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**EQUITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE WASH SERVICES:
FUTURE CHALLENGES IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD**

**Building water governance for community supply systems:
Lessons learned from Tanzania**

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Introduction

Approximately 33,000 people in Tanzania die each year from diarrheal disease associated with unsafe water and poor sanitation alone (WHO 2009), and approximately 16 million people (45% of rural communities) still do not have access to suitable quality drinking water (JMP 2019). Rates of clean water access have not matched the required pace in recent years, partly because 30% of infrastructure is non-functional (URT 2020). Inadequate governance contributes greatly to these challenges as responsibility for infrastructure sustainability falls heavily on communities that lack the necessary financial, technical or management capacity. This study aimed to investigate how to improve the governance of rural water supply systems in Tanzania through the interaction of local government, community organizations, and contracted private service providers (TAWASANET, 2019). The objectives that guided this research study were:

1. Explore existing and potential governance challenges for rural water systems in Tanzania.
2. Identify governance models, tools, and approaches that have the potential to improve the provision of water services in rural areas of Tanzania.

Methods

In partnership with the Government of Tanzania, we selected two sites in rural Tanzania (T1 and T2). T1 is an umbrella organization organized as a trust. The trust was created and comprised of individual communities and their water leadership structures to govern a set of gravity fed piped water systems originally installed by an international non-governmental organization (NGO). T2 is a prepaid water meter system with electronic taps installed in a cluster of communities. The water supply is owned by the community, but the electronic taps are sold by a private firm that provides ongoing data management services for the local government. The representative region for these sites is below the national average in terms of the proportion of residents with access to improved water sources.

For this qualitative study, data came from ten face-to-face interviews (Is) and nine focus group discussions (FGDs) that were conducted with a variety of stakeholders related to the two research sites, including respondents in government at the national and local levels, in the private sector, in international and domestic NGOs, in civil society organizations (CSOs), in academic positions, water committees and users. The data collection methods followed a standard protocol guide that was adjusted based on the case study project. Participants were questioned about four main themes for this study: trust, accountability, transparency, and equity. While the Is were conducted in English, FGDs were conducted in Kiswahili to facilitate comfort and conversation with community members. The research team trained and supported a local enumerator team to lead the FGDs (Olsen, 2011). Credibility and dependability were achieved through triangulation and peer debriefing (Creswell, 2015). This work was conducted as part of a USAID-funded project entitled, "Governance Research on Water Systems"

Results

The thematic analysis of the results is presented in the four elements of water governance on which the participants were questioned: trust, accountability, transparency, and equity.

Trust

This project operationalizes the concept of trust, separating into two dimensions. First, trust comes from offering *reliability*, mainly regarding service provision and quality. On the other hand, public trust develops around the *trustworthiness* of agents, in the general assurance that they will act in the best interests of the community. Participants affirmed that inclusive decision-making increases residents' confidence in the water system, including free and popular election of community representatives to water boards. One of the participants mentioned: *"We elect like any other national election because all water committees are governed by law."* According to users, the technology for revenue collection has been effective in building trust.

Accountability

Participants say that accountability is compromised by poor leadership in administrative capacities and little information on the performance of those charged with operating the water system. According to users, this problem prevents direct targeting of the person responsible for each system operation. Another issue that emerged among the participants was how the new technology for payment for water services had benefited accountability, especially that of users: facilitating the monitoring of expenses, the investment of financial resources within the system, and overall responsible use of payments.

Equity

According to the participants, good governance should guarantee the equity of benefit among all users in all phases of a water supply system. Good governance should also provide equity in the decision-making process, since some groups may see their demands and needs ignored in the absence of institutional measures that allow and promote their influence and participation. Increasing the participation of minority groups affects the equity of the system's service. One participant mentioned, *"We [women] have been involved in the project without any problem, the community engages us, and we are happy we received water and were not worried about water problems anymore."*

Transparency

Transparency analyzed primarily through evaluating if citizens have reliable and accessible information about the financial status of their water system across all phases of implementation, as well as information on the related decision-making processes. Stakeholders stated that they must receive timely and understandable informed decision-making. For example, regarding fees and payments for services, one participant mentioned, *"Information should be the norm. People [users] should be aware why are you raising the tariff... {Because} It [tariff] has to be accepted by the people."*

Discussion and recommendations

Analyzing governance requires careful attention to what it entails in each environment, considering many dimensions at once rather than simplified metrics. This research showed how citizen participation, the dissemination of system information and payment technology promote governance schemes to solve water challenges and potentially replicate those tools that have improved access to water in other rural communities in Tanzania.

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