

## **Public-Private and Community Participation in Water Resource Management: The Missing Dimension - The Power of Three**

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### **Abstract**

The call to find more sustainable ways to protect water resources and improve water related services has yielded a number of important strategies. One such course of action is that of Public-Private and Community Participation. As the name denotes the approach derives its strength from voluntary collaborations between governments, the private sector and the local communities. To create these relationships is no easy feat but the potential of such an alliance to accomplish positive results due to their combined strengths and capabilities is incentive enough for consideration. This paper attempts to highlight the attributes of this approach and how its application to the water sector where appropriate can alleviate some of the chronic problems it is combating. The Public-Private and Community Participation Concept is not a cure for all that ails the water sector, each country must make its own assessments as per to the merits of this strategy based on their water needs and its suitability to the fulfilment of those needs.

**Keywords:** Public Sector, Private Sector, Community/Civil Society, Tri-Sector Partnerships, Synergy.

### **Introduction**

In most countries water resource management and related services is the prerogative of the government. Growing dissatisfaction with the performance of the public sector has given rise to a change in the status quo allowing for the participation of the private sector. A more attractive alternative came in the form of public and private partnerships. Through these respective strategies many positive in roads into the water sector have been achieved. The call for a more active participation by the community gave birth to the Public-Private and Community Participation concept. The inclusion of the community to the public-private equation has changed the dynamics once again. PPCP has allowed for the entry of the community into areas that were once considered the exclusive domain of either the public or private sector. In the context of this paper the term 'Public' is in reference to the government, 'Private' denotes Private Businesses and Companies and 'Community' is civil society or local people and non government organizations. It should also be noted that in this paper the term "participation" is at times used interchangeably with that of "partnership." In some of the consulted literature the Public-Private and Community Participation concept is also referred to as Tri-Sector Partnerships (Tremolet & Browning,2002) Other terms such as Multi Stakeholders Partnerships (Caplan, Heap, Nicol, Plummer, Simpson & Weiser,2001) or Cross Sector Partnerships(Hagen,2005, Tennyson,2006) share commonalities but the activities of the later are not strictly confined to the involvement of the public, private and community sectors. They often at times include the participation of bilateral, multilateral, international agencies and institutions.

### PPCP in Action

The Public-Private and Community Participation approach is not a new phenomenon and has been employed for some time in other public utilities such as health, security, energy, telecommunications (Ockelford,2000) and by extractive industries (Tennyson,2006) such as mining, oil and gas. The Philippines is the first country to produce an official document recognizing the inherent advantages of tri-sector partnerships. (CADI,1998) Through its Centre for Alternative Development Initiatives it is pioneering tri-sector partnerships or three folding stakeholder approaches to sustainable development. In light of its ground breaking work the case study highlighted in this paper is taken from the Philippines. The Philippine Agenda 21 initiative however is only the tip of an iceberg. There are other examples of tri-sector partnerships starting to take root in many unexpected and unusual places and in many different settings and parts of the world. For example the World Bank, ADB, Business Partners for Development, Synergos, World Business Council for Sustainable Development, World Economic Forum, World Wild Life Fund, Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum, PACT, Global Knowledge Partnership Partnerships for Poverty Reduction (BDP,2001)

### Building Blocks of PPCP

Though the Public-Private and Community Participation approach presents much promise such partnerships do not occur naturally nor are they easy to create. Given the different interests and agendas of the three sectors getting such a partnership off the ground will take more than the desire to try out something different There are certain conditions that have to be met before any collaboration can be considered a true partnership (Gunton & Day,2003) These conditions will determine whether or not the three sectors can create and sustain a working and mutually beneficial partnership.

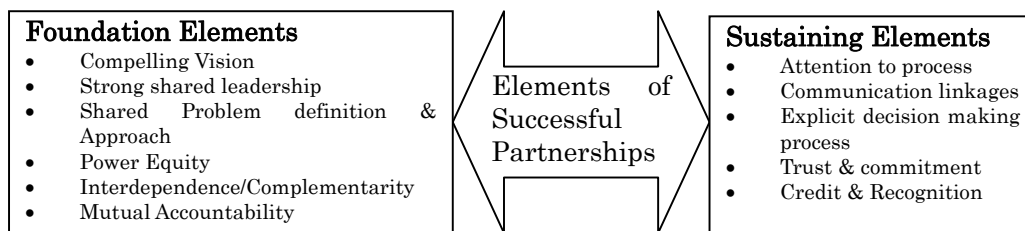


Figure 1. Elements of a Successful Partnership.

Source: Spink & Merrill-Sands, 1999

There is no universal blue print for creating a successful partnership for each one was created with a different purpose in mind. A three way, collaboration is not easy to achieve and bringing together partners from three very different sectors to work together in a fragile but complex sector as that of water is not a simple process. It will take time to choose the partners with the right skills who is willing to be part of the team sharing costs and responsibilities together.

### **Potential Benefits**

Those who advocate the concept of Public-Private and Community Partnerships see it as an innovative approach to address an impressive range of issues such as corporate social responsibility, poverty reduction, good governance, natural resources management, water and sanitation, road safety, youth development, leadership development, democracy, human rights, labour, environment, social equity, information for sustainable development and sustainable development itself. Given the positive endorsement the next step is to see what PPCP can do specifically to improve things in the water sector.

The power of three: synergy. Synergy is the distinguishing feature of collaboration that gives partnership an advantage over single agents (Lasker & Weiss,2001) In the case of Public-Private and Community Participation the combined resources skills and capabilities of the three sectors gives this approach a significant advantage over other arrangements. Governments at times are unable to improve their water services due to chronic constraints to their limited budgets. (ADB,2001)The private sector with its financial muscle can inject the necessary funds into the required projects or services. Eliciting the help and input of local communities is beneficial. (Bell,2001) As the main consumers or the end users they may have in their possession local knowledge or information that would enable the partnerships to place its skills and finances into appropriate developments. Together the three sectors have a higher probability of success in overcoming obstacles they would have trouble navigating on their own.

