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MAXIMIZING THE BENEFITS FROM WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION

**Community management in conflict areas:
Lessons from Southern Sudan**

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Water and sanitation programmes are usually a key component of many interventions by aid agencies working in emergency or semi-emergency situations created by armed conflict. Many aid agencies adopt a community-based approach that aims to encourage community participation in construction of facilities and community responsibility for their operation and maintenance. This is normally accompanied by extensive backstopping from agencies in the form of technical support and spare parts supply. However, the complex social-dynamics within in affected communities, together with a 'dependency syndrome' that may be created by prolonged exposure to other aid (in form of relief hand outs such as food and housing materials) threatens the success of community management as a strategy for sustaining water services. In particular, there is a risk of failure if agency and community expectations regarding the form and level of support do not match. This paper highlights a case of how mismatched expectations could potentially lead to failure.

Introduction

As a result of more than twenty years of civil war in Southern Sudan, more than 35 percent of the population have been displaced and resettled in large areas commonly referred to as IDP (internally displaced persons) camps. Following an outbreak of cholera in some IDP camps in Magwi County the American Refugee Committee (ARC), an international aid agency, initiated a water and environmental sanitation (WES) programme in 2001 covering the five worst affected camps of Nimule Payam (administrative level below the County). The programme focused on construction of boreholes, support to construction of family and institutional latrines as well as hygiene promotion/education activities. At the root of these interventions was a community-based approach that encouraged community participation in the construction and community responsibility for operation and maintenance of the constructed facilities. However, the Community WES Management Committees (C-WES-MC) established for operation and maintenance gradually collapsed between 2002 and 2003 and eventually became non-functional. This paper reports the findings of a participatory evaluation of the C-WES-MC, and offers useful lessons for aid agencies implementing water and sanitation programmes in conflict areas. The paper outlines an adaptation of a methodology for participatory evaluation drawing on the expanded body of literature on participatory methods.

Community WES management committees

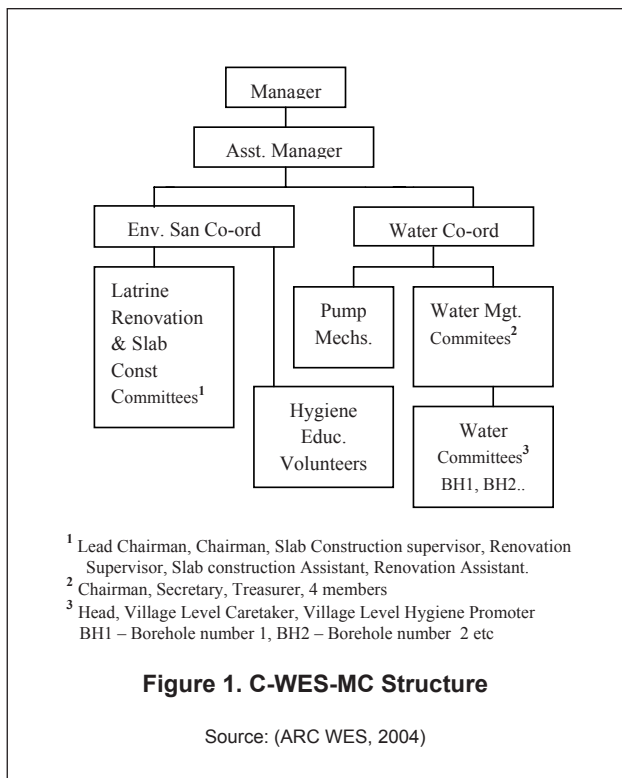
The committees were established in 2001 by ARC and the SRRC (Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission -the humanitarian arm of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Move-

ment). The aim was to ensure sustainable development of the WES programme in Nimule in line with the SRRC policy of self-reliance and implementation through community-based ownership and management. The committee structure composed of 2 Managers, 2 Co-ordinators and 3 Sub-committees as shown in Figure 1. This structure was established at the Payam and camp level, and in total, 5 Committees were set up to manage improved water and sanitation facilities. However, all the committees gradually collapsed between 2002 and 2003 and became non-functional. As a result, borehole functionality reduced by 8 percent within this period. In seeking corrective action, the authors, who formed part of the agency's WES team, conducted a participatory performance evaluation in April 2004 with the objective of involving all C-WES-MC members in assessing and evaluating the performance of the committees. The following outputs were realised from this evaluation:

