

Report on the lessons learnt at the workshop

by

Mrs. W B M Thoradeniya, Sri Lanka

Task:

Please write a short report (maximum 3 pages) that will tell us what lessons or new ideas you have found in this workshop, and how these ideas can be used in your personal situation, by yourself or by your organization.

Response:

I believe an introduction into my background would be of much use in responding to the given task. I am a senior lecturer in Civil Engineering by profession and my immediate audience is the middle level technological students most of whom would climb up in the ladder in their professions to senior managerial levels in the government and private sector employments or enter into the entrepreneuring world sooner or later.

I specialized in irrigation and drainage Engineering and possess an M.Sc (Hon) from IHE, the Netherlands and an M.Phil in technical education. Presently I am also engaged in research work in the area of stakeholder participation in River Basin Development, with the hope of presenting a thesis leading to a Ph.D Degree.

As an academic I have to admit that the practical issue of River Basin Management (RBM), and integrated water resources management (IWRM) are new experiences to me, even though I had been aware of some of the individual issues of River Basins mainly through reading available material.

Almost all the presentations by the individual speakers have added valuable insights to strengthen my capacity in the areas of RBM and IWRM. I would specially like to mention that the presentations by Dr. M U A Tennakoon (Director General of Mahaweli Authority Sri Lanka), Dr. Madar Samad (IWMI) and Prof. Malik Ranasinghe (University of Moratuwa) are the most interesting, thought provoking and lively presentations. I have been able to satisfy my desire to gain knowledge about new concepts and to strengthen the knowledge about the existing technology through those presentations.

Presentations by Mr. R S de Ariyabandu (IWMI), Mr. Ranatunge (Maha Oya Mithuro) and Dr. Abernethy were also lively and opened my eyes to a new dimension of issues namely; the management aspects such as policies, laws etc. The presentations by Mr. Arriens Mr. Abeywickreman clarified the roles of Asian Development Bank (ADB) and GWP SASNET in relation to RBM. Even though the presentations, by Mr. Anshori of Indonesia and Mr. Ishimura (JWA) lacked in clarity, they helped me to be aware of the parallel regional situations.

The field trip jointly organized by the IWMI and Lanka Jalani was also highly commendable. The ground conditions regarding the much discussed issue of stakeholder participation were amply experienced during the visit. I found that the technical knowledge of some villagers who are members of the CBO's is quite high. I was also impressed by the enthusiasm shown by some of the industrialists (e.g. at the service station) to support the idea of being friendly with the environment and having implemented measures to treat their waste. An important lesson learnt here is that the attitude of people could be changed at most instances with proper programmes of awareness/education about the issues or by monitoring and implementing the existing regulations at the required instances.

The field trip was also very useful to me with respect to gaining knowledge about the activities and available data of NGO, CBO and also making contacts with the active participants of those organizations. Since I do hope to use Maha Oya Basin to validate my current research this data and meetings would be of immense value to me. I also found that there will be scope for me to help these organizations in providing technology required by them to implement their identified solutions to some of the major issues. I do hope to work closely with them in the future.

Another dimension of the workshop I would like to mention is the multi-national group work sessions. The exchange of experiences of one's own local situations and being exposed to some unfamiliar but real life foreign situations were really useful to form new concepts and work frames to solve existing problems. For example the constant claim by my Pakistani friend, Mr. Yameen that water quality monitoring standards of Sri Lanka are very stringent compared to the standards of his country and the standards of the other countries in the region, opened the eyes to think of the necessary capacity building of government officials and also formulating some kind of mechanism to ensure that those measurements/tests, are carried out periodically.

For me, the workshop was an excellent occasion to gain knowledge on the whole concept of IWRM and RBM and the related issues. The knowledge gained and the new ideas experienced will be directly beneficial in my research work. Since the knowledge and experiences gained at the workshop will also be of immense use to technical community, such knowledge will be disseminated to my students who will one day become responsible officers, citizens etc. and therefore would be the stakeholders of the whole issue.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the team of trainers lead by Dr. Abernethy for the tough task of orienting a group of people with such diverse backgrounds, expectations and attitudes to focus at the main theme of the workshop. I am sure that in my case the efforts were 100% successful. The excellent support by the secretarial staff is also commendable. I also wish to record my deep gratitude to Lanka Jalani, my sponsors.