GIVING THE MOST VULNERABLE ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT: THE TALE OF THREE AFRICAN COMMUNITIES
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Abstract

African cities are growing in alarming rate that goes with expansion of slums, informal settlements and peri-urban areas. Communities living in these sections of the urban centres lack access to basic services like water and sanitation. Several community based water and sanitation projects have been implemented through the assistance of Local Governments, Non-Government Organizations and International donors. However, while there are many community water and sanitation projects that are going well, there are also many others that are in a state of collapse. The collapse of community based projects can be attributed to lack of proper involvement and empowerment of the beneficiaries. Mainly community projects are supply driven instead of being demand driven.

One of the thematic areas of the Water for African Cities’ programme of UN-Habitat is “pro-poor water and sanitation governance”. The programme has given due consideration to community participation and empowerment in planning, implementing and operating community based projects in the participating cities of Africa. The approach has helped the communities to effectively participate from the inception, manage the implementation process of the projects and also operating successfully after completion and handover of the facilities to the beneficiaries.

Therefore, the approach of community participation and empowerment particularly in the slums and peri-urban areas of Africa should consider formation of appropriate community structures (lessons from Kibera of Nairobi), establishments of the necessary by-laws (lessons from Sabon Zongo of Accra) and attitudinal change of poor community members as to their right of getting basic services (lessons from Dehoc of Harar).
1. Introduction

Apart from being basic necessity, safe water and improved sanitation are fundamental inputs for development. In UNICEF report on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (www.unicef.org/wash/) it is stated that “without WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene), sustainable development is impossible”. Safe water and sanitation are fundamental to human development. When people are deprived in these areas, they face diminished opportunities to realize their potential as human beings. Unsafe water and inadequate sanitation are twin deficits of the great drivers of world poverty and inequality. They claim millions of lives, destroy livelihoods, compromise dignity and diminish prospects for economic growth. While globally recognized that access to water for life and to decent sanitation are basic human needs and fundamental human rights, still billion of people are denied the right to clean water and lack access to adequate sanitation.

The inadequate provision of water and sanitation services is further exacerbated by the rapid increase of population. Under such situations the most victims are the urban poor who are facing an increasing health burden from water related diseases, resulting from unsafe water, inadequate sanitation and hygiene. In addition to higher health burdens, the urban poor often pay much more for inferior water and sanitation services than their wealthier neighbours. Therefore, if we wish to attain the MDGs for sanitation and water, we need to focus strongly on community groups. This requires integrating water and sanitation into all Community Development programmes of African Countries.

In the modern world of today community participation is taken as the democratic right of people. The community members need to have a say in all activities that either positively or negatively affect their lives. They have the right to participate in identifying their needs, in planning how to use resources, in implementing project activities, and in taking responsibility of operating and managing the facilities. This is what we mean participation of community in all aspects of the community projects.

However, there are many instances where the role of communities in community based projects is limited to labour or material contribution during project implementation stage. In some cases community representatives and people from local authorities are invited in the name of the communities to participate in making decisions. Others like NGOs take the lead role in the process of identification of the needs of the community and then implementation of the development ventures.

There are also many cases where the interests of women and children are not taken in to account during design of projects. The needs of women and children differ from that of adult men in terms the way water and sanitation facilities are designed. In developing countries the role of women in the management and operation of water supply facilities is very significant. Projects that are designed without taking in to consideration the ideas of women may not effective in delivering the envisaged benefits. Therefore, there is need to maintain gender balance and the role of community members in all matters of decision making should be ensured. “Community Participation is a process by which people are enabled to become actively and genuinely involved in defining the issues of concern to them, in making decisions about factors that affect their lives, in formulating
and implementing policies, in planning, developing and delivering services and in taking actions to achieve change" (WHO, 2002).

The idea of community participation is linked with empowering the communities in terms of the ownership and operation and management of the facilities. Community empowerment should not be taken as an exercise of formation of community committees that take the responsibility of management and operation of the facilities. Community empowerment is a wide concept that encompasses not only getting, operating and managing basic services but also the right of getting better services with better prices. “Empowerment is not a single event but a process through which a person or a group can gain a sense of control and influence. The challenge about getting to grips with empowerment is that it involves complex issues of understanding and actions, which go right to the heart of the interaction between the citizen and the state. Empowerment represents different things to different people and therefore is open to questions, debate and disagreements. In other words, it is a contested topic in which an easy simple definition does not exist” (Lishman, 2007)

“Empowerment is a continual process whereby individuals and/or communities gain the confidence, self-esteem, understanding and power necessary to articulate their concern, ensure that action is taken to address them and, more broadly, gain control over their lives.”(WHO, 2002)

2. **UN-Habitat Mandate and Water for Cities Programme**

UN-Habitat is mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all. Availing and providing basic services like water and sanitation is one of the necessary conditions for promoting sustainable cities and towns. Therefore, the water supply and sanitation programme, which is being implemented under the Water for African Cities programme is relevant to the mandate of the organization from the perspective of creating favourable conditions that will lead to sustainable cities and towns.

