



The Role of Users at the Different Levels of WaSH Projects

Learning and Communications in WASH in Amhara

Introduction

In Africa and other developing countries, sustainability of rural water supply is quite low with 30 to 60% of the schemes becoming non-functional at some point after implementation (Brikké and Bredero, 2003). The lack of community participation especially in management has been recognized as one of the reasons for the low sustainability (Carter, 1999). For example, limited involvement of the community at all stages of water development, the lack of a modest water service fee and a shortage of adequate skill and capacity to maintain water resources are specific aspects of community participation that have decreased sustainability of rural water supply in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia (Mengesha et al, 2003).

All water supply providers in Ethiopia are currently following the principle of community participation and community management in the rural area. Request for improved water point, selection of the water point site, the technology type, the administration of the scheme's finances and procurement, the contribution of labor and cash during construction and for operation and maintenance are positive indicators of community participation at the initial and later phases of the water supply project. And community management through water user committees is established at each water point. This briefing note provides an overview of the participation and management by users both contributing to sustainability of rural water supply in the Amhara Region.

The details and issues of community participation and management were uncovered during the effort to improve the documentation of different issues of Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in Amhara Region by the School of Civil and Water Resources Engineering at the Institute of Technology (IoT) of Bahir Dar University (BDU) and financed by WaterAid. The School has conducted research on community participation, technology, implementation, operation and maintenance, monitoring and evaluation, sustainability and impact of WASH project in Amhara Region. This research was conducted at 32 schemes located in different *woredas* in the Amhara Region.

This briefing note, extracted from the main research, provides an overview of the research community participation and management with key findings and

recommendations for increasing community management of WaSH in the Amhara Region. The main research document will soon be available at www.wateraidethiopia.org and www.bdu.edu.et.

Background

Harvey and Reed (2006) explain that “community participation does not automatically lead to effective community management, nor should it have to. Community participation is a prerequisite for sustainability, i.e. to achieve efficiency, effectiveness, equity, and replicability, but community management is not. The community management in rural Ethiopia is based on the formation of water user committees usually at each water point in order to follow up the implementation process, to manage the WaSH scheme during operation, to set regulations concerning the scheme after discussion with the community, to collect fees for the operation and maintenance and to monitor the scheme after implementation. Committees are literally the only responsible body for the installed water point since the sheer number of WaSH schemes in a *woreda* cannot be managed effectively by the limited number of water supply experts available in the vicinities. However, this type of management system is not always sustainable (Deneke et al, 2011) because every community and water point is different (Carter, 2009). And it is often assumed that these committees on each water point are established under the participation of all the users, but this is definitely not always the case. The documentation of such issues is not also enough in Amhara Region.

The objective of this case story is therefore to document the level of community participation and community management through water user committees within the Amhara Region. Moreover, we will show the level of non-functionality in the region. Thus WaterAid Ethiopia granted funds to the School of Civil and Water Resources Engineering at the IoT of BDU to document the above issues. This would help to understand the community participation and management status of the region.

Documenting the participation and management would provide an opportunity for dealing with these issues for various implementers of WASH, Government and responsible stakeholders in the region.

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with beneficiaries of the improved water supply scheme, the members of water use committees and *Woreda* Water Resource Development office members at the 32 sites of this project (Figure 1). In addition, findings from formal interviews, focal-group discussions and field observations in five *Woredas* (i.e., Achefer, Mecha, Simada, Libokemekem and Quarit) studied by the Cornell and Bahir Dar Universities masters of professional students are included in these case studies. Only the information regarding water user committees from the interviews were analyzed and included in the key findings of this briefing note below.

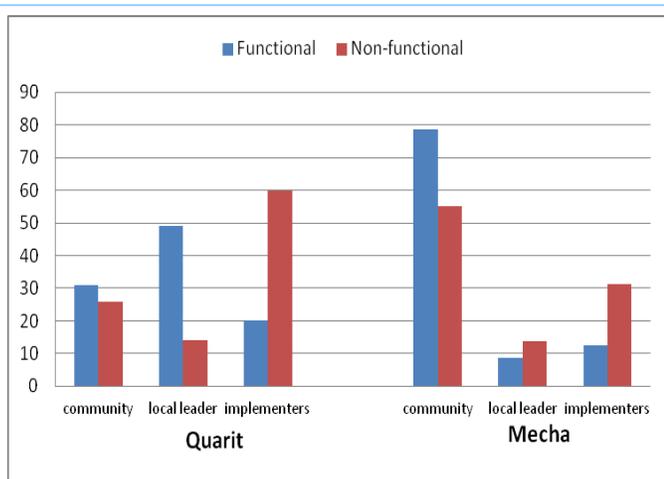


Figure 1 Relationship of the site selection capacity of community, local leader and implementers and functionality in Quarit and Mecha Woredas

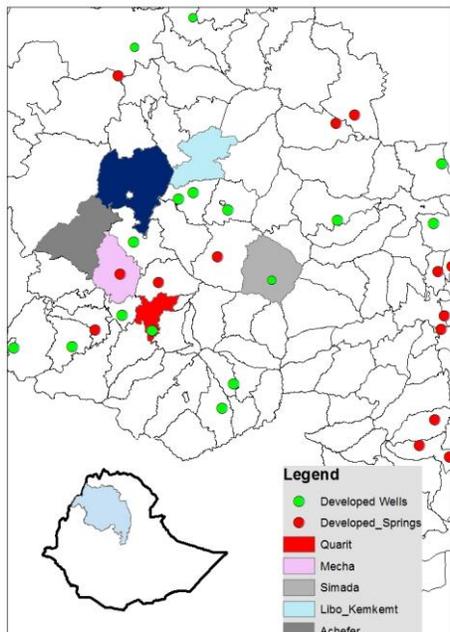


Figure 3: Location map of water points monitored in this study (Map by: ...)

