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Article

The dilemma of engaging community-wide in development: Has Konko's (Eastern Region, Ghana) water and sanitation committee taken over decision-making at the community's will?

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Local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have contributed immensely towards providing clean water to rural people, and is partly the reason that much attention has been given to water projects that they either directly or indirectly fund when it comes to understanding the impacts of the projects on the beneficiaries. This study, which assessed a local NGO in the Eastern region of Ghana (that is, Akuapem Community Development Programme) determined how this organization's water project has impacted the people of rural Konko which it serves. It also assessed whether and how their Water and Sanitation (WATSAN) committee involved the wider community in decision-making regarding planning, implementing and managing the project. The findings show that with the presence of the water project, the majority of the study participants were able to assess clean water in less time than they otherwise would have spent without the project. Also, they suffered fewer incidences of waterborne diseases and felt honoured having a water project in their community. What stood out in this study is how the residents had better access to water, in spite of limited involvement by the general community in decisions of the WATSAN committee concerning the project. About half of the participants were unaware of the means by which water became available. In the same way, many lacked the knowledge of how the day-to-day operation and management of boreholes occurred. Based on the findings, it is argued that there is a need to critically assess the participation agenda. Thus, is community-wide participation in development interventions necessary? Are rural residents merely concerned about the end goal of having clean water available or have other benefits they hope to attain through these projects?

Key words: Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), rural, clean water, Akuapem community development programme, participation.

INTRODUCTION

Increasing access to clean water to the people of developing countries is one of the millennium development goals (MDG) that has attracted attention from governments and development practitioners. By 2015, half of the people who lack access to safe drinking water and sanitation should have access (UNDP, 2005). Sutton (2008), however, anticipated that Africa, south of the Saharan countries might not meet the target till by 2040. The literature on clean water provision in rural areas of developing countries could be divided into two broad categories: (i) planning, implementing and managing the projects, which emphasize gender mainstreaming or broadly engaging both genders in the process (Millette, 1996; Narayan, 1995; Rall, 1999; Schouten and Moriarty, 2003; Prokopy, 2004; Zekri and Easter, 2007; Whittington et al., 2009; Padawangi, 2010) and, (ii) assessing impact of water projects in terms of how and whether access to clean water has changed the

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lives of beneficiaries in general, and then men and women separately, as well as the combined (both genders) effects on the household well-being on both economic and social aspects (Arku, 2010; Whittington et al., 2009; O'Hare, 2008; Akuoko-Asibey, 1996).

Easing rural people's access to clean water has many advantages which are largely documented. For example, Ademun (2009) maintained that water crisis has resulted in millions of women and girls in developing countries spending enormous time looking for water to meet their households' water needs. Thus, easy access to clean water is viewed as the panacea to time over-expenditure in water collection to allow them time for other beneficial purposes. For example, Arku's (2010) study indicated that easy access to clean water in a rural community in Ghana enabled women to directly, and men to indirectly save a considerable amount of time which they used in activities that supported their subjective well-being indicators. Sutton (2008) also argued that improved water supply services in rural areas gave women more time for productive endeavours, adult education, empowerment activities and leisure. Easy access to clean water can also reduce the incidence of waterborne diseases. Cairncross and Feachem (2006), for example, maintain that when people use clean water, incidence of waterborne diseases such as cholera, typhoid and diarrhoea will be reduced.

The literature on the importance of water committees in managing rural water supply projects is also vast (Arku, 2010; Arku et al., 2009; Whittington et al., 2009; Padawangi, 2010). In most cases, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), National Governments and International Development Organisations fund either supply-driven or demand-driven projects (Arku, 2010). Most of the NGOs which are involved in supplying rural people with clean water are either foreign-based or have their sister organizations operating in developing countries. Study on the extent to which local NGOs' engaging with communities for clean water provision have impacted the beneficiaries is limited in the literature.

For projects that are based on demand-responsive, water committees are normally formed by beneficiary communities before the communities apply for the projects. The committees are to serve as links between the community members and the development agencies. With input from the general community, the Water and Sanitation (WATSAN) committee with the development organization(s) are to plan and implement the project, and WATSAN committee on behalf of the community members take full responsibility in managing the project.

