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The Integrity Management Toolbox on small water supply systems as a governance tool for community-managed water systems

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PUBLISHER

WEDC, Loughborough University

VERSION

VoR (Version of Record)

LICENCE

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REPOSITORY RECORD

Kone, Nagnouma. 2021. "The Integrity Management Toolbox on Small Water Supply Systems as a Governance Tool for Community-managed Water Systems". Loughborough University.
<https://hdl.handle.net/2134/16929535.v1>.

42nd WEDC International Conference

ONLINE: 13 – 15 September, 2021

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

**The Integrity Management Toolbox on small water supply
systems as a governance tool for community-managed
water systems**

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Abstract

In Kenya, rural water supply is largely managed by community groups that operate outside the regulatory system. Most of them fail to sustain systems and services due to poor governance, failures in O&M and low cost recovery. As the sector moves towards professionalizing services and setting more stringent standards, there is growing recognition that rural water service delivery requires a deep transformation with the buy-in of community groups. The toolbox provides an approach to facilitate this change process in community managed water systems with a specific focus on strengthening integrity, accountability and governance.

Challenges in Rural Water Supply in Kenya

In Kenya, community management of water systems has for a long period been the model for water service provision to rural populations. Despite being managed by volunteers, community-managed water systems have been sustained by external agencies, as a means to buffer the slow pace of government service delivery mechanisms. The underlying principles of the community managed-water model are: i) community participation in the development of the system; ii) community ownership of the system, iii) willingness and ability of the community to pay for the water services and carry out operation and maintenance (O&M).

In 2015, the rural water access in Kenya was at 57% with the rest relying on other unimproved water sources and surface water (WHO/UNICEF, 2015). Despite the fact that the Kenya Water Act of 2016 puts the onus on county governments as water service providers to rural communities through infrastructures such as point sources, small-scale pipe systems, and standpipes, it is the small scale, self-help, volunteers and community formed water service providers (WSP) that have been main the main source of water provision to rural communities and hard to reach vulnerable populations.

However, many groups struggle to remain active and to operate and maintain their water system in a sustainable way (Lucie Leclerc, *et al.*, 2016). A recent study in Kenya showed that one-third of the newly established community-managed water systems stop functioning within the first three years after completion (Kwena and Moronge, 2015). Poor governance, failures in O&M, lack infrastructures needed to effectively management processes and operations as well as limited legal status are considered as the main causes of early breakdown.

Integrity challenges arise due to the fact that most of the community-managed systems are not officially embedded within the regulatory framework that would compel them to adhere to certain rules, regulations and standards of governance, service provision, cost recovery, operation and maintenance and reporting. As volunteers, which is the status of many community groups, they cannot sign agreements as water service providers. Therefore, there is a need to address these issues in community-management of water services.

There is need to support communities: to become formalized using the existing regulatory framework, to improve the quality of service from a business perspective, and to become more accountable.

What is the Integrity Management Tool Box?

Developed and piloted in Kenya from 2015 by WIN, Caritas Switzerland, and WASREB, the Integrity Management Toolbox for small water supply systems is a participatory approach to improve the performance (in terms of service delivery and governance), and regulatory compliance of rural water services in Kenya. The overarching objective of the tool box is to improve the performance as well as enhance the formalization of existing community water managed systems and catalyze their formalization within the current legal regulatory framework and improve their performance.

The toolbox raises awareness among community groups providing water that being linked to the legal and regulatory framework is an enabling rather than a disabling factor – and that this would professionalize the way the water systems are operated, enhance accountability, ethical practices and transparency, and sustainability of the water systems.

The IM toolbox achieves its objective by accompanying community groups in a change process towards regulatory compliance and better internal performance. Both pillars come together in establishing management arrangements that are conducive to cost recovery, O&M and quality services as well as adhere to agreed regulations, standards of governance, reporting to County Governments and to the community, thus contributing to the realization of the Right to Water. It is designed as a moderation kit for coaches and is underpinned with a number of practical guidance, checklists, tools and templates.

Taking the community groups through the Integrity Management process will lead to:

- Better organized groups with improved internal processes;
- Increased performance and sustainability;
- Improved downwards and upwards accountability;
- Iterative formalization and coordination with sector institutions

Conclusions

So far, the IM toolbox has only been tested by at least 87 community group. At the sector level, it has been positively received as a promising tool for community groups in the transition towards regulation. Key government institutions, like WASREB and MWI, support the approach and there is growing buy-in from county governments as well as NGOs.

Key words

Community management, integrity, accountability, right to water, rural water supply, regulation.

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