



Processes for Sustainability in Community-managed Water Systems

FACILITATING A CYCLE OF SUCCESS

Project Partner: World Vision®
water

Main findings & recommendations

1. **External support actors (e.g. government, and NGOs) can enable water committees to enter a cycle of success by providing balanced support to communities that facilitates ownership, participation, building of social capital, and the opportunity for the committee to demonstrate their success to the community by quickly rehabilitating breakdowns.**

Recommendation: Share all necessary information about the water system, provide initial and occasional refresher trainings, connect committees with permanent support organizations or strengthen mechanisms for support, and encourage community and committee participation through labor, financial contributions, and decision-making.

2. **Committees employ a variety of resource mobilization approaches, including the use of monetary water fees as well as alternatives including mobilization of personal assets, community assets, community institutions, and community labor.**

Recommendation: Adapt financial training for water committees to be more inclusive of these alternative options for resource mobilization to promote sustainability and equity.

Background

The lack of sustainable community-managed drinking water systems is a major concern in low- and middle-income countries. While water system breakdown is inevitable, some water systems continue to be rehabilitated and provide water for decades while others fail permanently shortly after implementation. Previous studies have shown that water committees and fee collection are critical to sustainability (Fisher 2015, Foster 2013). This study examined successful water systems to identify processes for sustainability.

A cycle of success

The community entry process and training of committee members should build social capital of the committee members, increase community participation, and develop a sense of community ownership of the water system. Increasing social capital, ownership, and participation makes committee and community members more invested in and more likely to mobilize resources for the water system. This increase in resource mobilization increases the likelihood that the



Borehole rehabilitation in Zambia.

Courtesy of Nikki Behnke. Written consent provided for the use and reproduction of this photo.

community will be able to repair water system breakdowns without external financial support, reducing their reliance on external actors, and decreasing repair times. Increasing social capital and ownership also makes both committee and

This brief describes the main findings of qualitative research on processes for sustainability in community-managed water supplies involving interviews and focus group discussions conducted in Kenya, Zambia, and Ghana. Recommendations are intended for actors who provide support to community-managed water systems.

For more information, please visit the project website at <https://waterinstitute.unc.edu/processes-for-sustainability>

community members more likely to engage in collective action (e.g. maintaining or cleaning their water system). This increase in collective action increases the likelihood that the community will be able to repair water system breakdowns.

In interviews and focus group discussions, management committees, community members and external actors often gave rapid hardware rehabilitation as a reason for considering that a committee is successful. If a community perceives the committee to be successful it helps to build social capital of the committee. Higher social capital facilitates greater resource mobilization and collective action, which in turn facilitates faster rehabilitation and allows for a committee to enter into a cycle of success (Figure 1).

Alternatives to monetary water fees

Resource mobilization is an important component of this cycle of success. We identified several mechanisms for resource mobilization related to water systems. Water fees are a common and well-documented method of mobilizing resources. Our research revealed a number of non-monetary

and non-fee alternatives to mobilize resources for water systems that have been previously overlooked. These alternatives include mobilization of personal assets (e.g. paying with a chicken or bag of rice), community assets (e.g. selling water at a premium), community institutions (e.g. collaborating with community savings groups), and community labor (e.g. community members working for a farmer who pays the water committee for their work). Community-specific resource mobilization mechanisms can allow for sustainability and equity in the context of seasonal variation, poverty and rural economies and existing institutions and relationships.

Methods

We conducted qualitative and participatory field research in 18 rural communities in Kenya, Ghana, and Zambia through interviews, focus group discussions, community mapping, timeline activities, and structured observations. Additionally, we conducted interviews with World Vision stakeholders and post-construction support providers. In total, 321 recordings totalling 237 hours were collected between June and August 2015. Data were coded and analyzed thematically.

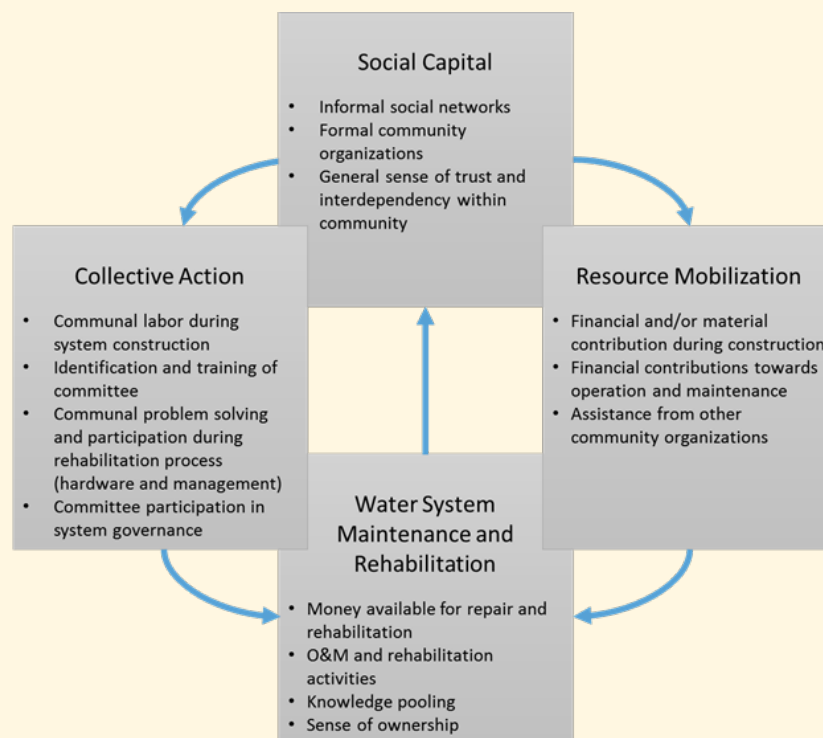


Figure 1. The cycle of success: a positive feedback loop where success in water system maintenance and rehabilitation leads to increases in social capital, leading to additional resource mobilization and collective action and future success in maintenance and rehabilitation.

Acknowledgements

The Water Institute at UNC thanks team members from World Vision for their valuable guidance in this project. We also thank Julian Oliver and Leah Everist for their role in developing this study and conducting field work and Dr. Peggy Bentley and Dr. Valerie Flax for their guidance in the creation of study tools. Special thanks are due also to the study participants, interpreters and transcribers. This project was made possible with support from World Vision, the Wallace Genetic Foundation, the Morehead-Cain Foundation, the American Water Works Association (AWWA), the Jon Curtis Student Enrichment Fund, and the UNC Class of 1938 scholarship.