



The challenges of community managed development

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IRELAND AID HAS attempted to adopt an integrated community based approach to the implementation of basic service delivery programmes in Zambia. Key principles of this approach are community empowerment, partnership with local government, sustainable development, poverty alleviation, and improved governance at the local level. The approach involves:

- Creating opportunities for communities to initiate activities aimed at service provision, poverty alleviation and sustainable environmental improvement;
- Encouraging local government to understand and experience community participation in the development process; and
- Building the capacity and willingness of government structures at all levels (local, provincial and central) to promote the concept and practice the reality of decentralized community managed services.

Ireland aid's approach

Ireland Aid has been supporting water supply and sanitation activities in Zambia since 1983. During the early phases of programme implementation, most activities were directly managed and implemented by Ireland Aid staff and those seconded from partner Ministries – principally the Department of Water Affairs. The main emphasis was on the hardware components of water supply (infrastructure) with lesser emphasis on the software components such as promoting health and hygiene practices or community management aspects.

In line with the overall shift in Ireland Aid policy towards encouraging community participation and integrating projects / programmes into partner country administrative systems, in the mid-nineties, Ireland Aid began the process of integrating and 'institutionalizing' the various water sector programme processes into partner Ministries.

This involved the juxtaposition of somewhat oppositional policy orientations: ensuring government ownership of development processes where communities were effectively in the driving seat.

In order to ensure government ownership, energy and resources needed to go into building structures – developing the technical but also the bureaucratic capacity of government to manage resources and co-ordinate the delivery of services. In such an environment, one quickly discovers that in order to really respond to the dysfunction of government 'service providers' a local level, one needs to

develop a multi-layered response that attempts to build capacity at a multitude of levels – national, provincial, district and sub-district.

Ensuring that communities are in the driving seat however often involves very different processes, methodologies and skills. The sheer diversity of communities and the huge variance in structures of power and participation from one community to another makes it impossible to develop one single model or framework that will suit all contexts. The use of participatory processes for getting to know a community and mobilizing the necessary resources, commitment and confidence for community-led management of services implies a flexibility of approach and a commitment to democratic participation.

Such community-friendly methodologies and approaches are often anathema to the culture of a government Ministry with its tendency towards hierarchy and structure. The challenge of aligning and integrating these two development 'orientations' has been the preoccupation of much of Ireland Aid's work in the water and peri-urban sectors.

Through our PoCMUS (Promotion of Community Managed Urban Services) programme and our support for RWSS (Rural Water Supply and Sanitation) in Zambia, management responsibility and ownership of programmes has been firmly placed in the hands of partner Ministry – principally in recent times, the Ministry of Local Government and Housing. At the same time however, participative structures have been developed from the community up, to ensure the active engagement of communities at various stages of programme implementation.

By structurally linking community groups with the decision-making apparatus of government at local, regional and national levels, Ireland Aid has sought to demonstrate to government in concrete terms, the practical necessity and utility of placing communities in the driving seat of community development.

The demands of such an approach are great. The potential pitfalls are many. A genuine commitment to government ownership and community participation involves the transfer of resources and decision-making powers to a whole new set of stakeholders - people that may not be accustomed to managing resources or accounting for themselves in the formats and financial management procedures required by donors. The passive attitudes and 'recipient' roles of communities, (as much as the didactic attitudes and 'provider' mentality of government agents) need to be broken down. Communities need to become more systematic, and government systems more responsive and flexible.

The approach takes time and successes can only be measured incrementally.

Practical examples of some interventions

Peri-urban Programme – (PoCMUS) chiba water system

Chiba community, through its Resident Development Committee, identified water as its priority. Together with staff from Kasama Municipal council (who had received training in community participative approaches), they planned a spring-sourced gravity water system project and submitted their proposal to the Provincial Approvals Committee (PAC). A representative from a neighbouring community sits on the PAC and was able to inform the Chiba association how the discussions went. The project was approved and a request was made to the National Steering Committee of the Ministry of Local Government for funds to be released (K282 million). The project has since been successfully completed and the community is managing the system quite well.

User fees are paid on a monthly basis and the community manages these funds through their local bank. A technical team within the community does on-going operation and maintenance and the department of Water and Sewerage Services of the Council provide technical and financial back-up support.

Rural water supply and sanitation programme

Kaputa district faces many water and sanitation problems. To identify WASHE (Water Sanitation and Hygiene Education) needs, the villages most affected were assisted by the Sub-District WASHE (D-WASHE) to develop an action plan. Various activities were proposed ranging from new boreholes, rehabilitation of old boreholes, improvement to traditional sources such as communal hand-dug wells, lining with bricks, construction of VIP sanitary facilities in schools and Rural Health Centres and health and hygiene education activities. Kaputa D-WASHE submitted their proposal to the Provincial WASHE, and the district received funds to implement their action plan.

Despite the existence of relatively well-organized D-WASHEs in the various project areas of this remote district, the programme has been beset by problems. Many of these difficulties are technologically related - such as geological conditions resulting in several dry boreholes (out of 10 proposed, only 2 were successful). The communities have not received any technical advice on these conditions or other available options. The participatory planning process has raised expectations among communities, which the district has not been sufficiently able to respond to.

Reflecting on the experiences of Chiba and Kaputa

Community level

- The Ireland Aid-funded programme has demonstrated that strong and organized communities are capable of

identifying needs; analyzing problems; planning and managing the development of their communities on the basis of clearly-identified community priorities.

- Community participation is now an accepted idea (if not a fully practiced reality) within the water and peri-urban development sectors. It is now accepted that partnership with community structures is fundamental to working towards sustainable community development.
- The level of technology employed in water sector interventions is critical to the success and long-term sustainability of those activities. In terms of the 'higher' technologies, many communities have been unable to carry out some of the major rehabilitation / repairs of the various systems developed.
- There is a need to link communities to permanent service providers, line Ministry departments or commercial utilities in order to ensure their access to the technical and financial support needed to enhance sustainability.

District, provincial and national level

- External influencing factors (such as poor conditions of service, low or no payment of salaries for protracted periods of time, lack of resources or transport for job implementation) have resulted in lower levels of commitment and ownership of the programme among district, provincial and central level.
- The lack of a comprehensive government democratic decentralization policy framework and the very real lack of power and resources for local government have effectively paralyzed structures at this level. Until such a time as central government devolves real autonomy to local government, service delivery will continue to be ad hoc, unreliable and dependent on the benevolence of dysfunctional structures at the central government level.
- Principal obstacles to the process of full integration of this approach within government are weaknesses in the areas of planning, coordination, financial management and reporting at various levels; and confusion around roles and responsibilities for government staff.
- There are indications that centrally initiated programmes tend to be handled as separate programmes, owned by the respective Ministries and departments. It is difficult for D-WASHEs to access central funding despite annual budgets indicating otherwise.

Some key learnings

Experience from attempting to implement community driven development has led IA to conclude that the most important "ingredients" for a successful capacity development approach are as follows:

- Sustained political commitment and leadership;

- Genuine democratic decentralization of devolved power and resources to local government with institutionalized mechanisms for community participation, feedback and ongoing dialogue.
- Well-structured institutional assessments involving local experts;
- Involvement of key stakeholders right from the planning stage;
- Recognition of need for a slow, gradual and sometimes unpredictable process;
- Frequent and continuous monitoring with feedback into design and implementation.

References

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