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Community-driven water, sanitation and hygiene programme implementation

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**WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE:
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND MULTISECTORAL APPROACHES**

**Community-driven water, sanitation and hygiene
programme implementation**

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REVIEWED PAPER 230

Engendering sustainability and programme ownership has remained a major challenge in water supply and sanitation service-delivery within developing countries. Efforts have been made in the past to ensure that communities are consulted and that they participate in decision-making and possibly be involved in the course of programme implementation. This however, was not able to guarantee ownership as communities were often pictured at the receiving end and were only regarded as beneficiaries. Experiences from the Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Reform Programme implementation in Cross River State, Nigeria, have led to an upscale of community involvement in programme implementation. Within this approach, communities are viewed as key players in programme implementation as they are empowered to spearhead key aspects of programme implementation. This created opportunity for human resources that abound within communities to be tapped with resultant improvement in programme output, dynamism and resourcefulness with increased ownership and sustainability.

Background

Water supply and sanitation service-delivery in Nigeria has been evolving since the United Nations' International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade. Various policies, programmes, and strategies have been adopted over the years towards improving sector performance. The Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Reform Programme (WSSSRP) is one of the many programmes that are currently being implemented in the country. As the name implies, the programme has as one of its major focus, the need to reform the sector for improved service-delivery in the perspective of developing models and best practices that are replicable and can be scaled up across the country. It is being implemented in Cross River State and 5 other States in Nigeria.

WSSSRP interventions in Cross River State cut across 5 out of the 18 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the State and consist of Urban, Small Town, and Rural Components. Activities within the Rural Component border around the following programme results:

- To put in place at State and LGA levels Monitoring and Evaluation Systems and harmonise them with the National system
- To strengthen the capacity of Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (WSS) institutions at the State and LGA levels to plan and implement WSS programmes
- To support programme implementation in 25% of LGAs in the State and promote State-wide strategies for community mobilization and hygiene promotion
- To formulate and test sanitation strategies towards ensuring that 80% of the total households within the project communities have access to sustainable basic sanitation facilities
- To pilot sustainable and integrated (WSS and hygiene promotion) approach in about 20 schools for 10,000 children and promoted State-wide.
- To establish community-based sustainable water supply models in 138 rural communities and increase access to safe water supply for about 280,000 beneficiaries
- To eradicate Guinea worm in all endemic communities within the State.

WSSSRP implementation in Cross River State has not gone without the challenges of proffering improved alternatives to the traditional practices that are often deployed in programme implementation. One such alternative is the paradigm shift from direct programme implementation within communities to getting communities to play a leading role in programme implementation.

Like every other conventional practice within the sector, the Programme started with the traditional myth of community participation and involvement in programme implementation. Thus, the intervention structure was such that programmes are designed at the State level, stepped down at the Local Government level from where implementations at the community level are launched. This, however, turned in results which were short of the expectations and the targets. Furthermore, programme ownership and sustainability were continually threatened as communities were only responding to calls and actions from the external drivers while they remained recipients. This remained the practice until what is best described as the programme turning point, ‘community-driven programme implementation’, emanated.

Inception of community-driven programme implementation

It all started with an initiative tagged “Community WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) Clinic”, which was introduced midway into programme implementation. This is a participatory peer review meeting conducted for community programme management committees, the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Committees (WASHCOMs). This peer review system has a few issues, which make it different from every other programme review meetings. They include the following:

- The meetings by design are hosted within project communities and the key determinant for identifying which of the project communities to host the meeting is performance
- These meetings are also completely facilitated by the host community, while the Programme Staff provide funds for logistics and observe the proceedings of the meetings
- Key issues discussed at these meetings are mainly comparing levels of success across the communities, and identifying factors that are responsible for success, thus, challenging the non-performing communities to pick on the best practices that were shared, and strive for their own improvement
- Ultimately, the meeting offers the host community the opportunity to showcase programme success within their community, while members from the other communities engage in participatory appraisal of the success stories being presented by the host community.

Beyond the intentions for which these meetings were held, a lot more happened as this process progressed.

- It was revealed that, contrary to initial thinking that communities are always at the receiving end of programme implementation, a lot of resources to drive programme implementation are available within communities
- This process also revealed a lot of dynamism and homegrown initiatives within communities
- It also revealed that within communities, there are many well-respected and resourceful individuals, who can spearhead expected change processes in their communities, much more than a stranger could.

Uptake of community-driven implementation

The realization of these facts came like a revolution, leading to changes and improvements in programme implementation strategies within the State. The focus of the intervention was then fully decentralized with implementation coordinated at the Local Government level while planning and actual implementation occurs at the community level. This was steered by increased community mobilization with headhunts for community change agents, strengthening of community-based institutions (e.g. women groups, community development associations, Youth organizations, etc.) with increased focus on capacity building at the community level.

