



Water sources management in rural Somaliland

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THE ISSUE OF the provision of water is a valid and worthwhile endeavor, and presents an enormous challenge to the international aid agencies and the local authorities in Somaliland. Over the past seven years, there have been continuous efforts on the part of the international organizations and the local authorities to meet this challenge. Many of them who have been involved, have found that a tangible progress in this field is by no means simple and depends on more than just the allocation of funds for the rehabilitation of existing water sources, or the construction of new ones. Problems have been experienced in the selection of appropriate technologies, the operation, and maintenance, the administration, organizational aspects, finance, and with the achievement of health and other related benefits. Nevertheless, reports from some international agencies some times create highly misleading impressions, as they ignore the large numbers of sources functioning inadequately or not at all. Although consensus on the underlying causes of these problems could be hard to achieve amongst the various actors and stakeholders, I would venture here to point out that the major constraint in Somaliland on the development of water in general, and to the rural water in particular is the "Lack of proper Management Organization". A good example, which could shed some light in the matter, is the experience from a water program funded by the EU and implemented by Caritas Switzerland in the Hargeisa region of Somaliland.

In The Field Of Water/Sanitation Caritas Switzerland (SwissGroup) was operational in Somaliland, from Sep. 95 to March '97 under Caritas funding. The project concentrated on the punctual rehabilitation of strategic water resources in Sool region and Hargeisa district. The project realized 23 punctual mini-projects comprising of: shallow wells, spring wells, berkads, Balleys, and flood protection rehabilitation, and support to a wells/water technology workshop, and a drought mitigation activity, etc. SINCE May 1997 Caritas have also been implementing a program for the Rehabilitation and Improvements of Shallow, Ground and Surface Water Sources in the Rural Areas of Hargeisa Region - Somaliland" funded by the 6th and 7th European Development Fund. The project was thematically focused to the rural areas of Hargeisa Region, comprising of 40 concrete lined shallow wells for farm irrigation, 53 family owned berkads, rehabilitation of 2 dams, 1 flood protection structure, a masonry reservoir tank and pipes for two cooperative farms, 12 communal shallow wells for agro-pastoralists, 1 spring protection structure, 1 subsurface dam structure, and a support to a wells/water

technology workshop (on tooling and training on roof run off harvesting techniques). The project was also having a component of capacity building focused on the institutional development of one partner NGO, skills upgrading, and a water quality surveillance program.

The main aims and objectives being to: a) Increase water security quantitatively in the rural districts of Hargeisa region. b). Ensure that water sources at the rehabilitation sites are protected from pollution. c). Elaborate and develop the local institutional and community framework; i.e. with the final aim to have a sustainable community based rural water Supply.

During the planning period of these project consultations and collaboration has been made with the local government of the region, The Ministry of water and Mineral resources, and the elders of the respective locations. Implementation was done through 3 prominent local NGOs, while supervision was done by SwissGroup.

In an agreement with the community elders, their contribution to the project funds was 25% in kind (unskilled labour, water for construction, watchmen, storage of materials etc), and SwissGroup contribution was 75% to cover skilled labour, materials, transport, supervision and administration costs of the implementing NGO. It was also agreed with the community leaders, that they would be responsible to look after, maintain, and manage the rehabilitated water sources after their completion.

Physically, successful projects have been accomplished, and have been evaluated by an external evaluator, but internally SwissGroup and the implementing agencies have later realized that there have been shortfalls in the sustainable management of the water sources by the respective communities. The ownership, community participation, the operation, maintenance, and other related aspects, which are important for the sustainability of water sources, came into question.

After several field visits, meetings, and discussions between SwissGroup, and the three local agencies, it became clear that the issue of proper community management of water sources is essential for any water project, and needs a strategy for planning, and establishment of a software program, as a component in the rehabilitation programs, so as to achieve a proper community participation, and management, in the rural water projects.

