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Local private sector participation: Oju/Obi Experience

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Introduction

THIS PAPER SEEKS to share the experience of the Oju/Obi Water and Sanitation Project with focus on the rationale, process of development of the model, lessons learnt and the challenges. It is an invitation to development practitioners in the water and sanitation sector to consider adopting these approaches. The broad objective of the local private sector participation in water and sanitation service delivery on the Oju/Obi Water and Sanitation Project was to ensure sustained effective service delivery for the people of Oju and Obi Local Government Areas (LGA) in particular and Benue State in general. Specifically, the project seeks to:

- To develop and strengthen institutional structure for sustained effective village level operation and maintenance of water points
- To establish hand pump spare parts outlets within easy reach of the local communities of Oju and Obi LGAs
- To facilitate the sustained application of cost-effective water and sanitation technology options developed on the project
- To diversify the institutional base for water and sanitation service delivery in Oju and Obi LGAs and Benue State
- To give users a voice to demand accountability from service providers.

Rationale and Range of Services Provided by Private Sector

At the start of the project baseline survey was conducted in Oju and Obi. Information from this survey revealed that there were a range of constraints facing the people that adversely affected their access to safe water supply and sanitation facilities. Some of these limitations were identified as follows:

Sanitation

- Collapsing latrines (due to soft soil formation)
- Termites eating up wood logs used to deck latrine pits with the decking falling in before the pit fills up
- Non-availability in the local environment of gravel (aggregate) for concrete slab construction
- No retail outlet for construction materials in the appropriate quantity for concrete slab construction and absence of organised group to procure whole sale and share between themselves
- Lack of knowledge of latrine pit lining

Hand Dug Wells (HDW):

- Seasonal total collapse of wells in the wet season (they had to dig a well every dry season and this became a daunting task that they abandoned)
- No knowledge of hand dug well lining technology
- Inability to dig wells with straight walls
- Few available wells were abstracted unhygienically with rope and bucket because they lacked money to pay for hand pumps.

Hand pumps: there were several hand pumps broken down and neglected because the people:

- Lacked knowledge of hand pump maintenance and repairs both at LGA and community levels
- Lacked hand pump spare parts shop within easy reach (the closest and yet unknown to the communities was in Makurdi – the State Agency for Rural Water and Sanitation office)
- Lacked tools for routine maintenance and repair of hand pumps

Rain Water Harvesting

In the greater part of Obi, ground water abstraction was impossible due to the hydrogeological formation. The people knew about and practised rainwater havesting. However they lacked large enough containers to collect adequate Water for use later in the dry months of January – April.

Given the above limitations and the determination by the project team to work with the people to remove or minimise the constraints, a range of technology options for safe water supply and sanitation were developed with the people to increase the options available to them. A system for ensuring the continual availability of skills and materials for replicating and maintaining the options selected had to be developed. The effort of putting in place this desired system translated into a relationship that the project came to refer to as Associate Partnership. These Associate Partners are the small-scale private sector partners involved in service delivery.

Range of Service Providers

Sanitation Centre Operators: stock and retail materials for sanitary latrines construction, provide information on the

range of suitable latrine designs for the local environment and information on locations of trained latrine builders. The first set of materials adequate for 50 latrine slabs was provided by the Project as a revolving seed fund for the sanitation centres to get started. To date, 2 of the 6 centres are operating without any financial support from the Project. The other four are still retailing below the real market price as an incentive for promoting latrine up take in the remote villages. Plans are however, rife for the withdrawal of subsidy from these 4 so-called dependent sanitation centres.

Latrine Builders: all masons trained to cast slabs and line Latrines. They respond to request of householders wishing to build latrine slabs and where necessary lined pits. The householders pay an agreed fee to the latrine builder on satisfactory completion of the construction involved.
Masons (hand dug well lining and rainwater tank construction): these are masons that have been provided with additional training in hand dug well lining and ferro-cement rainwater tanks construction. Communities and individuals negotiate with them to provide technical support in the construction of their facilities.

Hand pump Spare-parts Dealer/Windlass fabricator: this partner stocks and retails hand pump spare parts to communities and individuals. He also fabricates windlasses for installation on hand-dug wells for communities preferring windlasses over hand pumps. The project supported him to design the windlass and fabricate the first copy. He now does the fabrication on his own without any support.

Hand Pump Mechanics: these are made up of a plumber and a welder that were trained in Lagos by Unipumps Nigeria Ltd on Hand Pump Maintenance and repairs. They provide training for the village hand pump mechanics and back up support in the repair of village hand pumps when the village mechanics are unable to fix a fault. The communities pay for their service on satisfaction of the service provided.

Private Management of Drilling Rig: this is a developing aspect of the small-scale private sector participation approach at state level. Preliminary discussions have been held and agreements reached with the Benue State Government on putting the Project Drilling Rig under private sector utilisation to compliment government drilling capacity. An initial part of the arrangement involving the use of the rig by a private driller to drill boreholes in project communities is already operational with encouraging results.

Access for the Poor

To motivate the private sector service providers, the Project encouraged them to charge realistic rates of payment for goods and services. A subsidy arrangement to make the services affordable for the poor had to be developed. This involved the use of vouchers whose face value is complimented by the cash contribution of a beneficiary. A service provider receives the voucher plus the cash balance and provides the beneficiary with the desired service or goods. The voucher is then presented to the Water and Sanitation Unit (WASU) who redeems it to the service provider.

Regulation

WASU have the responsibility of monitoring and ensuring maintenance of quality service. This is achieved through an agreement between WASU and Associate Partners that spells out the standards and allowable profit margin for services and goods provided. In addition to monitoring visits by WASU agents, community members also have a form they sign to confirm that a service provider has provided the desired service satisfactorily (see Table 1). WASU therefore plays the role of umpire between the service providers and users.

Table 1: Certification of Satisfactory Borehole Drilling (Community Level)

1. Name of Community .....

2. Borehole site (GPS) .....

3. Dates of Drilling: Started ..... 4. Completed .....

5. Depth of Borehole: ..... 6. Static Water Level .....

7. Yield l/s: .....

8. Comments by WASCOM Chairman or Community Leader:

Name/Signature of Driller .....

Name/Sign (Community Rep.) .....

Witnessed by WASU/WESU (Name/Signature/Date

.....

Strengths of the System

- Associate Partners are seen by communities as separate entities from the Local Government and so are confident of doing business with them without fear of red tape or being short changed.
- The range of people with knowledge of water and sanitation technologies in the LGAs has increased significantly.
- Both project and non-project communities can access the services of the Associate Partners, and this contributes to increased access to improved water and sanitation facilities.
- The Associate Partners are a significant group of people

to keep improvements working and replicate affordable technologies.
- The Associate Partners are not completely reliant on the services they provide, hence there is opportunity for complimentary existence of the water and sanitation business and their other businesses.

Lessons and Challenges

- Assurance of delivery of reliable quality service is capable of stimulating willingness to pay for services.
- The ability to pay for services by everyone is not the same but this can be addressed through careful design of transparent subsidy systems that target the poor.
- It is possible for Government to facilitate effective service delivery through creating the right policy environment that protects both the service provider and the consumer.
- Keeping the Sanitation Centres in remote villages operational independent of subsidy could be difficult given the low appreciation of latrines' health benefits contrasting with the real cost of latrine slabs (about N1,200 or $ 9.45) for a slab.
- Establishing a supply depot of hand pump spare parts within the state to reduce the travel distance for the Associate partners could reduce the eventual cost passed on to the service users
- Getting the State Government to scale up the approach in the state and so contribute to more effective resources utilisation is a challenge we are working on meeting.

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