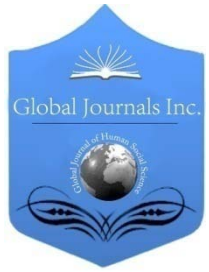
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Perceptions of Lesotho's Rural Communities on their Contribution Towards Sustainable Rural Water Supply Systems

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Abstract- This is a research study examining the perceptions of Lesotho's rural communities on their contribution towards sustainable rural water supply/RWSsystems. It is a Beneficiary Assessment Approach study and observatory study. In an effort to improve the quality of results that development interventions exhibit, development practitioners engage in beneficiary assessment. The approach gives researchers information that assists in assessing the value on an activity as perceived by its prime users (Salmen, 1995:1). Kumasarisi (2009:2) submits that beneficiary assessment enhances the sustainability of demand-driven development interventions; therefore, it is useful in pointing out bottlenecks to participation faced by target groups. It also uncovers reactions and views that beneficiaries have on the implemented interventions as well as opening up new information that would otherwise not be known.

Keywords: 1. lesotho, 2. rural communities, 3. sustainable rural water supply systems, 4. beneficiary assessment approach study, 5. sustainability.

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Figure 1 : Map Indicating the Location of Lesotho in Southern Africa

Source: Department of Lands Survey and Physical Planning, Lesotho, 2015.

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I. Introductory Background

This study aims at establishing how Lesotho rural communities perceive the significance of their active participation in a decentralized system of managing rural water supply/RWS systems or sources towards sustainable water supply. The study discusses some aspects of sustainability in rural water supply and the perceptions of rural communities on their contribution towards sustainable rural water supply systems within the context of Lesotho. Assessing communities' perspectives focuses on the role that communities play in the management of the water supply systems, also indirectly the negative impacts that social exclusion may have on development initiatives, specifically on rural water supply, and prospects for sustainable custodianship of decentralized functions. Social exclusion refers to the segregation of other groups of society, especially the poor, in areas where they could meaningfully participate and access opportunities. This study regards exclusion as a process that deprives individuals and families, groups and neighbour hoods of the resources required for participation in the social, economic and political activity of society as a whole. This process is primarily a consequence of poverty and low income but other factors such as discrimination, low educational attainment and depleted living environment also underpin it. Through this process, people are cut off for a significant period of their lives from institutions and services, social networks and developmental opportunities that the great majority of society enjoys.

The research study adopts a beneficiary assessment and observatory approach. Salmen (1995:1) mentions that the key assumption of beneficiary assessment is that "the people for whom development is intended, the beneficiaries, too often lack a voice loud enough to be heard by the managers of development activities". Beneficiary assessment has three main techniques: direct observation in which information is gathered by noting noticeable facets of the status quo in development. The potential to quantify the observed phenomena is major and immediate (Salmen, 1995:7 and Kumasarisi, 2009:2). Conversational interview is another technique, where researchers use a well-guided conversation revealing feelings, thoughts and beliefs that beneficiaries bestow upon a particular issue (Kumasarisi, 2009:2).Observation further involves the researcher building rapport with the target group by residing with them for a short period to gain a picture of the representation of their living conditions. There is use of case studies of households in collecting such information (Salmen, 1995:9 and Kumasarisi, 2009:2).

II. Some Aspects of Sustainability in Rural Water Supply

Sustainability in the RWScontext has been defined as "the maintenance of an acceptable level of services throughout the design life of the water supply system (Sara and Katz, 1998: 30)". Sustainability in RWSalso refers to maintenance of water supply facilities such that they remain in a condition that guarantees a reliability and adequacy of potable water supply. Further, benefits of water supply continue to be realised over a prolonged period of time (Musonda, 2004:36).

