

From confrontation to cooperation

Daniel Schotanus and Binyam Yoseph, Ethiopia

NGOS ENTERED ETHIOPIA en masse after the world-wide publicity given to the 1983-84 famine. Most NGOs were active in food distribution programmes and the provision of other basic services, such as health, water and sanitation from a relief perspective.

Differences in ideologies meant that the humanitarian and religiously motivated NGOs often deliberately kept their distance from the government. They were generally not keen to be identified too closely by the international media and their own donors with the repressive policies of the government. As a result NGOs often faced harassment from the various government agencies involved in monitoring their activities.

While some left after the emergency, many NGOs stayed on and expanded their programmes to include rehabilitation and development projects.

Due to a generally improved political and economic climate in Ethiopia after a change of government in 1991, the number of indigenous NGOs in particular has increased rapidly. However, in spite of significant liberalizations, NGOs are reporting continued harassment by officials when government services are required or when local government officials demand NGO services.

Articles have started appearing periodically in government controlled newspapers denigrating the role of NGOs in Ethiopia (even to the point of comparing them to the Mafia, e.g. Ethiopian Herald, 7-4-96).

We do not necessarily want to suggest that all this stems from an official GoE policy to discredit all or a certain group of NGOs, but whatever the motivation of government to keep a tight reign on the NGOs, it is not sensible to dismiss the NGOs and their achievements out of hand. In light of the figures shown in Table 1, it should be realized that, while Ethiopia faces an uphill struggle in order to achieve the target of *safe water and sanitation for all*, over the past ten years the NGOs have played a key

role in the rural WatSan sector and are responsible for at least half to three quarters of the (rural) coverage figures.

NGO WatSan performance

A 1991 survey commissioned by UNICEF showed that 38 NGOs were involved in WatSan programming in the period 1986 -1990. Five were classified as local NGOs, the others all had their headquarters outside of Ethiopia. 50 per cent were Christian and 50 per cent secular organizations.

During 1986 -1990 NGOs reported spending over 115 million Ethiopian Birr (US\$55m) on the rural water sector with an estimated 3.5 million beneficiaries, making the NGOs the largest contributor to the rural water sector, while covering roughly one-third of the total sector expenditures (UNDP-WB, n.d.).

At the request of the Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA), a local umbrella organization, the authors carried out a follow-up survey of NGO WatSan activities in 1995. This second survey covered 64 NGOs, an estimated 90 per cent of all NGOs involved in WatSan activities with a reported 4.3 million beneficiaries over the period 1991 - 1994. One-third were local organizations and two-thirds international NGOs. Just over a third identified themselves as Christian or church-affiliated and the balance as secular organizations. The distribution of NGO WatSan expenditure (see Figure 1) shows that only nine organizations are responsible for over 75 per cent of the total investment of EB 150 million (US \$32m). In spite of the increase of nearly 50 per cent in NGO investments in local currency, a sharp devaluation of the previously overvalued Ethiopian Birr in 1992 resulted in a drop in the equivalent US Dollar expenditures of over 40 per cent.

Unfortunately there is no comparative information for this period on government performance in the rural and peri-urban WatSan sector. Given the political upheaval

Table 1. Ethiopia Statistics

Capital:	Addis Ababa	Human Development Index No:	171
Area:	1.3 million km ²		(out of a world total of 174)
Population:	55 million	Average Life Expectancy:	47.5 years
Rural Population:	87%	Infant Mortality:	125 per 1000 live births
Growth Rate:	3.5% per year	Water Coverage:	Urban 80%
Government:	Federal Republic		Rural 19%
Religion:	Muslim, Christian, Animist	Sanitation Coverage:	Urban 60%
GNP per Capita:	US \$110		Rural 1%

Sources: EU, 1994; UNDP, 1995; Datta, 1995

**Figure 1. NGO WatSan expenditures 1991-94
(5 NGOs did not report expenditures)**

after the 1991 change of government and the subsequent decentralization policies, it is likely that the NGO output will have been equivalent to if not actually higher than the government output.

Strict qualitative conclusions cannot really be drawn from the numerical data provided by the survey. However, by comparing the UNICEF and CRDA survey data a number of trends become visible:

- More NGOs are paying attention to the integration between water and sanitation. 69 per cent reported a sanitation component to their water supply projects (up 11 per cent from the previous reporting period) and 82 per cent provide hygiene education with their water projects. Low sanitation project expenditures (i.e. only 5 per cent of water project costs) indicate, however, that NGOs could do a lot more in terms of sanitation programming.
- Handpump standardization is slowly moving forward. There has been an increase of 18 per cent in the annual rate of handpump installation to a level of 265 units per year. The proportion of different types of VLOM (village-level operation and maintenance) pumps has increased from 14 per cent to over 50 per cent. Only a cast iron suction handpump is produced in the country, all other pumps are imported. An Ethiopian Afridev prototype, the Ibex, has been under development for the last 6 years, but has to date failed to achieve the SKAT production standards. Although hardly reported in the survey, a subsequent CRDA

handpumps workshop revealed numerous technical and institutional problems with handpump applications.

- NGO borehole construction rates have increased in the second survey period by about 20 per cent to over 150 per year, with about 20 per cent of the NGOs owning their own drilling rigs (of which 37.5 per cent were not used) and another 20 per cent using the services of government agencies and other NGOs. A commercial drilling company was employed only once by an NGO.

