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**WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE SERVICES BEYOND 2015:
IMPROVING ACCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY**

**The role of legalizing water sanitation and hygiene
committees on the sustainability of rural water supply
schemes in Kindo Koyesha District, Ethiopia**

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The Southern Nations and Nationalities Peoples Regional State (SNNPR) has adopted a new community management structure of rural water supply scheme in 2012. It shifted the responsibility of managing the water facilities from the existed committees, WASHCOs, to WASH Association and Federation and provided legal entity to them. The Kindo Koyesha District with the support of UNICEF has successfully set up the new management structure across the district in the year 2013. A total of 210 WASH Associations for each facilities and 23 Federations who are coordinating the activities of the committees were established. Since the functioning of the new structure in 2013 the district has witnessed improvement in collection and utilization of users' contribution, reduction of non-functional water schemes and improved monitoring and reporting system. However these can only be sustained if continued support is provided from the government at all level and other partners.

Introduction

The Government of Ethiopia and its partners are striving to achieve universal access to safe water supply. The focus to accelerated increase of coverage remains on massive construction of new water supply facilities. However, a considerable number of the constructed facilities are failed to deliver intended services to communities.

According to the National WASH Inventory conducted in 2011 about 27% of the rural water schemes in Ethiopia were found non-functional. Unless the functionality of the facilities is improved then continued investment in the development of water supplies is not worthwhile.

The sustainability of rural water supply schemes is a key factor in meeting the universal access to safe water supply. There are several factors why water schemes are not sustainable. But it can be categorized as social, financial, environmental, technical and institutional factors. Addressing the issue of sustainability is a very complex challenge and cannot be solved by only water supply professionals but also by policymakers and politicians. Therefore appropriate policy and legislation framework is important to provide an environment that promote sustainability. The Ethiopian Water Resource Management Policy (EWRMP) realized that lack of community participation and ownership of the water facilities is one of the critical problems to sustainability. However, the previous community management structure of rural water facility could not bring the expected sustainability level that hampered the proper management of the rural water facilities.

In response to this the SNNP Regional Government has adopted the Rural Potable Water and Sanitation Associations Establishment Regulation in 2012. The main aim of the Regulation is to facilitate the activities of the committees and empower them in decision making processes. The Regulation harmonized the wide range of approaches to management of rural water supply facilities and it provided legal entity to the committees managing the facilities. Following this the SNNP Regional Water Resource Development

Bureau using the support of UNICEF has launched a program to establish new WASH Association and Federation across the supported Districts.

This report assesses the major findings of the short study conducted in Kindo Koyesha district with the objectives of examining the effect of the new management structure and legalization of WASH association on the sustainability of the rural water supply system.

The old community management structure

Previously rural water supply systems were managed by a committee, commonly known as Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Committees (WASHCOs). The committees comprising of five members were responsible for day to day management of the facilities. However, the management structure did not allow to the committees to perform their duties and responsibilities due to many factors. Some these were roles and responsibility of the committees and its member were not clearly defined or not well understood; management styles were fragmented across the facilities; poor collection of contribution from users; misuse of the collected funds; unbinding rules and laws; weak reporting structure; lack of follow up and support from the Kebele administration; and above all were not legally recognized. Therefore majority of the WASHCOs were not actively engaged in the overall management of the facilities.

The new community management structure

Organizational structure

As a replacement of the previous community management structure, a new approach was designed. The Regional Government of SNNP has adopted a new regulation in 2012 known as Rural Potable Water and Sanitation Associations Establishment Regulation. The Regulation has fully given the management of all rural water supply to Associations and Federations and recognized them as legal entity.

A WASH Association can be formed by a group of people who are voluntarily joined to improve their water supply system. The size of the association depends on the number of individuals who use the water supply but should not be less than 20 households. The basic attributes on its establishment are membership should be on voluntary basis, should have its own name, members must have a common interest for an improved water supply, leadership should be elected democratically; registered in the District as legal entity and acquire certificate of registration; and need to have its own bylaw to run its internal affair.

An Association Committee is composed of five members who are elected democratically by the user community. These are chairperson, a secretary, a treasurer and two other members. The role and responsibility of the new WASH Association committee is almost similar to that of the previous WASHCOs. The major new changes is that committees are now accountable to Federation where previously were to Kebele Administration. Kebele administration role is now limited to provision of support to committees.

The roles and responsibilities of the committees includes registering members; represent the users in contacts with external bodies; protect and manage the water supply schemes; encourage the community to take part in the existing and new water development projects; organize contributions by the community for new construction, operations and maintenance;; keep records of all contributions and expenditures; promote proper hygienic practices and sanitation among the community; conduct regular committee meetings to discuss and decide on issues, procedures, and problems; inform the community once in three months about decisions; report on revenues and expenditures; and take the necessary action when rules are not followed. A group of association form a WASH Federation. A Federation having six members has a responsibility of coordinating committees in the Kebele and ensure that committees are running their activities in a harmonious manner.