Hope and Lekorwe (1999:838) coined it as the ability for current generations to efficiently utilize resources available to them, mainstreaming within their efforts the view that future generations ought to similarly meet their needs from those very resources. Camagni, et al (1998:105), further claim that the middle ground reached by different scholars in unpacking the concept of sustainability sheds light to the fact that it is a whole encompassing notion that covers aspects of the environment, economy and society. For this reason, on the social plane (especially looking at rural water supply) Peltz (2008:22) maintains "the idea that communities should be actively involved in the provision of water supply has become widely recognized as critical to the long-term sustainability of any water supply system". Against these, this research aligns itself with Musonda (2004:11), corroborating that sustainability in RWS pertains to the maintenance of water supply systems such that reliable and adequate domestic water supply is served for a prolonged period of time. Indicators for sustainability include the following aspects as also found in the Ha-Ntsi, Nazaretha and Ha-Makotoko rural communities in Maseru district:

- **Reliability:** Due to the little or no supply of water in the dry seasons, water committees decided to conclude that efforts towards achieving the standard of 30 litres per capita per day are futile. The water committees carry out precautionary inspections every two weeks. Action for repairing minor breakdowns sometimes delays for weeks or months due to failure by other community members to contribute on time, financially. Contributions from community members buy spare parts from town but some community members voluntarily provide them. Capacity for minor repairs is minimal due to lack of formal training of the water minders.
- **Human Capacity:** Committees could not assess the human capacity of the department of rural water supply/DRWS at national and district levels based on the explanation that they have not been in contact with them at any point in time.
- **Local Institutional Capacity:** There only are the water committees and the community councils involved in the management of the water supplying facilities

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(covered springs, boreholes and limited faucets). There are no autonomous entities collaborating with the communities in terms of RWS.

- Operation and maintenance: "The communities contribute money for maintenance and there is willingness to make such contributions, it just so happens that other households do not have funds at the time of need to contribute, hence delays in repairs for maintenance (Field interviews, October 2014)".

On the human capacity indicator, respondents in Nazaretha and Ha-Makotoko maintained that they could not assess the capacity of personnel of the DRWS due to lack of contact between communities and such a personnel. All three rural villages maintained that monitoring for functionality of water supply facilities by the DRWS is not carried out.

In all the three villages, atleast a water committee, chieftaincy and local government authorities have been reported as existing local institutions. Nazaretha and Ha-Ntsi residents contribute labour, tools and money for operation and maintenance. There is also willingness, across the board, to make these contributions. Ha-Makotokohas willingness to make any form of contributions that will emancipate them from their lack of access to safe and clean water.

All the three villages do not have NGOs that they link with on issues of RWS.All respondents are unaware of inter-sectoral collaboration at national level. There, however is a recommendation from the respondents for promotion of dialogue between and among all institutions that are involved in RWS.

III. Perceptions of Rural Communities on Their Contribution Towards Sustainable Rural Water Supplys Systems

Below are general views on the extent to which the respondents feel that the water supply infrastructure is in the hands of the community, collective contributions in pre and post-construction phases as well as perceptions on the idea of co-financing for construction.

On the extent to which the RWS system lies in the hands of the community, 20% of the respondents in Nazaretha reported that by virtue of having a Village Water and Health Committee/VWHC democratically elected by the community to run day-to-day operation and maintenance of the infrastructure; that is enough evidence for ownership. Another 20% of respondents maintained that the responsibility for minor repairs as a community meant the water supply system is in their hands. Some 60% uphold that as a community they feel responsible for the management of their RWS system because they provided resources during construction and perform the responsibility ofwhistle blowing whenever there is a problem with the system. They also contribute resources from their homes (if available) whenever there is need for minor repairs. Some 70% of the respondents reported that nothing is done on the issue of investing in building the community's capacity to better perform operation and maintenance for sustainability.

In pre-construction phases, 70% of the respondents recall that they contributed labour, where they dug trenches for pipes and collected stones for the construction of tanks. There also was co-financing for construction between the community and the government. Some 20% said they were very young during construction, hence could not recall the form of involvement of the community, however in post-construction they are involved in making financial contributions for maintenance.

