

# Development of "Federation of Drinking Water and Sanitation Users Nepal (FEDWASUN)": A Model for effective local governance.

Ratan Budhathoki, Anamika Singh and Umesh Pandey<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Many actors (Government, donors, I/NGOs, CBOs, Private sector) are involved in the water and sanitation sector to provide basic water supply, adequate sanitation facilities and effective hygiene education to the rural communities in Nepal. However, most of the actors who have emerged at intermediary level generally struggle with their new roles and responsibilities for which they are not fully capacitated in terms of financial resources, knowledge for effective management, methodologies, tools and experiences. Such limitation reduces the chance of empowering communities and enabling them to operate and maintain their systems properly and ultimately hampers the project sustainability.

As long as there is no organised forum for users to raise issues of importance to them at the policy level, efforts towards providing drinking water and sanitation will go in vain<sup>2</sup>. The concept of federation building has been supported by NEWAH with the support of WaterAid Nepal, mainly to help create a forum for users to raise and discuss issues and pressurise concerned agencies at district and national level to take them up. The federation will act as a body to speak up for the water and sanitation rights of the users and also increase local governance accountability, promote social auditing activities, establish linkage with the media, coordinate local level hearings on sector policies, and act as channel in disseminating information on national and international issues on water and sanitation to its members.

## Key words

Drinking water and sanitation, FEDWASUN, Federation of Community Forestry Users of Nepal (FECOFUN)

## Introduction

This paper introduces the 'Federation Building of Drinking Water and Sanitation Users Nepal (FEDWASUN)' with the funding support of WaterAid Nepal which NEWAH has supported - from establishment to development phase. This initiative is first of its kind in the sector. The paper also provides the rationale for establishing the FEDWASUN in the water and sanitation sector in Nepal and describes its development process, its core function and present position in the sector.

Thousands of water and sanitation users' representative groups are involved in the operation and maintenance of their water and sanitation projects at the local level. However, it has been difficult to deliver the expected results to the users simply through the unilateral efforts of these groups. On one hand the users are not aware and on the other these groups are scattered and disorganised and do not have a single representative body to cohesively take up common issues and problems arising at the grassroots level in the drinking and sanitation sector to concerned levels. The users groups formed (some prior to implementation of the project and some post completion) and the communities are merely passive beneficiaries who watch while others design and construct the new schemes for them leaving them to deal with the problems and manage the new scheme before

---

<sup>1</sup> The authors are from NEWAH [www.newah.org.np](http://www.newah.org.np)

<sup>2</sup> NEWAH, 2003- 2004. Annual report

moving out. Therefore the necessity to make the government, non government and donor investments, policies, rules & regulations in the sector more people centred and favourable to the users has been realised.

Against this backdrop and in line with developing new approaches, in 2001 NEWAH conceived developing a strategy to encourage and strengthen community water users groups to form district federations that would work with district authorities and other organisations to:

- Ensure the long term sustainability of existing water supply schemes,
- Ensure fair allocations between drinking water and other uses of water, and
- Achieve universal access to adequate amount of safe drinking water and sanitation by ensuring that the new investments are utilised in an efficient, equitable and effective manner.

Therefore NEWAH with the support of WaterAid Nepal started a process meant to ultimately put an effective network body in place and strengthen the governance of water and sanitation sector in Nepal. The major goal of the federation building (FEDWASUN) is to bring the water and sanitation users' groups together in a forum to raise and discuss issues and problems of the users and most importantly to influence concerned line agencies at the district and the national level. And finally to gradually strengthen its governance and management capacity at local level, intermediate level and contribute to policy improvement at the national level.

Today keeping this fact in mind the government of Nepal has also supported to this process by pointing out the need of a federation for the independent monitoring and social auditing of drinking water and sanitation projects in its Rural Water Supply and Sanitation National Policy 2004<sup>3</sup>. Further the national strategic plan 2004 also expresses commitment to establish a national and district level drinking water and sanitation federation for the users' organisations.

