World Vision's Approach to Community Engagement for Sustainable Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Projects

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Introduction

Studies have shown that over 30-50% of water points provided in the developing world fail between 2 and 5 years following implementation. Many times these water points fail at the community level when the community based management scheme fails to properly operate and maintain the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) technology. This often takes place because the development organization or agency prematurely withdrew before the community was properly equipped to manage the project. The community, in effect, was not successfully engaged by the development organization.

In contrast to the typical failure statistics associated with water points, World Vision's water points have historically had a high rate of functionality (79% for wells in the Afram Plains) even if they are nearly two decades old (University of North Carolina and Water and Sanitation for Africa Study, 2014). This high rate of success was determined to be because of the existence of a functioning water committee and charging a small fee for use of the water so that there was money available for repair of the well. The establishment of a robust water committee that fully owns and understands how to repair the WASH technology is the crucial way in which World Vision development workers engage within the community. Thus, this report will serve to articulate the method of community engagement that World Vision has implemented to achieve high levels of long-term sustainability within their West Africa Regional WASH projects.

Community Engagement Scheme

The skills a community must learn to sustain a particular WASH technology take time to manifest. In fact, the most successful World Vision WASH projects have had deeply embedded teams that interact and engage within the community for 10-15 years. Within these programs, healthy community engagement surrounds the belief that community capacity or ability to sustain a WASH technology is intrinsically available within the community before the World Vision development worker arrives on site. Thus, the World Vision development workers' job is to assist in the community transformation from low to high capacity to sustain the new WASH technology and for new skills to emerge within the community which can be leveraged for other exciting development pursuits.

The processes inherent in proper community engagement and maturation take place in three Phases:

1. **Phase 1:** Listening, Learning & Knowledge Transfer (6-12 months of community engagement to accomplish Phase 1)
2. **Phase 2:** Implementing & Coaching (1-5 Years of community engagement to accomplish Phase 1 and 2)
3. **Phase 3:** Collaboration & Leveraging (5-10 years of community engagement to accomplish Phases 1 through 3)

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PHASE 1: LISTENING, LEARNING & KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

This initial Phase is an involved process of community engagement which begins by listening to fully understand community needs prior to beginning the process of *co-creating* appropriate WASH solutions with the community. World Vision development personnel begin engaging with the community for 2 to 3 weeks through simply listening to understand, document and appreciate the communities perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, practices and existing knowledge that relate to water supply, sanitation and hygiene. It is possible that institutions or committees already exist within the community. Therefore, in this "community diagnosis" process, it is the goal of the development worker to leverage this existing structure, and to broaden (if necessary), the existing committee to appropriately manage the new technology that would be installed.

Box 1: The Usefulness of Metaphors

Often it is useful to begin the process of educating the community about a new WASH technology by comparing it with a technology that they already use. *How does the WASH technology fit within the community's existing perception and understanding regarding the technology they already have?* For example, if bikes exist in the community you could ask how they used to get around before the emergence of the new technology. Now that the technology exists, *what does it take to maintain the bike? How do you keep it from getting stolen?* Then you can begin making the comparison between the bike and the WASH solution.

The process of initially engaging within the community takes on the form of *appreciative inquiry* with the emerging understanding of these community beliefs taking the form of a *community framework*. This process develops, within a World Vision development worker, an appreciation for how a particular technology will fit within the community. With an understanding of this community structure and framework, the development worker can then more effectively seek further clarification through engaging in open dialogue with community members. In these dialogues the development worker begins introducing knowledge and practices within the framework of sustainable water supply, gauging how this might function within the community framework (See Box 1 for a community engagement tool). Within these dialogues the development worker continues to spend more time listening, and *learning* from the community, instead of teaching. World Vision believes that understanding and learning are built around *relationship*, *trust*, and *respect,* not authority. The development worker meets the community where *they* are and integrates within the dynamics of the community, while spending a great deal of time *reflecting*. It is through this process that the worker becomes ready to start the co-creation process coming from a position of understanding and appreciation for the community itself.

PHASE 2: IMPLEMENTATION & COACHING

After the community has been engaged and trust has been built (typically 6 months to a year after initiating the process of community engagement), the WASH interventions are provided. This includes not only provision of the new water point such as a borehole, protected spring, or mechanized water system, but training on hand washing and other hygiene and sanitation interventions. Establishment of a water committee to take ownership of the water point also occurs prior to digging the water point. World Vision invests as much in the "soft ware" side of community engagement on WASH as the "hardware" side of providing the new water point.

