IWRM Action Hub

IWRM TOOL - B2.03

Community-based water supply and management organisations

Summary

Community-based organisations (CBOs) play a very important role in supplying and managing water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services, particularly in rural areas in the Global South. Community-based organisations have various forms and functions and levels of interaction with public and private entities. This tool discussed the advantages brought by community-based water supply and management organisations together with their practical constraints.

CBOs Involvement in WASH

From the conceptual standpoint, community-based water supply and management embodies one of the core principles of IWRM “water should be managed at the lowest appropriate level” (Van Ittersum and Van Steenbergen, 2003). Community-based participation in WASH service delivery was promoted all throughout the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (WHO, 1983) and further propelled with the increased adoption of decentralisation and devolution policies across the world (Mugumya, 2013).

In the 1990s and early 2000s, donors and recipient governments indeed started paying more attention to community management in rural water supply as a pathway to filling in the service delivery gap, for instance through Water Point Community Based Management trainings (InterAide, 2015). At present, success stories from Africa, Latin America and Asia, ranging from decentralisation in El Salvador using community sustainability model and improving access to drinking water in Kirgiz villages using community approach to discovering the potential of community-based water supply for

poor urban and peri-urban households in Malawi (Adams and Zulu, 2015), demonstrate high relevance of CBOs in this sub-sector.

Motives for and Conditions for CBOs Involvement

Community-based management starts with involvement in decision-making process about water supply, management and use by democratically elected representatives of the community (Wood, 1994). Several incentives for creating community-based water supply and management organisations may be found:

- Satisfying the needs for integrated approach to water resources management;
- Filling in gaps in service provided by public and private waterworks (Tool B2.01; Tool B2.02);
- Tapping into indigenous knowledge on water resources;
- Applying bottom-up approach to disaster risk management;
- Exploiting community-based approach as a poverty reduction strategy;
- Relying on daily monitoring results from local users;
- Using strong ties between local users on a community level to disseminate knowledge of national sanitation and hygiene strategies.

Additionally, it is important to identify the pre-conditions for successful creation and efficient operation of CBOs:

- Community participation has to match community's needs;
- Assessment of available water assets, resources and risks should be conducted (Tool C1.01; Tool C1.05);
- Community-based water governance should not be limited to management of water assets and include water resource management;
- A distinct regulatory framework has to exist to ensure protection and access to businesses, support agencies, banks, investors and government entities for CBOs (Tool A2.03);

- Community leaders and members should be provided with trainings as the performance of CBOs relies on the competence of community actors (Tool B4.02);

- Decision-making should adhere to democratic principles;

- Financial health and technological capacity of CBOs should be maintained as key factors of continuous functioning and sustainability (Tool D2.03).

Forms of CBOs for WASH

Community-based water supply and management may require new institutions or new functions of the existing ones depending of the scale of their operations (Van Ittersum and Van Steenbergen, 2003). Local Water User Associations (WUAs) are an example of a small-scale local institution whereas district or basin level and sub-national or national inter-communities networks aim to consolidate the efforts of several entities and strengthen their model of governance (Dupuits and Bernal, 2015). WUAs were promoted as a response to the failure of governments to provide water services in underserved areas, particularly rural areas and urban slums. WUA is a non-profit user-based organisation created to manage the entire water supply system. The water supply system can be as simple as a protected well or community borehole to a gravity fed-pipe system using spring water. Network-based examples may be observed in Brazil in the state of Ceará where community-centered approach in the form of community associations was used to supply rural areas with water and sanitation services. In Kenya, during the implementation of “Water for the Maasai” project aimed at restoring boreholes in the Kajiado district, Borehole Custer Association Committees were merged into one Association to become self-supporting, thus diverting full responsibility to the community.

Constraints faced by CBOs

CBOs for water supply services have a number of operational, institutional, financial constraints, including but not limited to:

- Lack of technical expertise (data collection, geological studies, legal orientation) hinders CBO’s performance;

- CBOs are often dependent on NGOs and government extension workers for capacity building initiatives;

- Communities do not always represent a homogeneous group and may encounter disparities in terms of knowledge, wealth, interests, and power;

- Manipulation of the communities by opportunists and external powers may occur;

- Insufficient water fees make it challenging to cover operation and maintenance costs, together with high costs of management;

- CBOs system expansion depends on the financial capacity of the community, which is often low compared to large water supply systems;

- No standard approach to performance assessment of participatory organisations exists, not to mention limitations to quantitative assessment;

- Unrealistic targets may be imposed on communities leading to the expectations not being met.

Thematic Tagging
Urban , Water services

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