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WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL: PARTNERSHIPS AND INNOVATIONS

Cooperative management of RWSS in Haiti

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ONE OF THE most important economic characteristics to consider at the turn of this century is the decline in the state's capacity to offer basic services to the various populations living all over the globe. Thus, an increasing majority of the world's economic sectors recognizes the superiority of private initiative and market pressures over collective initiative and centralized planning. More and more analysts are recognizing the fact that well-being will be the result, of personal effort, of the private sector, of competition between enterprises and of a less prominent role of the state. In this context, rural areas of very least advanced countries were neglected because the state was overly concerned with urban constituents belonging to a particular social sector; efforts undertaken in rural areas were sporadic at best. This kind of situation could be perpetuated in less advanced countries like in some parts of Africa, or some Asia or in a country such as Haïti. The direct consequence of this situation is the persistent economic exclusion of the rural areas. Conversely, the current neo-liberal movement opens the opportunity to re-think the non-urban areas located in severely underdeveloped countries. A new management concept that would stop or reverse the tendency to economically restrict these sectors is needed. One could naturally question how sound the possibility of cooperative management would be if applied to offer crucial basic services such as water and essential sanitation; these services have traditionally been provided by the state. This study proposes to explore the feasibility it would be to create such public service enterprises.

Methodology

To set down this study informations have been gathered from two sources:

Local sources

- Several association sites were visited as well as a well known potable water cooperative in Camp Perrin (COSEP), also, various potable water supply committees (CAEP) were contacted.
- Four (4) public sector representatives were interviewed to determine the State's position with regard to establishing cooperative public services in the rural areas.
- The structural law pertinent to the functioning of cooperatives in Haïti.

International sources

At this level, representatives were contacted from different organizations identified as potential supporters such as DID (Desjardins International Development), UNDP, BIT (International Office of Work).

Results and discussion

Examples of public service cooperatives such as for water or basic sanitation are not prevalent in Haïti. Since these utilities are state owned, the services were traditionally also rendered to the population by the state. Centralized services and a lack of organizational expertise did not encourage rural populations to take such initiatives. And that is why we have only been able to locate one rural organization providing these services, although we have questioned several specialists on the subject. The Camp-Perrin Cooperative is located close to Cayes. It is noteworthy to indicate the existence of the CAEPs (Potable Water Committees), which is a kind of community organization created by SNEP, POCHEP and CARE during the International Water Decade (DIEPA, 1981-1990).

La Ravine du Sud, one of the 10 biggest rivers in the country cuts through Camp-Perrin. Prior to 1980, the population (close to 40,000 people) would usually draw water directly from the river without any preliminary treatment to fulfil their various needs. The national services in charge of water supply had made no offers of that type in that area. The persistence of these archaic practices could not last forever due to population growth, increase in demand, natural proximity of offer and the risk of epidemics spurred by water-borne germs. Therefore in 1980, the order of Oblat brothers, a religious congregation living on a hill in Camp-Perrin, decided that there was a more rational mechanism that could be used to distribute water in the area. Father Roland Gagnon was the leader of the initiative. This organization was managed by a directing committee, under the sponsorship of the Oblat order. The embryonic organization implanted boundary fountains for distribution throughout the area. The area residents had no monthly fees to pay in 1980 for water. The system, which was mainly financed by the Oblat order was conceived for the sole purpose of collectively distributing potable water by boundary fountains. Residents had to go to the nearest fountain in order to get water. The water system was supplied by three springs in the Hotte massif. In 1990, to satisfy their needs in potable water in their homes, the area residents decided, without questioning the Oblat's original initiative, to take things into their own hands. At that time a cooperative was created. The Oblat's informal organization was then named, Camp-Perrin's Cooperative Water Services (COSEP).

The CAEPs, on the other hand, are community-based organizations created by the beneficiaries of certain water projects, with the support of SNEP, POCHEP and of CARE. The CAEP committees vary between 3 and nine committee members. These variations are dependent upon the organization that creates the potable water system. The basic structure of functioning CAEPs is a President, a Secretary and a Treasurer. The members are elected by the concerned population. Usually, the members are not paid, except in certain rare cases where the President and the treasurer receive a gratification. However, all the plumbers who are tied into the system receive a monthly salary which is equivalent to 1/3 of the total of the taxes. The salary is never more that 300 gourdes a month (US $1 = 15 gourdes) per plumber. Most of the potable water supply systems (SAEP) that are managed by CAEPs, are located in areas where rainfall is equal or superior to 1300 mm per year. These areas present agricultural potential. Also, the areas are densely populated (200-500 residents/km^2), except in Grand Anse communities. The small farming surface areas and the country's economic crisis prevent farmers from generating sufficient revenue. Generally speaking, less than 20 per cent are able to generate an annual revenue superior to 6000 gourdes (US $400). The 121 SAEPs which were evaluated are located throughout the 9 regional departments. Practically all of them were built between 1982 and 1989 by CARE, POCHEP, ODN and Inter-Aide. Generally, they are characterized by an absence of operational and maintenance structures. Problems such as, missing faucets and bordering fountains, poor workmanship in the collecting and water piping, leaks in distribution pipes and the deterioration of the bordering fountains system. These problems are not tied to dilapidated systems, but rather, a lack of maintenance and the absence of technical and administrative support.

