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TRANSFORMATION TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE
AND RESILIENT WASH SERVICES

Community confidence in WASH and development service delivery: a case from Kianjai, Kenya

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Gaining the trust and confidence of the community is an important part of service delivery. This paper draws lessons on gaining community confidence by assessing the '(retrospective) disjointed incrementalism' approach seen in the operations of a humanitarian and development organisation - Friends of Kianjai Kenya (FKK). FKK found that community distrust arises through an unexpected group response to an organisation's actions. FKK assisted in the development of social capital in the community and that enabled effective communal action during community engagement and built the community's confidence towards FKK. Building community confidence through disjointed incrementalism meant taking short steps towards achieving a long-term goal. This research showed that building community confidence enabled the successful completion of the project and facilitated the long-term sustainability of the services.

Introduction

Humanitarian missions and development projects focus on interventions to improve the lives of people, sometimes irrespective of whether they want it or not. Repeated crop failure is a precondition for famine; this intensified in marginal communities and that creates a humanitarian crisis. The immediate response of Humanitarian organisations to such communities is to relieve suffering through food/seed distribution, and while distribution is a viable way of providing initial relief to famine, it does not provide a sustainable solution that will eventually lead to community development and self-reliance. Many communities are typically open to the contributions of these organisations at the level of charitable giving, but forms of community resistance are observed when organisations begin to make strides towards actual socio-economic transformation.

Literature review – community involvement and community confidence

In WASH interventions, planned community development programmes include "engagement" and "participation" but they do not always achieve both (Peterson et al., 2018). Community engagement and participation are both encapsulated in "community involvement" because they seek to reach the same objectives of achieving tangible behavioural changes and giving the community a sense of ownership of the problem and its solution (Peterson et al., 2018). However, the words "community engagement" and "community participation" are used rather interchangeably in research and practice. In the simplest terms the difference is, you *engage* the community in the preparation (input) so they can *participate* in the programmes (output). Chickannaiyappa and Ramaswamy (1984) gave guidelines which suggested involving the community from data collection to scheme selection, preference identification, planning, design and construction and finally operation and maintenance (O&M). This is a basic outline that applies to many WASH schemes, however, the difference between "engagement" (input) and "participation" (output) lies in the point and scale at which participation happens. In many water schemes participation begins at the point of O&M for more *communal* supplies; in some sanitation schemes, participation begins at the point of construction in *household* toilets while hygiene schemes tend to have less community engagement and more participation as they tend to steer towards *individual* lifestyle change e.g. handwashing practices.

"Community involvement" is an organisation's perspective on how to get a community to buy into their services; from an opposite viewpoint there is "community confidence" (Walker et al., 2010). Community confidence is the community's perspective on why they should trust an organisation; It is defined in this context as the individual and collective decision of the community to allow or disallow an external organisation's continuous operation and the constant (re-)evaluation of the extent of the community's technical, financial and social involvement in its programmes, demonstrated in individual and communal behaviour. Community confidence can be defined in terms of trust (Walker et al., 2010). In this paper, the authors make a distinction between trust and confidence. Whilst both are positive expectations used to bridge the gap between the known and the unknown, "trust" is a risk-based evaluation with people having faith in (uncertain) future expectations, "confidence" is based more on certainty, looking at past outcomes. The amount of evidence available for making a decision will determine if that decision is made in trust or confidence. Typically, if there is insufficient evidence to project similar patterns in the future, then larger leaps of faith are taken into the unknown in "trust". However, if we have substantial evidence, we make more "confident" decisions with a greater degree of certainty (Adams, 2005). For example, when donors award projects to organisations, they do so in trust; however, payment is made in instalments. As organisations fulfil deliverables, further instalments are released in confidence (Banks et al., 2015). While it is important to understand these two terms for the sake of clarity, our main focus in this research is community confidence, and its opposite manifestation, "distrust".

Premise, aim and approach

True development transformation lies in social and economic development, not necessarily infrastructural advancement. Organisations (both government and non-government) that drive towards delivery of infrastructure and depoliticize themselves from the deep-rooted socio-economic challenges of the communities will fail to deliver a sustainable service if they do not get the community to have confidence in that service. Consequently, organisations without community confidence may not achieve true sustainable development and will only have a temporary impact on the community (Banks et al., 2015; Walker et a., 2010; Kapiyo, 2018). This paper aims to draw lessons from how an organisation - Friends of Kianjai Kenya (FKK) - built community confidence over time. As such, the paper is written in form of a *disrupted narrative*, revealing the operations of FKK in a community and drawing lessons on building community confidence.