In the light of that, two consultants have been appointed by SwissGroup to conduct an assessment on projects implemented earlier in three villages of the project area. The three locations were selected for their different geographi-

cal, social, environmental, and water usage, two locations with Communal shallow wells, and one location with privately owned Berkads.

The assessment focused mainly on the community participation levels during the projects preparation, implementation, and after the completion of water projects carried out in these three village.

The three locations, having their different characteristics in the economical, social and geographical terms, as well as water sources, has been visited by the consultants, to independently meet and discuss with the communities, the technical and the management aspects during the preparation, implementation, and after completion of the rehabilitation works. In particular, the assessment addressed the roles taken in the past by the local NGOs, SwissGroup, and the communities in the overall realization of these projects, and the positive and negative results that has been achieved.

The assessment has also looked into the capacities, awareness, and opinions of the community leaders and their members as beneficiaries, and managers of their water sources.

Findings: The wells were not having sufficient water during the dry season for the villagers and the periodic migrant nomads. Wells dry up quickly in the morning hours, which force people to get water from other nearby contaminated sources. Covers of wells were broken. This was the result of misuse by the nomads and a delicate make, and has resulted children to throw objects into wells and hence contaminate the water. Lack of ownership sense was observed. Villagers regarded the wells as common sources to everyone, since it is donated by an organization. The village elders attend to their livestock rearing activities and the wells were left to the mercy of the passing nomads and children. At the well sites, the major problem at the time of conducting the evaluation was malaria; water scarcity was not their major problem. This was contrary to the initial need assessment, which earlier stated water hardship in the location. The privately owned berkads were fenced, well kept, and repaired by the owners, but were the breeding grounds for mosquitoes. Malaria has been their major problem, and contaminated water was their next problem, due to the use of improper extraction methods, lack of hygiene awareness and the lack of covering for the Berkads.

The Berkads were not sufficient to provide water throughout the dry three-month season. Surface water reservoirs (Balleys) were required as a supplement for watering livestock. The analysis of these findings clearly showed:

- Resource driven approach used by the NGOs: - It became very clear that the two local NGOs who implemented the shallow wells have used “a resource driven approach”, during the initial project preparation. This is understandable, and is due to short implementation periods from SwissGroup, which forces the NGOs to speed up the works, so as, to finish in the time specified on the contract agreements. Community elders expressed that their needs in general are greater than the provision of several shallow wells – lack of proper and

realistic need assessment in the past resulted that their general needs have not been addressed and in particular their water needs have not been considered. In one village the main priority is said to be Malaria, water scarcity is not regarded as a major problem. The water demand for the large nomadic communities, which settle around the villages during the dry season periods, has not been considered. On the other hand the same community one-year ago, has not mentioned these problems during the need assessment.

- Community lacking sense of ownership: - During the preparation period of the communal shallow wells, inadequate mobilization to the communities has resulted, a very low involvement of communities in the implementation works, and is the major reason that they could not assume ownership. On the other hand, the lack of proper hand over of rehabilitated sources to the communities has contributed to the lack of ownership sense. Unhygienic extraction methods in use: - Traditionally the villagers of all the three locations assessed are illiterate nomads, with poor hygiene awareness. The lack of awareness raising during and after implementation with the lack of introducing appropriate safer extraction methods, has been the case in all the locations.
- In adequate presence and Supervision by the funding agency: -The village wells have been constructed and completed with the minimum presence and supervision of the funding agency,. An on site representative or supervisor was necessary in both locations. This has resulted, low quality workmanship, and poor construction of well covers, the wrong siting of wells, the later, resulting less water during the dry season when the water table drops to the lowest.
- Concentration on physical works only: - The project mainly focused on physical works in all the locations, some degree of community mobilization and involvement is however exercised in the village were Berkads were rehabilitated. This is understandable and is due to the lack of budgets for training. Basic training on operation and maintenance was required in the shallow well projects, and a similar training on hygiene awareness was clearly needed on all locations. This surely would have enhanced the sense of ownership among the communities, as well as the proper operation and maintenance of the water sources.