*Community Empowerment* is another factor that PPCP can influence in a positive way. Allowing the community to be part of the management process ignites a feeling of ownership which in turn engenders a sense of responsibility. This can be manifested by the community taking better care of their water resources and conserving supplies responsibly.

### **Challenges**

PPCP is a feasible alternative but finding the appropriate place where it can be applied is a considerable challenge. There are a number of areas within the water sector that can benefit from the tri-sector approach such as the management, monitoring and protection of water resources. Supply and distribution services, fee collection as well as systems installation and maintenance. The Tri-sector approach can also be employed during policy consultation and information dissemination programs.

There are other challenges aside from the one mentioned but failing to apply to concept appropriately will cause more complications on an already troubled sector.

## **Glimpse at a Case Study**

### **Public-Private Community Partnerships in Management and Delivery of Water to Urban Poor: The Case of Metro Manila.**

In the Philippines, the Public-Private Community Partnerships are serving the poor with water through public faucets, group taps, bulk water and individual connections. The removal of technical and institutional barriers in providing water in urban poor communities or informal settlements in Metro Manila has allowed delivery of different forms of water services in these areas. The principal partners are the government as represented by the residual water utility and the regulatory office as well as the local government, the private sector as represented by the private concessionaries of the water utility and the community by the local associations and non governmental organizations.

The government allowed private companies to bid for a 25 year concession agreement to handle the East and West Zones of Metro Manila. The bidding process resulted in Manila Water (2.32 pesos per cubic meter) winning the concession for East Zone while Maynilad Water Services Inc (4.97 pesos per cubic meter) won the West Zone. Their bid prices were low compared to the prices before hand (8.78/cu.m) making Metro Manila the place with the lowest water prices in the country as well as in the ASEAN region. The community was involved in the consultation stage with the concessionaries. The communities agreed to phase out all illegal connections both agreed on bulk water service where a local association was given the responsibility to manage the local distribution net for the entire area. The concessionaries waived the Land Title requirement and gave allowance for connection payment fees to be spread over a period of 3 months to 2 years. This procedure paved the way for regularizing illegal connections in squatter communities which in turn reduced non revenue water benefiting consumers and concessionaries alike.

Source: Inocencio & David, 2001.

## **Lessons Learned**

The three sectors working together were able to improve significantly the living, health and economic conditions of the serviced households in terms of access to and availability of safe and good quality water. Reduced cost of water per cubic meter translated to families saving a bit more money. Installation of public faucets and individual connections meant households, especially women and children who once spent hours queuing up for water were now free to utilize their time in other activities, such as earning incomes, leisure or taking care of young ones. In helping the disadvantaged people of Metro Manila the Public-Private and Community Partnership has proven that the provision of water to the poor can be a potent and innovative tool for alleviating poverty taking into consideration its positive impact on the health, income, consumption, gender and social inclusion of the community. Allowing the people to be a part of their water management has transformed not only their lives but their perceptions about the importance of water which is of great value in itself as responsible users are important to the care and protection of the resource. Valuable lessons learned from the Metro- Manila case may be operationalized, improved and adjusted to comprise good practices that can be applied to other water utilities around the Philippines as well as other countries in the region. Relaxation of earlier stringent technical and institutional requirements in providing water service connections by both concessionaries made possible the positive changes to take place however the government still played a key role. In its capacity as regulator the government allowed for the biddings to take place giving the private sector the opportunity to service community. The community asked to be part of the consultation process made certain commitments initiating trust between the respective partners completing the three way relationship and completing the missing dimension.

## **Recommendations to Improve PPCP Knowledge and Application.**

1. Concrete cases of Public-Private and Community Participation from around the region/world must be documented and followed up as to compile a database to monitor its success. This is important, as the potential of such an alliance to attain success due to the combined strength

and capabilities of the three sectors is just as valuable as the implications of failure due to the complex functions, nature and interests of the different parties involved.

2. The success of the Public-Private and Community Participation approach depends not solely on the financial capability, technical know how and manpower of those involved, a clear commitment, trust and resolve are just as important. Therefore defining and solidifying the responsibilities and obligations of each partner is a priority.
3. Public-Private and Community Participation is a local strategy that can be applied on a global scale. Successful case studies can be replicated but care must be taken to ensure that they are adapted to suit the local conditions and not be transplanted or taken at face value. Just because it worked in one community does not guarantee automatic success elsewhere.

### **Conclusion**

The Public-Private and Community Participation approach though lays no claims as to being a magic bullet can be a powerful engine for achieving sustainable water resource management and associated services. The three sectors working together is incorporating the best of what society has to offer. Each sector has a specific role to play in the partnership that must be acknowledged as necessary and equally important. The key to obtaining optimum results is applying the strategy in an appropriate context. The Metro-Manila example shows that it has great potential when given a legitimate chance, the necessary political will, financial backing, technical and human support it requires. There is a genuine need for the three sector to work together to combat the troubles in the water sector and this is emphasized by the words of Norwegian Environment Minister and Chair of the United Commission on Sustainable Development Borge Brende.

*“Water is the world’s most precious resource. Its fair, stable and sustainable distribution must be a priority in all countries, particularly in the fight against poverty. To succeed, we need a wide range of measures and partners. The needs are great, but so are the opportunities, for governments, private companies and the civil sector. We need them all – and we need them now.”*

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