

# **STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY WATER MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA: A MODEL OF DECENTRALISED MULTIPLE PARTNERSHIPS IN SENEGAL**

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Over the last ten years, a successful public-public partnership has taken shape between the water users associations in a rural region of Senegal, the French city of Cherbourg-Octeville as well as several other partners including civil society groups in Senegal and Europe.

## **SERVICES IN RURAL AREAS**

Like elsewhere in Africa, communities in Senegal's rural areas have managed their own water services for many years. This was due to a lack of resources and skills at national level, and a lack of interest by private enterprises in markets that were barely viable and rarely profitable.

Public drinking water services in Senegal are governed by a law introduced in 2008 that confirms the principle of public-private partnerships. The law recommends that management of drinking water services in rural areas be contracted out. A sector-wide programme was introduced in 2005. The operating manual recognises that "in the framework of decentralisation, no aspect of rural water services has yet been transferred to local communities. All responsibilities still fall upon the State".

Rural people are responsible for public water services in rural areas of Senegal through borehole users associations (Associations d'Usagers de Forages Ruraux - ASUFOR). These associations are incorporated under private law recognised by the State and they operate water services under license from the Ministry of Hydraulics. They are democratically managed by communities and their responsibility is limited to a multi-village network with a maximum of five thousand inhabitants. The ASUFORs fall under the auspices of the Ministry for Water, via the Directorate for Implementation of Water Services and Maintenance and its regional offices.

The partnership between the French town of Cherbourg-Octeville and communities of the Tenghory District in Casamance, southern Senegal, is a pilot scheme that attempts to make the most of the space available to local actors in the legal framework, and stimulates the emerging democratic bodies and management of water services through transfer of competence via decentralised development cooperation (between municipalities).

## **HISTORY OF THE PARTNERSHIP**

In 2001, the town of Cherbourg-Octeville - in north-west France - signed a development cooperation agreement with the rural community of Coubalan and created a twinning committee called "Kadjamor". This provided the framework for a water and sanitation project limited to the village of Finthiock, one of the thirteen villages in Coubalan. Support from Cherbourg-Octeville helped raise €375,000 in funding for the project. Because of this initial funding, a partnership was created with ACRA (Cooperazione Rurale in Africa e America Latina), an Italian development NGO that had worked in the region for several years.

This opened the door to European funding linked to the 9th European Development Fund (EDF). The funding enabled the implementation of a far more ambitious water and sanitation project through which about 17,000 people got access to clean drinking water, taps and latrines. The town of Cherbourg-Octeville asked for technical expertise from the Urban Community of Cherbourg. ACRA was responsible for the operational implementation of the project, which was implemented between 2007 and 2010 at a cost of €1.6 million.

In 2011 the Centre International d'Etudes pour le Développement Local (CIEDL) was asked to evaluate the decentralised cooperation, to analyse initial results and to make recommendations. The final report, presented to elected representatives of Cherbourg and Casamance, said: "This project is an almost unique achievement in Senegal. The water and sanitation implemented by the rural community of Coubalan is a project that aimed to provide all families in all the villages and hamlets of the rural community with running water in their homes. [...] It is exemplary in this respect in terms of the provision of a fair public service for all." The evaluation also had strong comments on the joined-up management model: "This management structure is also innovative at national level and as such is a genuine laboratory for the future of regulatory texts for the whole country in terms of local public water and sanitation services."

On the strength of this success, the existing team extended the programme to a further four rural communities with about 60,000 inhabitants. The Urban Community of Cherbourg signed decentralised development cooperation agreements with four rural communities of the Thengory District. The cost of the project is €2.6 million and it is supported by the Water Agency of Seine Normandie, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Senegalese Ministry for Hydraulics in the framework of PEPAM (Senegal's Water and sanitation millennium programme), and the rural communities in question.

Furthermore, the development NGO ACRA and the Urban Community of Cherbourg submitted a tender to the European Commission's 10th EDF, which was approved. This additional project aims to ensure sustainable, participatory and integrated rural water and sanitation by strengthening local capacity. The European Union has agreed to funding of €1 million.

The two projects will be implemented in 2012-2015.

## **AMBITIONS AND OBJECTIVES**

The Urban Community of Cherbourg adopted a Local Agenda 21 in December 2007; it is called "Participating in North-South Solidarity", and is the concrete expression of the political will of the Urban Community to commit to decentralised cooperation. In December 2008, in order to achieve its ambitions, the Urban Community relied on the "Oudin" law, which authorises local authorities to earmark one per cent of the revenue from water and sanitation management for decentralised cooperation projects in the water sector.

The municipality considers access to water and sanitation to be an indispensable prerequisite for future development. The water sector is a fundamental pillar in preventing waterborne diseases and benefits can be measured immediately with a decrease in infant mortality.

It is fundamental to the French municipality that the right to drinking water and sanitation be controlled by local public authorities. Water cannot be considered to be a commercial item from which profits can be made to the detriment of people in need.

Water projects should also provide an opportunity to establish real local governance.

They should allow democratic principles to become more firmly anchored. Good management of water implies learning to live together in a better way.

#### **THE ACTORS**

1. Local elected representatives (the Town of Cherbourg-Octeville, the Urban Community of Cherbourg and the Rural Communities)
2. The State of Senegal (various different bodies)
3. The technicians (ACRA, the local grassroots organization KDES and the Kadjamor association; the University of Ziguinchor)
4. The water management services (the technical services of the Urban Community of Cherbourg, the ASUFORs and their Federation)
5. Civil society (local communities that elect their representatives to the Rural Councils and the General Assemblies of the ASUFORs in Casamance; the citizens of Cherbourg who elect their town council and run the twinning committee; the members and people who run the civil society associations that support ACRA and KDES).