In explaining their views on the notion of making financial contribution towards construction all respondents uphold that it is important for the community to contribute because it builds a sense of responsibility and ownership of the water supply investment. Another issue that came out very strongly was that there is willingness to make such contributions across the board because people yearn for safe and clean water.

Respondents in Ha-Makotoko collectively report that because there is no efficiently functioning water supply system in their community, there is no facility to make reference to on issues of capacity building for operation and maintenance and sustainability. In essence, therefore, there is little or no action in the area of water supply in this village.

In the pre-construction and post-construction phases of the existing, but non-functioning, infrastructure that was constructed, respondents are adamant that no form of community involvement was done. Some 16.6% of respondents have forgotten what happened because construction took place a very long time ago. Respondents constituting 66.6% however, maintain that they provided both labour and money.

All respondents agree that communities should make financial contributions towards construction of the water supply infrastructure for their villages. They claim that it is only just to do this since people are the ones with the need for water, therefore should do something to solve their problems instead of waiting helplessly for the government. Furthermore, it is claimed that such contribution intensifies a sense of ownership for sustainable management. There is also a high sense of willingness to contribute; more so because this village has been without water for over two decades and are willing to go at lengths to get safe and clean water.

Ha-Ntsi villagers are very satisfied with the service they get from the water supply infrastructure. For this reason, they feel that the system belongs to them

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since they undertake management activities contained in the by-laws. These include communal cleaning of tanks and surrounding areas, attendance of public gatherings on issues related to the water supply system, enforcement of the law upon defaulters and collective action on inhibiting any acts that may impose damage on the infrastructure. Part of the reason for so much energy and ownership of this investment lies in the fact that in the pre-construction phase the community contributed to co-financing. In post-construction phase, they continue to contribute not only labour, but also money for conducting minor repairs. Moreover, the committee and the chief are very dedicated to investing in building the community's capacity in operation and maintenance by having monthly public gatherings to share reports and carry out sensitizations to promote equitable access and knowledge on all issues pertaining to water supply.

In addition, all respondents exhibited a lot of support on the idea of co-financing between government and the community for construction. The impression was that this concept builds a sense of responsibility for protection of development initiatives among the community. It further promotes the zeal to know more about sustainable management of these assets.

The overall perception of who owns the water supplying facility is that it is for the people. This is demonstrated by the effort the community takes when making contributions advised to make towards construction of new promised systems. Democratically elected rural water committees collect funds from the households.

Respondents acknowledge the importance for their human resource and financial contributions in pre and post construction phases as a way of promoting ownership. Generally, perceptions on ideal ownership and management of water supply systems are centered on local structures. Respondents mentioned the chief, the committee and community council as options ideal for sustainable management of water supply systems. However, responses vary so much that there is no one clear local structure agreed upon as responsible for the management function. There was community satisfaction on the involvement in the election of a community organization (village water committee/VWC) responsible for day-to-day management of the water facility. The research found that in some communities, people played a key role in determining the need for a water supply system. Some respondents uphold that their needs are not represented in the rural water projects cycle; some revealed that the chief is the one that represents them but others did not know whether they were represented.

IV. Summary

Community participation in the RWSproject cycle is perceived as important. Evidence for these perceptions is gathered from firm support by respondents for the importance of co-financing for construction, contributing water user fees, their appreciation for involvement in pre-construction and during construction and being afforded the liberty to elect the water committees. However, while communities deem their participation as essential, findings reveal that there is still more that still needs to be done in involving communities in the rural water project cycle. This is due to confirmation by data that participation in some areas was passively limited to providing labour and money for construction. There is need to expand community participation to other realms such as selection of contractors for major repairs and building capacity on all underlying issues for rural water supply. These will culminate in communities that are better prepared to take over the responsibility of sustainable management of the water supply infrastructure.

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