## Major issues in the sector

Nepal's water supply and sanitation sub - sector is currently characterised by lack of reliable coverage information; lack of information on the extent of access of the poor to the services and on unserved communities and people; lack of effective and sustainable management systems resulting in enlarging backlog of projects needing rehabilitation; and lack of coordination between agencies involved in WHS leading to inefficient use of resources. <sup>4</sup> These challenges in the sector are due to the existence of;

- Multiplicity, competitiveness and mutual incompatibility of donor supported Water Health and Sanitation (WHS) initiatives at the local level
- Top down planning system and inefficient use of resources
- Lack of technical support for user groups
- Lack of local resource mobilisation for regular upkeep and maintenance and backlogs of rehabilitation
- Insufficient local capacity that ensures participation of stakeholders, transparency of management, and accountability of WHS managers to the users

## Methodology

A series of consultation meeting within NEWAH, in its five regional offices, and with WaterAid Nepal were organised to develop the clarity and understanding about the concept of federation building, defining its role, creating environment for its existence and positioning in the sector. A number of workshops were organised at district level by involving user committees, local bodies, government, NGOs, stakeholders and other related networks representatives, and sharing, interactions, discussions and feedback collection were done.

---

<sup>3</sup> HMG, 2004. RWSS Policy & Strategy

<sup>4</sup> NEWAH, 2005. DBA concept note

The major conclusions drawn from these workshops further justified the need to establish the water and sanitation sector federation both at district and national level to bring the entire water and sanitation users group under one umbrella capable of strongly promoting and representing the voices of poor users.

## Embryonic Stage

A series of interaction and advocacy meetings between WaterAid Nepal and NEWAH were organised at this stage.

Steps	Why it was done	What was done in each steps	Outcomes/ lessons learnt
<b>First meeting</b>	<p>To set out the broad objectives (vision) of the federation building in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable post completed drinking water, health and sanitation project</li> <li>• Universal coverage of safe water &amp; adequate sanitation</li> </ul>	<p>On December 12, 2001 the first meeting was held in NEWAH headquarters between NEWAH and WaterAid Nepal as WAN indicated its interest to take the proposal forward.</p> <p><b>Background study visit carried out to various user group organisations:</b></p> <p>As planned various organisations such as Federation of Community Forestry Users of Nepal (FECOFUN), National Federation Irrigation Water Users Association Nepal (NFIWUAN) were visited to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• find why, how and when those organisations were established</li> <li>• how they function &amp; provide services to their stakeholders and what are their responsibilities</li> <li>• common issues about the users' group and the rights of the users in the source</li> <li>• registration procedures, the number of district branches/affiliate user groups at district level, the services that they provide to the user groups and in establishing new groups,</li> <li>• membership criteria and revenue collection methods</li> </ul>	<p>Task force formation with four members from NEWAH with WaterAid representatives in the advisory role, Initial action identification:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Background study visit of different existing federations (FECOFUN, Federation of Irrigation, LUMANTI, Helvetas and Action Aid Nepal)</li> <li>• Invitation of NEWAH partners as many as possible from Dhading district for a meeting to discuss on "Common issues in Water Supply Sector and rationale of federation building."</li> <li>• Interested and capable partners selection to lead the federation building initiative forward</li> <li>• exposure visits to some existing federations to acquire relevant information,</li> <li>• workshop among NEWAH team, WAN representatives and partner members and preparation of an action plan</li> <li>• Documentation of the process from the early stages of federation building</li> </ul> <p>Learning: From the visits it was understood that these organisations played significant roles in advocating and supporting the common issues of their user groups at the national and policy level and influencing in the decision making process of the sector.</p> <p><b>Conclusion:</b> At the initial stage NEWAH to</p>

			begin the federation building activity concentrating on one particular district where NEWAH's local partners and users group were found to be more proactive. Based on the experiences and lessons learned from this district, then further action plan were to be executed gradually to the other districts.
<b>Second meeting</b>	The objective of this meeting was to review background visits outcomes	The second round meeting was held on January 11, 2002 at NEWAH office between NEWAH and WAN. The task force presented findings of study visit. A checklist was developed for future visits.	The presentation lacked key areas of learning so this meeting further specified areas to develop a checklist.
<b>Third meeting</b>	To present the finding of background visit and decide future action	On January 31, 2002 NEWAH/WAN meeting was held at WaterAid office. The background visit report was presented. Various points on the findings were discussed.	The meeting suggested and concluded that NEWAH should make an action plan based on these findings. February 25, 2002 was proposed for next NEWAH internal meeting to discuss on the following issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare and invite the partners for the workshop on federation building</li> <li>• Aware the proposed partner about the federation and it objectives</li> <li>• Present the findings of the background visit</li> <li>• Discuss the different issues regarding water and sanitation in their respective areas</li> </ul>
<b>Fourth Meeting</b>	The meeting was focused on planning for the federation building workshop at district level.	On March 8, 2002, fourth meeting held in NEWAH Central region office.	Considering the relevancy of the initiative emphasis was given to go district level for this workshop. Dhading district was proposed for conducting the workshop. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The purpose of this workshop was to maintain proper coordination with DDC, acquire information about security and conflict situation.</li> <li>• To acquire information about existing district based federations</li> </ul>