Organisation – Friends of Kianjai Kenya (FKK)

The Friends of Kianjai Kenya (FKK) was jointly founded by a group of Britons and Kenyans in 2011 to mitigate the impact of famine due to repeated crop failures from drought in the region. The decision to begin relief operations in the Meru county around Kianjai as opposed to other areas or counties with similar or more extreme challenges was fostered by the apparent enthusiasm and self-drive of some groups within this community who were perceived to be receptive of initiatives during preliminary explorations. The apparent input of previous organisations (even though these were not always successful) also gave a good starting point, with plans to extend to other communities. Initial operations of FKK were seed distributions to farmers and feeding programmes for destitute children in Kianjai, though the operations since increased to address other needs and to reach other rural communities within Meru county. After two years of famine relief, FKK, found it was unsustainable to continue in its current trajectory and redirected to moving the community towards self-sustenance. For this paper, the focus is mainly on the efforts of FKK towards an irrigation for famine relief project, but there are reflections on how FKK used other community programmes (e.g. water supply and disability support) to build confidence and cooperation towards the irrigation project.

The aim of the irrigation farming project was to identify a sustainable year-round irrigation scheme and a suitable community management programme for a community farm. Additional objectives of the project include providing clean water for household purposes and initiating self-development in neighbouring communities through a built-in outreach programme. The proposed site which had no title deed initially 'belonged' to the community and was gifted to a nearby polytechnic, which was the most respected secular institution that identified with the community. FKK affiliated with the polytechnic to use this land for the irrigation scheme, which will be monitored by the polytechnic but owned and managed by the community for the profit of the community.

Photograph 1. Example of farm with failed crop

Photograph 2. Proposed irrigation scheme site

Sources of community distrust

Before expounding on the FKK community confidence plan, it is important to know some of the challenges that brought about distrust in NGOs from the community.

Paying for another man's sins: The issue of distrust can be traced to a community's experiences from civil conflict, even as far back as colonial times; though most relevant to this case, is the current state of infrastructures previously implemented by other organisations. In order to gain community confidence, FKK assisted the community to repair and maintain some damaged water pans (small reservoirs) from a previous NGO project and also built new ones. Trust is an outcome of cooperative behaviour (Walker et al., 2010), with each partner delivering its promises. The failure of this existing infrastructure damaged the reputation of all NGO infrastructure projects, as the external organisation had not produced its side of the bargain. Rectifying another NGO's poor infrastructure is good for rebuilding trust, however there might be possible repercussions for overall confidence because identifying with a dysfunctional project associates the new organisation with previous failure (re-directing collective antagonism). In addition, affiliating with a project that has inherent challenges such as re-siltation due to poor location of a water pan increases the risk of distrust.

Insufficient social capital: In its water supply project for the community, FKK employed a participatory approach that was to lead to community financial and labour engagement in construction. FKK agreed with the community leaders to contribute every other item of infrastructure if the 'community' would lay the pipes from the water source along the routes and this brought the questions: *is there a "community" – and who are its members?* A community's ability to initiate a Water and Sanitation project is an indicator of the potential sustainability of an external intervention in the future (Bisung et al., 2014). Once a project is initiated, poor community participation may hinder progress if it does not produce the necessary results. Trust is good for building respect, reciprocity and commitment among community members and towards an organisation. This is reversed in the case of distrust, particularly if the external organisation is seen as being responsible for the "new insight" on their social dynamics (Walker et al., 2010; Bisung et al., 2014), such as inequalities in the costs of participation.

(Mis-)Information: FKK had previously acquired land on behalf of a marginalised self-help group within the community and was in negotiations for a larger land for the irrigation project (on behalf of the wider community), but some members of the community assumed this land was going to be owned by FKK and eventually misappropriated. Trust and distrust can be asymmetric. An (adapted) quote holds that "Rome was not built in a day, but it burned in one" (Anonymous). Keeping a disparate community informed can consume time and resources, but even a small amount of rumour, fake news and conflicting knowledge can generate collective "inaction" and stop a common opponent. Whilst there may not be much social capital to actively initiate a project, there may be enough to passively prevent it, creating an informal Community-Based Organisation (CBO) in opposition to the project.

The above challenges are why FKK believes that if the community does not have confidence in an external organisation, they are less likely to pick-up where the organisation stops and continue in the development of their community towards resilience.

The FKK community confidence plan

The FKK framework for gaining community confidence has been identified as one that models (retrospective) disjointed incrementalism. Disjointed incrementalism in public administration as described by Lindbolm (1979) is one of the three forms of incrementalism, which simply promotes taking small steps away from the norm. Making decisions as new problems unfold rather than instigating large societal or cultural changes gives an appearance of being disjointed and unplanned, but promotes flexibility as projects develop. Disjointed incrementalism as described in Lindbolm (1979) is characterised by:
1. Using few familiar alternatives
2. Merging with other problems
3. Focusing on problems to be solved rather than goals
4. Trials, errors and retrials
5. Assessing the consequences of some alternatives
6. Fragmenting work to other partners

In this case it is described as retrospective because it was inadvertent, a turbulent process full of trials and errors, which carved out a natural course to disjointed incrementalism. The retrospective viewpoint reflects on efforts made towards community confidence, prior to initiating work on the irrigation project. The steps taken can produce better community confidence when applied in a planned manner and it is FKK's long-term exit plan to build resilience into the community. Using Lindbolm's policy-making characteristics and examples from FKK operations, some plans can be put forward.

