



## Targeting the vulnerable in water and sanitation – Obi Experience

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IN MOST PLACES in Nigeria services are delivered without any set criteria. This practice hinders to a large extent the most needful people having access to facilities. In an effort to get to the people that need the facilities most, vulnerability system is developed for assessing people's well being so as to prioritize selection for intervention.

This system for targeting the most vulnerable people is at two levels, community and household. It is used to select communities and also to determine level of community contribution for water point and household contribution for latrines.

Community applies in writing to Water and Sanitation Unit (WASU) of the Local Government Council (LGC) for assistance. To ensure that this request is not lopsided WASU visits the community to ascertain this demand and their vulnerability status through a process known as "rapid survey". This consists of focus group discussion, key informant interview and structured observation.

The community is scored against 6 factors developed by WASU viz: wealth, water supply, attitude to open defecations, demand, access to community, access to medical care by the following factors; wealth 3.8 water supply 2.3, attitude to open defecation 2.7, demand 1.2, access to community 1, access to medical care 1. The total score is the community's vulnerability rating.

Community scores are submitted to the Local Government Council Water and Sanitation Management Committee who monitor WASU'S activities. The scores are used to decide which community to work in. If two communities have the same vulnerability score, the management committee then uses geographical location and date of application for selection.

After a community has been selected for intervention, another assessment is carried out at household level. The community chooses indicators for three wealth categories; rich, medium and poor. Key informants are chosen by the community to identify and rank each household. The population of the community determines the number of key informants (3-5). The results are discussed in a general community meeting for deciding subsidy level for household latrines. WASU gives a block subsidy of 50% to the community for latrine slab material. In groups of men, women and children, the community comes up with the remaining 50% splitting it amongst themselves (rich, medium and poor). They now get back to the general community where a final consensus is reached. The rich pay more, the medium pay average while the poor pay the least.

The use of vulnerability rating in community selection provides a transparent means of selecting community and can be used to explain selection decision to various stakeholders. The likelihood of political influence is reduced as the system depends on a pre-defined set of criteria.

### Obi Project

Obi is one of the poorest Local Government Areas in Benue State with an estimated population of about 180,637 people by the 1991 population census. The area falls within difficult geology, which makes ground water development difficult and was highly endemic in guinea worm and other WATSAN related diseases like diarrhea etc. The Obi WATSAN project was initiated by the British Government's Department for International Development in 1996 and has since been managed by WaterAid.

### Vulnerability

Vulnerability in development term does not apply to only children and women, as it seems to be in the case of war situation or disease. In development term, the word applies to an entire community and it is determined by the level at which poverty strikes the inhabitant of the community particularly at the household level. This has informed WaterAid and her partner to undertake a vulnerability survey before implementing WATSAN project.

### Conducting vulnerability assessment

Applications for assistance are received from communities. These factors have standardized weights of wealth 3.8, water 3.2, defecation practice 2.7, demand 1.2, access to community 1, Access to medical care 1. The weighting was done using a sample rapid survey score of wealth ranking 144, access to water 118, defecation practice 100, demand expression 44, access to community 37 and access to medical care 37. The least score divided the score for each factor, which is 37.

### Vulnerability at community level

In selecting community for intervention, priority is given to the most vulnerable. WASU provides 77.8% of the total cost for water point construction while the community provides 22.2%. However, the community contribution increases while that of WASU decreases as communities provide points. This is referred to as the sliding scale of community contribution for Water Supply (Tables 1a and

1b). Table 2 gives the items each category of community are expected to procure.

POPULATION	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
0-250	A	N/A						
251-500	A	B	N/A					
501-750	A	B	C	N/A				
1,000	A	A	B	C	N/A			
1,250	A	A	B	C	C	N/A		
1,500	A	A	B	C	C	C	N/A	
1,750	A	A	B	B	C	C	C	N/A
2,000	A	A	B	B	C	C	C	C

POPULATION	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
250	B	N/A						
500	B	C	N/A					
750	B	C	C	N/A				
1,000	B	B	C	C	N/A			
1,250	B	B	C	C	C	N/A		
1,500	B	B	B	C	C	C	N/A	
1,750	B	B	B	C	C	C	C	N/A
2,000	B	B	B	B	C	C	C	C

A = 22.2% Community contribution  
 B = 28%  
 C = 40%

A	Hand pump and tool kit
B	All hardware costs except rising mains
C	Full cost of all hardware and training

### Vulnerability at household level

In a general community meeting, indicators for wealth classes of rich =1, medium =2, poor = 3 are set; key informants of about 3-5 were identified (Table 3). The key informants listed out the names of every household and, using the indicators already set, rated each of the households (Table 4 gives some examples of the rating procedure). WASU provide to all project communities a block subsidy of 50% of the total cost for latrines and the remaining 50% is shared by the community amongst the different wealth classes of rich, medium and the poor.