After the evaluation, and during the time of preparing the proposal for the second phase of the program, the following has been considered as a remedial action to the previously implemented projects and as the strategy for the future ones: -

On Communal shallow Wells: - Increasing the yield by carrying out any necessary increase of depth, increase of sand storage capacity etc. Installation of hand pumps, in order to protect wells from pollution - In the case of installing hand pumps, the training of village based technicians, and availing of spares is required. Properly designed

and constructed covers to be installed with a lockable mechanism. Awareness raising of the community on participation, and training on safe use of water sources through hygienic practices is also essential. Advocate for the community on the issues of the water related problems - informing, and collaborating with other organizations capable in assisting is essential.

On family owned Berkads: - Installation of appropriate covers and improvement to the present extraction methods. Rehabilitation of Balleys in this dry environment, so as to supplement the use of Berkad water, and to separate livestock and human water sources. Awareness raising of the community on participation, and training on safe use of water sources and hygienic practices is required – however, this could only make an impact if the water scarcity in the area is drastically reduced, otherwise the existing situations will continue. Advocate for the community on the issues of water borne and water related problems.

Conclusive Remarks: From the above Points, it is clearly indicated that the success of projects will mainly depend on the careful planning by the funding agency, during the initial preparation period, that is to use “need driven approach”, and “bottom up approach”, by involving and working with communities through a village based (community based) local NGO, or with village committees that are well established. During implementation, presence of a community development worker from the funding organization to work with the implementing agency and the community is found to be beneficial, such presence is necessary in establishing a closer relationship with communities, conducting training and supervising construction works. After completion of the water project, a systematic hand over of sources to the communities after conducting any required training is essential. Both the donor and the implementers should be able to assist the communities in taking over the operation and maintenance as well as the sustainable management of the water sources – monitoring and evaluation missions are necessary to be taken at certain intervals after completion. This can only be achieved, by having longer preparation, and implementation periods of projects, and hence more budget allocation from the donors. The short implementation periods practiced now (one to two years maximum) have shown to be the major obstacle in implementing sustainable water projects. In the nomadic environment, the communities experience different problems at different times of the year, need assessments and monitoring of achievements would therefore require more time than practiced now, and must be considered during planning stages of water programs.

One major reality which existed in post war Somaliland, and which still prevails, is in identifying local institutional frameworks that support sustainable management of small

scale community based water supplies. The constraint is that before the war the state central government (The ministry of water & mineral resources with its water development agency), assumed responsibility for all communal water sources. The new government, here in Somaliland have the unfortunate expectation, but not yet the capacity of assuming similar roles again, whereas evidence elsewhere in Africa suggests that the responsibility for small scale supplies is best assumed by the major stakeholders, i.e., the supply users in collaboration with “technical” agencies. Clearly the sustainability of a project is significantly determined by the maintenance of the structures, but what is important to note here, is that widely accepted approaches, and concepts like community empowerment, community management, and participation, that are practiced elsewhere, can not automatically be replicated in Somaliland, Firstly because there are so many people on the move as nomads whose lives depend on the availability of pasture and water,, secondly, because it is not the geographical locality, but rather the clan is the binding factor among people, and thirdly, due to the still weak and recovering judicial, and local government administration systems, which could not play a leading role in the equity of resources (interest groups could easily get confronted and assistance could turn easily into a conflict).

Therefore the challenge in the future for SwissGroup and similar organizations working in the field of water is to establish an institutional framework, for the management of rural water sources, that suits the existing environmental, social, economical and political setting of Somaliland.

Glossary of words

- Berkads : Underground rectangular masonry tanks, for harvesting rainwater (usually constructed in the dry areas).
- Balley : A surface water reservoir made of earth embankments, for harvesting rainwater, in the dry areas.
- Hargeisa : Capital of the self declared state of Somaliland, former capital of the northwestern region of Somalia.
- SwissGroup : A Swiss International organization, working in Somaliland under the mandate of Caritas Switzerland.

Reference

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