## **Pre-Development Stage**

The primary workshop of federation building was organised by NEWAH from 1-3 July 2002 in Kathmandu. The objective of this workshop was mainly to:

- discuss about the need for a drinking water and sanitation federation and decide on its vision
- prepare an action plan in moving ahead with the federation establishment process

A total of 36 participants from Dhading district representing partner organisations, water and sanitation users groups, NFIWUAN and the District Development Community (DDC) were present for the workshop.

Sharing was done about the status of national and Dhading district drinking water supply and sanitation scenario. Issues pertinent to drinking water, health and sanitation sector and the learning in the sector were identified through group discussions. Further sharing was done about other federations and their objectives, concept about drinking water and sanitation federation, experiences of FECOFUN (especially questions on the forest sector, vision of the organisation and their activities). The focus was to discuss and decide on possible future actions and topics such as significance and importance of federation building, raise awareness of the drinking water users, coordinate with concerned bodies and collect data about users committees.

As a result of the workshop a coordination committee was formed with nine members from among the participants and they decided to set up their contact office in Dhading district. At the end of it a plan was drafted consisting the functions like sharing information with respective office staff, corresponding and informing the users groups, sharing responsibilities, coordinating with the VDC and organising the second workshop on the drinking water and sanitation users federation building at national level.

## **Development Stage**

### **Extension of Federation building process at district level**

A preparation meeting was held in November at NEWAH HQ, to prepare for extension of federation building initiative at the district level and selecting a district of each five development regions. Seventeen participants from the NEWAH regional offices and the HQ participated in the facilitated by the Vice-Chairperson of FECOFUN Ms. Apsara Chapagain.

The meeting started with revisiting and reviewing the progress of federation building initiative. Then the progress and experiences gained by NEWAH Central Regional Office were shared. Likewise, experience sharing of FECOFUN on its formation, conceptual clarity on a federation, its legal framework and its relevance in WATSAN issues and context were also presented.

The regional level team then informed about the regional level planning on federation building on which discussions also took place. Following this a strategic plan was developed to move forward with the extension programme. Five districts (Udayapur- Eastern, Dhading- Central, Baglung- Western, Dang - Mid Western and Baitadi – Far western) respectively were selected by NEWAH regional offices for this phase. Then the district level federation building initiative in the five development regions was prepared as in the following table.

### District level FEDWASUN' Building Plan for 2002/03

Region	Selected districts	Model	Regional focal person
ERO	Udayapur	Long term Partners (LTP) coordinated with other partners and district agencies. ERO and LTP to jointly organised 1st workshop (among partner and district agencies representatives)	Laba Hari Budhathoki
CRO	Dhading	CRO coordinated with all project implementing partners and district agencies and organise workshop (among partner and district agencies' representatives)	Raju Shah
WRO	Baglung	The interested partner selected to coordinate with district agencies and Project Management Committee (PMC). NEWAH WRO and the partners worked together to organise 1 <sup>st</sup> workshop (among partner and district agencies' representatives)	Dinesh Upreti
MWRO	Dang	Some interesting partner will be selected to coordinate with district agencies and Project Management Committee (PMC). MWRO and those partners to organise 1 <sup>st</sup> workshop (among partner, district agencies and PMC representatives)	Bhagwati Poudyal
FWRO	Baitadi	FWRO to directly coordinate with partners, district agencies and PMC to organise 1 <sup>st</sup> workshop (among partner, district agencies and PMC representatives)	Bishnu Pokhrel

#### District level workshop

A series of 'District Drinking Water and Sanitation Support/ Implementing Agencies Stakeholder' workshops and meetings were organised in Dang, Dhading, Baitadi, Udayapur and Baglung at several stages to share about the rationale of a drinking water and sanitation users federation Nepal. During these workshops representatives of local government agencies, non-government organisations, sector stakeholders in the district, water and sanitation users committee representatives were involved.