Generally, studies assessing how rural water supply projects have been planned, implemented and managed have largely sought primary data from water committee members. However, it is also important to determine broadly from water users in the community their perception of their involvement in decision-making processes regarding the projects. For example, Barrow and Murphree (2000) participation typology on rural people's participation in development projects and WHO (1988) hierarchy of participation in rural water supply projects can be used to determine how and when community members were involved.

The goal of this study therefore was to determine how local NGOs' involvement in rural water supply projects with WATSAN committees impact access to clean water as well as how the general community beneficiaries (not only the WATSAN committee members), have been involved in the decision-making processes to enable an understanding of the project functioning.

The specific objectives of the study are:

(i) To determine whether and how local NGOs have helped rural people to access clean water;
(ii) To assess whether and how non-WATSAN committee members were involved in decision-making processes in rural water supply projects and their understanding of the project.

STUDY AREA AND AKUAPEM COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The study took place at Konko, a community located in the Akuapem North District of the Eastern Region of Ghana with a total population of 542 at the time of the study; 137 male adults, 127 female adults, and 278 children below 18 years (field work). A local NGO called Akuapem Community Development Programme (ACDEP) helped the people to access clean water. The ACDEP, which was established in 1986, is located at Dawu-Akuapem at Akuapem North District in the Eastern Region, and Dawu is about 20 km from Konko. The mission of ACDEP is to help to improve the livelihoods of the residents of people of Akuapem North and its surrounding districts through:

(i) Providing potable water,
(ii) Promoting safe hygiene and sanitation practices,
(iii) Encouraging rural communities to engage in reforestation efforts and sustainable environmentally friendly issues,
(iv) Providing affordable toilet facilities.

The ACDEP received financial supports from WaterAid (that is, an international NGO based in United Kingdom) to fund the project. WaterAid is the major funder of the ACDEP. The aim of WaterAid is to improve the living standard of the poorest communities in Africa and Asia through water, sanitation and hygiene projects. With eight local NGO-partners in Ghana of which ACDEP is one, WaterAid has implemented projects in Greater Accra, Western, Volta, Eastern, Northern, Ashanti, Upper East and Upper West Regions.

This is how the ACDEP works; a community in need of clean water has to apply for it through its WATSAN

Table 1. Participation by age.

Age	Frequency	Percentage
21-40	30	40.0
41-60	40	53.3
61 and above	5	6.7
Total	100	100

Table 2. Educational level.

Educational level	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	13	17.3
Junior high/middle school	35	46.7
Senior high/secondary school	2	2.7
Vocational	1	1.3
Tertiary	4	5.3
No education	20	26.7
Total	75	100.0

committee, and in the absence of WATSAN committee, the community has to apply through its Town Development Committee. The ACDEP would assess the water situation of the community in question and within its mission framework to determine whether the community qualifies to be provided with clean water. In the absence of a WATSAN committee, the community would be advised to form one. The ACDEP operates within the demand-responsive framework, so beneficiary communities have to pay a percentage of the investment costs either in-cash or in-kind and take part in planning and implementing as well as take full responsibility for maintaining the project. In the case of Konko, the community's contribution to the investment costs was in-kind; they provided sand, stone and labour towards the project. The WATSAN committee was to oversee the maintenance of the boreholes. A trained person who is a member of the committee was to do the repair works.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA PROCESSING

This was a mixed method study where both qualitative and quantitative techniques were employed. A sample size was determined using a systematic approach. There were about 100 residences in the study community. Each residence contains an average of two households. To obtain a representative sample of the residents, half (50%) of the residences were considered for the study. The sample frame of 100 was divided by the sample size of 50 and every 2nd residence was then selected. But because of the need to randomly start any systematic sampling, 1 and 2 was randomly selected. The chosen number was 1. Thus, the first residence was picked on the sample frame, and subsequently every 2nd residence. Thus, the procedure was followed till the 50 residences were selected.