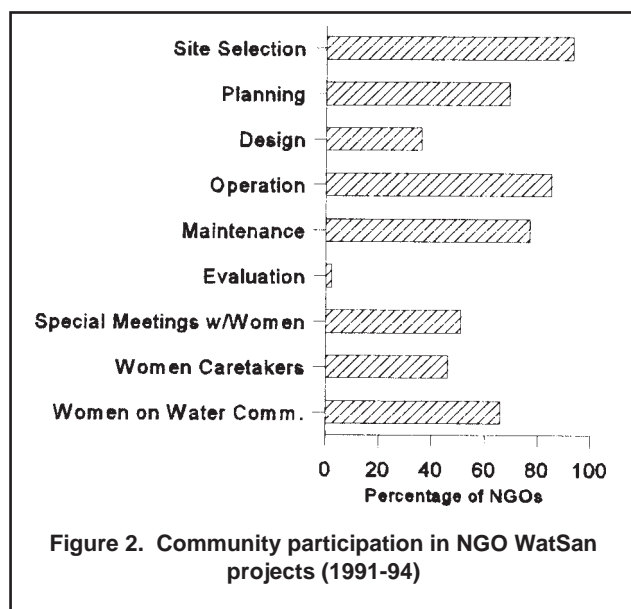
Production rates are low (average 15 wells per rig per year) and the drilling cost high (average US \$200 per meter).

- One of the common objectives of the NGOs is the promotion of better health among their target communities. This is generally translated as providing safe and adequate water for household usage. Only 30 per cent of the NGOs however practiced well disinfection and only 15 per cent regularly monitored water quality, leaving the impression that it is of little concern to most.
- The involvement of the community in WatSan projects seems to have moved from the traditional role of contributor of free labour, local materials and cash for project implementation to a more active voice in project planning and design. Figure 2 shows the extent of participation of the beneficiaries in various aspects of the project cycle. Several NGOs indicated that they are moving even further to full community management of the project cycle, with the NGOs acting as animators and facilitators in the development process. Yet at the same time, with many of the NGOs the participation of women in the decision-making, operation and maintenance processes appears to be underdeveloped.

Strategies for the 21st century

For more effective and efficient development of the Ethiopian WatSan sector in the twenty-first century, the authors would like to suggest a number of strategies to extensively integrate the NGO efforts with those of the government and other actors:

- The government water sector should itself be fully integrated with the sanitation sector into one organization, the Water Supply and Sanitation Authority (WSSA) before the year 2000, as proposed by Datta (1995). Currently they are under two different ministries, with no policy or practical integration at the field level. The task of this authority at the national and regional government levels will be to coordinate, monitor, evaluate and where necessary subsidize the WatSan sector development activities, including water supply, water quality surveillance, sanitation, hygiene education and solid and liquid waste disposal.



At the earliest opportunity a clear government WatSan policy should be worked out to this extent, delineating the roles and responsibilities of the various actors in the sector and providing guidelines and regulations on targets, priorities, approaches, designs, standardization, training, cost-recovery mechanisms, etc.

- Before the year 2000 government policies should be in place which encourage the private commercial sector to take the primary role in WatSan project implementation. Currently the commercial sector is virtually absent in Ethiopia's WatSan activities. Legislative and fiscal incentives should be developed to create the enabling environment necessary for the commercialization of project planning, design, implementation, operation and maintenance in order to develop the in-country capacity for competitive and sustainable water and sanitation development. The recent GoE Water Resources Utilisation Proclamation (92/1994) is a good starting point, but will need to be modified to accommodate the integration of the sanitation and commercial objectives.
- As long as rural and urban poverty continue to exist there will be a need to (partially) subsidize the implementation of water supply and sanitation projects. Given the extent of the task, the NGOs should be allowed to play an important role in rural and peri-urban WatSan development well into the next century, subject to WSSA's policy guidelines and regulations. Rather than implementing their own programmes, the NGOs should be encouraged to empower communities to plan and construct their own projects, either as a community effort or -preferably- through the paid services of a local contractor. The NGOs can help to mobilize communities, facilitate the planning and implementation process, provide needed external resources and train technicians and manag-

ers to operate and maintain the system. As a matter of principle, operation and maintenance costs should always be borne by the users. Parallel structures and unfair competition can be avoided if NGOs use and optimize the role of the private commercial sector in their WatSan programmes.

- Transparency by all actors in the WatSan sector is essential for better cooperation and coordination. Before the end of the century this can be stimulated in the following manner:
 - a. The legislative aspects of the WatSan sector should be further developed and supported by an integrated and unambiguous framework of qualitative and quantitative guidelines and norms. The institutional structures of WSSA should be built up to facilitate, monitor and control all sector activities (implementing tasks of the government WatSan sector should probably be phased out and privatized since they represent a potential conflict of interest between the legislative and executive duties).
 - b. An independent national advisory board to WSSA should be set up with elected representatives from government, commerce, NGOs and other professionals, possibly including observers from donor agencies. This body will monitor developments in the sector and the effectiveness and efficiency of WSSA and the other actors and provide policy-level recommendations.
 - c. At the national and regional levels regular meetings should be organized for government, NGOs, commercial and other actors in the WatSan sector. These meetings will facilitate the free exchange of practical information and experiences, serve to clarify procedures, identify bottle necks, stimulate interagency cooperation, networking, feedback and back-stopping. Organization of these meetings must be taken on by the integrated WSSA as soon as it is operational.
 - d. A national, independent bulletin, magazine or journal should be published periodically with up-to-date WatSan sector information, relevant articles, project reports, news items, training information, technology updates, etc. The bulletin will complement the quarterly reports currently required by the government, as such reports have a tendency to remain basically undissemated and unavailable to those who could benefit most from the information. The bulletin, which can be funded by institutional and individual subscriptions, sector advertisements and initial subsidies from government and interested donors, will serve as a networking tool and increase the transparency of institutions and the accountability of the WatSan actors to each other and the general public.

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