

UYOMA WATER PROJECT: A CASE STUDY OF
POSSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES IN COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT OF A
RURAL WATER SYSTEM IN MADIANY, WESTERN KENYA

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Introduction

Water is increasingly becoming a critical scarce resource and an endangered “species” in the era of global warming gone awry; it might be a major source of global, regional, national and internal conflicts. In deed major wars may be fought in the very near future over waters! In view of this impending scarcity and potential for conflict, debate on access, control and management of water supply and provision is more urgent today than ever before. This forum, being held in Africa for the first time is therefore timely and relevant in its global content because we are dealing with a problem with global dimensions. Whereas liberalization gives access to private entities to control and manage the supply of water with profit as the primary motive, control and management by public and community entities tend to give attention to social concerns depending on nature and degree of participation by the citizenry. In a continent with the greatest poverty levels and where poverty, disease and unemployment continue to escalate, control of water supply should fall squarely in the public and community domain as a matter of necessity. Living in a country where 60% of the population live below poverty line and in a region where only 3% of the population have access to piped water, access to water and affordability are critical. Communities and public entities when empowered, have the potential to successfully manage water systems as the case of Uyoma Water Project attests. As in the distribution of all scarce resources, this desire will not be realized unless those who share this concern come together in an organizational form beyond borders to articulate to articulate these concerns and influence water sector policy formulation at all levels nationally, regionally and globally.

The push for Public and Community participation in the provision of water not a new phenomena in Kenya. The Uyoma Water Project located in Madiany Division of Bondo District in Nyanza Province of western Kenya (See Map) was originally a community initiative. It provides testimony to growing local community initiatives and readiness to take over the ownership and management of water systems in Africa against attempts at privatization. Failed efforts at providing free drinking water through bureaucratic state institutions have also heightened the urge to take over water provision by public and community organizations. The push is further heightened by the desire for reliability in water supply and its affordability.

Background

The Uyoma water Project was initially a product of local community initiatives as far back as 1948. Community members based in urban areas such as Nairobi felt the need to address water scarcity and periodic drought situations in the area by raising funds among themselves. The initiative was however overtaken by government nationalist policies of the 1960s and 1970s that aimed at providing free basic social services including water by the year 2000 -“the so-called Water for all”. When the government took over the initiative in the 1960s under the ideology of nationalism, the initiative was turned into a free water project for the over 30,000 residents of the area and adjacent locations of Sakwa and Asembo. The project was launched in the early 1970s through joint funding by the Kenyan Government and the Swedish Agency for International Development (SIDA).

Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s the initiative to provide social services such as water was mainly a state preoccupation and probably part of the state’s overindulgence in providing free social services, in the past fifteen or so years, the push has been for the liberalization in the control and management of water resources.

Project description

The Uyoma Water project is composed of nearly four hundred kilometers of piping, fifty six (56) distribution cemented water tanks of varying sizes (5,000-100,000 liters) and nearly thirty (37) stand pipes as communal distribution outlets and over (50) fifty individual consumer points. The system was initially run by three sets of diesel engines and corresponding pumps. The water is pumped from the lake 60 meters away by “3” steel pipes through gravel and sand filtration systems and treatment tank by a low lift engine and pump. The clean treated water is then pumped through a “6” rising main to a 340 cubic meter reservoir tank on Naya hills (2.5 kilometers) away by a high lift engine and pump. From this reservoir, water then flows by gravity through steel but mainly plastic pipes of 6, 4, 3, 2, 1 inches to the distribution points, the farthest being nearly forty five (45) kilometers away.

The project was commissioned in 1973 as a free water supply system managed by the Ministry of water personnel. It was sustained for nearly four years after which its operation became sporadic. By 1978, the project was on its death bed thus forcing community members to rely on raw water from ponds, streams and Lake Victoria for their water needs. This for those living in Central Uyoma meant walking long distances of almost fifteen kilometers to and from the lake. Water borne-diseases especially Cholera and Bilharzias became common annual occurrences. As in many regions of Africa, women and children, especially girls, bore the brunt of fetching water given the traditional gender division of labor widespread across Africa.

In the 1980s various committees formed by individuals tried to keep the project going but to no avail. These efforts were too little to late. In fact, these initiatives managed to supply water only to the points closest to the source.

It was not until 1999 that a local Community-based Organization (MCDP) together with CCFMC Women’s Projects got together to chart a way forward in rehabilitating the project through a community-based participatory approach. A Participatory rural appraisal of the project was conducted by MCDP through capacity building support from MS-Kenya (DANIDA). Through the appraisal, the Projects multiple dimensions were identified and a strategies arrived at for its rehabilitation. The appraisal by key leaders from various sectors of the society identified the problems that had be-deviled the project and even identified technical areas that needed attention.

CCFMC’s Intervention

CCFMC intervention was in response to our beneficiaries in the area who are 90% women who in a needs assessment had identified water provision as their top priority need. Our intervention also coincided with a new Government Water Policy Paper of 1999 that sought to liberalize the management (not ownership) of existing government Water Systems to communities since the government had belatedly realized that government management of water systems had proven a failure and alternative modes of management necessary. The shift was also in vogue with the new paradigm shift to community participation in the water sector though that participation was not given legal backing then. Consequently, the Community only received a temporary letter of management not from the Ministry of water but the Provincial Administration (Office of the President) an indication that a coherent policy had not been formulated. A

management letter was a critical element in guaranteeing donor finding because state- run institutions in Africa in general and Kenya in particular had come to disrepute in donor and funding circles.