Within each of the 50 residences, a male and female who collected clean water and was at least 18 years old took part in the study. For all the 50 residences selected for the study, there was at least one woman in each residence who collected clean water and in all the 50 residences selected, 25 men who lived there collected clean water. Thus, 75 participants took part in this study; 50 women and 25 men.

Focus group discussions, structured and semi-structured interview questions, and observation were employed to collect data. The Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) software was helpful in analysing the data collected through structured and semi-structured interview questions.

FINDINGS

General background

Participants were adults within a fairly widely age range - mainly 20 and 60 years (Table 1), with generally some formal education. The majority of the participants had Junior Secondary/Middle School education (Table 2) and about 27% of the participants had no formal education. All the four participants with tertiary education were men (Table 2). Table 2 is statistically significant at 0.05 level with chi-square value of 109.3.

Self-employment is a common feature of Konko and farming is the predominant economic activity reported. Fifty-nine per cent were farmers, 20% were traders, about three per cent were seamstresses and four per cent were both farmers and traders (Table 3). Almost all the traders were women who engaged in petty trading. On the formal employment side, four per cent were public school teachers.

Acquisition and operation of the water project

Their main source of water is the borehole system. There are three boreholes located at vantage points within the community. About 56% of the respondents said the water

Table 3. Occupation of the respondents.

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Farming	44	58.7
Trading	15	20.0
Seamstress	2	2.7
Teaching	3	4.0
Driving	1	1.3
Carpentry	1	1.3
Hairdressing	1	1.3
Farming and trading	3	4.0
Not working	3	4.0
Total	75	100.0

Table 4. Respondents knowledge about acquisition of the boreholes.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	42	56.0
No	33	44.0
Total	75	100.0

project was applied for through the WATSAN committee, and 44% of the respondents did not know how the project was acquired. They reported that they were only asked by the WATSAN committee to contribute sand, stones and labour for the construction of the boreholes which is their share of the investment costs (Table 4). Thus, contribution towards the investment costs was in-kind, not in-cash.

Access to clean water and its impacts

With the water project, residents were largely able to access clean water by paying some fees yearly. The majority of the respondents (95%) used water from the boreholes and only five per cent collected unclean water from wells in addition to collecting water from boreholes. Persons living alone paid about US $2.00 and more than one-person household paid US $4.00 yearly to maintain the system. The WATSAN committee maintained that some community members failed to pay their yearly maintenance fee. Teachers were exempted from paying the yearly maintenance fee as an incentive for attracting and retaining them. Water collection was generally a task for women. About 33.3% of the men-participants reported collecting clean water while this was the case for 66.7% of the women.

Participants shared a common view that the water project brought many benefits to them. When they were asked whether and how the project has impacted the community at large, about 11% were unsure of the impact and so they could not tell (Table 5). The rest said that the project has reduced waterborne diseases, brought honour to Konko and they saved time for collecting unclean water. During a focus group discussion, they indicated that they felt honoured by having clean water available to guests who come to festivals in their community. They can now get easy access to clean water to drink and/ or bath unlike before the project when it was very difficult to get clean water.

Some of the residents believe that their access to clean water has limited incidences of water borne diseases. Surprisingly, although there was no data on waterborne diseases, more than half of the respondents (53%) indicated that they thought the project has reduced waterborne diseases (Table 5).

Knowledge of water facility maintenance and repair

There is a clear indication that participants were not fully aware of how the water facilities are managed. For example, they reported that they did not know how long it took for broken boreholes to be repaired (Table 6). While about 37% said that it took up to one week for the boreholes to be repaired, 44% and nine per cent indicated that it took about two weeks and three weeks, respectively for the boreholes to be repaired. During a focus group discussion with the WATSAN committee members, they indicated that it took about two weeks for the system to be repaired. The Table 6 is statistically significant at 0.05 level with chi-square value of 75.5.

Even though the participants were aware that the WATSAN committee was responsible for the repair each

Table 5. Effects of the project on the community.

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Reduced waterborne diseases	32	42.7
Brought honour	3	4.0
Saved time	24	32.0
Reduced waterborne diseases and saved time	8	10.6
No response	8	10.6
Total	75	100.0

Table 6. Duration for repairing of broken down boreholes.