- Feedback from committee members on the appropriateness of the structure, roles and responsibilities of C-WES-MC members;
- Feedback on the areas of assessment, indicators for monitoring and evaluation and the means of verification;
- Evaluation data compiled by the members;
- Explanations for poor/good performance;
- Way forward

Participatory evaluation methodology

A participatory evaluation methodology was adopted in assessing and evaluating the performance of the committees. This methodology seeks to involve stakeholders in problem-solving and shared decision making through the generation and use of knowledge (Narayan, 1993). Following



the collapse of the Community WES Management committees, ARC sought corrective action by involving committee members in order to increase relevance and ensure that the evaluation focused on issues of real concern taking into account the perspectives of the members. It was also hoped that the participatory evaluation would heighten the sense of ownership since members would be more committed to follow up action if they participated in the evaluation work (Gosling and Edwards, 1993). Following several agency staff visits to a number of water points, committee members were invited to a one-day workshop. Out of a total of 5 committees invited, 3 committees were represented at the workshop with total of 45 participants.

To obtain feedback on the appropriateness of the structure, roles and responsibilities of C-WES-MC members, participants were divided into 5 groups according to sub-committees as follows:

- Group 1: C-WES-MC in general (Manager, Assistant Manager, Co-ordinators, and Pump Mechanics)
- Group 2: Latrine renovation and slab construction committee members
- Group 3: Water Management Committee members
- Group 4: Water Committee members

Each group was asked to list what they perceived as the functions of their committee and the roles and responsibilities of each member and how their committee relate to other members of the C-WES-MC.

To obtain feedback on the areas of assessment, indicators for monitoring and evaluation and means of verification, participants were guided through a brainstorming session in which they gave their views on what they thought were

the areas of assessment, verifiable performance indicators, and means of verification. Using the list of indicators they suggested, participants in each of the 5 groups were asked to carry out a quick evaluation of the performance of their respective sub-committees. Participants used all their available records as means of verification. On a scale of 1to5, participants were asked to rank the performance of their respective committees as follows:

- 1 – for excellent,
- 2 – for very good,
- 3 – for good,
- 4 – for poor, and
- 5 - for very poor

Results and discussion

C-WES-MC structure, functions and member roles

It was noted that participants did not know the overall functions of the C-WES-MC. Top committee members' understanding of their roles was completely different from what ARC/SRRC expected them to do. It is possible that the roles given to them were beyond their technical and management capacity, and so they chose to interpret them in their own terms, e.g. supervising the other members of the committee. The sub-committees seemed to have understood their functions, although there was a duplication of functions between the water management committees and the water committees. Members of the latrine renovation and slab construction committee did not know their individual roles although they understood the overall function of the committee. Other than the top committee members, none of the C-WES-MC members perceived community mobilisation as part of their roles. In fact, there was a general indication that members looked at themselves as the ones to carry out the work on behalf of the community. This caused them to feel like direct implementers of the programme rather than members of a voluntary management structure.

Areas of assessment and verifiable performance indicators

Participants observed that maintaining the water points in good working order was the primary reason why the committee was formed and therefore should be the main area of assessment. For the C-WES-MC in general, and for each sub-committee, members came up with a list of verifiable performance indicators that included: number of functioning water committees; number of users contributing to the operation and maintenance of water points; number of committee meetings held; pump caretakers performing their duties; number of days hand pumps are in good working order; number of maintenance/repairs carried out using user contributions; and number of households with latrines. Although not exhaustive, these indicators give a useful monitoring tool, which can be used for any community management structure. Participants used these indicators to carry out a quick evaluation of their performance.

