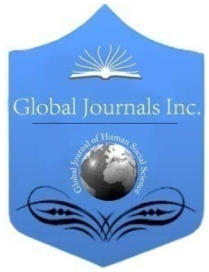
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# Perceptions of Rural Communities on Ownership and Management of Rural Water Supply Systems (RWSSS) in Lesotho and a Summary Recommendary View

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*Keywords: 1. ownership of rural water supply systems, 2. rural communities, 3. rural water supply systems/rwsss, 4. management of rural water supply systems, 5. lesotho.*

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# Perceptions of Rural Communities on Ownership and Management of Rural Water Supply Systems (RWSSS) in Lesotho and a Summary Recommendary View

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## I. General Introduction

The significance of this research study is to add to the body of knowledge on community ownership and management practices in Rural Water Supply/RWS. It further seeks to contribute to policy implementation, specifically on, capacity building of local structures for sustainable management of rural water supply systems using the case study of Lesotho as one other Southern African country. The research study adopted in-depth interviews, focus group discussion and beneficiary assessment research study methods to enhance reliability, validity, accuracy and confidence in the findings in the sense that it also used relevant multiple research methods. That is in collecting data the researcher used semi-structured interview guides, focus group discussions and beneficiary assessment methods as explained below:

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews at household level. A semi-structured interview guide was used to this effect. Bryman (2012:471) reports that in using this tool, the implication is that much interest is on the interviewee's point of view. This is because the interviewee has leeway in replying, thus shaping the content of the conversation (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:291). This data collection method is applauded for its flexibility since the interview is not based on rigid questions determined prior to the interview. Instead, open-ended questions enable the respondents to pick up issues that are not included in the guide (Bryman, 2012:471).Another advantage of this method is the high yield in response rate due to the language advantage. The researcher is able to explain questions in the interviewees' mother tongue. For this reason, this method of data collection elicits genuine information from respondents.

The study also had structured interview questions for the benefit of ease during data processing. Bryman (2012:211) maintains that since structured interviews use closed ended/fixed choice questions, facilitation into processing data is simple. Moreover, variability is reduced since the responses are recorded as they are from the interviewee. Babbie and Mouton (2001:233), concur that closed ended questions are not only easy to process but also provide uniformity of responses as well. Here the researcher asked questions and recorded responses under the themes that directly link with the study's objectives.

A focus group technique of interviewing entailed interviewing a group on a specific theme to be explored in-depth. The advantages of focus group discussion are that it facilitates group perceptions on a particular topic rather than focusing on individuals. The researcher extracts much data from many people all at once over a short period of time (Bryman, 2012:501). The embraced quantitative approach revealed how group participants viewed issues they are faced with, since the interviewer created an unstructured environment for discussion (see Bryman, 2012:501).

For this study, focus group discussions were conducted for the three Village Water Committees/VWCs and each emanated from the selected communities under study. These groups consisted of 7-9 members made up of the village Chief and the community councillor as ex-officio members. Other members are the chairperson, deputy chairperson, treasurer, secretary, deputy secretary and advisory members, known in Sesotho as 'litho baeletsi' (advisory-members). These were interviewed to get their perspectives and

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understanding on ownership and management in rural water supply systems/RWSSs for sustainable management and maintenance of water supply systems.

## II. The Contribution of Lesotho's Communities Towards Capital and Management Costs and the Influence of Financial Contributions on Perceptions of Rwss Ownership

This section reflects on findings pertaining to issues around communities' contribution towards capital and management costs and the extent to which financial contributions by the community have influenced perceptions of ownership.

In Masapong, 30% of the respondents reported lack of ability to pay for management costs because these are trying times where most people are jobless. Some 70% reported that there is ability to pay based from the sale of produce from fields and income earned from community self-help projects. This boosts their ability to pay. Furthermore, this filters into the notion of contributing towards capital costs where the respondents mentioned that they were able to collect among themselves, some funds upon which they were subsidized for construction.

Upon the issue of how far the contribution towards capital costs contributed to ownership of the RWSS, 1% said they do not know because they are still young to comprehend some of the issues around water supply. Some 99% upheld that contribution towards construction has instilled a great sense of ownership and traces of this are visible in the courage around the development of the by-laws and their enforcement and the commitment from those responsible for performing maintenance function. However, the community does not have a maintenance fund to which they contribute.

At Masapong, 41.7% articulated that they do not have the ability to pay for management costs due to many hardships they have in life. They however followed this up by reporting that, in the case where they really need to make a contribution they will do all they can to get the money since they still have hope that one day this life they have led for over 2 decades without safe and clean water will come to an end. The 58.3% highlighted that there is ability to pay for management costs, unfortunately there is no functioning water supply system to work with. This also follows that this community does not have a maintenance fund.