Few familiar alternatives: FKK employed an inclusive approach towards overall community awareness. This included a disabled football championship that drew out men, youth and the disabled, and engaging the women in making traditional bags (sold at UK fundraisers). As the community confidence grew towards the organisation, progress was quicker and "opposition CBOs" began to dissolve. Taking familiar alternatives supports the principal rule of incrementalism, which is to deviate only slightly from the norm. Football tournaments are integral parts of Kenyan community activities, but most communities do not hold these competitions at large scales for the disabled. It is usual for women to sell their craft in markets, however it is impactful and engaging to have their crafts exported for profit.

Merging with other problems: FKK collaborated with various organisations dealing with other causes such as HIV/AIDS, education and disability to promote total development in community. Collaborating with other organisations to solve additional problems is a way of both getting additional support from donors of other causes by showing interrelation of problems and ensuring inclusion of more stakeholder groups. By empowering and assisting societies/ groups/ stakeholders in their objectives, this ensures they do not abandon their causes to become opposition groups.

Focusing on problems to be solved rather than goals: FKK conducted a study in the community that linked malnutrition in disabled children to educational attendance. In this case, the *goal* was to increase attendance of disabled children in schools, but it would be true to say that school facilities were not adapted to take care of disabled children. As a result, the goal could only be achieved if either a specialised school was created or existing schools were adapted. However, the underlying problems were (i) mothers were housebound, taking care of the disabled children, therefore household income was lower and they could not afford schools; (ii) these children even where possible, were not capable of helping themselves to a reasonable extent so would require a carer at the school and physiotherapy; and (iii) families were uninformed on proper care procedures, appropriate feeding methods and available medication. FKK assisted parents of families with disabled children to form a self-help group and provided support in dealing with each of these problems.

Trials, errors and retrials: FKK employed a participatory approach when deciding on the irrigation scheme. This brought similar community participation challenges to those discussed in previous section (sources of community distrust), and these where tackled through an open approach of trials, errors and retrials. In delivering WASH projects the margin for error is dependent on the availability of funds, time constraint for delivery, situation/ context (disaster emergency, refugee or development) and the type of organisation (non-profit or for-profit). According to Lindbolm (1979), the concept of incrementalism is synonymous to muddling through; whilst this would suggest a slow and expensive route, in a world ever racing with time and cost, disjointed incrementalism is faster in the long run.

Assessing the consequences of some alternatives: In arriving at the solution of a drought resilient irrigation scheme, FKK assessed; the intensity of the problem, the proficiency of the current solution and available resources. The significant feature of this characteristic is that it is an opportunity for community

involvement, which once again shows the place of overall involvement in gaining community confidence. This is because community involvement should go beyond choosing from (pre-selected) feasible options, to include guided intellectual contributions (Chickannaiyappa and Ramaswamy, 1984). Assessing alternatives alongside the community enables the beneficiaries to appreciate the final outcome, with an understanding that it was the best solution under the prevalent social, financial and developmental constraints.

Fragmenting the work to other partners: FKK partnered with local institutions, both religious, educational and community groups, to be responsible leads in projects, particularly those projects aimed at building social capital. Social capital is described as mutual expectations and trust on members of the society (Bisung et al., 2015). Building social capital on existing social structures within local institutions for the purpose of fostering community involvement, creates a more stable community management body, with more communal confidence amongst themselves and towards the organisation which reduces the risk of the "who is community?" dilemma. (Carter et al., 2005). It is a progressive approach to the classic method of establishing new community (project) management committees, which fail now and again due to unstable social foundations.

Photograph 3. Food distribution to parents of special needs children

Photograph 4. School adapted for special needs children

Conclusion and lessons

After conception of the irrigation project, which became the prime focus, FKK began muddling through the community with the irrigation project as its major target. In retrospect, the soft deliverables of the irrigation project were spread out into the objectives of each of the smaller development programmes and this built confidence towards the organisation. In summary, the lessons are:

- The weighting of each evidence in a communal decision towards trust and confidence is important because different stakeholders have various interests and while it is possible to find common ground, the importance of a singular act to each stakeholder will be different.
- Community distrust, as the opposite of community confidence, indicates that old distrust has to be paid off and trust has to be regained before confidence can be built.
- Some of the characteristics of "community confidence through disjointed incrementalism" are observed in community involvement, but what brings confidence is going the extra mile, sometimes in a different direction. The FKK strategy suggests first of all participating with the community so that they will in turn engage with the organisation and finally participate in the programme.
- Although this case study is retrospective, prospectively, disjointed incrementalism purports planning to go beyond the immediate objectives of the project from conception. Disjointed incrementalism encourages short term focuses with long term expectations when true socio-economic development is the goal.

Successfully building up social capital along with community confidence ensures sustainability and resilience of humanitarian missions and development projects. This comes from better community involvement, which has to be rooted in a sense of communality with the organisation and therefore a greater appreciation for deliverables.

Acknowledgements

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