

MAXIMIZING THE BENEFITS FROM WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION

## Scaling up management of water supply and sanitation services: Ethiopian experience

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*The major problem facing the development of water supply and sanitation sector is sustainability of the completed water schemes. The reasons for the failure of the schemes are many, which could be categorized in broad terms, as social, institutional, technical, financial and environmental. The current statistics indicate that 20-40 % of the completed water supply schemes are not functional due to the reasons mentioned above. Plan Ethiopia, an international NGO, has taken up the initiative to coordinate an action research for scaling up community managed water supply and sanitation services by involving stakeholders in the sub-sector to give guidance and coordinate activities through their good offices to study the support mechanisms required for sustainability and then replicate the results at regional and national levels.*

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### Introduction and background

The MDGs for water supply and sanitation have put Ethiopia for an immense task: to reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation by 2015. This means that coverage has to be increased dramatically and in a speed unknown so far. The past experiences however show that it is not only coverage that needs to be increased. The sustainability of implemented water and sanitation systems must be ensured to be able to deliver water and sanitation services not for the life time of a project or a system, but indefinitely. These are the two goals of “scaling up community management of rural water supply and sanitation”.

Community management has become the main model for implementing water and sanitation services in rural areas. The Ethiopian Water Resources Management policy clearly states that rural water supply schemes have to be managed, operated and maintained by the beneficiary community and there are adequate good experiences in the country regarding community management. It is with no doubt that it is most preferred option for rural water and sanitation service delivery.

Community management has proven to be a successful and effective model for water and sanitation provision, but it also has its problems and constraints. Community managed water and sanitation systems are vulnerable. They are vulnerable to a range of social, technical, institutional, environmental, financial, integration of water supply and sanitation, monitoring and evaluation etc constraints. Some of the constraints are that water committees lack capacities, trained committee members or operators leave the community and are not replaced on time women are excluded from decision making though they are carriers of water to the family, water supply technologies are not sometimes

appropriate and are complicated, spare parts are hard to find, there is not transparency in book keeping and decision making, financial resources are misused. Some communities do a good job, even years after system completion, but many communities struggle with their water management tasks. These are practical experiences that are very common and contribute for failure of schemes in Ethiopia.

It is believed that to ensure sustainability of schemes communities managing their water and sanitation services need support from different angles. It is not fair to leave communities by their own after the completion of a new water and sanitation system. Institutional support mechanisms, policies, legislation, proper monitoring and capacity building, these are all elements of a water supply and sanitation service to rural people. The service ensures sustainable water provision, equitable water provision and water provision to all. That is much more than putting in place infrastructure. Communities are the preferred managers of such a service, but they can only do a good job if these elements have been taken care of and support is in place. Within such framework both sustainability and coverage can be addressed. That is what is often referred to as scaling up.

Learning from success and failures in the past, learning from community management models in use in the country, investigating key factors for success and failure, analysing the strengths and weaknesses of a country's water and sanitation sector, knowing the gaps in terms of capacities, policy and legislation, investigating the country's institutional set up, these are some of the aspects that need to get attention. Action research is an appropriate model to dive into these questions, reflect on the outcomes, design actions to overcome problems and gaps, test them and monitor their impact. Action research combines critical reflection, with acting, testing and trying things out. Action research enables learning.

Therefore, Plan Ethiopia has taken the initiative to conduct an Action Research in collaboration with IRC Water and Sanitation to address the constraints mentioned above and others in one of its project area. The process of the Action Research started in April 2004 and the activities and the lessons learned so far are presented hereunder with the background of the country and the project area.

## **Water supply and sanitation situation in Ethiopia**

The current improved water supply coverage of the country in 2005 is 42.3% and when this figure is disaggregated into urban and rural it is 85.2% for the urban and 34% for the rural. The country has launched the International Decade for Action, Water is Life (2005-2015) to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in water Supply and Sanitation and has conducted MDG Needs Assessment to set the targets and determine the financial requirements. The targets set are to raise the national coverage to 71.2% and 96.9% and 65.6% for the urban and rural respectively. The country is also committed to improve the sanitation situation from the current national coverage of 11.5% to 56%, rural coverage of 3.9% to 58% and urban coverage of 49.75% to 75% by year 2015.

## **Population and water supply situation in Shebedino, the pilot district (Woreda) for the action research**

Shebedino is located in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region about 22 kilometers South East of Awassa, the Regional Administrative Centre and has an area of 100,800 ha of which only 0.2% is covered with forest. It has a population of over 300,000. The urban dwellers are about 3% below the national average which is 15% and the rest 97% live in the rural areas. With a density of 487 people per square kilometer, Shebedino is the second most densely populated woreda in the country.

There are about 187 water supply schemes out of which about 40% are not functional due to many reasons like poor community management, lack of spare parts, technicians, source problem, and capacity of the water desk responsible for repair.

The water supply coverage is 25% while the sanitation coverage is estimated at 50% which is higher than the national coverage which is 11.5%. The situation improved due to the recent initiative taken by the Health Bureau in digging latrines by teaching and convincing each family to have latrines.

## **Action research for scaling up community managed water supply and sanitation services**

### **International initiative**

In 2001, Plan International, together with other international water and sanitation organizations like WEDC, Water Aid, IRC, WSSCC and EHP, organized a conference under the theme "From System to Service" Scaling up Community Management of Water Supply. After the conference the parties continued working together in a thematic group and after some time decided to start action research to further develop the knowledge. As a consequence of this Plan International sent a concept note to its country offices and one of the countries that responded positively to the initiative was Plan Ethiopia.