The Machache community upheld that due to the various income generating activities that households embark on such as commercial farming and employment in towns, they have the ability to pay for management costs. Having contributed towards capital costs also, there is a collective sense of ownership towards sustainability of their water supply system. However, there is no concrete maintenance fund. The chief assured the researcher that efforts would be made to resuscitate this fund as they do realize its importance towards sustainable operation and maintenance/O&M.

## III. Perceptions of Rural Communities on Ownership and Management of Rural Water Supply Systems (Rwsss) in Lesotho

Figure 1 below, illustrates perceptions on issues of ownership and management of rural water supply systems/RWSSs in the three sampled villages. Issues explored include knowledge on who owns the RWSS, who do respondents ideally believe should own the water system and who should be bestowed with the task of managing the water system.When asked who owns the system after construction was completed, 9.8% upheld the chief, 2.4% of the respondents said the village water committee/VWC; the community council was mentioned by 14.6% of the respondents while no respondents mentioned the government. Most respondents maintained that people were said to be owners of the system as based on the field interviews ofNovember 2014 here below.



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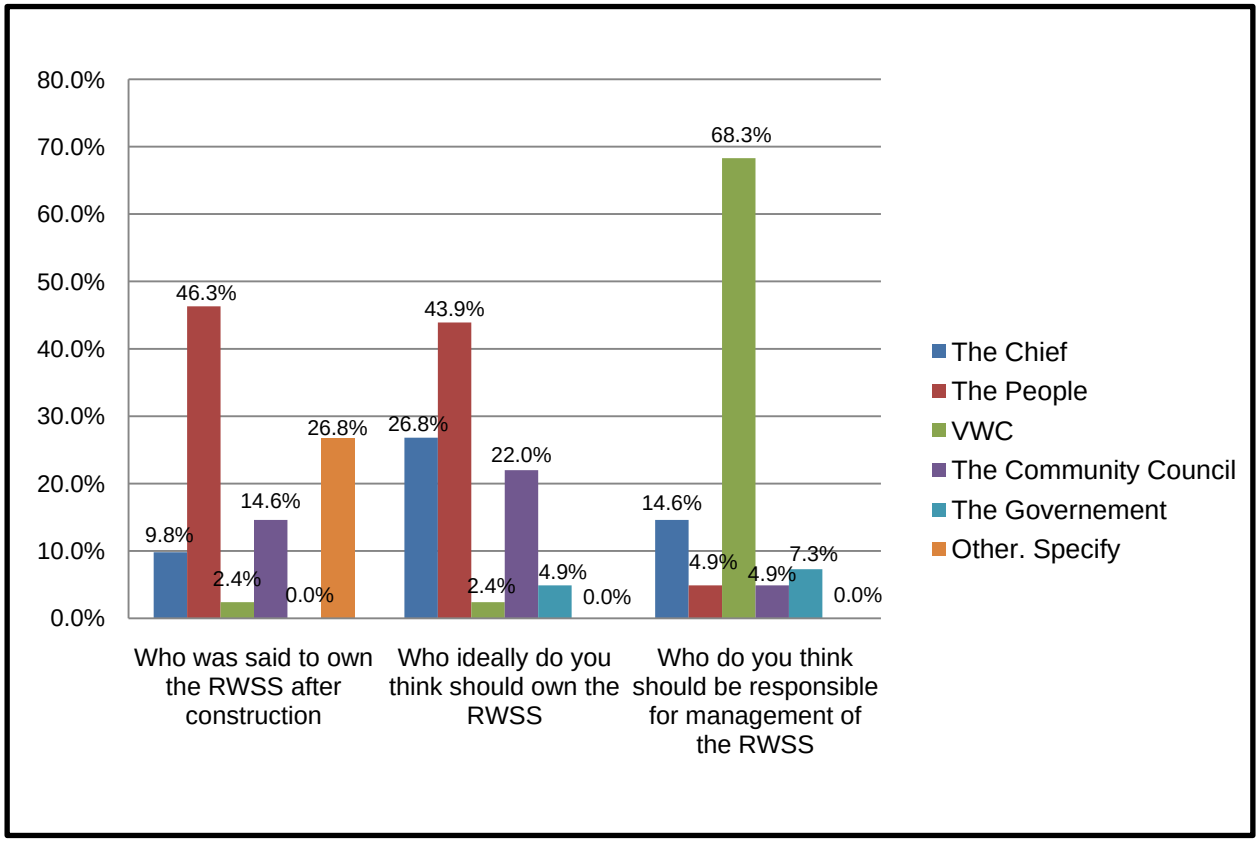



*Figure 1:* Perceptions on Ownership and Management of RWS

Those who specified other options mentioned that they do not know to whom it belonged, and others, especially in Mahlabathengrecall that it was said to be owned by the asparagus farmers.