The process of developing a water committee, and a plan to operate and maintain rural WASH infrastructure, often begins outside of the community's paradigm of management and, thus, substantial time is required on the part of the development worker to engage in mentoring and coaching the community. This process revolves around community meetings so as to engage each and every community member in the decision making process. Therefore, the majority of the development workers' time is spent mentoring, coaching and teaching community members to debate and allow space for various opinions to be voiced; for team building to take place; for groups to form; and to develop healthy ways to resolve conflict. The goal of conflict resolution is to bring the community together to engage in productive discussion of a problem, to help make group decisions, and as a group, implement the decision. This means including men, women, children, and elderly, people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), and people with disabilities (PWD) within the decision making process. Everyone is involved. Women are particularly

encouraged and enabled to take part in this discussion as many times they are responsible for managing the WASH system.

Group formation, group dynamics, group mentoring, and group capacity building, over time allows for the community to more effectively resolve conflicts, debate, disagree, make decisions, monitor, and report. What ultimately takes place is a holistic community participation framework that goes beyond having an individual custodian over the WASH technology. This process of debate, conflict resolution and complete community engagement becomes a part of the belief system and culture of the community. It becomes culturally acceptable to debate and express one's opinion. This thereby establishes one of World Vision's key-processes for the survival of a WASH Technology: *meet, debate, repeat.*

A step-by-step process for how committee formation can take place is shown here:

1. **Understanding of Existing Committee Structure:** If applicable, existing water committee competencies are evaluated through understanding such things as: how often the committee members meet (available in meeting records), and what type of repairs have been done to the existing system.
2. **Committee Member Election**: Prospective (or existing) committee members are presented to, and voted in, by the community.
3. **Team Building:** Committee members attend trainings to learn how to resolve conflicts, interact as a team, raise money, and make decisions for how inter-community funds are used for the operation and maintenance of the system. Additionally in these trainings, a management structure is formed for the long-term maintenance of the water system. Monitoring and reporting schemes are also articulated, monitoring and reporting on such things as: how much money is raised per month from household tariffs, how the water system is functioning (water quality and quantity), where spare parts will be collected, details of committee functioning, and decisions for how surplus funds are used when they are raised. It is also during this step when the important link between the community, government and private sector are initiated (Box 2)

Box 2: The Importance of Simultaneously Building Institutional Capacity

The existence of a sound institutional foundation within local governments and organization is crucial to sustain long lasting community WASH services. If the capacity does not exist within these institutions, development workers will need to build the competencies needed for effective engagement and support by the government and local organization for the community.

4. **Training of Maintenance Worker**: From the beginning someone must be present within the community that can handle the mechanical aspects of the hand pump, and who can be trained after the water point is established. Example of training levels are:
    a. Level 1: Basic knowledge pertaining to the operation of the water system
    b. Level 2: Skills for how to maintain and repair the water system
    c. Level 3: Field experience removing, installing, and repairing the technology

PHASE 3: COLLABORATION AND LEVERAGING

The final Phase of "Collaboration and Leveraging" emerges approximately 5 years after implementation of the project. At the beginning of this Phase the community has ideally developed the skills necessary for proper maintenance of a WASH system, and has graduated to a place of leveraging new skill sets. With these skills, communities begin to work together and utilize the expertise available in different communities. Communities begin to link and leverage their strengths to collaborate, to learn from each other, and to develop skills in inter and intra community conflict resolution. Communities often hold one another accountable by challenging those communities who are not performing well through developing their own set of community network dynamics and reporting structures. At this point World Vision development workers begin changing their roll from facilitator, coach, and mentor, to one of advisor and encourager.

Value is added to community growth and development beyond the direct value of the WASH interventions. The community, through learning to manage their WASH project, can now better manage their time, hone their own skills and competencies--whether in the creation of new farming techniques, formation of women's groups, and even savings groups. They can begin leveraging money and expanding their businesses. They can better care for their children. More children go to school, and from this they begin to see improved attendance in schools and more teachers come to these communities. Health systems are improved through better information transfer and dissemination of educational programs for services such as immunizations and workshops. Community dialogues improve and they begin to engage with the government to influence policy and demand that government services and competencies are improved (see Box 2). What began as a WASH project is leveraged into holistic multi-sector integrative programs that improve the overall life of the community. The community thrives.

Conclusion

Ensuring that clean water continually and permanently flows in a community, and health practices of improved hygiene and sanitation are adopted, requires multiple years of community engagement by the development worker. There is no short-cut for the investment in time needed to build trust and co-create improved WASH practices within communities. World Vision has found that by building the capacity of our development workers and having them live and work in the communities for several years (5 to 10 years), we can ensure that water points and improved sanitation and hygiene continue to provide community transformation long after exiting the community. A summary of World Vision's 3-Phase Community Engagement Plan is shown below, where the time duration signifies the estimated years of community engagement to complete the associated Phase, starting from the beginning of Phase 1.