Self-Evaluation

Results of the self-evaluation revealed that all the five groups perceived their overall performance as poor. The participants attributed their poor performance to the following reasons:

- No food for work
- Lack of uniforms for identification. “We need something to show that we are different from others” a member of Rey water committee noted
- Lack of means of transport (bicycles)
- No testimonial to show that you work with ARC
- Lack of tools and equipment for construction
- Little or no training given
- Lack of stationary for records and reports
- Lack of tools for maintenance
- Lack of gumboots
- No support from ARC/SRRC
- Failure to mobilise the community to participate
- Difficulty in getting contributions from the user community
- Lack of motivation (incentives and soap) from ARC/SRRC. “You work throughout the year without anything” one pump mechanic said.
- Unfulfilled promises of bicycles and gumboots from ARC. “ We were deceived that we were going to be given bicycles for the head to be able to deliver reports to the chairman of the management committee, but up to now we have not received” a member of Rey water committee noted
- Lack of clear system of reporting broken down pumps
- No clear relationship between them, ARC and SRRC

Institutional Analysis

From this participatory evaluation we were able to make some useful observations regarding the appropriateness of community management structure established by the agency. Firstly, the C-WES-MC seems to have been established as a field support structure for an infant ARC/SRRC WES programme during its initial phase in 2001, rather than a genuine community management arrangement. Information on what the participants perceived as their roles shows that the function of the committee in general was not clear. Individual roles related to direct implementation of the programme on behalf of the agency. As a result, committee members did not assume ownership of the improved water and sanitation facilities - a pre requisite for successful community management. Instead, members looked at the agency as the owners and themselves as custodians of the improved facilities.

Secondly, the structure was big and complex, with many reporting lines. It is therefore not surprising that some members did not know how they related to each other. Top committee members (Managers, co-ordinators) were given roles far beyond their technical and management capacity and were operating as ‘bosses’ waiting for reports from their junior committee members to submit to ARC/SRRC. The

numerous reporting lines and direct implementation roles made members feel like they were on a full time job - hence the demands for payment, facilitation, gumboots, rain coats etc. The committee was established at the Payam/camp level, and so it was unrealistic to expect members to serve such a big area without facilitation in terms of transport.

ARC’s inability to provide for the above demands (perhaps due to budgetary limitations or more likely, the agency’s own policy of encouraging voluntary community management at that time) led to a gradual reduction in the morale and enthusiasm among committee members. Under pressure to meet project objectives and targets, ARC project staffs are reported to have made promises of bicycles, gumboots, and other incentives which were not fulfilled. The last attempt to put the programme back on track was the introduction of monetary incentives to a section of committee members - namely pump mechanics and some members of the latrine renovation and slab construction committee. By doing this, the agency deviated from the original policy of encouraging voluntary community involvement and perhaps this marked the final collapse of the C-WES-MC.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

It is clear that the C-WES-MC did not achieve its aim of sustainable development of the WES programme, because the operation and maintenance structure itself proved to be unsustainable. The authors identified the following as the main reasons for the failure of the community management arrangement:

1. The C-WES-MC was established as a field support structure rather than a community management arrangement
2. Committee members did not have a sense of ownership of the improved water sources
3. C-WES-MC structure was too big and complex to act as an institutional arrangement understood by the community, and in which they could participate voluntarily as the agency expected
4. The functions of the C-WES-MC in general were not clear
5. Some members did not understand their roles and responsibilities and how they related to the other members of the committee. There was little or no training conducted
6. Water management committees showed commitment to their role of ensuring proper operation and maintenance but were hindered by the fact that the areas they covered were large and they had no means of transport
7. Committee members had high expectations from the agency in terms of payment and facilitation. Looking at the reasons for poor performance given by the participants, one can note that expectations were high, not necessarily having been raised by the agency, but because of the nature of the management arrangement. ARC’s inability to meet these expectations led to the collapse of the committees.

Following the evaluation and several field visits, the authors

established that there existed a certain degree of community cohesiveness at a localised level, such as a village or sector - especially for a common undertaking such as maintaining a water source. Much as it may be unrealistic to expect communities in these circumstances to embrace the idea of maintenance contributions wholeheartedly, it is possible to persuade them to carry out the most basic tasks of keeping their water point working well (i.e. cleanliness, and routine preventative maintenance). This would undoubtedly require some form of community organisation, although not as complex as the C-WES-MC.

Following a series of community consultative meetings, it was recommended that water source committees be formed for each water source instead of a centralised management arrangement. With the recently signed peace deal in Southern Sudan, and the start of development projects, it is believed such a localised management structure would be more appropriate and would easily fit in future government water policies and sector restructuring. The above recommendation is currently being implemented for all new and existing water points. The overriding lesson for agency's working in similar situations is that community management arrangements in such environments need to be kept simple and localised, with constant follow-up by the implementing agency to assess whether the community is fully taking ownership of the facilities and feel empowered enough to maintain them.

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