The main objective of these workshops was to:

1. collect, share and exchange information on the present status of progress in the drinking water and sanitation sector in the concerned district
2. introduce the concept of federation and share & discuss on the rationale of a drinking water and sanitation federation
3. form a coordination committee to support the process of establishment of FEDWASUN
4. decide on future work plan

Apart from the main objectives there were various other objectives involved such as:

- Introduce and share about working procedures and modalities of NEWAH, its vision mission, goals, project cycle and the organisation's contribution in the sector through its five regional offices about NEWAH
- Increase the level of coordination between stakeholder organisations in the drinking water, health education and sanitation sector (WHS) and seek for possible opportunities
- Support to prevent duplication in WHS projects implemented at community level
- Discuss about subsidy/grant contributed by the VDC fund, local development fund and DDC and how it is spent
- Support in the process of passing WHS projects from the VDC assembly and endorsement from the DDC
- Support to get water and sanitation users committee registered in the district water resources committee office

During the open floor discussion in these workshops various important points and queries were raised for discussion such as:

- The need to avoid duplication due to lack of coordination among many service providers and the various causes behind quick failures and non sustainability of drinking water schemes
- With regard to discussion on why a federation and sharing about experiences the participants views were that this would not be effective at the regional level and would be better if developed on the basis of VDC, District and Center Government to take the responsibility of maintenance and follow up of projects implemented with the support of I/NGOs and if timely attention not paid to these aspects then greater investments necessary to rehabilitate those projects
- While discussing on the formation of the ad-hoc committee, it was decided that the committee would be formed keeping in mind the region and geographical aspects.
- The participants raised queries concerning the registration process of WSUCs in the District Water Resources Committee as per the drinking water regulation and legal provisions related to it.

Necessary requirements for registering the Water and Sanitation User Committee (WSUC) constitution:

- The constitution to be prepared by the users and the each page of the constitution needs to be signed by all the members of the committee
- Details of the source needs to be clearly specified
- The copy of the citizenship paper of all the members need to attached
- Recommendation of the concerned support organisation is required
- The VDC recommendation has to be made available
- Recommendation of the district drinking water office is necessary
- The users committee have to hand in an application
- Fee of NRs. 100 has to be paid

The participants identified the importance of Water and Sanitation Users Committee (WSUCs) and its role as follows:

- To allow project planning and implementation more favorable to the users
- To develop feeling of ownership of projects among the users
- To take up issues of their rights
- To develop wider understanding of laws related to water and sanitation and make appropriate uses of existing laws
- To solve local issues
- To exchange experiences
- To take responsibility for the projects and to give sustainability to it
- To make people understand the importance of sanitation along with drinking water
- To extend the work areas
- To nationally unify and work collaboratively
- To enable an institutionalised body of stakeholders to take up issues that the government, non government and users committee have not been able to take up
- To act as a pressure group to ensure that while laws are being framed they are favorable to the users needs and requirements

The participants reached to the following conclusion on the importance of a federation and its role:

- For institutionalisation and unity of water and sanitation users groups
- To work in contact, coordination and partnership with each other
- Lobby for project and financial transparency and to bring about uniformity in programmes
- For regular upkeep and maintenance of projects and to give continuity and sustainability to projects
- To acquire/provide legal awareness
- To increase access of NGOs and WSUCs involved in the drinking water and sanitation programmes from the district to the center
- To develop a feeling of ownership
- To act as a pressure group and make the voices of the people heard at the central level
- For collection and dissemination of information, exchange knowledge, skills and experiences
- To increase access of users to information, knowledge, resources and services
- To solve disputes and to ensure social justice
- To influence sector policies and regulations

In addition to this, comprehensive discussions were held on the following issues as well:

- How to establish the district ad hoc committee of the federation?
- Who will take on the work responsibilities?
- And what activities to undertake in the future?