The Water for Cities Programmes demonstrate several ways for tackling the multi-dimensions of environmental sanitation and help to break the cycle of disease and reduce peoples’ exposure to disease. The measures include: i) provision of water and washing facilities for personal and domestic hygiene; ii) alternative means for hygienic management of human excreta, refuse, and wastewater; iii) water, sanitation and hygiene behaviour change related activities, iv) improving access to water through rainwater harvesting, and v) introduction of participatory processes that have addressed the issues of sustainability of the infrastructure. The involvement of women and children has further improved overall capacities and empowered communities.

In doing this, the Water for Cities Programmes have introduced/ implemented sanitation and water interventions in response to the different challenges. The focus has been on
community managed water supply and sanitation services in locations where piped infrastructure cannot be extended or managed easily.

The Pro-poor governance and follow-up investment component of the Water for Cities programme is to support change in governance, so that low income people are given a voice in collective decision-making that leads to improved access to good quality drinking water and basic sanitation. The approach is to directly influence policy, legal and institutional instruments, and indirectly stimulate follow-up investment in water and basic sanitation to benefit those without access through community mobilization, participation and empowerment.

3. **WAC II PROGRAMME: THE TALE OF THREE COMMUNITIES**

**Case 1: Ethiopia- Harar “Dehoch” Community Based Water Supply and Sanitation Project**

The “Dehoch” Community is found in Harar city of Ethiopia. The community, including the neighbourhood, has an estimated population of 10,000. It is one of the oldest slum settlements located in the inner part of the city.

The condition of housing and the level of basic services show the real picture of the poverty level of the community. More than 85 household members are living in an old and debilitated building in which the hall is divided by plastic compartments and each compartment has a size of not more than 12m². Each compartment belongs to one family member consisting of up to 10 persons sharing the limited space and even sleeping during the night on shift basis. The community members had neither potable water supply nor adequate sanitation services. The baseline survey revealed that 98% of the community members were using unprotected water source (spring, surface water, wells etc…). It terms of sanitation 73% and 23% of the members were using communal latrines open defection respectively. Of the 73% that were using communal latrines about 97% reported that the latrine smell was offensive, which showed the poor quality standard of the communal latrine. Under such circumstances the most victims were women and girls that constituted about 52% of the total community population during the baseline survey.

Recognising the poverty level and the appalling water supply and sanitation situation, then the Water for African Cities Phase II programme of UN-Habitat selected this community as target for intervention. The project entitled “Small Scale Community Based Water and Sanitation” was initiated in 2005. The project identified the 85 households living in the debilitated building as direct beneficiaries and the neighbourhoods with an estimated 10,000 people as indirect beneficiaries. The main components of the project included Water Supply, Public Sanitation and Awareness and Capacity Building.
The empowerment process of the “Dehoch” community of Harar started with advocacy and awareness raising activities. The initial task was to bring a profound change in the perception and attitude of the community members on poverty. This started with the change of the name from ‘Dehoch’ (which means poor in local language) to ‘Gra-Ule’. Changing the name was necessary from the standpoint of uplifting the moral of the people. The community members were the one who decided to be called ‘Gra-Ule’. This was followed by the establishment of a legal small scale service provider association known as “Gara-Ule WatSan Association”.

The WAC II programme has also carried out an advocacy task to convince the local authorities to recognize the rights of the people and to provide support for the project. The outcome was positive. The local administration and Harar city municipality had shown full collaboration and provided support to the poor community. This was reflected through availing land free of charge for the construction of water supply and sanitation facilities as well as assigning labour force to carry out the survey and provide technical support.

The community members were voluntarily mobilized and contributed labour for the construction works of water and sanitation facilities. As shown in the picture community members were participated in the excavation of trenches for laying of water supply pipe lines.

The Water supply component of ‘Dehoch’ Community of the project included the construction of public water point. The public water points, apart from being source of potable water for the poor community, have been used as a means of generating income through selling water to the neighbourhoods.