Duration of repairing of facility	Frequency	Percentage
Within one week	28	37.3
Two weeks	33	44.0
Three weeks	7	9.3
More than three weeks	4	5.3
Cannot tell	3	4.0
Total	75	100.0

time a borehole or the water system was faulty, the majority did not know the source of the funds for the repairs although they pay the yearly maintenance fee. Seventy-six per cent maintained that they did not know who paid for the maintenance and only 24% said they knew that the yearly fee is put towards maintaining the water system.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Contribution towards investment cost and access to clean water

Beneficiaries of rural water supply projects are to contribute a percentage in cash or in-kind towards the investment costs within the demand-responsive framework (Rall, 1999; World Bank, 1997), but in-kind contribution appear to be desirable. In most cases, beneficiaries contribute cash towards the investment costs. Residents of Konko contributed in-kind towards the investment costs of the project. It has been suggested by Arku and Arku (2011b) that neo-liberal policies which require payment of cash to establish water projects in poor rural communities in Africa only serves to exclude them from accessing clean water because many of them may not have the cash to pay. Thus, accommodating in-kind contribution by the residents of Konko is in right direction if the aim of development organizations, such as Akuapem Community Development Programme is to make water accessible to all. Understanding the ramifications of cash contribution on the people based on competency on the local context and the circumstances of residents can allow creative and flexible project modalities that serve the interest of local people.

Residents of Konko appear to be paying a relatively high annual water fees. One recommendation of demand-responsive approach is that the water systems should be maintained by the beneficiaries. Residents of Konko paid from US $2.00 and US $4.00 yearly depending on their household size. However, some of the residents did not pay the yearly maintenance fee. Whittington et al. (2009) indicated in their study that on the average, rural households in Ghana that they studied paid a yearly maintenance fee between US $1.32 and US $2.64. Comparing their finding with Konko's fees shows that, Konko residents paid far more. Perhaps this is because some of the residents would not pay the yearly maintenance fee, hence, the high fee allocated to be paid by the few who did not default payment to be used to maintain the system.

In spite of the water being available in the community, some still used unclean water not because of cost reasons – which is not uncommon in rural communities. About five percent of the participants used unclean water. Similarly, this situation was evident in Arku's (2010) and Whittington et al. (2009) studies. However, unlike Arku's (2010) study where water users had to pay cash daily to collect clean water, and the cash paid depended on the quantity of water collected, Konko residents paid a yearly maintenance fee instead. Also, Konko residents were not prevented from collecting clean water, if they failed to pay the yearly maintenance fee. Thus, based on findings of this study, rural people might use unclean water not because they do not have cash to pay for its use; they may have other reasons for using unclean water which

needs to be explored.

Participation in the "business" of accessing water

Generally, women in developing countries are said to perform the reproductive work (Arku and Arku, 2011a; Moser, 1993) of which water collection is one (Arku, 2007). In this study, women were also the majority of the participants who collected clean water; 67.7% were women and 33.3% were men. Arku's (2010) study in the Volta Region of Ghana showed that only 6.7% of male participants collected clean water after implementing a rural water supply project, while as high as 99% of female participants' collected clean water. Comparing this study with Arku's (2010) indicates more men in Konko collected clean water for domestic use in his study in the Volta region. The question remains: is the traditional gender division of labour changing such that men are increasingly performing reproductive roles? It is clear that even if there is an agreement on this question, the pace of gender role changes seem to vary by place, culture and other factors.