At the end the workshops preparation committees were formed from among the participants. The participants were also involved in developing a future work plan with proper division of tasks. They expressed the need for NEWAH's support till the central body of the federation was not established and that NEWAH had to play the facilitating role to make the WSUCs active in the federation building process.

Actions identified through these workshops

- Need to develop a small package and proceed forward
- Collect data and information about the Users Committee
- Share about the concept of federation within the committee members of the organisation and among the users committee
- Develop the skill of the facilitator
- Establish coordination between local institutions and organisations
- Correct the forms and finalise it
- Provide essential documents to the organisations and community on time
- Organise a district level meeting of the users
- Establish the federation
- Sit for the first meeting of the committee

### **Lessons learned and suggestions that came up from the workshops**

- As the concept of an federation has been developed in most of the sector, the necessity of a federation building in this sector is felt
- All the stakeholders in the district government or non government should be included
- Would be more effective if the programmes are taken forward nationally without much delay by extending to other districts

- Need for sharing about the concept of federation positively with all the bodies realised
- While implementing projects the need to manage services based on the desires of the stakeholders perceived
- Several rounds of interaction among government bodies in the sector and various stakeholder organisations seen as necessary and helpful for establishment of the district federation
- Better to have a clear vision in the establishment process of the federation from the central level and timely take the programme forward

## **Consolidation and institutionalisation stage**

In 2003, the Federation of Water and Sanitation Users Nepal (FEDWASUN) subsequently came to be established at national level as per the concept developed during the workshop organised in Lalitpur in Jawalakhel in July 2002. Representatives of the federation, government and non-government bodies representing all the five development regions in the country have a great role to play in the establishment of the federation.

The National FEDWASUN was formally registered at Kathmandu District Administration office on May 10, 2004 with the following vision, mission and objectives:

### **Vision**

“To be known nationally and internationally as a capable, a strengthened network representative and a lead organisation of the drinking water and sanitation users’ organisations throughout the country<sup>5</sup>.”

### **Mission**

“By protecting the rights of the drinking water and sanitation users’ organisations throughout the kingdom of Nepal and making them aware, organising and empowering them for attainment of additional rights it will advocate for access to policy framing and decision making process and its achievement based on inclusive participation for availability of drinking water and sanitation and their sustainability.”

### **Values**

The FEDWASUN has set its values as Based on networking, Transparency, Democratic, Self-reliance, Social Justice & Inclusion, Advocacy, Commitment, Service Oriented and Non Political

### **Objectives**

- Unify the drinking water and sanitation users’ organisations by improving mutual support and goodwill exchange the knowledge, skill and experiences
- Exchange experiences and learning at the local and national level between the organisations and the centre for mutual benefit
- Carry out a coordinated campaign, monitoring and evaluation to ensure safe drinking water and qualitative sanitation and their sustainability
- Take up matter on procedural or practical weaknesses on government policies, legalities and plans and its implementation at policy level to make amendments and draw attention of the government of Nepal and concerned organisations on in clarities, confusion and unexpected results arising from time to time on these matters
- Help to establish relation and coordination between the government of Nepal and the users’ organisations and build their capacity and capability
- Establish necessary coordination and partnership with the local bodies, NGOs and other concerned bodies in favour of the federation and the users’ organisations

---

<sup>5</sup> FEDWASUN, 2006. information leaflet - Brochure

- Inform the drinking water and sanitation users' organisations about the traditional, national and international legal provisions on drinking water services
- Develop the federation as a responsible and capable representative organisation for the drinking water and sanitation users' organisations and establish it sustainably

### **The FEDWASUN is involved in**

- Organising technical, skill based, legal trainings, workshops, meetings, gatherings, visits etc. necessary to build the capacities of the drinking water and sanitation users' organisations and the various units of the federations,
- Implementing awareness campaigns from local to national level on environmental cleanliness, balance and sanitation to conserve people's right to qualitative/safe drinking water,
- Supporting in solving personal disputes arising between the drinking water and sanitation users' organisation as an intermediary and provide necessary assistance to these organisations facing legal and policy issues and problems
- Building the institutional capacities of the users' organisations and encouraging them to bring concepts of good governance, social justice & gender sensitivity, inclusive participation and common consensus into practice
- Maintaining necessary interrelationship with the government and various concerned organisations and exchange support, advice and suggestions and;
- Carrying out various works as per the necessity and favourable to the drinking water and sanitation users' organisations to achieve the goals and objectives of the federation.

