

**UN-DESA Water Utilities Workshop**  
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## **Worker Participation**



**A Strategy to Improve  
Quality and Efficiency  
Using Workers' Skills  
and Knowledge**

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**Public Services International**

## **Public Services International PSI**

**Global federation of public services unions**

**25 million working men and women**

**650 national unions**

**150 countries**

**Sectors : health; water, waste and energy;**

**local, state, national government, etc.**

**PSI founded in 1907**

## Workers – the untapped potential

- The most important resource is our human resource
- HR management is very complex
- How to make the most of worker knowledge
- How to facilitate and sustain motivation
- Maintain and increase skills/capacity
- Trade unions as local, national, regional and global partners

Can we change?

Labour is the most poorly understood factor  
in the water equation

## Why Worker Participation?

- **Use all the information in the organisation**
  - *Workers are closest to the production and closest to the users*
  - *A methodology for consulting workers*
  - *Bring hidden knowledge forward*
  - *Cheaper than consultants*



## Increase productivity

- Workers want to do a good job
- Workers know the operations
- Avoid bottlenecks
- Prevent problems
- Common interest in improving services
- Show workers trust – get efficiency back



## Meeting Actual Needs and Priorities

- Do we deliver the needed services, in correct amounts, to the right people?
- Are there any other services that should be delivered instead?
- Workers are in closest contact to citizens
- People talking directly to people is the best way to improve dialogue and teach people how to better use services



## Efficiency and effectiveness

- Avoids bottlenecks in production
- Offering the needed services to the right people/communities
- Avoiding unnecessary bureaucracy
- A part of every worker's job will be to create change
  - *Find better ways to do the job*
  - *Use resources more effectively*



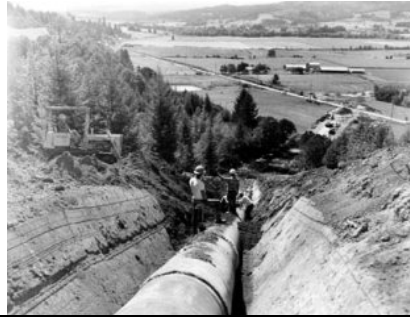
## Better workplace cooperation

- Workers in different units can cooperate and coordinate their work
- Workers from different units as back-ups for each other
- Less need for buying services from more expensive contractors



## Number one for politicians

- **Better services – high quality**
  - The key is to use the knowledge of those who actually deliver the services and the feedback they get
  - Involvement leads to higher motivation and performance
  - Focus on services, not on conflicts
  - Better knowledge on services provided



## Restructuring and Reforms

- **Restructuring public services is necessary**
  - *New technology*
  - *Limited finances*
  - *New and higher demands*
  - *Changing population*
- **Workers contribute better if they participate at design phase**



## Flexibility

- **Change is an important part of the job**
- **Finding new ways will make the job safer**
  - *Flexibility and innovation will be the best way to improve working conditions*
  - *Necessary changes implemented without conflict*
- **A part of the project is to educate workers to handle new tasks**



## Avoid labour conflict

- **Regular dialogue will reveal what might be controversial**
- **Solve problems before they become conflicts**
- **Less conflicts when workers feel safe and trusted**
- **Influence means solving problems at a low level**



## Health and safety is key

- Workers with influence in their workplace are healthier and more motivated
- Job security is good for health
- Positive relation to citizens
- Delivering high quality services gives higher job safety and satisfaction
- Fewer workers away sick
- Higher efficiency



## Starting

- **Accept the three involved partners**
  - *Workers and unions*
  - *Managers*
  - *Elected politicians*
- **All partners must be committed to the common goal:**
  - *To deliver high quality and efficient public services*



## Respect

- All partners should be respected
- Achieve consensus
- Respect for written agreements and law
- All partners must have an internal discussion on principles



## Serious, credible information

- New ways of working can create fear
  - *Is this just another way to put pressure on working conditions?*
  - *Will the workers try to get rid of all mid-level managers?*
- Each partner must present the project to their group
- How can I contribute?
- Citizen information





## Political backing

- Workers will have more influence
- This methodology needs political backing and should be rooted in a political decision at the right level
- Politicians will not handle details
- Politicians should follow the project closely



## Pilot strategies – early success

- Overcome workers' scepticism
- Unions may know some projects that could be quickly successful
  - *Pilot strategies*
  - *Best way of convincing people is to show that it works*
- Do not start too big, workers and managers must build confidence in the process



## Finding ideas for improvement

- **A problem could be an idea**
  - *Unions must be involved in motivating workers to bring their ideas*
- **Build working groups around ideas**
- **Designate a project leader**
  - *To coordinate and facilitate new ideas*
  - *Confidence of all partners*
- **Educate other workers to help in the process**



## Fast reporting back

- **Response from decision-makers must be quick**
  - *Implementation should be rapid*
- **Reduce bureaucracy**
- **Long waiting time = less commitment**
- **Every proposal needs an answer**
- **A negative answer given in the right way could be inspiration for further development**



## Sharing the results

- All partners should gain
- The methodology is not about wages
  - *This does not replace collective bargaining*
  - *It is about respect and dignity and Quality Public Services*

*Workers' initiative methodology*

## Labour Participation

- Gain for all partners
- Higher quality and efficiency
- Safer jobs
- Fewer conflicts
- Dialogue
- Better reputation