A lack of knowledge of the operation and management of development project seem apparent in rural communities which questions the "participatory development agenda" that has been popularized two decades ago. Since 1990s when the concept of participation and community engagement in development was introduced into rural water supply projects; beneficiaries of rural water supply projects were to be fully involved in planning, implementing and maintaining the projects. The findings from this study show that 44% of the respondents (who were not WATSAN committee members) did not know how the project was acquired and they also did not know how long it took for broken boreholes to be repaired. This was evident in the different responses when they were asked about how long they waited to have a broken borehole repaired. Some were certain that it took, a week, others said two weeks and some felt it was not until three weeks or more. For some, they chose not to tell. This situation suggests that aside from WATSAN committee members who knew the "ins and outs" of planning, implementing and managing of the project, the general community lacked this knowledge. This kind of participation by non-WATSAN committee residents, Barrow and Murphree (2000), referred to as passive participation which is the least form in the continuum of participation that is largely discouraged in the development literature – where community members' participation occurred by being "informed" of what is going to happen or has already happened and not necessary to seek their input on decisions. The non-involvement of the non-WATSAN committee members in the decision-making process and their lack of knowledge on many issues did not come from the ACDEP. This is attributable to the WATSAN committee members. Thus, not only are development organizations to be blamed as often suggested by the literature, local people can also fail to involve other members of the community in the decision-making process.

This limited involvement of the general community in the water deliberations and decisions raises concern for the need to understand the underlying reasons. Could it be that some of the community members failed to pay the yearly maintenance fee because they were not involved in the decision-making processes as revealed by the findings? Is it that they are not getting opportunities to be involved or they trust their leaders to run the project? Do they have a capacity problem where residents are not empowered to understand and feel competent to actively participate in their own development? Also, is full participation more important than access to clean water? Are all community members interested in decision-making processes towards a development end? Further research has to be carried out to determine rural people's perception and interest in participating in development projects.

Impacts of the project

Development interventions impact people differently depending on what the beneficiaries consider to be important to them. Arku (2010) study reveals that the major impact of a rural water supply project on the beneficiaries was that a considerable amount of time was saved and the time was used for religious, economic and social activities. Similarly, 43% of respondents of this study said they saved time (however, how much time they used and its uses was outside the scope of this study). Also, the respondents maintained that the project has helped to reduce waterborne diseases and, brought honour to them. Although honour may be viewed as not universally accepted well-being indicator, honour according to the development literature can be viewed as a subjective well-being indicator (Sen, 1988; Deneulin, 2002; Pressman and Summerfield, 2002; Arku et al., 2008) and subjective indicators vary from one society to society because it is value-laden. Consequently, benefits of a development intervention to a community cannot be fully captured in planning and evaluating it without close attention to non-traditional subjective measures of anticipated project outcomes from the perspective of beneficiaries.

Access to clean water can also have indirect impact on education in rural communities. The findings from this study show that in order to attract teachers to Konko, teachers did not pay cash for collecting clean water. Although the majority of the respondents either had no education or a low level education, they seem to understand the importance of education. Hence, they have exempted teachers from paying water fees as their incentive to attract and retain them. This suggests that when communities have easy access to water coupled with creative policies can contribute to enhance their

children's education.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This study which explored what easier access to clean water meant to rural people also looked into the level of participation among community members aside the WATSAN committee. Since assessing the role of a local NGO in this effort is often overlooked in the literature on water provision, this study of the Akuapem Community Development Programme contributes to understanding the role of such NGOs in improving the well-being of rural communities.

This study demonstrates that subjective well-being indicators are indispensable when trying to understand project impacts on rural people. A water project can be honouring for residents, and also a source of incentive for attracting and retaining the other services such as human capital needed to operate quality rural schools. It was evident from the findings that local NGOs, when involved in helping rural people to achieve their basic needs, can largely have positive impact on their beneficiaries. This is partly because they can have a better knowledge of the local context which is a valuable asset in planning any development intervention.

Also, rural people may find in-kind contribution to development projects much desirable. Their participation level may not often be heavy especially among the wider community particularly with planning, implementing and managing these projects. It is of no surprise that development organizations find themselves challenged by exclusionary practices that fail to fully engage local residents in project development. As well, WATSAN committees can exclude non-members from being involved in deliberations concerning development initiatives. However, it is not well-fully understood whether or not the local people are really interested in participation agenda. More efforts in streamlining the role of community groups such as WATSAN committee are needed, as well as creativity in keeping the general community engaged on projects, because engaging the good will, resources, and local knowledge and giving voice to the silenced promote equity and sustain community projects.

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