

**WSUP**Water & Sanitation  
for the Urban Poor**TOPIC BRIEF**

TB#007 • FEB 2013

# Getting communities engaged in water and sanitation projects: participatory design and consumer feedback



The purpose of community engagement 1

Context is key 2

Understanding incentives and obstacles 3

Assuming sustainability 3

Accountability: transparency, compliance and responsiveness 4

Obstacles to community engagement 5

WSUP-ACF approaches to community engagement 6

Coordinated approaches - by stakeholder group 8

Building on asset and responding to need 8

Equity and inclusion 9

Recommendations for programme managers 10

Annex: Dealing with non-engagement 11

References 12

Community engagement in water and sanitation service delivery is key for ensuring project sustainability and accountability. In all of its programmes, WSUP works with local service providers, community groups and local authorities to enhance stakeholder participation. This Topic Brief looks at community engagement approaches used by WSUP in three cities within the African Cities for the Future (ACF) programme: Antananarivo (Madagascar), Kumasi (Ghana) and Maputo (Mozambique). The specific focus is on ways to encourage community involvement in the design of water supply and sanitation projects, and ways in which service providers can elicit input and feedback from people living in low-income communities. The Topic Brief discusses several cases in which community engagement has positively contributed to the development of WASH services. It highlights some of the key challenges currently faced by WSUP and other sector organisations, and ends with practical recommendations for programme managers about how to engage low-income communities.

## 1. The purpose and role of community engagement

Actively engaging community members in social development projects is commonly undertaken to ensure sustainability and promote accountability (by empowering citizens to participate in such projects). Yet truly understanding the processes and impact of community engagement and how it is managed is not straightforward, especially within multi-stakeholder partnerships such as WSUP. 'Engagement' includes a range of activities and approaches that are undertaken to varying degrees by different actors, ranging from public consultation to active participation in the design and delivery of projects. In addition, such activities tend to offer some form of empowerment for members of the community. However, 'community' rarely refers to a cohesive or homogenous unit; rather, it is often a diverse set of people with diverse, and sometimes competing, interests.<sup>1</sup>

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## “National frameworks and standards may enshrine principles for community engagement”

So ensuring that community engagement approaches are well-tailored, effective and able to lead to sustainable outcomes is an ongoing challenge for implementing agencies. Furthermore, programme design requires careful consideration of community engagement efforts so as not to negatively influence local power relationships or reinforce existing inequalities.

WSUP, through the USAID-funded African Cities for the Future (ACF) programme and other programmes on-going, seeks to increase equitable access to water and sanitation by supporting delivery to the urban poor in six cities. It aims to build the capacity of local service providers (LSPs) and the low-income communities they serve, as well as to strengthen local authorities (LAs) to provide a more supportive and enabling environment for stakeholder engagement. In line with WSUP's strategy, this multi-faceted approach seeks to move beyond supporting communities in the short term. Rather, by working with LSPs and LAs, the aim is to instil better community engagement systematically throughout the WASH delivery process and to sustain project gains. At the heart of the issue is the recognition that community engagement activities cannot be undertaken in isolation: in fact WSUP encourages LSPs, authorities and community groups alike to incorporate such activities on a routine basis.

Drawing on the ACF experience, this Topic Brief reviews the current discussion around community engagement, analyses the current context of pro-poor service delivery, and identifies the key incentives and obstacles for development partners. It goes on to review WSUP's approaches in three of the six ACF cities (Antananarivo, Kumasi and Maputo), looking at both water supply and sanitation, specifically in relation to channels for community input into project design, as well as ways in which service providers can elicit input and feedback from citizens that are being trialled with LSPs and local authorities in the different cities.<sup>a</sup> The Topic Brief ends by drawing together key lessons learned by WSUP into more widely applicable and practical recommendations for project managers seeking to encourage greater and more effective community engagement in WASH supply programmes.

### 1.1. Context is key

Exploring the impact of different contextual factors allows for a better understanding of why community engagement approaches may work better in some places than others. At the wider political level, local project teams are best positioned to determine the extent to which social engagement, can take place, i.e. whether repressive governments allow space for democratic and participatory engagement and how political interference can have an impact at the local level (e.g. the influence of cartels, local government capture, corruption, etc.).

At the policy level, national frameworks and standards may enshrine principles for community engagement that in turn can be used as a political campaigning or practical tool by development partners in the design and validation of their approaches. For example, in Ghana the National Water Policy and the National Environmental Sanitation Policy encourage cooperation with communities and spell out the principles that guide citizens' involvement in WASH service delivery. The latter policy, for example, demands participatory decision-making, equity and gender sensitivity, recognition of indigenous knowledge and specific community engagement. In addition, regulatory bodies increasingly seek to protect the interests of consumers (including the poor) through better communication and engagement: for example, by gathering information through report cards and customer satisfaction surveys, which have proved a critical asset for regulating utilities' performance (see the Ghanaian PURC Social Policy).