### **Achievement and Current status**

Since the FEDWASUN building process is inspired from the Federation of Community Forestry Users of Nepal (FECOFUN) which has supported to greatly increase the living standards of people living in rural areas, it is assumed that the drinking water and sanitation user groups can emulate the achievements like the community forestry users groups. People working in various areas have already started to actively use the experiences of community forests in their respective fields.

One of the most important reasons why the barren mid-hills of Nepal have experienced an increase in forest covering is because user groups were devolved absolute authority of conservation, extension, promotion and consumption of their forests. According to Sociologist Mr. Bihari Krishna Shrestha 'if people are given the responsibilities for developing their communities according to their requirements, there is little need for external support and this is the best way for decentralisation'.<sup>6</sup>

In order to achieve its mission, the FEDWASUN has been expanding its network through out the country. It has established its district federation network in 23 districts with more than 750 users' committees (WSUCs). The national federation has been involved in making the district federations aware about the present legal provisions on water and sanitation, the common issues in the drinking water sector and management of the district federation. They are also playing a key role in identifying various issues and advocating on behalf of the users and establishing coordination with various sectoral bodies. The national federation is headed by a chairman with 16 member executive committee.

One of the major achievements of FEDWASUN is that it has been involved in "Citizens' Action in Nepal" supported by WaterAid.<sup>7</sup> The FEDWASUN has been conducting this activity to collect "User's voice in the rural districts" in various locations across the country well known as Water and Sanitation Users' Group Voice. The nature of the activity is to strengthen NGO and CBO ability at national and district levels to make and strengthen stakeholders alliances and network.

---

<sup>6</sup> Adhikari B (NEWAH) & Dixit A, 2003. Drinking water organisations: voices of dissatisfaction

<sup>7</sup> WaterAid, 2006. Citizens' Action for accountability in water and sanitation,

The established district federation and the national federation targets to build their institutional capacities and at the same time conduct various activities to ensure that the users organisations implement their schemes sustainably, give continuity to sanitation activities and assure representation of women in the decision making process. Accordingly, its members at all levels are receiving training on:

- Localising the MDG targets on water and sanitation.
- Water law
- Issues of gender and poverty.
- Leadership skills.
- Collecting evidence and generating advocacy at district and national levels.

Currently there has been networking with ActionAid, UNICEF and DFID to increase the scale of activities and FEDWASUN is now recognised as providing a potentially vital role in bringing in local users' perspective for improving services<sup>8</sup>.

## Conclusion

The Federation of Water and Sanitation Users Nepal (FEDWASUN) thus today stands as a recognised umbrella organisation for the users' groups, committees and organisations involved in the sustainable operation and maintenance of drinking water and sanitation projects throughout the country. The federation now is engaging in advocating for common issues of drinking water and sanitation on behalf of the users' and for maintaining coordination between all government and non-government organisations concerned in protection of the rights and benefits of the users. It also is involved in strengthening the capacities of the users' organisations, district federations and national federation.

Currently, the existence of FEDWASUN has been acknowledged by the government, sector organisations, donors at national level and it has been expanding its programme at district levels. However, as FEDWASUN is a newly established body it needs greater support to increase its lobbying skills and identifying linkages to better support effective local governance. It is envisaged that by means of this appropriate model that represents the voices of real users, ultimately the sustainability of the water supply and sanitation systems at the local level are ensured.

"Any issues raised by FEDWASUN will be positively taken up by the department" – Mr. Srawan Kumar Upadhy, Division Chief, DWSS
---

## References

Adhikari B and Dixit, A, (2003) "Drinking water organisations: voices of dissatisfaction FEDWASUN" Draft information leaflet, brochure

HMG Nepal (2004) *Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (RWSS) National Policy & and Strategy*

NEWAH (2004) *Annual report*

NEWAH (2005) "DBA concept note"

NEWAH *Workshop reports & Progress reports*

WaterAid (2006) *Bridging the gap: Citizens' action for accountability in water and sanitation*

---

<sup>8</sup> WaterAid, 2006. Citizens' Action for accountability in water and sanitation