Perceptions on who ideally should own the RWSSs were less on the VWC and the government; these were represented by 2.4% and 4.9% respectively. Those who perceive the community council to be the rightful owner of the systems said lawfully, these institutions have been hailed as owners of all development initiatives in their jurisdiction. The community council has a mandate to be in contact with the central government pertaining to issues of development, as it is the one that mobilized relevant agencies and facilitated construction of the water supply system. These make up 22.0% of the respondents.

Some 26.8% said that ideally the chief should be the owner of the water supply system because he is the authority in the village responsible for maintaining law and order, as well as the protector of all developments in the village. Others argued that the chief lives very close to the system and hence it could be easy for him to exercise authority conveniently. Respondents that make up 43.9% hailed the people as a group that ideally should own the water supply system. This was supported by reasons including that people are the primary whistle-blowers on any issue that needs attention on the system. By virtue of being users of the system, they are supposed to take responsibility upon maintenance; the system has been constructed among them and for them; care taking of the system rests on them; when there is breakdown, they are the key group that is affected and that suffers the most.

Perceptions on management of water supply system mainly leaned towards the VWC as shown by a representation of 68.3% in figure 1. Reasons for this are that this group has been elected solely to perform the management function of water systems, they have been given capacity by DRWS on management and maintenance; they conveniently live close to the infrastructure; there is trust in the committee to execute their mandate and they facilitate enforcement of by-laws. Some 14.6% reported the chief as the one responsible for management because he is the authority in the village; he is responsible for protection of the system against damage; the chief is the one whom all who enter the village have to report to first; at all times s/he is always with the people and their developments. The 7.3% who mentioned the government said it is because they are the ones who give funds for construction and they are at the apex of all development issues.

To further investigate the perceptions on ownership and management of RWS, respondents were asked to give details on first steps the community takes when the tap is broken. This information is useful to the researcher since it illuminates on the understanding of



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who is responsible for the management of RWSSs. It also sheds light upon a sense of ownership for minor repairs by the community. Table 1 below outlines the responses.

*Table 1 :* First Steps Taken by the Community When the Tap does not Work.

| Characteristic | Variable | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| First step taken when the tap does not work | Report to the committee | 28 | 68.3 |
| | Report to the DRWS district office | 0 | 0 |
| | Repair the tap ourselves | 3 | 7.3 |
| | Leave it until it is completely damaged | 0 | 0 |
| | Other. Specify | 10 | 24.4 |
| Total | | 41 | 100 |

*Field interviews, November, 2014*.

As reflected in table 1 above, 7.3% mentioned that they repair the tap themselves. This came out especially in Masapong in the area where they suffer lack of water in the dry season. The 24.4% specified that they follow hierarchy, therefore they first report to the chief who then, by authority, alerts the committee. Up to 68.3% mentioned their first step as reporting to the committee.

## IV. Summary: Recommendary Views

Respondents reported that having trained committees and water minders would enhance better performance in measures for sustainable management. About the effective supervision of VWCs and monitoring of water supply Assets: The researcher recommends that in line with the Lesotho national decentralization policy, there should be a position within DRWS fully devolved to community councils to work as a technical advisory arm for local authorities and community organizations. Such a position could play a supervisory and monitoring role to ensure adherence to standards and prerequisites for sustainable management of RWSSs.

With regard to consideration of social factors inRWSSs management at local level, theresearcher recommends that the following social aspects be regarded if RWS infrastructure is to be sustainably managed at local level:

- Public awareness raising campaigns need to be undertaken to promote knowledge of the population on their contribution towards sustainable management of water supply facilities. Such campaigns will also level the ground for common perceptions and understanding on all issues within a decentralized RWS management system.
- The researcher recommends improving participation of local authorities, as gateways for development initiatives in their jurisdictions, in processes that lead to selection of maintenance contractors so that, they may own the process fully.
- Consideration of all groups in the community in pre and post construction phases to have well informed decisions is paramount.

Furthermore, a summary of recommendations deemed to be factors that could salvage the sustainability gaps in Lesotho's RWS sector are sketched in Figure 2 below. The diagram reflects on how sharing of responsibilities among multiple actors may contribute towards sustainable management of RWS facilities in Lesotho.

