

CASE STUDY 77

Cost effectiveness and sustainability in the management of the Kumbo Water supply Scheme, Cameroon

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Country & Sector: Cameroon, WaSH Sector.

Context

The Management of Kumbo Water Authority (KWA) witnessed serious problems with water users in 2008, where a very significant number of users are not willing to pay their water bills. This situation has pushed the KWA to do a clean-up of their system to fetch out all those with outstanding bills that dates over 5 years. The clean-up had started in October 2008; users who did not pay their bills have been identified and among them, more than 55 public stand taps (PST) over 78 have been disconnected. The views of different stakeholders are expressed as follow during this period *"We have witnessed situations like this and when this happens people are forced to buy water (400 CFA (Euro 0,61) for 1.5 litres).- People have to fetch water from streams and some sources provide water and fit for consumption."*

In August 2009, KWA decided to change and apply new rate per cubic meter of potable water. Fortunately, SNV advised the water authority to reduce the price of one cubic meter of water at the level of public stand taps from 155 FCFA (Euro 0,24) to 100 FCFA (Euro 0,15), to make it more affordable for the poor.

Client

The Kumbo Water Authority (KWA) was created in 1994 as an arm of The Nso Development and Cultural Association (NSODA). It has under gone several changes the latest being in February 2008 when the Kumbo Council became the supervisory authority. Within the municipality, each consumer has a meter and is issued a bill at the end of the month. Payment is done at the Kumbo Water Authority office. In case of a problem, the consumer reports to the office for necessary action. If it is a general problem, the matter is reported to elected members from the different quarters that make up the general assembly. There are very few public stand taps, mostly disconnected. Consumers are generally satisfied with the scheme though they still complain that the bills are high.

Intervention logic and methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in six public stand taps; more than 30 families were concerned. The idea of conducting interviews helps to assess the changes in the livelihood of selected inhabitants/beneficiaries. Upon completion of the interviews, the data are used to assess the impact of the unit cost price reduction at public stand taps in Kumbo.

Outcome

Firstly, the population was informed through radio on the unit price reduction, and the public stand taps controllers have seen their water bills cost reduced up to 20 %, means that many bills passed from 2500 CFA (Euro 3,8) per month to 1800 CFA (Euro 2,74). Secondly, the person in control of the public stand taps have said that using water and paying at lower price is motivating, because people are applying now to be included in the public stand taps group of users in

their quarter. For example, initially they counted three families around one public stand tap, now they are 8 families.

Thirdly, the cost reduction has given opportunity to renovate building surrounding the standpipe for more comfortable use.

Finally, the unit cost reduction improved the access of poor families to safe drinking water.

Impact

It's too early to talk about the economic impact at the level of each family. The spared amount of money is fluctuating between 500 CFA (Euro 0,76) to 1000 CFA (Euro 1,52) per month per family. This amount is small to show impact at family level in short term. But, the economic impact have been seen when all the families using the public stand taps spared cost is put together; then, they are saving up to 80.000 CFA (Euro 121,60) per month and they will be able to clear progressively their unpaid bills. The six public stand taps about 30 families interviewed own KWA, from August 2006 to November 2009, more than 968.450 CFA (Euro 1.472) as amount of unpaid bills pending at their level.

Lessons learnt

The consequence of poor communication between KWA and public stand taps (PST) users is that: no public stand taps committees were put in place till now and some families are not informed about the unit cost reduction by the person in control of their PST. They are still paying water at old rate. Ms Wirsly Precilia said: *'I will start to read the detail of my bills, so that if they cheat us, we will know'*. Facing difficulties to pay their debt now, people still confirmed that water should be free at PST. Users must form PST committees; they also need training on management, their roles and responsibilities. It is important for them to know more about transparency, accountability and efficiency. KWA must pass through his quarter representatives, churches, and traditional rulers to intensify his information campaign on the unit cost reduction, to let everybody be informed.

Photos and quotes

'Where will KWA is going to take chlorine they are putting in water? Users should pay small money for that'. Tabi Christian, a person in control of Vekaakui public stand tap.

'Water became close to me, no need for long distance again to fetch it' Glarys Berinyuy of Tankum, user of a public stand tap.

