



Sustainable water and sanitation committees

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WATER AND SANITATION Committees which emerged as a result of the establishment of Community Water and Sanitation Agency have no doubt achieved remarkable successes in both water and sanitation promotion, environmental improvement, and awareness creation in terms of health and hygiene education in general. In spite of the successes chalked, some problems abound which threatens the very existence of the committees. Some committees have totally gone out of operation, while others are dormant and a few others operating partially. A study I undertook in hundred (100) communities in four districts revealed some reasons for such set backs in WATSAN Committees.

Methods used

The method used took the form of interviews in communities and the respondents were all manner of people at the community level which includes; WATSAN members, Women, Chiefs, Teachers, Youths, some Project Workers and some Stakeholders

Findings

All respondents agreed that the WATSAN idea is a very good one especially looking at the successes they have chalked during these few years of existence. For instance they have been able to generate a lot of funds through various ways like, Water Levy, Harvest, User Fees, Kilo-kilo contribution, Royalties, Fines, Donation/grants and household rotational sales.

They have also through the training given them earlier, been able to compile and kept records on communities as well as issues on water and sanitation. Furthermore organization of communal labour for communities improvement and of school buildings, latrines etc. goes to their credit. All these feat goes without saying that some problems abound which when not checked will ruin the gains achieved as manifested already in some WATSANs

Causes and effects that threatens the existance of watsans

WATSAN Selection

- Criteria for selection of people to serve on the WATSAN Committees are quite explicit but more often than not, chiefs, elders and opinion leaders influence the selection behind the scene to protect their interest. Eventually the selection is not free and fair.

Mission accomplished

- In a bid to satisfy the criteria laid down for water and sanitation by the project, WATSANs follow the rules religiously before facilities are installed. After acquiring the water facilities, the motivation or interest to work hard as before wanes with the feeling that “after all what we desired have been achieved and there is no need to worry ones self again.”

Laws not enforced

WATSANs operate on mutual laws agreed by the whole community. However favouritism sets in after some time hence the law does not work as expected, thereby rendering the WATSANs powerless in the event of the laws being broken.

Misappropriation of funds

Although there are checks and balances within the committees and the communities as a whole, some members who are signatories to the account, team up to use part of the money without the knowledge of others. When this was found out, animosity sets in and the committees are thrown apart.

Disgruntled members

Members of the committees from the onset were made aware of the voluntary and sacrificial nature of the job. However when money generated from water tariffs became huge, some members then started to agitate for allowances and other incentives. Passiveness sets in when their requests are not forth coming.

Local Politics

It is not uncommon to see chieftancy disputes torn apart communities. Therefore if members decide to take sides in such disputes then the WATSANs have no stand as have been experienced in some communities.

Friction with other Locally based committees

The political authority at the grass-root level are the Unit Committees. Other locally based committees (LBC) also exists e.g. Village Improvement Committee, Electricity Committee etc. At times friction occurs when the Unit committee tries to use its authority to coerce them render account. There were instances where they try to take over from the WATSAN committees.

Ethnic background of WATSANs

Most residence of communities are of different ethnic background and so are the WATSAN committees. Whenever decision making are usurped by the indigenes, the minority become suspicious and assume a passive posture which does not auger well for the committees.

Emigration of some WATSAN members

Some active members of the WATSANs because of lack of fertile land around emigrate to other areas for farming purposes and when this happens the spirit dies down among those left behind.

Delay in supply of inputs and materials

WATSANs were highly enthusiastic when their communities were included in the project. They contributed their quota as expected but when the construction of water facilities delayed for several months and at times years, they became despaired and passive as a result of insinuations from community members who have contributed cash towards the pumps.

Initial training not well organized

Training of WATSANs was aimed at making them all round members to cope with some of the problems associated with their duties. Some how the contents and the style used make them more theory oriented then practical oriented. The end result was their inability to stand the test of time i.e. A little misunderstanding that could be solved amicably normally tore them apart just to mention a few.

