



World Health Organization

**Operation and Maintenance
Working Group**

***To decentralise or not to
decentralise?***



**Operation and Maintenance
Working Group**



**Water Supply and Sanitation
Collaborative Council**

Geneva, June 1996

202.3-96TO-17323

LIBRARY IRC
PO Box 93190, 2509 AD THE HAGUE
Tel.: +31 70 30 689 80
Fax: +31 70 35 899 64
BARCODE: 14323
LO:

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM¹

The activities and tools produced by the OMWG are being well received and the **demand** for OMWG products is **increasing**. The current efforts to promote O&M and to provide O&M assistance at the global, regional, country and local levels is becoming very successful. Existing arrangements are experiencing **difficulties in trying to respond to requests** and demands created by activities and tools generated by OMWG. A need is arising for an increased ability to respond to requests from the promotional activities of the OMWG.

How can we best serve **requests for the services** of the OMWG from the water supply and sanitation sector? The objective of this issue paper is to present a document for discussion by the OMWG to optimize the OMWG efforts by examining the advantages and limitations of various alternative organizational schemes (centralized, decentralized, or a combination of schemes)

The approach presented in this paper outlines the formation of a **centralized activity centre for each product** and service created by the OMWG. This centralized activity centre could be located any place in the world. A critical issue is the degree of decentralization of the centralized activity necessary for optimum performance. Each centralized activity centre should consider the efficiency of **satellite** (decentralized) operations at appropriate locations throughout the world. Issues of concern regarding centralized activity centres and decentralization are addressed in a separate following section.

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES AVAILABLE

1. **Promotion** of operation and maintenance
2. **Planning** for operation and maintenance
3. **Publications** and training materials
4. Workshops
5. O&M network
6. Field and pilot studies
7. **Evaluation** and troubleshooting O&M programs

¹Document prepared by **Prof. K. Kerri** in cooperation with the Secretariat of the Operation and Maintenance Working Group

ISSUES OF CONCERN REGARDING CENTRALIZATION/DECENTRALIZATION

This discussion assumes each of the above products and services is administered (located) in a centralized activity centre (**decentralized from current organizational structure**) and that each activity centre has the potential for decentralized satellite regional activity centres.

1. **Loss of control** over operation of centralized activity centres
2. **Lack of communication** and cooperation among centralized activity centres
3. **Financial viability** of centralized centres
4. A **forum** is needed to bring the activity centres together on a regular basis. The purpose of this forum is to allow the activity centres to become **better acquainted**, to enhance cooperation and to facilitate the exchange of ideas to optimize the O&M program efforts.
5. **Selection of centralized activity centre**
 - a. **How** can specific organizations (entities) be **stimulated** to request the role of a centralized activity centre?
 - b. What are the **conditions** for delivery of services by the activity centre?
 - c. What are the **requirements/controls** for a satellite regional activity centre?
6. Linkages must be established among centralized activity centres (**communications**). Centralized activity centres should be encouraged to communicate directly among themselves, rather than through headquarters (Geneva), but headquarters must be kept informed.
7. What is the appropriate level of **direction** and **coordination** to be provided by headquarters?
8. **Financial**. What portion of funding for activity centres should be provided by headquarters and what portion should be generated by user services and other fund raising efforts?

ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS OF CENTRALIZED AND DECENTRALIZED ACTIVITY CENTRES

1. PROMOTION OF OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Centralized

Advantages

- a. **Coordination** of all promotional operation and maintenance efforts
- b. Activity centre is aware of all successful efforts and problems encountered by other efforts

Limitations

- a. May not be aware of local successes

Decentralized

Advantages

- a. Aware of local concerns and successes

Limitations

- a. Not aware of all global efforts and successes

2. PLANNING FOR OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Centralized

Advantages

- a. Activity centre is aware of successful global efforts and problems encountered by others

Limitations

- a. May not be aware of local successes

Decentralized

Advantages

- a. Aware of local concerns and successes

Limitations

- a. May not be aware of all global efforts and successes

3. PUBLICATIONS AND TRAINING MATERIALS

Centralized

Advantages

- a. Publish large quantities at low unit costs
- b. Maintain inventory of publications

- c. Everyone contributes to centralized activity centre to keep publications and training materials current.