As depicted in figure 2 below, there needs to be clear lines of responsibility for all stakeholders in RWS. The community as the ultimate owners of the water supply infrastructure needs to be mobilized towards understanding of policies and strategies that guide management of these.



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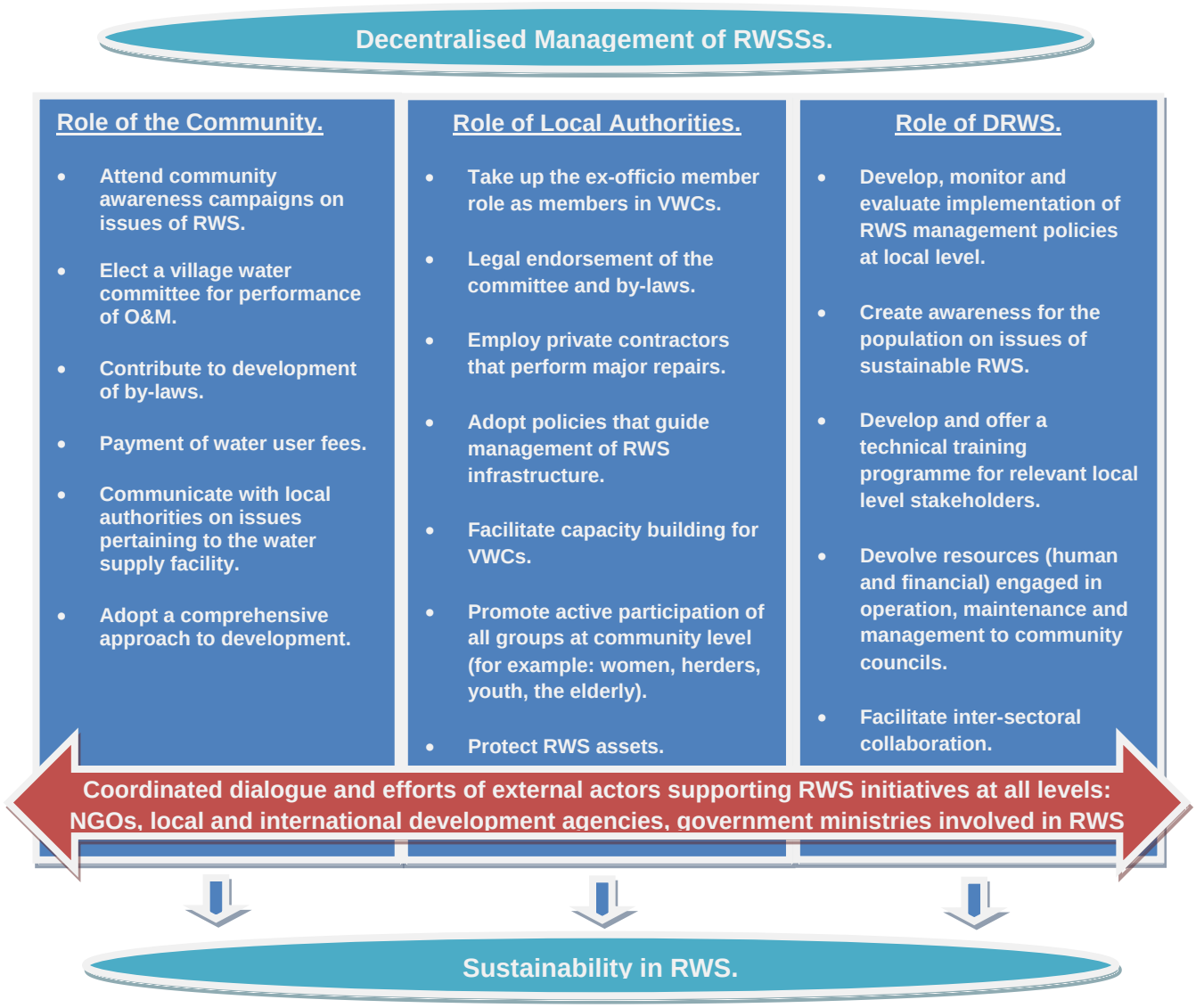



*Figure 2 :* Recommended Factors for Sustainable RWSSs Management in Lesotho.

*Field Interviews, November, 2014.*

Assets, local authorities also need to attain confidence in taking up the leadership role in development initiatives. The RWS agency needs to also introspect so that internal gaps in the implementation of policies are identified; for example, develop a programme for disseminating standard information on prerequisites for sustainable RWS. External actors whose initiatives influence the RWS sector need to be anchored in the project cycle to avoid having parallel structures and efforts in RWS.

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