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# Learning from failures: the challenges in the Olmaroroi community

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## CASE STUDY

### THE COMMUNITY GROUP AND THE WATER SYSTEM

The Olmaroroi community is in Kajiado county, southern Kenya. The majority of the community members are Maasai, keeping livestock and practicing small-scale farming. The semi-nomadic lifestyle sees predominately men migrate with their livestock in search for pastures and water during dry season, while the rest of the community remain behind.

In 2016, the county government rehabilitated an old water borehole that was constructed in 2008. They extended the system by adding three kiosks, rehabilitated the storage tank, and installed three connections – two household, and one for the primary school.

Since 2008, the management of the system has been in the hands of a community water group, which was registered as Olmaroroi Water Project self-help group in 2005. A new water group was elected in March 2016, and is composed of fifteen members, including two women. This is the group that followed the *Integrity Management (IM) Toolbox* approach.

### THE INTEGRITY MANAGEMENT PROCESS

The IM process was organized in coordination with the county government to complement the rehabilitation of the system that was taking place at the time. The coach for the process was a Caritas Switzerland staff member, and the counterparts were the sub-county water officer and Caritas Ngong.

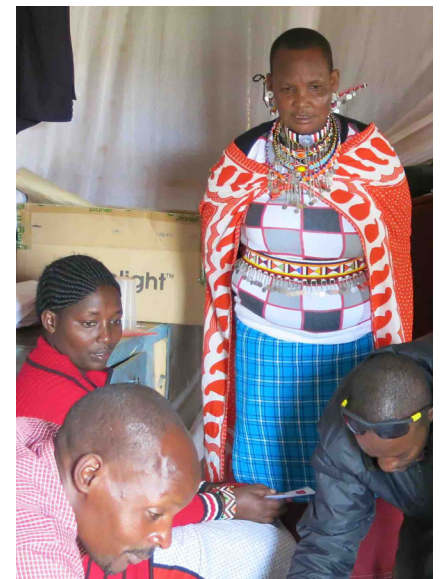
The *IM Toolbox* workshop was conducted in June 2016. Participants had extensive prior knowledge of the water system and their respective roles and responsibilities. The explanations on stakeholders and compliance were of interest, but difficult to facilitate due to low literacy

levels. Elderly members found this particularly difficult, and referred to younger members. The sub-county water officer complicated things further by declaring that the government would not be able to enforce the rules and regulations in such isolated communities.

The community group prioritized the following problems, some of which were closely linked to integrity issues: (1) the group does not have the skills to carry out maintenance and repair; (2) the group does not know what fees are collected; and (3) customers refuse to pay.

The discussion also revealed general discontent over poor management of the income generated, and possible fund embezzlement. Very little money was being collected, as community members would only pay for fuel and maintenance when the system was broken. During the rainy season, the community collects rainwater, and generally does not pay for bore water, resulting in low funds to pay operators.

The development of the action plan was time-consuming, as constant translation from English to the local language was needed. The process was not very participatory as it was mainly left to members who could speak either English or Kiswahili. The group requested some time after the workshop to



consult with the wider community on the management model to adopt. The community group elected their most literate and vocal member as change agent.

### KEY CHALLENGES

Despite some progress, implementing the IM Toolbox in Olmaroroi was very challenging, and the implementation process suffered from significant problems and delays: (1) Most group members did not speak English nor Kiswahili, so translation to Ki-maasai was needed; (2) after Caritas Switzerland refused to pay allowances for attendance, the attendance rate lowered, and participants showed little motivation; (3) the sub-county water officer, who was supposed to support the follow-up of the implementation, refused to continue being the counterpart when Caritas Switzerland would not pay him allowances. A staff member from Caritas Ngong replaced him, but she faced language barriers; (4) the committee was unable to register as a Water User Association, as they could not compile all required documents; (5) and the main challenge is that the water committee is still not working as a team, evidenced in the fact that only a few committee members are involved in actively managing the water system.

After some time, the management committee decided not to continue with the registration process and follow-up meetings. On July 2017 Caritas Switzerland held a meeting with the County Water officer, the Chief Executive Officer and the water director to discuss the challenges with the committee. As a result of the meeting, the Kajiado County Water Officer committed to organise a meeting with the opinion leaders, the community and the committee to agree on the way forward.

### OBSERVED CHANGES

Right after the *IM Toolbox* workshop, the management committee began having regular meetings and was able to set water fees. By August 2016, the committee had held consultative meetings with the community, and eventually decided for a management model where the community itself manages the water system.

So, even though the committee quit the process and the action plan was mostly not implemented, this was an important learning experience for those involved and small changes were implemented, including:

- The community came together to discuss their water issues
- A new water kiosk was connected with the system and

a kiosk attendant employed to collect the money

- A baseline survey on the views of the community was carried out
- The rehabilitation process, that was stagnating at the beginning of the IM process, was finalized

### KEY LESSONS LEARNT

- Engaging the county government at the highest level from the onset would have really helped legitimize the process, and may have prevented the withdrawal of the sub-county water officer.
- Motivation and eagerness to change of the community group are key requirements for the success of the process. In this case, attendance to meetings and activities was highly dependent on the availability of allowances. Moreover, some community members were not convinced of the positive outcomes that the process could bring, and some others appeared afraid of the legal consequences of not conforming with the legislations.



### ACCOMPANYING CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES

- Creating a platform for accountability in the **Dagahaley community**
- Preventing integrity risks in a newly established community group in the **Tabaita community**
- Building collective action in the **Sabuli community**
- Moving towards formal water management in the **Olchoro-Onyokie community**
- Improving the integrity of community groups managing small water supply systems