Follow-up

District Water and Sanitation Teams (DWST) who were trained to monitor and organize follow-up activities to activate WATSANs seldom visit the communities to boost their morals and may be, resolve issues cropping up within the WATSANs. Of course some have tangible reasons for their inability to operate well as expected e.g. lack of means of transport, funds and others.

Recommended solutions for a sustainable WATSAN

A careful look at the causes which have thrown apart or nearly collapse most WATSANs suggest that most were self inflicted and also some due to external factors.

On the issue of WATSAN selection, I would suggest that if there is in existence a strong locally based group recognized by the community, then there should be no need to create another committee. However to alley the fears of the others, the committee could be widened to include the chief's representative, and that of women. This also will forestall at the same time friction among locally based committees (LBC) Furthermore, by including representatives of most LBC will also mean that people are likely to conform to the laws since it will have the backing of all, especially with the inclusion of the Unit Committees who have the authority to sanction all those who misbehave at the local level.

There should also be time for re-election. At present no provision has been made and once elected they stay in power for ever. This made them complacent.

WATSAN members can operate in communities without hindrances if they will draw a middle line as far as chieftancy matters are concerned. However, most often they are not able to do so. What can stem the issue is that whenever a member openly indulge in such disputes, he/she could be asked to resign or suspended. The clause may be entrenched in their constitution so that the committees may not be seen as being politicized or partisan.

One main issue which has broken the front of WATSANs is monetary matters. Some few members find ways and means of spending some of the tariffs and when detected they are not taken lightly. To check this from happening, I will suggest that all monies collected the previous day must be accounted for, and sent to the Bank promptly. Keeping the money at home to accumulate for unspecified period should be discouraged since this leads to temptation.

Emigration of members to seek fertile land elsewhere has also been a problem though to a lesser extend. Hard working members of the committees who most member look up for leadership and direction, leave the scene and the rest are in disarray. The remedy will be to trained all WATSANs to be able to take up the mantle when it falls, no one should be allowed to be "in-all". All must get an insight of all the happenings in the committee. At the same time replacement with hard working people is recommended.

The idea of working as a member of WATSAN committee for a long time on voluntary basis, is past and gone.. It is an accepted fact that voluntary work in communities are occasionally rewarded by incentives, compensation or remuneration especially when the water points generate a lot of money. The programme should allow the communities to decide whether they will pay WATSANs or not. My suggestions are that occasionally communities at a meeting may decide to supply rain boots, T-shirts or hand bags with the inscription WATSAN member on them. They can also occasionally help them on their farms or allow them to fetch their water quickly whenever there is a queue at the water point. A certificate of good service could also help. All these will go a long way to boost their morals so that they may not press for any payment of services rendered.

Delivery of inputs like pumps and hygiene education materials are external in nature, however to keep the committees enthusiasm still high, the project could award the contract to one company to supply the necessary inputs at a go. This will eliminate the delay in the current arrangement where different companies supply different parts of the same pump.

A review of the contents of WATSAN training to be more practical oriented will help in the long run. Current training for WATSAN are more theoretical and therefore exposes them when the real test surfaces. Emphasis should be laid on conflict resolutions, leadership qualities and role of women. Apart from this the District Water and Sanita-

tion Teams (DWST) who monitors the training must do so to enable the trainers be on their toes.

They should also pay regular visit to the WATSANs and the communities to encourage and boost their morals. Occasional visits from the Regional and District offices to interact with communities and WATSANs boost their ego as well as solve certain problems that may have surfaced at that level .

Networking of WATSAN committees is a sure or possible way of solving most of the problems enumerated above. Lack of exposure of members to other environments to enable them see what others are doing sometimes make

them feel certain problems are insurmountable. An encouragement to WATSANs to form an Association within a catchment area will create a forum for interactions. Problems experienced elsewhere could be discussed for solutions and this will go a long way to create confidence among themselves. In fact frequent interactions among WATSAN committees to discuss issues is the main key for a sustainable WATSAN.

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