The freedom to form associations hold meetings without weapons, for economical, political, social, or cultural purposes, is guaranteed by the 1987 Constitution (article 31). This constitutional freedom warrants legal coverage for the cooperative movement in Haïti.

Potential support organizations for the development of public service cooperatives in Haïti such as, [Desjardins International Development DID, United Nations Development Program PNUD, International Work Office BIT] are inclined to favour this development. Nonetheless, their prevailing hesitations mainly come from the fact that legally speaking, governmental policies are not well defined concerning cooperatives. The heart of the issue is that that state does not yet consider cooperatives as autonomous enterprises, with the same rights are enterprises in the private sector.

In any case the State has adopted an ambiguous position toward establishing cooperatives in Haïti, they tend to be favourable and critical at the same time. The Minister of Agriculture, the engineer-agronomist Gerald Mathurin (summer 1996) told us that overall, the state supports the principle of organizing associations for public services in the rural areas throughout the country. For example, the state favoured the development of intermediate entities, of associative nature, to manage perimeter irrigation. This took place in Archahaie and at Blanche river. However, according to the same source, the state should intervene on an individual case basis for several reasons: a-water in general, and irrigation water specially, are becoming rare resources in Haiti, which calls for strict management in time. Therefore, the Haitian State currently favours the creation of mechanism, i.e. a central inter-ministrial unit for water which would be coordinated by certain instances, the Ministry of Plan, of Agriculture and Natural Resources and of Public Works. b-Delegating regulating authority to community associations or public cooperative services is tied to the strategic importance of the region. This transfer cannot happen without conditions if the strategic importance of the region is too high. Moreover, if it is an important region, the State will be the sole judge concerning the extent and the delegation of the authority in question.

Conclusions and recommendations

During the course of this study, the foremost impression in all cases was that the creation of cooperative of RWSS is a feasible task, provided certain human, technical, and institutional obstacles are overcome. Generally speaking, the Haitian rural environment is not opposed to the principle of the creation of cooperative public services. Quite the contrary, the populations we came in contact with were extremely favorable to the offer of these services. Similar response is expected from other areas around the country where access to potable water and sanitation is difficult. Favourable disposition is normal due to the daily importance of basic elements like water and sanitation. Without these essential services a community cannot adequately survive or develop. The absence or lack of water forces members of these communities to leave their homes and sometimes walk long distances in search of the indispensable liquid. This pursuit is inevitable in order to satisfy different needs, such as, personal comfort, cooking and agricultural production and is a tremendous waste of time and money. Creating cooperatives of public services must be considered in the global policies of economic development in the Haitian rural areas. One of the fundamental objectives would be to demand that the state respect its own laws.

Other external restrictions can not only prevent cooperatives development but can also curb potential donors good intentions. These restrictions may include the following:

- Inadequacies of laws on cooperatives, according to which no cooperative can produce a request for funding or for a loan without a stated request from the National Council on Cooperatives (CNC).
- Potential donors main concern could be that the CNC, due to internal regulations, could at its discretion put

aside an undetermined amount of the cooperative's profits. The possibility of random intervention is not an encouraging factor to motivate them to seriously commit themselves to the process of developing cooperatives for public services. The equivalent would be direct state subsidization, and that would be in directly opposed to the fundamental objectives of the cooperative movement.

- Concerning management techniques in the case of COSEP in Camp Perrin, experience has proven that a flexible managerial structure is useful. One of the ways to reduce the preoccupations of clients on one hand, and the degree of service of the management unit is to hold a promotion campaign for owners and consumers on the traditional role of a general assembly, its importance and its contribution to the smooth running of the association.
- On financial front, the problem of profitability is present at COSEP level as well as at CAEP level. Two fundamental elements are at the root of the problem. First, the implementation costs of the water systems and second, the cost of maintenance and operation. Although those in charge of COSEP claim an eventual profit it would be interesting to question the system's internal capacity to recuperate the initial invested capital. This questioning could lead to the state adopting a management model in which they are in charge of production, whereas the cooperatives would be responsible for the distribution.
- The installation of these plants warrants putting into place a systematic surveillance system, which is consistent at different levels, to prevent any foul play. Usually, foul play is the result of an unstable political climate and a shaky economy; those conditions render more likely social group division and violence.

In light of these considerations, the feasibility equation for a water cooperative could be formulated in the following manner:

SC = f (AL , Ae , Epc , Ss , Iep)

SC: The success of a public service cooperative
AL: An amendment to the legislation concerning cooperatives
Ae: State's attitude
Epc: Educating the community and participants
Ss: Surveillance system
Iep: The state's investment in the production of services.

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