The sanitation component of the project included the supply of waste-bins and the construction of public toilets with shower services. The completed toilet facilities include two building blocks with shower rooms (one for women and one for men), rainwater
storage tanks. These storage tanks have been designed to serve as a reservoir of water from the network (which is being supplied on rationing system). The toilet and shower rooms are delivering services for the users on use and pay system. The service charges are decided by the community members and there are different charges for members and non-members of the association.

![Image](image1.jpg)

*Fig 2: All community members including disabled people were part of the community participation process*

From the income generated through providing water and sanitation services the community members have reinvested part of the saving to construct additional shower rooms in order to address the growing demand for the service.

The intervention has changed the attitude of the poor people of the community. This attitudinal change is particularly reflected with the sentiment being self-reliant instead of dependence on others including donors.

The inauguration event got a wide coverage of the media and was broadcasted through TV and Radio. The top officials including Member of Parliaments of the regional government made a visit of the facilities and were impressed by the achievements. In due course of the visit the Harari Housing Development Agency promised to the community members to improve the housing conditions through providing construction materials.

Above all the intervention has inspired the poor community members to realize their right of getting basic services and have started to raise their voice collectively, a big lesson taken from this project.
Case 2: Kenya-Nairobi Kibera Integrated Water, Sanitation and Waste management Project

Kibera is the largest informal settlement in Nairobi. Poverty in Kibera informal settlement is manifested in many forms, which include not only the lack of subsistence income, but also lack of access to economic opportunities; housing, land; education; health services; water and sanitation services; safe and unpolluted environment.

The aim of Kibera Integrated Water, Sanitation and Waste Management Project was to contribute towards improving the livelihoods of the urban poor in Soweto East, by supporting small-scale community based initiatives in water, sanitation and waste management.

The integrated nature of the project is reflected by the main components of the project activities. In addition to the sanitation facilities road and drainage works, offices and a resource centre are included.

The Community Mobilization & Participation process started at early stage of the project through involvement of communities in project design and preparation. This facilitated in joint decision making and was critical in determining post project sustainability of any interventions. Flexible and incremental approach to community driven development has been achieved through shared/joint decision making processes and resource management, which in turn leads to community ownership of project/program deliverables, creation of local knowledge, better cost recovery and ultimately improved operation and maintenance.

The Awareness Creation process helped every user and resident understand the anticipated positive results and impact of the project on their heath and livelihood, and the expected experience to be generated. The sessions have been conducted in various parts of Soweto East and were preceded by well-publicized communal clean-ups.

The Community Appraisal system adopted is a modified rapid PRA process used to draw a Community Resource Map and a Community Action Plan. The map provided base-line data on existing social infrastructure, road/paths, communal water points, drains, water reticulation as well on the location of households, available latrines and other hygiene indicators such as dish racks. It also used to identify the boundaries of the facility users, population (segregated), community resources, disadvantaged households, wealth ranking, livelihood situation, gender issues, women-headed households, local institutions, HIV/AIDS situation, conflict resolution mechanisms and existing water service level and sanitation service level.

The beneficiaries, with the assistance of the consultant, drew respective problem tree of the main water and environmental sanitation problems (Problem Analysis). This was

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1 The sources of information are various quarterly progress reports of Maji na Ufanisi (Water & Development), KIBERA INTEGRATED WATER, SANITATION & WASTE MANAGEMENT PROJECT; Theta Lane, Off Lenana Road, Hurlingham; P. O. Box 58684 – 00200 Nairobi, Kenya
followed by making a Community Action Plan (“CAP”) for the interventions, with elaborate resource requirements and timeframe. At this stage, the facility users also drew a Community Plan, which is a model of how they would like their community to look like.

The community participation and empowerment was ensured through the formation of various committees with defined duties and responsibilities as shown in the following Box.

| Settlement Executive Committee (SEC): overall coordination and management of the implementation process  
| Facility Management Committee (FMC): overseeing the day-to-day management and operation of the sanitation facilities  
| Road Reallocation Committee (RRC): facilitate and follow up the relocation of those on the road reserved  
| Project Management Committee (PMC): oversee management of all the facilities, including the road, drains and solid waste management facilities. |

The community played key roles that include:

- **Labour contribution.** Skilled and unskilled labour has been drawn from the community with the help of SEC. Maji Na Ufanisi’s technical department will supervise the work.

- **Space acquisition.** A key challenge in Kibera like in all other settlements is land unavailability and lack of space for way leaves. It has been clear from the onset that the best approach is to have SEC negotiate for space amongst the community members. SEC therefore led in identification of spaces and leeway and acquisition with minimal displacement.

Verification, Planning & Programming was spearheaded by SEC and was carried out in a participatory process geared towards formation and/or strengthening of project implementation structures.