### **Initiation of scaling up in Ethiopia**

The practical action taken to launch the Action Research on the ground was in the Workshop held from April 26-30, 2004 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where more than 40 participants from different national and regional Government sector institutions, NGOs, multilateral, bilateral donors etc with the coordination of Plan, and close collaboration of IRC for Water and Sanitation, confirmed their commitment to implement the Action Research to improve the sustainability of water and sanitation services in Ethiopia.

### **Establishment of national and regional steering committee (NSC & RSC)**

After the Workshop Plan Ethiopia visited different stakeholders and explained the objectives of the Action Research to get their full participation in the process and establish the National and Regional Steering Committee. Following the visit of the different stakeholders the Steering Committees were established and made functional as of May 2004. After the establishment of the National Steering committee a series of meetings were held and one of the big tasks accomplished was approval of the Proposal for Action Research for Scaling up Community Management of Water Supply and Sanitation Services Project and developing the understanding of the sector problems.

### **Roles and responsibilities of NSC**

- Provide policies and guidelines that govern the action research
- Define tasks for the TAG and the Secretariat
- Prioritize action research agenda
- Identify and mobilize resources.
- Disseminate/share information, including the definition of dissemination strategy

- Guide advocacy activities
- Facilitate networking and cross learning (internationally, region wise and in-country)
- Approve action research proposals
- Monitor and evaluate the process and progress of research activities
- Approve ToRs for the action research.
- Review and approve research findings and reports.

#### ***Roles and responsibilities of RSC***

- Review and recommend research agenda
- Endorse pilot districts for action research
- Disseminate research findings
- Support district core team
- Identify and coordinate collaborative organizations
- Mobilize resources
- Advocate for enabling and appropriate legislation, policies and strategies
- Monitor and evaluate progress
- Guidance to the Regional Technical Advisory Group (RTAG)
- Review performance of RTAG

#### **Establishment of national and regional technical advisory groups**

After the establishment of the Steering Committees the National and Regional Technical Advisory Groups were established to give technical advice and guide the research process.

#### ***Roles and Responsibilities of the Technical Advisory groups***

- Advise the National Steering Committee on policy and strategy issues
- Providing technical advice on appropriate technology.
- Provide technical advice to the action research group.
- Review research proposals/ methodology.
- Review the reports of the findings of the research.
- Provide technical assistance to the District Action Research Team
- Review findings/reports of the action research
- Advise the Regional Steering Committee for policy, strategy formulation and scaling up

#### **Establishment of the Woreda/district action research team (WART)**

The WART is the body that implements the Action Research.

#### ***Roles and responsibilities of WART***

- Identify the issues which affect the sustainability of community managed water and sanitation services.
- Identify best practices in Shebedino Woreda.
- Implement the action research outcomes with the involvement of all stakeholders and partners.

- Ensure the action research is well integrated with the Woreda activities and the district development Plan.
- Ensure the communities are fully participating in the Action Research.
- Disseminate finding to the RSC, NSC and TAG.

#### **The Capacity Building/Training Workshop.**

Action Research is new to the country though the problem it is trying to solve is not new. Therefore to internalize the concept and processes a capacity building/training workshop was held from December 20-22, 2004. The participants of the workshop were sector partners in water and sanitation activities. The objectives of the workshop were:

- To work towards a shared understanding of all stakeholders on the basic concepts, elements and phases of the scaling up of community managed rural water supply and sanitation services.
- To discuss on the overview of the 3-year Action Research program of the proposal.
- To discuss on the planning of the Inception Workshop.
- To update the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders of the Action Research (National, Regional, and Woreda or district level).

The workshop discussed a number of issues and recommended the following.

- Recommended the Meta Evaluation Study to be conducted to learn from previous country experiences in the management of water supply and sanitation services.
- Recommended the Situational Analysis of Shebedino to be conducted and both to be presented at the Inception workshop and the Way Forward to be drawn from these presentations and discussions.

#### **The inception workshop**

An Inception Workshop was held from 4-7 April 2005 where government, Multilaterals, bilateral, NGOs, Civil societies, communities participated. The major presentations at the workshop were the country experiences compiled in the Meta Evaluation study in the management of water supply and sanitation services. The study was conducted by reviewing evaluations and final reports of rural water supply and sanitation projects implemented by different sector partners and the government. The purpose of the study was to learn from the experiences of those stakeholders and use the good experiences for the Action Research exercise and then document the process and its replicability to promote sustainability of schemes.

The purpose of the Situation Analysis of the Pilot District was to describe and explain the current situation and at the same time collect information on the water supply and sanitation management practices.

The outcome of the Inception Workshop has clearly enabled to design and prepare the action plan for the coming months. There will be workshops every six months to review progress of the Action Research and learn from the process and prepare an action plan for the next six months.

### **Action research coordination office**

The Action Research has a Coordinator at the national level and a Research Officer at the Woreda/District level who are responsible for coordination and follow up the day to day activities and ensure the implementation of the research to achieve its objectives.

### **Lessons learned.**

The Action Research is at its infant stage to share research outcomes, however the following lessons have been observed to date.

- Sensitization of sector partners about sustainability issues due to the scaling up process..
- The notion of Scaling Up attracted other sectors and stakeholders to consider scaling up in their own respective sectors and activities.
- The meetings of the Steering committee at National and Regional levels served as a networking forum to discuss issues of sustainability and accelerating coverage to meet MDG targets.
- Assessed the existing situation of community manage-

ment practices in the country through the Meta Evaluation study.

- Served as an advocacy forum of the water and sanitation sector.

### **Conclusion**

Sustainability of water and sanitation schemes is has become a real challenge for the water supply sector development. The country has launched the International Decade for Action, Water is Life, and this would be one of the major challenges unless an appropriate action is taken at the initial years of the decade. The Action Research for scaling up is therefore, a timely action that many stakeholders are expecting to see the result and then use it in their water and sanitation development activities.

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