Community participation

During the PRA sessions, a number of initiatives were recommended to counter past factors that led to failure of the project. These were aimed at consolidating community participation in the project:

- a) Community management of the water project through committees at tank, sub-location, location and apex level of division (through a an elected water board of two members each from each location), brought several elements that were later to prove to be critical to sustaining of the project:
- b) Real community participation in the decision-making through bottom-up approach.
- c) Evolution of an ownership concept by community members leading to “total security” for system distribution parts
- d) Access to water levies through a system of one third of the cost of water being retained by community committees for surrounding homes registered under the water point whatever tank or stand pipe.
- e) Sensitization of the community on the importance of using treated water
- f) Conducting skills trainings for
 - i. the community representatives on management and record keeping
 - ii. the technical staff at the in take and distribution

Through funding from donor agencies in Germany and United States and skilled labor from local retirees from the water sector, CCFMC managed to conduct technical rehabilitation of various components of the system from the intake, engines and pumps, filtration and purification systems as well as the distribution networks of pipes and water tanks. By the year 2003, water supply in Uyoma was over 90% operational with little reliance on the government and unlike the years of state management when supply was only sustained for four years, the community has managed to keep water flowing from 1999 to-date and generated revenue even under very difficult circumstances. The major technical challenge remains the expansion of the system so as to be able to serve a population that has tripled.

Benefits of the Project.

During the process of rehabilitation and normalized flow of water to 90% of the original distribution network, a number of changes were noticed. Availability of clean water had:

- Positively impacted on agriculture, and encourage horticultural production. This will create conditions for meeting the basic dietary needs of the community and be a source of income.
- Reduced livestock death due to drought and lead to increased beef and milk production. At present,
- Reduced absenteeism and the number of school dropouts especially among girls who remain at home to fetch water
- Reduced water borne diseases such as cholera and typhoid in the area such as schools (especially boarding schools), health centers, trading centers and beaches as evidenced in the records of various health facilities in the Division.

- Enabled three secondary schools have functional science laboratory tests.
- Enabled community members especially pregnant and elderly women to have close access to clean treated water
- Built special water distribution tanks for income generation for widows and orphans.

Policy Shift.

In 2002, the government came up with Water Act 2002 which gave birth to regional regulatory bodies in the country. The act created new institutions and called for the transfer of Water delivery services to Water Service providers (WSPs). Under the new Act, all Service Providers must be registered as legal entities by the registrar of societies. Service providers could be private, public or community entities whose only main basic qualification is possession of the capacity to supply water under the regulatory oversight of (LVSWSB). Through Water and Sanitation Trust Fund (WSTF), the service providers in the region can access capacity building funding through proposals via Lake Victoria South Water Services Board (LVSWSB), one of 8 such boards created by the Act. The Uyoma water project is today registered as Uyoma Water and Sanitation Society and operates as an independent legal entity.

It is important to note that at the center of water sector reforms is the World Bank and the government of France. The World Bank has been very active in pushing for water sector reforms. Today, the provision of water is the hands of municipal authorities and companies or associations established by community entities. However, the process of identifying members of various boards has not been participatory and transparent with the government having a significant say.

The policy changes have had its toll on water Ministry personnel who can not be absorbed by the new regional institutions and community water projects in existence. This has created tensions between community employed personnel and government employees threatened with job insecurity and who are seeking employment opportunities in such supply systems.

Lack of broad participation

Policy changes in the water sector have not been in a participatory and all inclusive manner. More often they are boardroom discussions between creditors, the private sector and the government. It is crucial that civil society and other social movements get actively involved in policy formulation in this sector coming together to press for inclusion in water sector reforms in the country. As we gather here today, we have no effective organizational instruments to influence policy formulation. This forum may give impetus to the formation of such an entity.

Pressure on African governments to deal with external threats to Water sources.

As we put pressure on African governments to open up water provision to community and public control and management, we must at the same time put pressure on them we must demand that

- a) environmental and regional factors that threaten water sources be adequately addressed.
- a) African governments must provide institutional support to community managed water systems, facilitate skills training for water personnel needed to boost the

- capacities of local communities to manage delivery systems effectively and efficiently.
- b) east African governments should address the problem of receding water levels in Lake Victoria that has been attributed to
 - (i) the construction of a new hydro-electric power Dam by Uganda,
 - (ii) the increased use of Nile waters by Egypt for irrigation.
 - (iii) The emergence of the water hyacinth weed which has resulted in increased siltation and evaporation levels.
 - c) Our governments enforce by-laws relating to animal and human pollution of our water masses.
 - d) Our governments penalize riparian industries and local authority polluting water sources through poorly managed sewage and sanitation systems
 - e) East African governments address increased algae formation that has turned the lake water green.

Conclusion

As we strategize on how best to counter liberalization of water supply systems we should note several issues:

- That there are challenging issues that are specific to each system, country and region
- That the common denominator is the need for public and community participation in policy formulation in the water sector so that issues of social control and affordability become core to water provision.
- That networks, national, regional and global must be created to strengthen civil society and social movements to have greater influence in the Water sector.
- That water sector policy and reforms are essentially political and require political will which calls for broad political participation of the people in the political process.