Community mobilization, although a gruelling process, has been instrumental in the smooth running of operations in Soweto East. A lot of time was spent in mobilizing and informing residents about their roles in the project, before actual implementation begun. This is not a one-off activity as had been envisaged but a continuous process throughout the project cycle. As such when budgeting for future projects, this should be put into consideration.
The Soweto Community has been empowered on problem identification and prioritization, community resources identification and utilization and gender issues. The impact of this project is not dependent only on the completion of its physical infrastructure but also on capacity building programmes. The impact of K-Watsan is already being felt not only monetarily, but socially in terms of behaviour and attitude change. The demand is already being felt from neighbouring villages.

Fig. 4 Road opening in Soweto East slums has facilitated proper WATSAN service provision and also movement of people including school children.
The important lesson derived from this project is that a good community organization structure is a major boost to successful community project implementation, especially when it puts community members at the core. Such a structure gives mandate and legitimacy to a group to represent residents. In this project the SEC, Road relocation and WATSAN committees have been very instrumental in joint planning, space identification, monitoring of community participation and supporting the Implementing Partner in averting internal and external threats to this project.

**Case 3: Ghana – Accra Sabon Zongo Community**

Located in the Greater Accra Region, Sabon Zongo is basically a slum settlement with most of its residents falling within the low income bracket of urban society. In 1984, the population of the area was 16478. Sixteen (16) years later in 2000 it moved up to 18616. The estimated growth rate between 1984 and 2000 is 0.8%. Using 0.8% growth rate, the population in 2007 was about 1963.

The WAC II project of UN-Habitat has the overall aim of improving health and productivity by increasing access to good drinking water and proper sanitation facilities on a sustainable basis. The project has seven components and this report deals with two of them, i.e. pro-poor governance for water supply and sanitation services with gender mainstreaming; and increasing access to sanitation facilities.

The project design entrusted responsibility for the management of the facilities to be provided to a project creation christened “Sabon Zongo Community Development Committee (CDC)”, as a means of institutionalizing a Community Management Model in an Urban setting. Accordingly an eleven (11) member CDC was formed. This comprised of six (6) males and Five (5) females. The mandate of CDC was to engage the community in the planning, implementation and management of community interventions; and also serve as liaison between field operators and the Sub Metro Council.

Following the birth of the CDC, Terms of Reference designed to regulate the activities of the CDC prior to the promulgation of its constitution, was developed for the committee. This was followed by the preparation of a draft constitution through facilitating a series of discussions with CDC members with a view of seeking consensus on the tenets and contents of the document. The constitution, approved by the residents of Sabon Zongo was forwarded to Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) through the Ablekuma Central sub-metro for ratification.

As part of measures to create a sense of community management of the water facilities to be provided, a Facilities Management Plan for the CDC was prepared. Training

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2 The sources of information are End Project Reports of WaterAid Ghana on Component I: Pro Poor Water and Sanitation Governance & Component II: Increasing Access to Sanitation Facilities and Services
workshops were held for the CDC to equip them with basic management skills to enable them operate effectively.

A Social Infrastructure Audit was conducted in the Project Area to establish an effective institutional framework and appropriate financing mechanisms that rely on households’ and communities’ resources for improved neighbourhood services and facilities. In conducting the study a strong collaboration was established with professionals and residents of the Sabon Zongo community mainly to ensure that the survey results are politically, socially and culturally acceptable and representative. The broad stakeholder participation adopted undoubtedly enhanced project ownership and sustainability by the community.

The information generated from the survey evidently will serve as a useful baseline document for the Municipal Authority and other stakeholders who are committed to the socio economic development of the area. It was also found out from the infrastructure audit that the major need of the community is adequate drainage and should be urgently addressed to significantly improve their environmental sanitation conditions and reduce the potential of risks of unsanitary conditions associated with poor drainage.

An important principle of the Project is the involvement of the Sabon Zongo community in the selection of options for improving facilities. This has been followed as much as practicable in the development of all facility types to be provided.

4. **Challenges and Lessons Learned**

The greatest challenges facing implementation of projects in many of the slum settlements like Kibera/Kenya is space acquisition. The process is time consuming and can take several months to acquire land for construction of facilities. In Sabon Zongo/Accra land tenure issues were also one of the challenges that hindered the implementation of the project. Considering such challenges at the planning stage of the project is very crucial in order to avoid delays in the implementation phase of the projects.

Effective water and sanitation programmes must be demand driven and this implies that the capacity building of utilities must be complemented by programmes to empower communities and strengthen participatory approaches to utility management.

