



## Community participation for nomads/semi-nomads

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MUCH HAS BEEN LEARNED about how to implement low cost water supply and sanitation programmes since the beginning of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (1980). The decade principles have become standard in water supply and sanitation programmes. (Burgers, Boot and Van Wijk - Sijbesma 1988). These include emphasis on the use of low cost technologies, women's involvement, cost recovery, national inter-agency collaboration, health/hygiene education, community participation and the need for an integrated approach.

### Community participation

Community Participation means different things to different people. At the beginning of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, the term community participation meant the organising of community members to provide free unskilled labour for water and sanitation systems. The concept later expanded to include beneficiary participation in the planning and design projects and also in their execution. community participation in the creation of the organizational structure and only a little in the management of the water supply systems. In the water sector in Northern Somalia communities were involved mostly during construction in the form of unskilled labour and transporting equipment. To a lesser extent there was community participation in the form of labour mobilization (capital intensive systems and financing of handpumps (Unicef 1997). There have been many attempts at community participation in the water supply and sanitation sector. Some of them have worked and some have not. This therefore implies that community participation may be more complex than we think (Srinivisan 1990).

### Background

Somali culture is based on a nomadic lifestyle. The nomads who make up 75 per cent of the population derive their living from the management of livestock (Abdullahi 1990). They are continuously moving from place to place looking for water and new grazing. The remaining 25 per cent of the population are semi-nomadic involved in agriculture, fishing, frankincense collection and small businesses. Season migration is a common phenomenon, not only for the nomadic people, who return to permanent water sources during the dry season but also for people along the coast who during the hot season move to the cooler highlands.

During the civil war in the early 1990's the Bari Region was affected by destructive actions, the collapse of the government structure and migration of many displaced

persons. In the absence of a central government traditional institutions such as the genealogically-clan based system play an important role. Today, most of the existing water supply systems have broken down, there is no Water Authority and only 26 per cent of the population have access to safe water (Unicef 1999). In Somalia widely accepted approaches like community participation cannot automatically be applied like in other countries and need to be adjusted. firstly because there are so many people on the move. Secondly, because even in relatively permanent settlements, it is not the geographic locality, but rather the clan that is the binding factor.

### Approach taken in SAWA/SPDS's biyo water project

Since 1998 SAWA in conjunction with local NGO Somali Peace and Development Society (SPDS) has been involved in the ongoing European Union/Dutch government funded rehabilitation programme for water supply systems in small towns and urban centres in the rural areas of the Bari region. Potential project villages are selected following a village assessment and baseline survey they are grouped into clusters of 2-4 villages according to their geographical location. In most project settlements the technical intervention is a community berkad sub surface dam and community latrines. This is accompanied by hygiene education and community participation components. The established Steering Committee at regional level is an advisory body that can play a conflict mediating role at village level. This committee is informed regularly about project proceedings and choice of target villages.

Community ownership is translated into the establishment and training of Village Water Committees who have been selected by the community and elders to manage and maintain the systems. With regard to the nomadic lifestyle of the Somali people it has been decided that each of the positions except for the leader should have two people to enable that one person per position could temporarily stay in the village while the other is away. The committee should include women and comprise of a community berkad operator, technician, accountant, health promoter and leader.

### Village water committee establishment process

Step 1, project introduction and community involvement serves as a basis for further participation. The project staff

pay 3-4 visits to explain and prepare the community for the participation required, VWC role and water related health and sanitation awareness sessions.

Step 2, community awareness about water and sanitation related diseases coincides with initial VWC introduction. An awareness day for adults with a separate session for children is organised and implemented in each village. Drafting a list of community representatives results in an initial VWC list. The role they play and the responsibilities they will carry out requires another 2-3 meetings. In the meantime project staff organise a Health and Sanitation workshop for 5-6 participants per cluster village. At least 1-2 people from the initial VWC list are included. During this step the community decides on the location of the community berkad, latrines and garbage pits. Toolkits are also distributed at this stage to encourage excavation.

Step 3, VWC nominations and identification of responsibilities usually requires another 2 meetings. Once the list is produced and agreed by the community VWC members receive training to assist in understanding of specific tasks and internal VWC communication. A VWC 3 day workshop is organised for all VWC members of a specific cluster and topics include community berkad operation and maintenance, health and sanitation promotion methods, financial book keeping and budget allocation, water fee calculation and internal VWC communication. An agreement is then signed between the elder committee, the VWC and the project that defines each party's responsibility. At this stage most excavation has finished and construction preparations are undertaken: VWC members are involved in the construction process to strengthen their involvement for future management. Once construction has finished a handing over ceremony to the community takes place. After handing over, the community becomes the owner of the berkad and public latrines/bathrooms and garbage pits. The responsibility for good water and sanitation management is with the VWC.

Step 4, monitoring of the project is the last activity and is seen as essential to show ongoing support to the VWC. This takes place every 4-6 weeks within the project term after technical works have been handed over to the community.

## Lessons learned

So far the the ongoing project has only reached the monitoring stage in four villages of the fourteen and monitoring has been hampered by a recent drought.

Even at this stage though lessons have been learned. The idea of a VWC that represents the community is a new concept, but it is accepted. It was found that some villages include more semi-permanent people than others and this influences the VWC nomination of people. The position of the VWC members is usually selected according to (sub) clan relations. Relevant skills in some cases have shown not to be a reason to be nominated for VWC positions. VWC's are male dominated and only one or two women have been elected on to the VWC's in each village. Previous project activities in villages already handed over to the community have been found to have a positive impact on newly selected project villages.

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