Wealth class	Indicator
Rich	Money, large yam farm size, motor vehicle, zinc house well rendered, train children up to tertiary institution.
Medium	Zinc house, motorbike, farm size enough to feed family, train children up to secondary level.
Poor	Thatches round hut, sagging roof, works on other's farm children only in primary level.

S/NO.	NAME OF HOUSE HEAD	SCORE BY KEY INFORMANT			TOTAL SCORE	AVERAGE SCORE	CLASS
		1	2	3			
1	John Ogbobo	3	2	3	8	2.7	Poor
2	Akumachi Atu	2	3	3	8	2.7	Poor
3	Oga Opioko	2	1	1	4	1.3	Rich
4	Ede Oko	2	2	3	7	2.3	Medium

### Lessons learnt

During a review of the system for community assessment, it was found out that the structured observation walk always takes precedence in the scoring over the focus group discussions. This may not be a problem in the sense that it might indeed be the most accurate measure, however, it also means it is usually only one team member who undertakes the walk.

WASU and WaterAid however believe that the level to which the system is open to manipulation is still relatively small compared to the political influence that it manages to overcome. The wealth assessment uses household assets, which some community members and WASU staff feel may give misleading result, as a household's economic status may have declined since the asset was purchased. However, since the assessment is not solely based on assets; it was agreed that the degree of inaccuracy is likely to be insignificant.

Some community members complained that people who did not turn up for the general community meeting blamed key informants for placing them in a higher wealth category than they perceived themselves (therefore attracting less subsidy). WASU has not found this to be a major problem in their experience as indicators (see Table 3) are set by community members before household are placed into categories, and once the indicators are in place it is relatively easy to determine which category house hold should fall under. However, there is some evidence That people's perceptions of each others wealth are strongly influenced by their status in the community, for example a powerful speaker is seen as rich even though his assets may indicate otherwise.

The rationale for the setting of the cut off score for less vulnerable communities was based on an arithmetic average, rather than on socially determined factors. It could be argued that this score should have been set at different levels.

The community assessment is carried out in piece meal, so it is possible that some communities rated vulnerable at one point in time are less vulnerable if compared with other communities not yet assessed. There are also questions over whether the most vulnerable communities are actually being missed by the project, as they are unable to apply to WASU, which is the start of the process. For this reason WASU is currently reviewing the possibility of putting together an LGA wide picture of communities, using key informant, so that if necessary extra efforts to create

demand could be made in the more vulnerable communities that don't apply. The LGA wide assessment could use representatives from communities, extension workers and other knowledgeable people in the area to create an initial overview of the LGA. This could be quicker than the detailed vulnerability rating, which could then be used as a second step in the process if necessary. The difficulty with using the LGA wide assessment is that it wouldn't recognize changes over time, unless it was regularly reviewed. For example, if selection decisions are still being based on the same assessment five years later it is likely that communities 'status will have changed.

### **Replicability**

The process used in Obi project could be used by other projects interested in targeting the most vulnerable. It is recognized that it can be a time consuming process, however in Obi it is carried out in the wet season when construction is not possible, and therefore number of activities WASU can undertake at this time is limited.

The wealth assessment at households level may be deemed offensive in other cultures, however in Igede culture this is not the case. WASU and WaterAid feel that if this was a

problem; the rapid survey could be used on its own and would still provide useful results.

If the approach were used on a larger scale, the personnel and time requirement would have to be recognized. However, any development project that is serious about reaching the poorest of the poor has to be prepared to invest the resources to do so.

### **Conclusion**

The use of the rapid survey has certainly provided a clear rationale for community selection and WASU and WaterAid feel confident that they really are reaching the poorest of the poor.

Even if there is a degree of manipulation in the findings, the comparative advantages of the system outweigh this. The household wealth assessment should be continued as it is empowering communities to make their own decision based on a greater level of information, enabling access to sanitation for all.

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