From the perspective of service providers, key contextual factors have influenced the scope and scale of their stakeholder engagement practices. For example, the legacy of debates over the role of private sector participation (PSP) in basic service delivery in the 90s has resulted in an increased focus for LSPs to formalise their stakeholder engagement competencies and reform their processes for doing so. Engagement

<sup>a</sup> This Topic Brief does not address the specifics of how urban communities are involved in service management operations at the local level nor how user associations are formed, etc. Further discussions on these aspects are captured in another Topic Brief on hybrid management models. The present report focuses on how, when, why and which community representatives might be engaged in community structures.

has reportedly become a clear priority for providers and has raised expectations of accountability of all sector actors.<sup>2</sup> There is a strong perception that effectively involving the community will simultaneously reduce operational risks faced by service providers and meet the need of citizens (or their NGO representatives) for more information and more transparency. Furthermore, the recently launched international standard for 'social responsibility' (ISO 26000) outlines how both public and private providers should address consumer issues, community involvement and development. The standard, which provides voluntary guidance, highlights the benefits of community engagement for providers at an operational level as well as for wider business motives (i.e. competitive advantage, reputation, staff and customer retention, enhanced external relationships, etc.).

Private sector participation approaches (including those with smaller-scale private operators) have arguably also informed how communities engage in the design of projects and their options for recourse. Communities are now increasingly involved in a variety of key decision-making processes (e.g. on tariff increases, service area demarcation, provider selection) through consumer dialogues and more in-depth channels for feedback on performance. As the type of engagement has shifted, so have expectations on the roles and responsibilities of the community.

#### Box 1: ACF in Kumasi (Ghana)

*WSUP works in the peri-urban neighbourhood of Kotei in Kumasi to deliver a decentralised water system and a toilet block. Kotei is an 'urban village' that is surrounded by elite communities. Poverty levels are high, the children are not educated and there are a lot of informal traders. A Project Steering Committee supports the management of the project, and includes community representatives. A Community Management Committee (CMC) has been created to facilitate community mobilisation and engagement processes as well as providing a communications channel between the utility and community. This was seen as a step towards recognising the consumer voice of the poor. (WSUP interview, 2011)*

#### Box 2: Dealing with local politics in Kumasi

*There is a resolve by the Kumasi Municipal Assembly (KMA) "to take politics out of this whole toilet business". The aim of having a Community Management Committee is to isolate the toilet block management from political interference. The Committee has representatives from different segments of the community. (WSUP interview, 2011)*

## 2. Understanding incentives and obstacles

*"Community participation is a means to an end and not an end in itself"*  
(WSUP interview, 2011)

As stated above, community engagement primarily seeks to achieve longer-lasting, sustainable services for the poor, and transparency and accountability throughout the process.

### 2.1. Assuming sustainability

Involving communities in generating the demand for WASH services, their design and ongoing delivery is generally assumed to ensure that interventions are appropriate for the context and for users themselves. Evidence suggests that informed hardware choice and ongoing system maintenance and management by communities can lead to longer-lasting access to both water and sanitation services,

- <sup>b</sup> For example, financial mismanagement by communities is the most often cited 'failure' of projects that engage communities in the delivery of services.
- <sup>c</sup> Drawn from the BPD analysis on 'Partnership Accountability - Unpacking the Concept', BPD, 2005.

for example through fewer system breakdowns due to pump maintenance/standpipe management and the ownership and protection of services e.g. pride in maintaining clean and safe communal sanitation blocks. Yet without an enabling environment and some form of ongoing support, it is often reported that community engagement does not automatically lead to sustainable projects and programmes.<sup>b</sup> Increasingly, the idealistic view of assumed gains through preliminary community engagement has been challenged by practices from the field. It is becoming more widely acknowledged that the sustainability of services can only be achieved through ongoing financial and technical support to communities by external bodies.<sup>3</sup> Recognising this challenge, WSUP programmes aim to build the capacity of LSPs and LAs to support communities on an ongoing basis at the local level - to influence all stakeholders to embed community engagement practices as the *modus operandi*.

### Box 3: Marrying reality with rhetoric

*"(It is generally agreed that) community engagement and empowerment is the solution to the sustainability of water supply and sanitation services. The hallmarks of empowerment and capacity building are factors such as transparency, partnership, flexibility, respect, and empathy. The institutional models generally associated with government departments, however, are autocratic, bureaucratic, authoritarian, and "top down". It is unlikely that an organisation with such characteristics will be able to develop and nurture a whole system of local level institutions which have very different characteristics."* (Abrams 1996)<sup>4</sup>

- <sup>d</sup> Water Safety Plans are not just focused on water testing but express an emphasis on quality assurance from the water source to the point of consumption 'through continuous monitoring and preventative maintenance of water supply systems' by communities.<sup>5</sup>

## 2.2. Accountability: transparency, compliance and responsiveness

A key motivation for engaging the community in water and sanitation programmes is to improve accountability amongst the different actors involved. Tools and approaches to community engagement that improve accountability can be framed as follows:<sup>c</sup>

- **Transparency:** 'giving an account' - ensuring LSP information about services and tariffs is accessible, understandable and relevant to the community; publishing information on financial management and decisions taken (by providers or community management structures); sharing project progress reports and achievement of targets; participation by community representatives in the implementation and management of services (from awareness-raising, liaison and advisory activities through to contracting and oversight).

