

Indonesia: the Impact of Women's Participation in the Aqua-Danone Advocacy Programme – A Case Study in Klaten District, Central Java

Challenges

A bottled water plant was opened in 2002 by Aqua-Danone in the Klaten district of Java in Indonesia. The company extracts a huge quantity of spring water just 20 metres away from the Sigidang spring, which is the area's primary water source. Every month, the plant produces 15-18 million litres of bottled water, causing a drastically decreased water supply in the district. Since the opening of the plant, the community, consisting mostly of farmers, has found its access to irrigation water decreasing and its wells starting to run dry. Pumping groundwater for irrigation purposes also dries out community wells. Some farmers have been forced to stop farming and to seek work as construction workers or market labourers.

Programme/Projects

In response to these water-related problems community members came together in 2003 to establish KRAKED (Klaten People's Coalition for Justice) to advocate on their behalf. Despite prevailing cultural values, this also gave Klaten's women the opportunity to participate in the advocacy activities. KRAKED's main objective is to close down the Aqua-Danone plant in Klaten; their short-term objective is to reduce its extraction rate and establish a community monitoring system.

Women in the communities utilise water for household and other uses every day. Women have traditional roles with key decisions being made by their fathers, husbands, and brothers. In this case, the women involved in KRAKED were highly motivated to participate in the programme and had the possibility to do so. In the earlier meetings their role was restricted to preparing food and drink for other members. However KRAKED set up a research project to get a better picture of the impact of Aqua-Danone's Klaten operations. Eight women and a couple of men volunteered to conduct the research. The project also targeted local government and members of parliament, journalists and Aqua-Danone personnel. KRAKED asked each of its members to share their knowledge and information about the water shortages with as many people as possible.

Outcomes

Information, mobilization and capacity building:

- More community members are aware of the water shortage issue due to KRAKED's information-sharing methods. Their individual approach works well with the local community; and
- Increased ability among participants to present strong arguments in dialogues with other advocacy stakeholders.

Impact on Advocacy Programme objectives:

- Stakeholders such as the local government, the local parliament and Aqua-Danone, are starting to include KRAKED in their meetings and discussions; and
- On 7 March 2005, KRAKED's second anniversary, the local parliament asked for a re-evaluation of Aqua-Danone's water extraction license. The license will expire soon and the company plans on asking for a new license with an increased extraction rate. Consequently, the re-evaluation request from parliament received a lot of publicity and response from KRAKED.

Research on gender aspects in information dissemination:

- Women's participation in this process made it more effective and facilitated KRAKED reaching a wider audience. Better insight was gained in the way women and men share information and how these differences can be useful in raising awareness; and

- In general, the women appeared to be more effective in sharing information within their families and through informal networks and the men in sharing information outside their families and through formal networks.

Women's skill development and empowerment:

- Participation in the advocacy programme has increased the women's self confidence and skills. They have learned to conduct research, share advocacy-focused information and discuss issues effectively with other members;
- Women in the community are more aware of water resources issues and have learned to appreciate water better and to use it more efficiently. They are also more aware of, and motivated to work with, issues concerning gender imbalance;
- Women involved in the advocacy project are now more interested in participating in advocacy and research activities and in activities providing them equal opportunities with men; and
- Male members of KRAKED concluded that, as both women and men suffer the negative impact of Aqua-Danone's operation, both should have the right to participate fully in the advocacy process.

Key Factors for Success

Previous Experience in organisational work:

- Most of the participating women were also members of a Small Entrepreneurs Network for Women that had successfully established a women's cooperative in Klaten.

Women's financial independence or access to financial services:

- Unlike most women in Klaten who work in the home and are housewives, most of KRAKED's women members have their own small businesses.

Support from family and male community members:

- Particularly important is that the women's families have been willing to share household tasks so that they have more time for advocacy activities; and
- KRAKED's male members were willing to give a chance to women to participate in the advocacy initiatives and saw the women as allies.

Evaluation by all community members:

- Data collection was done mainly through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with different community stakeholders, both those involved and those not involved in the programme. Programme reports were also used to get background information.

Main Obstacles

- Initially the division of responsibility in KRAKED was not gender-balanced. Women participated only at the service and then the discussion level and were not given a decision-making role; and
- A negative aspect of this project is that women have been spending so much time promoting advocacy activities, their small businesses have suffered. This has led to a decrease in their incomes.

Looking Ahead – Sustainability and Transferability

This study indicates that to empower women, a specially made programme with complex methods is not needed. Providing the initial opportunity to participate can empower both women and men. Advocacy organizations can formalize a women's empowerment process by ensuring that there are women representatives at all key meetings with stakeholders and by providing leadership training for the women and gender-sensitivity training for the men. After conducting the research on the impact of Aqua-Danone's operations in the area, the women became more motivated to continue and expand their roles in the advocacy process.

Further Information

- Contact the researcher:
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- For a look at the situation in Klaten:
http://www.eng.walhi.or.id/kampanye/air/privatisasi/klaten_aqua/

Source

Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women,
Gender, water and sanitation; case studies on best practices. New York, United Nations (in press).