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Moving towards formal water management in the Olchoro-Onyokie community

CONTRIBUTORS: LUCIE LECLERT (CARITAS SWITZERLAND), CATHERINE WANJIHIA (CARITAS SWITZERLAND), DORCAS KANINI (ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY REGISTRATION BOARD & TECHNICIANS REGISTRATION BOARD) & CARMEN FERNÁNDEZ FERNÁNDEZ

CASE STUDY

THE COMMUNITY GROUP AND THE WATER SYSTEM

The Olchoro-Onyokie community is located in Kajiado County, southern Kenya. Most community members are Maasai, and live in scattered homesteads, keeping livestock and practicing small-scale farming. For this community, reliable access to water for their cattle is crucial, and is given priority over people's access to safe drinking water.



In 1986, the Kenyan Government constructed a gravity-fed spring protection water system serving the people of Olchoro-Onyokie. The system has five distribution lines: two lines reaching the grazing areas and two bringing water to scattered homesteads through individual connections. However, the community has voiced concern over the amount of water wasted in these individual connections due to poor irrigation methods and neglected leaking pipes. The fifth line is supposed to bring water to the town centre but has not been working for the past two years.

A sub-committee is responsible for managing and operating each line. An umbrella committee representing the five sub-committees was elected in 2013, and is composed of sixteen members including two women. The main responsibility of the umbrella committee was to oversee the rehabilitation of the system in 2013. Since then, they have been meeting to discuss unsolved water issues.

THE INTEGRITY MANAGEMENT PROCESS

The Kajiado county water office worked closely with the community over the years and recommended the umbrella group to follow the *Integrity Management (IM) Toolbox* process. The coach was from Caritas Switzerland and the counterpart was the county water officer.

The IM process activated a dialogue with the water service provider OLWASCO. The Olchoro-Onyokie community is part of the service provision area of OLWASCO, but is not yet actually served by this provider. OLWASCO expressed interest in the *IM Toolbox* as a way to help them work with the existing groups in the area. Caritas Switzerland, the county government, and Caritas Ngong conducted an *IM Toolbox* workshop in July 2016 with the umbrella committee members. Participants were very open to talk about their problems, and sought to find solutions. They had extensive prior knowledge of the water system, as they had supported the rehabilitation works, and of the roles and responsibilities of the sector actors.

The most pressing problems discussed, which were closely linked to integrity issues, were: (1) community members purportedly being scared of having an institution taking over their system and of being 'regulated'; (2) the urgent need to rehabilitate the town line, despite users of the other lines not showing interest in collaborating; (3) the lack of willingness to pay for water; and (4) the water wastage, especially on lines leading to the farms. The discussion also revealed overall discontent over alleged mismanagement of funds when the town line was operational.

The participants of the workshop developed an action plan, which focused on organizing leaders' meetings with all key stakeholders to highlight the need to pay

for water services, and to choose the appropriate management model.

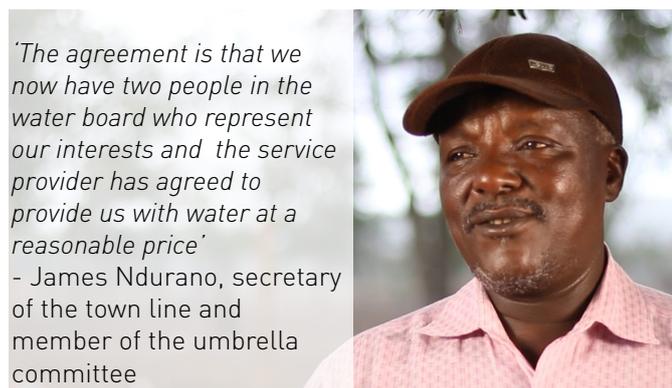
The change agent, James Ndurano, had been in leadership of the town line, and is a very respected and trusted member in the community. He appears very committed with improving the water system management and has resulted to be a natural integrity leader.

OBSERVED CHANGES

As a result of the process, the community group organized a series of meetings to bring together the county government, OLWASCO, local leaders, the umbrella committee, and community representatives.

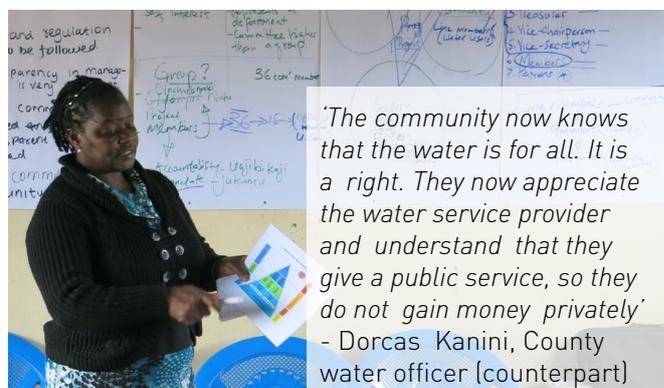
'With the service provider managing the system there will be enough water for everyone, no need to pay expensive vendors, water conservation will increase and planned monthly payments will be possible' - Sainko Partelekua, community member

The chair of the board of OLWASCO encouraged the community to hand over the water system, by inviting committee representatives to become part of OLWASCO's board, and agreeing to employ local staff to operate the system. The community finally agreed, and an MoU between OLWASCO and the Olchoro-Onyokie community was jointly developed and signed, stating that the town centre line will be taken over by OLWASCO once replaced. The understanding is that other lines will follow, when the process proves successful.



Another key achievement of the process was the county government, OLWASCO, and the community carried out a technical assessment, bills of quantities, and the design for the replacement of the town centre line. To date (July 2018), a series of meetings have already taken place, and a proposal has been submitted to the county government for approval of the required funds. There are a number of issues still to be resolved,

particularly in regard to the willingness to pay for water access in farming and cattle areas. However, the *IM Toolbox* approach has proven very valuable to mobilize all stakeholders, and the most valuable outcome of the process is its complete handing over to local actors.



Currently (July 2018), the county government, OLWASCO, and the community members, with support of the local coach, are the driving forces in the transition to the new management model and the tackling of the remaining issues.

KEY LESSONS LEARNT

- In order to legitimise the process and avoid conflict, all actors in key positions – such as community leaders and the sub-county commissioner – were included in all communications, and invited to every meeting.
- The commitment and integrity of the counterpart and the change agent were key assets for the success of the process. They were extremely helpful in manoeuvring through rising problems and in speeding up the *IM Toolbox* process.

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**
- Learning from failures: the challenges in the **Olmaroroi community**
- Improving the integrity of community groups managing small water supply systems