

CASE ON WASH ACCOUNTABILITY AT WATER SUPPLY SYSTEM LEVEL (August 2010)

The OKU BE LU borehole case (Adjumani district, Ciforo Sub-county) Community scorecard exposes water user loans worth UGX 2,000,000

Short summary

The management committee of this borehole water source had lent all collected users fees to the majority of consumers to help them survive during a famine in the village. The borrowers failed to repay their loans. The committee failed to hold monthly meetings for 5 months, because the community would not attend when called upon for failure to have the money for paying back the loan. The Accountability Dialogues brought committee members and users together. In the process of scorecards and self-assessment and the 'inter-face meeting', it was discovered that the loan scheme had a huge outstanding loan of UGX 2M. It was agreed that borrowers had to pay back their debts within two months and that if they failed, strict measures would be taken.

Background

The Oku be Lu borehole is found in Liru village, Ciforo Sub-county in Adjumani district. The village is some 6 kilometres from the Sub-county headquarters. 82 families (close to 500 people) collect their water from the Oku be Lu borehole. The Water Source and Sanitation Committee (WSSC) has 9 members of whom 6 are women, one of them is the caretaker. The present WSSC has not had any specific training in management of the water source. Their roles and responsibilities on the management of the water point were not really explained.

Although the WSSC had not received a proper training, the technical assessment of the water point (see table below) gave a positive picture on the physical and sanitary condition of the water point and surrounding.

Technical assessment of the water facility

1. The borehole is not fenced yet, the water source committee started on the process of fencing; poles are already on site
2. The surrounding is clean, no litter
3. No latrine or any source of pollution within 30 metres around the source
4. All nuts and bolts are tight
5. Drainage channel is clean and long enough
6. Water drains into the nearby swamp
7. No stagnation of water around the Apron

Participation of the WSSC in the WASH accountability dialogue session

The WSSC and a few water users participated in the 5th WASH accountability dialogue session in May 2010. There, they learned about the accountability tools: the community score card and self-assessment card. The Ciforo Sub-county Health Assistant (HA) and the Assistant Community Development Officer (ACDO) were also present in the Dialogue session and continued to facilitate during community meetings on water accountability using the tools.

Before the introduction of the scorecard and self-assessment card, the WSSC did not consider meetings with their consumers so meetings were hardly held. As the chairperson Mr. Owole Testo testifies: "... meetings were held once in five months."

After the introduction of the water accountability tools, there has been a tremendous change: now meetings are held monthly according to Adrawa Geoffrey, the general secretary of the WSSC.

The committee used to collect UGX 500 per household per month as a water user fee. Every 1st day of the month, all the heads of the household came for a meeting where they paid their monthly water user fee. When all the money had been collected, the total amount was calculated and announced.

The water fund as a lending scheme

All the money collected then became available to the water users for borrowing. The eligible persons include all consumer families who regularly pay up the water user fee; actually in practice all the 82 that use the water source could borrow.

Depending on one's demand, an individual can borrow a minimum of five thousand shillings only and a maximum of a hundred thousand shillings. This is then recorded in the books of accounts. An interest rate of 20% per year is charged on the loan.

Between February and August 2009, there was a terrible famine in the Sub-county due to a long dry spell. Out of the 82 households in the village, 70 accessed the loan, whereas 12 did not. And of the 9 WSSC members, only 2 accessed the loan, and all those who accessed the loan failed to pay it back, thus the 2m debt. In the period directly after the famine, August 2009 to January 2010, no monthly meetings were held. All WSSC efforts to recover the outstanding loans were not successful. The 12 households that had borrowed had no money reserves to pay back their loans.

In the accountability dialogue session, the participating WSSC and water users learnt how to use the community scorecard and WSS self-assessment. In July 2010, they applied these tools in the community - with some facilitation of the HA and ACDO. Various issues came up when a joint work plan was being drawn, books of accounts were balanced and to their surprise, two million Uganda shillings was all in debt.

This was communicated to the community and a community meeting was held in July 2010. The main agenda point was to come up with a strategy to recover the two million shillings in debt. The WSSC chairperson and LC1 strongly suggested that a byelaw would be set to clearly determine a deadline by which every debtor has to have paid the loan.

Key points in the Action plans developed by the community

- a. A grace period of two months was set for voluntary re-payment of the loan; from any member who failed to pay up with in this period, the community would confiscate property worth the loan
- b. It was agreed that the borehole should be fenced to keep away animals from accessing the water source
- c. All water users were to water animals far away from the water source
- d. All jerry cans and water collecting vessels should be regularly cleaned
- e. The water users were to buy jerry can lids /covers to stop water users from contaminating the water during transportation.

Success factors

- Involvement of the WSSC and some water users in the accountability dialogue sessions has revitalized the WSSC's functionality
- Facilitation support from the HA and ACDO in using the scorecard and self-assessment tool, during the interface meeting and also in the follow up on the performance of the WSSC
- The joint action work plan pointed issues that need to be worked out with the community thus improving the functionality of the WSSC, as now they have activities to accomplish and report back to the community of consumers.

Lessons learnt

- It is important to have an account in which water user fees' contributions are deposited; this helps better management and record keeping
- It is important to involve the community of consumers during planning to empower them to demand for accountability
- Joint action planning enables promotion of hygienic water practices at the water source and the homesteads
- Joint action plan enables the information sharing since communities find it then more interesting to attend the meeting
- Facilitating the entire community scorecard process has enabled the identification of bad practices, and thus facilitated immediate action to correct these.

Challenges

The Community Scorecards process is written in English, which makes it not useful for application in rural communities. The WSSC may remain with a problem to recover the two million Uganda shillings from the borrowers.

More info from netwasuganda@gmail.com; methodology and tools on <http://www.irc.nl/page/52603>

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