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Creating a platform for accountability in the Dagahaley community

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CASE STUDY

THE COMMUNITY GROUP AND THE WATER SYSTEM

Dagahaley is a community near the Dadaab refugee camp in Wajir County, north east Kenya. Community members identify as Somali, with highly patriarchal traditions characterised by a strong clan system with deep influences by community elders. The chief was one of the founding members of the pastoralist community, that was established in an area with no previous settlements.

A solar generator powered borehole in 2011 constructed by Oxfam GB serves 7,956 people. It consists of 14 household connections, three institutional connections, and four kiosks of which only two are currently operational. Four staff are employed to manage the system. There is a second borehole in the area, which is no longer functional.

The borehole system operation was formerly under the chief's authority. He was solely responsible for decisions relating to water service provision, such as hiring employees, and water rates. In 2018, the chief retired and management changes are currently under way. The Dagahaley water community group was established recently. It is still not registered as a water user association (WUA) and it does not have a constitution (July 2018).

THE INTEGRITY MANAGEMENT PROCESS

The counterparts, Oxfam GB and Arid Lands Development Focus Kenya (ALDEF), selected the Dagahaley community for the *IM Toolbox* piloting, with Caritas Switzerland as coach. During the preparation phase, the county water officers and the county water services provider, WAJWASCO, were engaged. It became evident early on that WAJWASCO might not be in a position to take over the management of the Dagahaley

water system. The company assigned a field manager to accompany the process as a counterpart.

It wasn't until the *IM Toolbox* workshop was held in July 2016, that the coach discovered there was no well-established group managing the system. Instead, the chief had handpicked 20 participants to attend the workshop. However, participants were active and they appreciated the process highly, especially the discussions on their possible future mandate, roles and responsibilities, and the compliance requirements to manage the system.

The problems selected were closely linked to integrity issues: (1) no appropriate management system in place (2); mismanagement of funds by unaccounted revenue (3); and insufficient transparency in water management. The development of the action plan was highly participatory, with the priority to set up a functional and properly constituted community water group. The participants selected a solution-focused and vocal member of the community as change agent and as interim chairperson of the group.

The participants intended to hold a community meeting to select the new group members. The chief did not approve the meeting to be held, fearing that he could lose control over the system. Later, the chief chose another group as water committee, and most of the community members, including the interim chair, accepted this decision

As the majority of the new members had not participated in the *IM Toolbox* workshop, the coach's advice was for Oxfam GB and WAJWASCO to repeat it, and support the new group in implementing the activities. However, this has not yet occurred (July 2018) due to a lack of resources, and a decrease of the level of security.

KEY CHALLENGES

The IM process had to overcome the following challenges: (1) continuous need for translation as the lead coach could only speak English and Swahili, yet most of the participants could not; (2) security concerns obliged the couch and counterparts to only travel and work during certain time periods; (3) ensuring all community groups were represented, resulted in petty disagreements slowing down the process and causing small conflicts (4); the counterpart could not visit Dagahaley frequently enough due to resources limitations and distance from their base in Wajir town; and (5) due to a lack of knowledge on the regulatory framework, the county government officials provided inadequate support.

OBSERVED CHANGES

The *IM Toolbox* triggered a series of community engagements, regardless of the initial opposition from the chief. The continued agitation by a section of workshop participants led to a compromised agreement with the chief, leading to formation of a properly constituted management group. The management group is willing and ready for *IM Toolbox* accompaniment. This is a development from the complete lack of accountability at the beginning of the process, when two individuals selected by the chief operated the borehole. As the chief has now retired, it is expected that once the counterpart takes the group through the *IM Toolbox*, they will be able to take remedial measures on performance to ensure that the scheme is run professionally.

KEY LESSONS LEARNT

• Mapping power dynamics and ensuring a balanced representation benefits the process. This is particularly critical in cases such as this one, where a strong leader accumulates all power, and where the presence of different community interest groups is vital. User representatives should always be included in the process. As this case shows, the 'random' community members raise most problems. Basic guidelines on conflict resolution can be helpful for coaches.

• Engaging the county government from the beginning is needed. This will help clarify the orientation of the county regarding community groups. Moreover, the community will need the county government's support to implement the agreed actions later on, especially those related to compliance. High-level county government representatives should be approached first, in order to get their full support and give legitimacy to the process.

ACCOMPANYING CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES

• Creating a platform for accountability in the **Dagahaley community**

• Building collective action in the **Sabuli community**

• Learning from failures: the challenges in the **Olmaroroi community**

• Moving towards formal water management in the **Olchoro-Onyokie community**

• Improving the integrity of community groups managing small water supply systems