Legal recognition gives such committees to open bank account, access to financial services, enter into contractual arrangements, communicate legally with external bodies, resolve water related disagreements in the community, have the power to sue and be sued and decide about their future.

Following the adoption of the Regulation the Regional Water Resource Bureau with the support of UNICEF have started to implement the new community management structure. The program was first started in Kindo Koyesha District and then moved to other districts of the region. The major activities carried out include an orientation training to District Water Supply Office staffs and concerned government staffs; facilitate the election of association and federation committee members, provision of training to the

elected committee members on their new role and responsibility and facilitate the formation of association for each water supply facility. By the mid of 2013 a total of 210 WASH Association and 23 Federations were established across the Kindo Koyesha District.

Collection of contribution

Financial issues was greatly compromising the sustainability of the water supply in the district. Contribution of fees before legalization was practiced in some of the water schemes of the district. A very small number, about 27 out of the total 210 WASHCOs were collecting contributions, though the EWRMP promotes the need to follow cost recovery principle with costs related to operation and maintenance. Furthermore, more number of users were defaulted from contribution from time to time.

One of the major tasks of the Associations is to collect fees from all users on regular basis. In this regard consensus have been reached with all committees and government actors at all levels during the series of orientation trainings. The committee have discussed the issue with members and came up with a decision that all members have to contribute on regular basis. Members with the support of the District Office has set water tariffs for their water supply. The agreed payment schedule is yearly fixed price system. The amount of contributions varies across the district which ranges from 1.5 to 2.5 USD per year and the agreed convenient time of payment is in the month of November where agricultural production is harvested.

Following this all the committees have started to collect contributions. Since the establishment the committees managed to collect a total of 610,000 Ethiopian Birr (30,500 USD). Though the current amount is not adequate to cover the full operation and maintenance costs of a water supply, it is an encouraging sign that users realized money for operational and maintenance costs have to from service users. The main reason for low collection of contributions were users believed that since the owner of the scheme is the District government maintenance works is also its mandate. Changing this attitude of the communities to pay for water was not easy to the committees as the people have a long history of receiving services for free.

