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Building collective action and improving governance in the Sabuli community

CONTRIBUTORS: LUCIE LECLERT (CARITAS SWITZERLAND),
FREDRICK OCHIENG (CARITAS SWITZERLAND) &
CARMEN FERNÁNDEZ FERNÁNDEZ

CASE STUDY

THE COMMUNITY GROUP AND THE WATER SYSTEM

The Sabuli community borders the Dadaab refugee camp in Wajir County, north east Kenya. Community members identify as Somali, and are traditionally pastoralists, however only the cattle herders lead a semi-nomadic lifestyle. The traditions are highly patriarchal, and characterised by a strong clan system with deep influences by community elders.

There are two operational boreholes in the community; The older borehole (SB1) is a diesel generator-run system installed in the 1970s. The second system is a solar powered borehole (SB2), constructed with the support of Oxfam GB. Together, the two systems serve 2,400 people and have 10 household connections, a connection to a secondary school and three kiosks to serve the rest of the population.

The average revenue collection is KES 20,000 per month during the rainy seasons, and KES 70,000 during the dry seasons. A total of six people are employed to manage the systems. Each of the water systems is managed by a distinct management group of six members. The first group, managing SB1, is registered as a Water Users Association (WUA) and has a constitution. The second group, managing SB2, has no registration and before the Integrity Management process had also no constitution.

THE INTEGRITY MANAGEMENT PROCESS

During the preparation phase, the counterpart – Oxfam GB – and their partner, Arid Lands Development Focus Kenya (ALDEF), held prior discussions with the community and their leaders. Other preparatory activities included engagement with county government officials and Wajir Water and Sewerage Company (WAJWASCO). WAJWASCO assigned one of its field managers to accompany the process as a second counterpart.



Unfortunately, the county government did not assign any direct staff, rather they confirmed their approval of and goodwill towards the process, and were continuously informed. Caritas Switzerland acted as a coach.

Initially, the *Integrity Management* (IM) process was to be carried out with only one group. However, the chiefs insisted that this would cause tensions in the community. The facilitators accepted the advice, and both groups were combined for the *IM Toolbox* workshop and the subsequent follow up activities. The chiefs, community leaders and clan elders were also invited.

The *IM Toolbox* workshop was held in August 2016. The participants were initially suspicious of WAJWASCO, believing they may audit them and takeover. Long explanations were needed to clarify the purpose of the *IM Toolbox*, and the roles of the coach and counterpart. These fears were allayed as the workshop progressed and constructive discussions held. Water provision and management appeared to be a very emotive issues and required a considered and balanced approach to avoid collapse of discussions due to conflicts.

The groups identified the following the integrity problems: (1) inadequate billing system which is open

to abuse by users; (2) unclear roles and responsibilities of group members; and (3) inadequate knowledge on general operation and maintenance (O&M) resulting in water supply interruptions.

The coach and counterparts advised both groups to merge under the existing WUA registration. The groups disagreed, but committed to having discussions about merging in the future. A single action plan was created, including activities for each group. The action plan gave priority to engaging the county government in the installation of more metres. Other tools selected focused on improving the management structure and training in operation and maintenance (O&M).

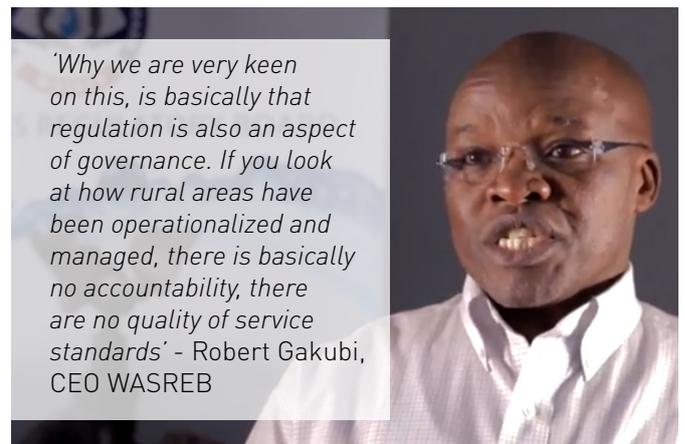
KEY CHALLENGES

A number of challenges emerged during the IM process. Importantly: (1) a drought reached emergency status delaying implementation of the action plan; (2) logistics also complicated things, as security is a major concern in the area, and Caritas Switzerland and Oxfam GB teams could only travel and work within a tight schedule of prescribed safe hours; and (3) the existence of different community interest groups was also a big issue, and additional members were invited to the meetings in order to balance participation and avoid conflict. This turned out to be very positive as new participants were more critical and pointed out more issues.

OBSERVED CHANGES

The IM process has increased the groups' self-awareness on their strengths and weaknesses, coupled with an increased willingness to take action. The groups showed significant enthusiasm to undertake measures that would improve the quality of their services. Namely, one group reviewed and signed its constitution, and both groups began to develop simple codes of conduct. The groups looked into options to install meters for household connections.

Community members were advocating for the installation of additional boreholes and requesting more individual connections. At least three new individual connections were installed by November 2016. Finally, there was a notable increase in interaction and trust between the groups and WAJWASCO, as the groups have decided to adopt a management model in which they handover some functions to WAJWASCO while retaining substantive roles. Unfortunately, WAJWASCO still lacks capacity to take over the management of the water system.



KEY LESSONS LEARNT

- Mapping power dynamics and ensuring a balanced representation benefits the process. This is particularly critical in cases such as this one, where the presence of different community interest groups is vital. User representatives should always be included in the process. As this case shows, the 'random' community members raise most problems. Basic guidelines on conflict resolution can be helpful for coaches.
- The local water service provider must be ready to take responsibility over the water system. In this case, the community understood the benefits of complying and was ready to sign a MoU of engagement with WAJWASCO, but the company lacked the capacity to commit. Caritas Switzerland is currently in conversations with the Water Services Regulatory Board (WASREB) to get their engagement in sourcing solutions for future problems like this.

ACCOMPANYING CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES

- Creating a platform for accountability in the **Dagahaley community**
- Building collective action in the **Sabuli community**
- Learning from failures: the challenges in the **Olmaroroi community**
- Moving towards formal water management in the **Olchoro-Onyokie community**
- Improving the integrity of community groups managing small water supply systems