Key Findings

Non-functionality: From 32 schemes observed in the study area, only 44% of the schemes are functional whereas the remaining 56% is either completely non-functional (13%) or functional with disrepair (43%) under the current management arrangement. However, if those schemes functioning with some disrepair are not properly maintained, they will stop functioning within a short period of time. Consequently, non-functional schemes in the study area will rise to 56%. Among those functioning with some technical breakdowns, damage of the faucets and valves are the major disrepair followed by leakage from pipes and poor construction of the scheme's components. The majority of disrepair of hand pumps involves mechanical problems leading to leakage of water during fetching causing the leaked water to flow back to the well. Complete non-functionality was caused by unproductive wells, breakage of the hand pump, failure of the spring box and a malfunctioning pump.

Community Participation: As previously described, community participation is crucial for the sustainability of rural water supply systems. Analysis from the 32 sites showed that the majority of the villages (75%) asked for improved water supply system. Similarly, in the other specific study areas of Achefer, Mecha, Simada, Libokemekem and Quarit, the majority of the water points were installed at the request of community or their representatives, such as elders. The major issues were then observed during the implementation of the water point. For example, beneficiaries from the sites with non-functional or functional with damage were not involved in selecting the site of the water point or the technology. Also, they were not involved in administrating the finances or procurement during construction, but they did contribute labor and local construction materials during construction. On the other hand, it was observed for functional water points that community's contribution to the project cost was more than 10%, and they (Eg. Dega Meske locality in Yilmana Densa Woreda and Shinkurte locality in Farta Woreda) were also involved in deciding the location of the water point. Unfortunately, the most frequent case observed from the 32 sites was the lack of participation of the community or the water user committees in site selection. This absence of participation alienates the community and does not generate the sense of ownership, causes unwillingness to use the water and leads to unsettled disputes between beneficiaries and land owners (Eg. Melame locality in Semada Woreda and Sali Sefer locality in Chilga Woreda) on which the water point is situated. The descriptive analysis (Fig 1) from both Quarit and Mecha Woreda showed that the involvement of communities and local leaders on site selection resulted in continued functionality and a desire by beneficiaries to sustain their water point.

When implementers decided the location of the water point, without consulting the users, more schemes became non-functional in the case of Quarit Woreda.

Contributing only labor and local materials is not enough for a greater likelihood of sustainability of water point. For example, in Lebo Kemekem, 20% of respondents have contributed cash and in kind while the remaining contributed only in kind. The most likely reasons observed from some sites are that users dissatisfied with the selected site (Eg Woleh locality in Wag Himra Woreda) and preference of alternative sources such as nearby springs (Eg Gafate locality in West Este) and availability of shallow hand dug wells (Eg Lebo Kemekem Woreda and koyou locality in West Gojam).

The opposite was observed in Achefer where about 92% had provided labor for site clearing and construction; 75% had provided cash in response to the requirement by the implementer that 10 to 12% of the project cost would be covered by the community; 81% had provided local materials such as wood for the construction of the water sources and fencing. In Achefer, no water point completely failed likely due to the better community participation in covering the project cost. There was a similar situation in Mecha Woreda. For functional water schemes, the majority of the community (47.5%) contributed cash, labor and local materials which increased the ownership of the community. However, in the case of non-functional water points, the majority of the community participated by providing only food and local beer for labourers as shown in Figure 3. However, it was still a challenge to get full participation of beneficiaries as 42.5% of respondents for functional water points did not contribute at all.

Water user committee: The idea of water point management by water user committees (WUC) is appropriate for the scattered settlement of rural people and the small number of Woreda level experts relative to the number of water supply systems existing in the

Ethiopian highlands. For example, there are only five experts (an office head, a planning and documentation expert, an operation and maintenance expert, a pump attendant and a water quality expert) for the total of more than 200 water supply points in the Quarit and Mecha Woredas. This shortage of human resources is the case in all 32 woredas evaluated by this project. Therefore, in the place of woreda experts, WUCs, manage and oversee the system's operation. This may include conducting preventive maintenance, collecting tariffs or payments for repairs, keeping records of financial transactions, organizing manuals and blueprints, and managing conflicts.