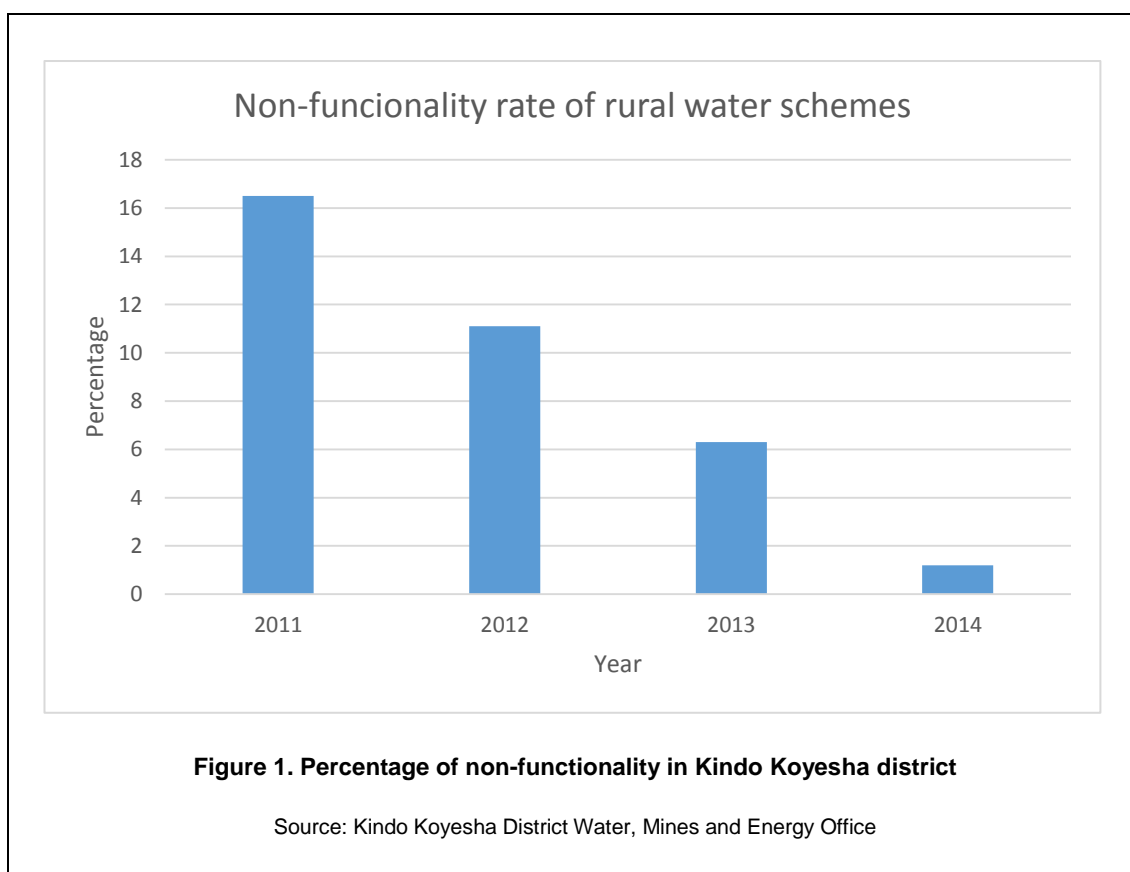
Financial management

Besides having a very small collection of fees from users the proper management of collected fund at previous times were very challenging. Only 12 out of the 27 committees who collected contributions had saving account and kept the money at microfinance institution. However, the rest kept with committee's cashier or with one of the members. Users believed that there was misuse of the money by the committees. The mistrust of communities was one of the main factors for insignificant fee collection and eventually lead to lack of financial sustainability for water service in the district.

The financial management has been changed for the newly formed associations. Contributions from users are collected using legal receipt where the associations give a receipt to users upon payment of fee. The collected fee is deposited in microfinance institution located in the Districts capital. During money withdrawal the committees need to get approval from District Water, Mines and Energy Office (DWMEO). The Office checks whether the proposed expenditure follows the right procedure and check the amount requested based on the need of the required work volume. Similarly the committee's financial document is audited twice a year by the staffs of the DWMEO.

Functionality of water supply facilities

The non-functionality rate of the water facilitates in the district has significantly improved since the introduction of the new community management structure. Few years ago about 20% of the district's water facilities were not working at any given time. Nevertheless this figure has reduced dramatically in the past two years. The DWMEO report indicated that only 2% of the total facilities were not working.



Ownership

One of the basic advantage of the formation of association is its creation to an increased sense of ownership. Committees have gradually begun to improve their existing water supply facilities using the money from their saving account. These includes the construction of four cattle troughs by four committees, expansion of one water supply to a community serving about 240 people and rehabilitation of six water facilities. The total money invested without the labour and local material contribution was 75,000 ETB.

Women participation

Women are represented in all the WASH committees but this doesn't necessarily mean an equitable division of work and responsibility between men and women. In all Associations and Federation committees no woman is chairing a committee. On the other hand more than more than 90% of the treasurer post is occupied by women as community believed that women are trustworthy to keep financial terms. Though the task of collecting and managing water at household level is women's responsibility, it can be said that women are still highly disadvantaged in the decision making positions at community level.

Monitoring and reporting

Previously the committees were accountable to their respective Kebele administration. However, as the administration is responsible to oversee the overall development activities in the Kebele they spend little time and energy to support and monitor the WASHCOs. The new management structure is changed by transferring the responsibility of the committee to their respective Federation Committees. The member of the Federation is not politically appointed and have no other responsibility in the Kebele. Therefore they have the commitment and time to provide all the necessary support to the association committees.

The Federation report to the District Water Office on monthly basis which is bridging the gap of reporting between the committees and DWMEO. The Office reported that it started receiving status of individual scheme in timely manner and make the office to take appropriate actions accordingly. On the other hand the DWMEO has developed a new indicator to regularly monitor the activities of the committees.

Conclusion

Management of rural water supply facilities by the legalized WASH Association and Federation is a recent concept in the District and region as well. In this short time coordinated and better management, well defined roles and responsibilities, better monitoring and reporting system, relatively higher contribution of fee and improved proper utilization of the collected funds was reported. However on the contrary women participation in decision making position of the committees is still remain unchanged.

The way forward

- The sustainability of rural water is dependent on a number of different factors. The issue can only be addressed if these factors are considered holistically rather than specific factor. The regional government has taken a very promising move by providing legal entity to WASH association and federation. The support and involvement of the regional government is very crucial towards the improvement of the other sustainability factors issues in the region.
- Legal provision for WASH association and federation is not an end by itself but continued support is very crucial. Otherwise committees may fail to continue their work. Institutional support to association and federation committees in the areas of financial management, operation and maintenance is crucial for better management of the facilities. The committees should receive refreshment and progressive training at regular interval.
- The degree of women representation through the decision-making bodies will determine the extent to which women are involved in their water supply system. Still the perception of the community to bring women on decision making position is very limited. The DWMEO should need to design a strategy in bringing women to chairperson and secretary positions in the committees.
- The involvement of local commercial operators in maintenance of non-functional water facilities is essential in reducing the burden of the DWMEO. The Office should provide incentive in the form of technical support and provision of minor maintenance tools.

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