

A FINAL SUSTAINABILITY PRINCIPLE FOR PURPOSES OF THIS PRESENTATION IS:

**MAKE SURE REPAIR PARTS FOR PROJECT EQUIPMENT ARE AFFORDABLE AND
LOCALLY AVAILABLE**

THESE CONCEPTS OF AFFORDABILITY AND LOCAL AVAILABILITY OF REPLACEMENT PARTS CAN CREATE LIMITATIONS ON PROJECT DESIGN. STILL, THEY ARE FLEXIBLE CONCEPTS, AND THEIR APPLICATION CLEARLY CAN VARY DEPENDING ON WHAT COMPONENTS AND SKILLS ARE LOCALLY AVAILABLE. FOR EXAMPLE, A PROJECT ADDRESSING A POOR NEIGHBORHOOD OR SCHOOL IN A LARGE URBAN COMMUNITY CAN USE MORE COMPLEX OR SOPHISTICATED SOLUTIONS THAN ONE ON A REMOTE, RURAL COMMUNITY. STILL, IT IS VITAL THAT THE PROJECT COMMUNITY HAVE THE RESOURCES, ORGANIZATION AND COMMITMENT TO PROPERLY OPERATE AND MAINTAIN PROJECT EQUIPMENT. A LOT CAN BE SAID IN REGARD TO HOW TO ACHIEVE THIS COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION AND COMMITMENT. HOWEVER, AN UNDERLYING PRINCIPLE HERE IS: **SIMPLE IS BETTER** – IN TERMS OF THE SOLUTIONS THAT ARE SELECTED TO CONDUCT THE PROJECT.

LET ME USE MY FINAL SECONDS TO PHILOSOPHIZE A BIT ON WHY WE ROTARIANS HAVE AN ESPECIALLY DIFFICULT CHALLENGE IN CONDUCTING SUSTAINABLE PROJECTS. OVER THE FIVE YEAR PERIOD I HAVE SUGGESTED MUST BE COMMITTED TO A SUSTAINABLE PROJECT, MOST ROTARY CLUBS WILL HAVE HAD FIVE DIFFERENT PRESIDENTS, AND PERHAPS SEVERAL DIFFERENT INTERNATIONAL SERVICES DIRECTORS.

HOST ROTARY CLUBS – THE CLUBS IN THE COUNTRY WHERE THE PROJECT IS UNDERTAKEN – ARE OFTEN OVER-COMMITTED TO BOTH PROJECTS SPONSORED BY CLUBS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES AND PROJECTS INITIATED BY THEIR OWN MEMBERS.

TO RESOLVE THESE ORGANIZATIONAL DILEMMAS OF ROTARY, I'LL REPEAT A TERM COINED BY OUR WASRAG CHAIR, BILL BOYD: MOST ROTARY HUMANITARIAN PROJECT ARE DRIVEN BY "GOOD HEARTED" ROTARIANS. AS ROTARIANS, WE WANT TO SERVE, WE TRY TO SERVE, AND EVEN IF WE MAKE MISTAKES WE WANT DO OUR BEST. THE "GOOD HEART" OF ROTARY WILL

ALWAYS MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN PEOPLE'S LIVES. WHAT WE ROTARIANS ALL ASPIRE TO DO IS TO MAKE THAT DIFFERENCE AS LONG-LASTING AS POSSIBLE.

THANK YOU