One of the characteristics of the programme is that there are many partners and one of the keys to success has been that all the actors truly assume responsibility for their appointed tasks. There is full agreement on fundamental values: respect, listening to others and mutual understanding. This has been a strong contributory factor to the success of the overall programme.

This experience brings together several strategic partnerships:

- The partnerships between locally-elected representatives through institutional agreements of decentralised cooperation.
- A solidarity partnership between a public operator and a federation of community operators.
- A support network composed of the regulatory authorities, associations and facilitating NGOs, enabling a favourable environment for ensuring water for all.

#### **FINANCIAL ORGANISATION**

With local budget resources allocated by the elected representatives of Cherbourg and Casamance, the partners were able to mobilise international funding for the water and sanitation sector or for rural development in countries of the South. Overall, the funding was granted by:

- 1) The Seine Normandie Water Agency
- 2) The European Union
- 3) The Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs
- 4) The Monte dei Paschi di Siena Bank
- 5) The Senegalese State via a loan granted by the AfDB (African Development Bank)
- 6) The local communities of Cherbourg and Casamance, via their budgets.

The Urban Community of Cherbourg has an annual budget of €50,000 under the "Oudin" law, which can be allocated to water and sanitation-related projects. The rural communities in Senegal are entitled to state grants to support their sanitation projects under the National Programme for Local Development (PNDL).

ACRA also has funding available for projects. This is raised from both private sector and

institutional sources for specific projects.

The rural communities participate in the projects that they wish to see funded by the decentralised cooperation.

ACRA provides the technical support for putting projects together in cooperation with the Urban Community of Cherbourg. The inventory of available funding is carried out jointly. The EU, French and Italian States are monitored to identify potential tenders. The partners are mobilised and the project is honed according to expressed needs. Once a project is funded and the contracts signed with the various donors, the project moves into the operational phase.

## **RESULTS AND OUTCOMES ACHIEVED**

Concrete results are that there are now five functioning water towers fed by five wells. Coubalan's entire rural community has access to drinking water via 1,200 taps with water metres, one in every household, and approximately 850 latrines are operational.

An initial study carried out at the healthcare stations in the villages shows there is already an improvement in the health of the rural community of Coubalan, compared with neighbouring rural communities.

Time that women and children previously spent on fetching and drawing water is freed up. Young girls attend school more frequently and women spend more time on activities that have an economic impact on family income (for example batik, soap...). Water is the first step towards sustainable development.

## **CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES**

One challenge is getting a balance between low-income inhabitants having access to the services and achieving long-term management of the system. The objective is to transfer the whole management to the Senegalese local authorities. The cost of the water service has to be economically acceptable; the revenue from water supply rates should enable the services to pay for all the overheads. Revenue should also allow for a budget for repairs and replacements in future (for example pumps).

To achieve this balance, the programme partners chose for pooling resources, so that there is a genuine public water service, with a single price-structure for all inhabitants. To maintain a balance requires strict payment of water supply rates. Compensatory rates' mechanisms are being studied to avoid discrimination against poorer social groups.

Broader financial coverage would enable management to acquire skills to ensure proper maintenance of the installations without having any significant impact on the price of water. This is why a single structure (a federation of the users associations involved) for the District of Tenghory to manage the 50-60,000 inhabitants' water supplies appears to be an essential part of a sustainable system.

This objective presents new challenges in terms of transparency and accountability of the management bodies; the partners have, however, introduced a programme on governance and prevention of corruption.

Another challenge is supervising the quality of the drinking water. Casamance does not have a scientific analysis laboratory so a partnership was established with the Ziguinchor University Department of Chemistry. The university will be provided with equipment for carrying out the analyses, and lecturers from the technical department in Cherbourg will give training on water analysis. They will also establish a water quality control

programme for the services in rural communities.

Finally, there is still an issue of discrimination and gender balance in resource management; this is an issue in an environment with marked traditions and culture.

### **THE KEYS TO SUCCESS**

Strong determination and political commitment in both the North and the South are essential ingredients for the success of large scale projects. Partners need to learn to trust one another. It is like a house of cards, where the failing of a single partner can cause the whole project to crumble.

Another key to success is good communication with local people. This should never be underestimated.

External evaluations at all key stages of decentralised cooperation are required. These will enable issues to be dealt with and mistakes to be examined, which will lead to continuous improvement.

### **CONCERNS ABOUT NEW WATER SECTOR REFORM**

In 2011 in Senegal a draft law was introduced to create the Office for Rural Water Services (OFOR), whose key aims are to delegate the management of boreholes and to organise the management of major water infrastructures by the private sector and the transfer of water to rural areas. These functions are beyond the capacity of the borehole users associations (the ASUFORs).

The financial resources of the office will come from tariffs; the amount will be established by decree and automatically debited from the revenue from sales of water by the operators, essentially the ASUFORs. This would remove some of the ASUFORs' ability to determine the price charged for water supply and will also reduce their role. Local peoples' ability to manage water through elected assemblies will thus be formally limited to small networks, whereas the OFOR will manage major water schemes whose size and profitability are of interest to the private sector.

Thus, the actors involved would remain, on the one hand, the central delegating authorities who collect part of the water rates and award national contracts, and on the other, the small associations that represent local communities and manage small networks that cannot be managed by private operators. There seems to be a "missing middle", given that the role of elected representatives of local communities (i.e. rural communities) is not taken into account in the 2011 reform proposal. As there is a considerable gap between the central government and small local associations, the involvement of local communities and the emergence of structures able to unite several thousand users are favourable conditions for negotiating a more equitable social contract between the State and its citizens.

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