The outcome of this shift in strategy has remained positive and has led to dramatic improvements. This approach has been applied in various areas of programme implementation with amazing results, some of which are described below:

Rapid sanitation uptake within communities through the implementation of Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) spearheaded by women groups within communities:

CLTS implementation under the rural component of WSSSRP in Cross River State was a full demonstration of community-driven implementation. This was expressed in the high involvement of community women’s

groups, as facilitators in the process. This approach, unlike CLTS interventions in other programme States, witnessed amazing communities' response. With the community women's groups facilitating, it took just 3 months to achieve Open Defecation Free (ODF) status in 10 out of 50 communities, in spite of the fact that the process was initiated at the peak of the rains. Going by this swift success, in contrast to upwards of 8 months to 2 years for ODF attainment, as is the case in other areas where Project Staff mainly facilitate CLTS interventions, this approach proved to be more efficient and result-oriented. Additionally, apart from their active participation during implementation, the community women's groups also spearheaded monitoring and follow-up activities towards attainment of total sanitation status, thus making the approach more cost effective.

Increased sense of ownership:

With communities leading the processes of programme implementation, there has been a tremendous transfer of responsibilities and increased responsiveness on the part of community members. Some of the clear cases include:

- Improved programme communication, especially from communities. Community members now follow up on issues around programme implementation, make calls, send letters, progress report and often get anxious about achieving set programme results in their communities
- A lot more programme implementation and sustainability initiatives have evolved from communities
- Popularization of programme within the community: most community members now get actively involved and acknowledge that the programme is theirs

Strengthening of community-based institutions:

Involvement of community-based institutions within the community also added value on their purpose for existence and has given them a sense of belonging and relevance. The communities' WASHCOMs and women groups have remained most rewarded by this approach. Their relevance within these communities has been magnified, and they have become much stronger and more vibrant with a high sense of purpose. More so, communities have also appreciated the need to ensure that competent hands are nominated and elected into WASHCOMs while such persons have remained willing to serve. Exposure to these activities and skills have also inspired the strengthening and establishment of four Community-based Organizations so far, to provide developmental support and services within and around their communities.

Gender perspective:

This approach has led to an increase in the involvement of community women in programme management structures. This also came out as one of the findings of this approach. It was observed that with increasing responsibilities apportioned to communities' programme management committees, competencies and life-skills became major prerequisites for nomination and election of community members into WASHCOMs. Within this search by community members for people with some level of competence to represent them, it was realized that most of the educated and well-read people in the rural communities are often women. They are found in their numbers doing low-paid white-collar jobs in the villages while their male counterparts are often in the cities in search of higher-paid jobs. In rural communities of Nigeria, over 85% of the teachers and health workers are women, who while in service or retired, have remained a huge resource within these communities.

With the opportunity of community-driven interventions, most communities have started tapping from this resource. Most women, for reasons of competence have been preferred by their communities to serve in such committees. Currently, many more women WASHCOM heads are emerging and they have proven more effective.

Programme dynamism:

A lot more new ideas have been injected into the programme delivery process. Key amongst them is the use of Community Theater, dramas and songs for the purpose of hygiene promotion and awareness creation. This new approach has further expanded and enriched the scope and content of hygiene promotion within communities, stimulated increased risk perception, and have greatly motivated communities towards behavioural changes.

Empowerment:

Ultimately, community empowerment is one key result that has become obvious in this process. community members having been given opportunities to build on their skills and expand their capacities, have remained amazed at how much they have been able to achieve on their own with little or no support from the programme.

Lessons

An appraisal of this approach has noted the following as the overwhelming edge and lessons that this approach has offered when compared with the traditional process of externally driven implementation:

- Community-driven implementation offers opportunities for focused, rapid and more sustained programme implementation at the community level with communities at the center of their development
- It increases programme ownership, triggered by communities' self-drive to succeed
- This approach proved to be a cost effective option as most of the resources needed are tapped from within the community
- The approach engenders empowerment, skills building and promotes communities' resourcefulness
- It also shows that there is a high level of resourcefulness within communities and these can be tapped only if they are given opportunity to express themselves
- Identification and working with change agents proved a major catalyst in communities' change process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the need for community-driven programme implementation has remained an age-long challenge in water supply, sanitation and hygiene service-delivery within rural communities. The findings from this work have shown that the problem has been that of programming rather than the often-blamed communities. It is therefore no longer adequate to merely involve communities in the course of programme implementation or keep them at the receiving end. We should begin to recognize the human resources that abound within communities and thus provide opportunities and the enabling environment for them to express themselves.

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