Limitations

- a. May require a long time period for shipped publications to reach destination

Decentralized

Advantages

- a. Quick delivery of shipped materials
- b. Only inventory publications and training materials relevant to local needs

Limitations

- a. Costly to publish small quantities to meet local demand
- b. Non-local publications may not be available
- c. Difficult to keep materials current and also to have access to knowledge gained by other activity centres using materials

4. WORKSHOPS

Comment: WHO(OMS) is currently encouraging the incorporation of WHO/OMWG training programs and activities into the curriculum of existing local training centres. Efforts also are underway to encourage the development of the capacity of existing local training centres as well as potential training centres. This section assumes that local training centres are viable and functioning efficiently.

Centralized

Advantages

- a. Access to highly qualified training staff
- b. All participants train together, share experiences and contribute to overall knowledge and skills of all participants

Limitations

- a. Costs of meals and lodging could be very high
- b. Costs of travel could be high
- c. Local issues are not properly addressed

Note: We will need to differentiate and consider the differences between centralized and decentralized

management of workshops and training and centralized and decentralized presentations of workshops and training sessions.

Decentralized

Advantages

- a. Travel costs and time to training site are minimized
- b. **Local issues** can be effectively stressed by experienced local trainers

Limitations

- a. Qualified instructors may not be available
- b. Shipping time for training materials to site may be extensive and costs of shipping materials may be high

5. O&M NETWORK

Centralized

Advantages

- a. High level of control of network

Limitations

- a. Network program may be diluted or distracted by other stronger programs

Decentralized

Advantages

- a. One activity centre away from headquarters could be very efficient

Limitations

- a. Loss of direct every day contact with headquarters and some vital information or activity could be misplaced

6. FIELD AND PILOT STUDIES

Centralized

Advantages

- a. Knowledge and skills obtained from all studies can be more easily applied to all studies
- b. Core of qualified expertise can be developed and assigned as needed to critical locations

Limitations

- a. May experience difficulties developing knowledge and skills applicable to some local situations
- b. Salaries of experts may be excessively high

Decentralized

Advantages

- a. Develop cadre of local experts
- b. Salary and subsistence costs for local experts could be lower than centralized experts
- c. Local technologies and equipment will be used

Limitations

- a. Local experts may lack knowledge and skills possessed by global experts who have been exposed to a wider variety of situations and problems
- b. Local rivalries and hostilities could be a problem

7. EVALUATION AND TROUBLESHOOTING O&M PROGRAMS

Centralized

Advantages

- a. Experts available with knowledge and skills gained from global experience

Limitations

- a. Experts may not be familiar with local situation
- b. Salary and subsistence costs may be high for experts to deal with problems

Decentralized

Advantages

- a. Local experts readily available to solve problems
- b. Salary and subsistence costs for local experts may be lower than for global experts

Limitations

- a. Local experts may not have global experience

RECOMMENDATIONS

Comment: **Each product and service should be administered at a centralized location.** Today they are all administered by headquarters (Geneva). Each of these centralized activities could be administered by a **specific organization** (entity). The expectation exists that certain products and services will be attractive to specific organizations which would submit proposals for administration. **Other products and services may not be attractive** to specific organizations and should continue to be administered by headquarters until they become attractive and generate interest by specific organizations. Some products and services may be deemed appropriate to remain under the administration of headquarters in spite of being attractive to specific organizations.

1. Promotion of operation and maintenance should be administered at a centralized location.
2. Planning for operation and maintenance should be administered at a centralized location.
3. Publications and training materials should be administered at a centralized location.
4. Workshops should be coordinated at one central location, but **regional activity centres** or training **centres** should be established to facilitate and present workshops. The central activity centre could develop global workshops for presentation at local workshops. The use of global experts could be expensive.
5. O&M network should be administered at a centralized location
6. Field and pilot studies should be coordinated at **one central location**, but regional activity centres should be established to facilitate development of action plans and dissemination of results locally.
7. Evaluation and troubleshooting O&M programs should be coordinated closely with field and pilot studies and should be administered similar to the field and pilot studies program.
8. A mechanism must be established at headquarters (Geneva) to control and coordinate all of these efforts. **A type of forum** should be implemented to facilitate everyone's efforts.