Development of infrastructure like water and sanitation for poor communities together with sensitization and awareness raising programmes is a means to motivate the local governments to divert their attentions to support the urban poor and as well will help the poor people to recognize their right of getting the services. This tells that unless supported by the software, building infrastructure alone cannot solve the problems of the urban poor.

From the practice of the “Dehoch” community project of Harar we have learnt that the first step should be to change the attitude of the most vulnerable people. Poor people are so desperate and they take for granted that poverty is the gift from God. They think that they born poor and they will continue to remain poor. It is difficult to convince such
kind of people that poverty is phenomenon that can be eradicated through their active participation and hard work.

It was recognized that without involving the local government achieving the goals of the project is difficult. It needs a systematic and wise approach to convince and motivate the local government to support the initiative. As an outsider we cannot claim that we are better than the government to address the issue of poverty in the country. Poverty is more politics than economics in the developing worlds. Therefore, consultation of the concerned bodies and getting clearance to go ahead with the programme is needed. Giving due recognition and respecting the regulations of the country as well as synchronizing with the country’s poverty reduction strategy is very helpful to gain the support of the local government.

It was also realized that the level of community participation is lined to the level of poverty. One cannot expect much contribution in terms of even idea from very destitute people. They need assistance at all levels. When we were asking the “Dehoch” community people about their interest of water and sanitation facilities they were confused and could not give us any idea. We were obliged to guide them and also take some decisions by our own. The community participation in terms of giving ideas and also contributing labour has gradually developed when the community members have started to realize the actuality of the project. Therefore, we can say that community participation has no common rule and steps to follow. It is rather flexible and depends on the situation and conditions of the community.

We can learn from the Kibera integrated project that a good community organization structure is a major boost to successful community project implementation, especially when it puts community members at the core. Such a structure gives mandate and legitimacy to a group to represent residents. In this project the SEC, Road relocation and WATSAN committees have been very instrumental in joint planning, space identification, monitoring of community participation and supporting the implementing partner in averting internal and external threats to this project.

The Kibera project further demonstrated the use and importance of organizing the youth within the community for the successful implementation of the project in slum settlements. Organized youth groups in Soweto East have been instrumental in peace talks and other water and sanitation related issues in the village as part of the advocacy component of the project. In addition, throughout the project cycle the importance of coordination and integrated planning with other departments made it possible to move as a team. This was the case with other government ministries other than Housing where KENSUP is housed. Other actors like the Kenya Power and Lighting Company found it easier to work within organized structures. Importantly government involvement in every aspect gave credence to the work; it also helped when enforcement of regulations was required.
5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The objective of this paper is not to claim that UN-Habitat’s community based project a new approach at all. It is something to improve on what has existed but failed to deliver results. It is something draw lessons from different approaches of community participation and empowerment of various countries and come out with best practices that can be replicated elsewhere.

The objective is also to emphasize on the need for community participation in the overall water and sanitation project management cycle. Reid, J. Norman (June 2000) said ‘Active community participation is key to building an empowered community. He also indicated studies that tell about communities with high rates of participation apply for—and receive—more funding than communities with less participation. In addition, participating communities achieve greater citizen satisfaction with their community.’ He summarized the ides by saying that “participation is the soul of an empowered community”.

Community participation is not something limited to some few activities like consultation of communities about the project. It should address all issues from project idea initiation to implementation and then to management and operation. Burns, Danny; et al (2004) regarding this fact has said “Community participation is not the same as consultation. Many organizations say that they have a community participation strategy when they mean that they have a consultation strategy. .. Community participation means that communities are playing an active part and have a significant degree of power and influence.”

It terms of the type of people to consider in the process of community participation, attention should be given to the poor and vulnerable groups including women, children and disabled people. In this line Plummer, Janelle (2000) indicated that 'it is essential that municipalities develop a more detailed understanding of the livelihoods of the poor, the characteristics of poverty and the needs perceived by the poor themselves. This will be informed by a greater knowledge of the dynamics and social relations within poor communities and households and the identification of factors that affect the capacity of men and women to participate. It is also essential that municipalities develop a more informed understanding of the objectives of participation, the potential of community participation (when participation can take place, in what forms, at what stage of the service delivery process) and what makes participation more sustainable.

We also need to take advantage of using the emerging and modern technology without violating the culture and level of development of our society. It is our recommendation that future researches focusing on the use of modern technology in community participation. For instance, there is a good practice of using mobile phones for sending text message to community members to call for a meeting or informing some alert situations like security issues. Therefore, this needs to be developed to cover large number of community members and encourage communities to widely use the technologies.
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