Sixty percent of the 32 sites have functioning WUCs consisting of 5 people on average -- two women and three men. The remaining water points' WUCs are not functioning because the water point is not functioning or functioning with disrepair; the committee did not exist from the start of implementation; or there is confusion about the ownership of the water point. Regarding the latter, for example, it was observed in two villages (Aliba locality of Awable of East Gojam Zone and Gondi locality of Meket of North Wolo Zone) that two hand-dug wells (HDWs) were constructed for communities and a school or clinic leading to confusion about who should manage it. Similarly, 90%, 100% and 62% of villages in Semada, Achefer and Mecha Woredas, respectively, have WUCs. A majority set monthly cash donations and called for communal labor contributions. Some have imposed monetary fines on those who violate the management rules. However, they have limited power to enforce regulations and are inconsistent in their application.

Water User Committees in the region are less effective likely due to lack of all inclusive and participatory committees during establishment (Deneke et al., 2011). The water point managing institutions seem to be established in rush as a prerequisite for receiving project assistance and developing a water supply point. For example, from the total respondents (n=160) in Semada, 47% did not know the presence nor the role

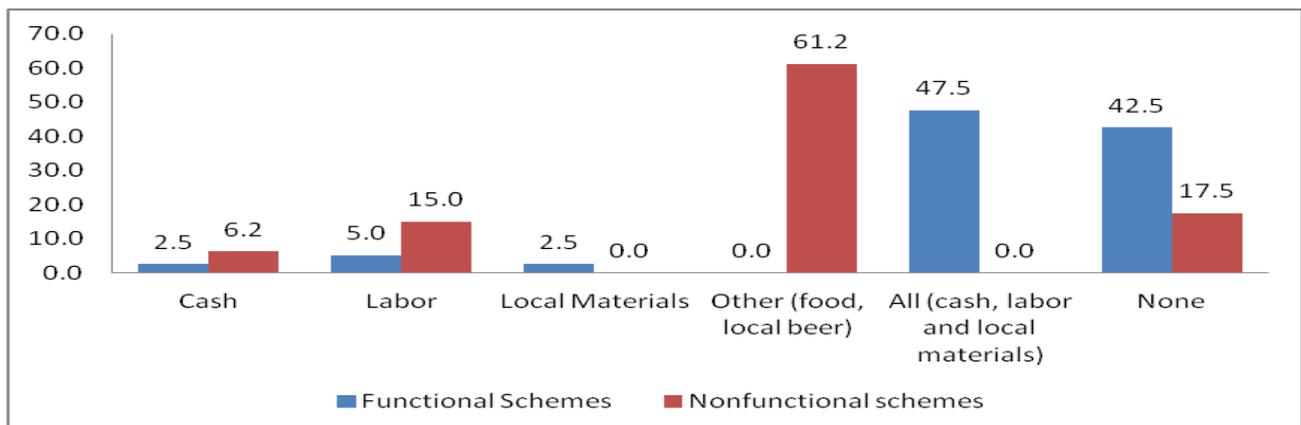


Figure 3: Percentage Distribution of Respondents in Mecha Woreda based on type of contribution for project cost

of the water user committee indicating that the participation of the community in selecting the committee was questionable in the area. In addition, it is observed that the members of the WUCs in the majority of the 32 sites were not selected based on full participation, especially with regard to women who are currently selected for project formality only.

If committee members are not selected in cooperation with the whole community, they are likely not to be trusted by beneficiaries, and this affects the sustainability of the water point. In Achefer, an increase of the level of trust in WUCs by one unit significantly increases the cash contributions by 0.19 ETB per month. This indicates that households with high levels of trust in WUCs that the money raised would be used for the intended purpose and contributes for operation and maintenance in order to sustain the scheme.

Recommendations

Give priority for indigenous institutions: instead of initiating new institutions such as WUS, learn first about existing local institutions and work on how this institutions may be able to manage the water point. Traditional irrigation schemes, local grazing conservation efforts and other outside initiated projects may provide examples of traditional institutions.

Develop effective network between WUC's with Woreda-level experts: It should really not be expected that, with the current capacity, the local government water supply experts be responsible for managing all of the implemented water supply points. Rather the goal should be for autonomous administration and management of water points by the community beneficiaries in each locality. But the woreda experts with relevant higher

government organizations are responsible to develop the effective network and to follow-up projects handed over to the committees, do timely audits, support in major maintenance requirements which are beyond the capacity of the committees, facilitate access to spare parts, change water committee members when they are not effective or committee members are missing for some reason. This will expand water supply coverage, promote documentation of each water supply point and enhance sustainability.

Establish committee with full participation of community: The community should decide who should be the members of the committee. In addition, emphasis should be given to increase the trust of community on the committee so that schemes will be sustainable.

Community management not always a solution: water supply providers can think of provision of continuous institutional support to communities where there is limited capacity of its implementation. Provision of water to individual households could be another alternative in areas, such as in Rime Kebele Mecah Woreda, where households have their own unprotected hand dug wells. In such areas, the support to the communities is only to protect the well and households to manage their system.

Strengthening community participation: Community participation should not only be limited to labor and cash contribution. Community members need to be consulted and given the chance to choose when appropriate on each step. Depending on the area, elders should be given enough room for participation. Women should be elected in the committee to take a more active role participate in the major decision making processes as they are usually the ones responsible to take care of families and victims of water problems.

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