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## Engaging local authorities in building sustainable water services in eastern Kasai, DRC

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

**Engaging local authorities in building sustainable water  
services in Eastern Kasai, DRC**

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**The context of disengaged local authorities**

Sustaining rural water services in Africa remains a challenge, and communities remain at the center of maintenance and management models<sup>(1)</sup>. In eastern Kasai Province of the DRC, where substantial numbers of people lack access to improved water services, local government authorities are often disengaged from the process of addressing the repeated breakdown of boreholes constructed by development partners<sup>(1)</sup>. This is due partly to unclear institutional mandates and generally weak administrative capacity of water sector institutions creating serious gaps in coordination, management and maintenance of rural water systems<sup>(2)</sup>. Local rural authorities have a role to play in creating sustainable water services, if they are engaged early as an active partner by development partners. This from the start of the program and if they are accompanied with dedicated resources, adequate information and appropriate skills before the end of the program along with a workable sustainability plan. This case study illustrates CRS facilitating work with local authorities in eastern Kasai of the DRC, in building strong and resilient WASH governance system based on dialogue and capacity strengthening for local service providers and administrative authorities. CRS is being aware of the complexity of the fragile environment where the program is implemented and is striving to help in reducing dependence on external aid and charity.

**The NGO as facilitator in building sustainable water services**

Based on an extensive consultative process during the refinement phase of the *Budikadidi* Project, a USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA)-funded food security project, CRS put local stakeholder engagement at the center of the program's sustainability plan. Increasing access to potable water is a large part of the 5-year *Budikadidi* Project. For the first 4 years of the project, CRS acted as a process facilitator in the construction of sustainable water service systems together with local stakeholders in two administrative Territories of Kasai Province. In particular, CRS worked closely with 42 government officials from different levels of eastern Kasai Province administrative system, together with technicians from the Health system and technicians from the *Office National de l'Hydraulique Rurale* (ONHR) (the National Office for Rural Waterworks), to engage local administrative authorities and customary chiefs on their legally mandated roles in WASH governance. CRS build the capacity of 136 Water Management Committees through coaching members, verification of books, and observation of the water services. At the same time, 136 village chiefs continue to receive orientation on the main concept of management of water services (financial, administrative and technique) so they understand and provide oversight of the work of the WMC. CRS also conducted training for local authorities on life cycle costing of different types of handpumps, including manually and foot operated pumps provided in their villages under the *Budikadidi* project. CRS was able to engage local authorities to understand the different type of costs and expenses needed to sustain water services. A series of learning and reflection workshops were conducted with water management committees (WMC), civil society platform and local authorities and served as a platform for effective dialogue and brainstorming on sustainable

water services between stakeholders in each Territory. Stakeholders from each Territory agreed on a set of sustainability factors, that directly affect their water service according to the particular social, cultural and geophysical context of their territory. Each Territory has defined agreed priority action to progress towards sustained water services based on a 15-year vision, similar to the useful mechanical life of respective water pumps.

### **Outcomes: improved local engagement**

The following examples demonstrate the increased engagement of local authorities in sustaining water services. 136 Village Chiefs led the election of WMC members, in total 952 individuals (272 Female) to manage the 118 spring sources and 18 boreholes that are constructed by CRS. The ONHR were fully engaged in controlling the construction norms of all infrastructure and officially approved all infrastructures before they are handed over to the communities. Local government offices reviewed and approved the internal regulation developed by the 18 WMC managing borehole. 10 Government technicians from Ministry of Health and ONHR are engaged, in conducting quarterly water quality testing of all water point, measuring the seven-WHO required parameters and sharing results immediately with WMC. In the Territory of Miabi, during stakeholders' reflection, customary conflict over succession was identified as a major roadblock for continued and quality water services. This threatened social cohesion between villages sharing the same water point, and hindered the work of WMC. However, the *Chef de Secteur* (senior Chief of the Sector) in charge of the villages involved in the conflict met with opposing factions and raised the negative effect of the ongoing conflict on water service provision, in particular its impact on women, children and families. Applying skills obtained during prior awareness building sessions and workshops, this Chief used access to potable water services as a powerful tool to bring peace in the region. In another sector of Miabi Territory, the *Chef de Secteur* requested CRS's support to assess the functionality of a WMC, following allegations of fund mismanagement. The *Chef de Secteur* led the assessment, using a functionality assessment tool developed together with CRS, and has used the results to warn the committee about the consequences of their mismanagement. This led to the re-election and replacement of some committee members involved in the mismanagement. The engagement of the Chief was viewed positively by water users and contributed to building more trust in the management of water services, thus increasing water service use, boosting payments to maintain and sustain the water systems and services. More generally, and as these examples, illustrate, the active engagement of local authorities at different levels and government technicians is considered to be foundational to the success and sustainability of water service in these rural areas.

### **Conclusion: engaging local authorities requires programming adaptations**

CRS and its local partner understood that bypassing government systems contributes to the fragmentation and fragility of the sector. CRS adapted its tools and methods to equip local authorities to become an effective actor in the governance of water service, by helping to mobilize the population to use potable drinking water and pay for services. Local authorities efficiently hold WMC accountable in providing quality services and in building trust from water users by organizing regular general assembly to share financial status report. Local authorities are developing their own roadmap for extending drinking water access coverage in their respective entities. CRS understood it is critical to include the perspectives of local authorities, in its WASH program theory of change and sustainability plan, because they have the most intimate contextual knowledge, to define what is feasible priority actions before the program ends<sup>(3)</sup>. In order to implement this, CRS successfully adapted participatory methods to ensure an inclusive process in making every voice count. This is especially important in building a system shared by those who govern and those who are governed. Establishing a platform for effective and continuous dialogue among local stakeholders is key to CRS' commitment to engage them in continuous adaptive thinking and actions, so as they co-evolve within the complex, dynamic and unpredictable context of water services<sup>(3)</sup>. In recognizing the catalytic role of local authorities and the guardian of norms and standards of key government ministries, and then using established participatory methods to engage local authorities, the Budikadidi project has significantly established a conducive environment of accountability and effective dialogue between stakeholders around the 136 WMCs leading to more sustainable, resilient and equitable WASH outcomes.

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