### Box 4: ACF Maputo, Mozambique

*The ACF-supported Tchemulane project aims to provide better water services for up to 162,000 people in 7 neighbourhoods (bairros) of Maputo and 1 in Matola. WSUP has been building sanitary blocks in Chamanculo C, Xipamanine and Mafalala and supporting the extension of water supply networks in two more bairros (Xipamanine and Mafalala). WSUP's partners in the project are the local municipality, CRA (the regulator), FIPAG (the asset holding company) and AdaRM (the main water provider).*

- **Compliance:** 'being held to account' - oversight activities such as engaging the community in LSP performance monitoring through the use of report cards, customer satisfaction surveys and contracts between water user associations and LSPs; Water Safety Plans used as a management tool to reduce exposure to risks,<sup>d</sup> participatory budgeting processes, etc.

“ ‘Communities’ are not homogenous ”

- **Responsiveness:** ‘taking account of’ – creating clear channels for community members to provide feedback to LSPs (e.g. through consultation on the design of systems) and to raise grievances and complaints, with recourse mechanisms in place (e.g. suggestion boxes, fault reporting, consumer forums, etc.).

Ultimately, community engagement is a valuable mechanism for creating a more responsive system that makes LSPs more accountable to their users. It also serves to keep those providers well informed and motivated to accommodate and respond to consumer voices.

**2.3. Obstacles to community engagement**

Although the incentives for increasing community engagement in WASH programmes and projects may be compelling and clear, the challenges are equally evident. This section provides an overview of some of the practical barriers to engagement drawn from the WSUP ACF experience and from other development practitioners.

**Barriers for specific stakeholder groups**

Attempts to increase or improve community engagement approaches are met with varying concerns at the local level. Within the ACF programmes the following reactions have been reported. Overcoming such perceptions and positions requires a clear case to be made to each stakeholder group, as well as providing ongoing influencing and practical support to develop appropriate tools and structures that are attractive to and relevant for each.

Stakeholder Group	Commonly reported barriers to engagement
<b>Communities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Lack of willingness or desire to engage with LSPs/LAs (see Annex on dealing with non-engagement)</li> <li>■ ‘Communities’ are not homogenous: they may lack social structures and can be transient due to frequent migration</li> <li>■ Lack resources or technical capacity</li> <li>■ Resistance to behaviour change</li> <li>■ Perceived symbolic rather than real (or meaningful) ownership of systems</li> <li>■ Lack of trust or confidence in LSPs or LAs</li> </ul>
<b>Community-based enterprises (CBEs)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Lacking communication resources and messages to deliver to communities</li> <li>■ Perception of low-income communities as ‘too poor’</li> <li>■ Risk aversion: prefer to work with easier, more accessible groups</li> <li>■ Security: concerns over vandalism of assets and personal safety</li> </ul>
<b>Local authorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Little widespread belief that engagement is their mandate</li> <li>■ Lack resources: finance, staff, time and often technical capacity</li> <li>■ Fiscal decentralisation lacking and taxes &amp; transfers insufficient</li> </ul>
<b>Local service providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Poor communities are not seen as a viable customer base</li> <li>■ Little widespread belief that engagement is their mandate</li> <li>■ Policy, incentives and enforcement lacking to reach universal coverage</li> <li>■ Lack resources: finance, staff, time and often technical capacity</li> <li>■ Security: concerns over vandalism of assets and personal safety of staff entering poor communities</li> </ul>

## “ Raising community voice may shift power balances between implementers and communities ”

<sup>e</sup> This is especially pertinent since the UN General Assembly recognition of the Right to Water & Sanitation. See <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/WaterAndSanitation/SRWater/Pages/SRWaterIndex.aspx>.

<sup>f</sup> For further analysis on non-engagement and how to deal with it, please see Annex 1.

Similar disincentives can be seen across different stakeholder groups – key issues are clustered around several political and socio-cultural dimensions:

**Political** - One of the key barriers to increasing community engagement is that no one stakeholder group takes responsibility for ensuring it happens. LSPs and LAs do not necessarily see it as their mandate, especially when capacity and resources may be constrained. Misconceptions of roles and responsibilities –and indeed of many donor-led interventions– lead many stakeholder groups to assume that community engagement activities are the domain of NGOs/CSOs alone. Making the case at the political level (i.e. through regulation, contractual clauses, LSP performance indicators or consumer advocacy to local government) may help to convince LSPs/LAs that it is their mandate and to embed practices more widely.

It is not only LAs or LSPs that may fail to take responsibility however; communities also have a role to play. Once systems are in place, the community should also be incentivised to comply with engagement mechanisms by, for example, paying bills, protecting assets (e.g. ensuring infrastructure is not vandalised or stolen) and continuing to provide feedback to providers.

**Social** - Even with political buy-in and when community engagement activities are underway, the process is not straightforward. Implicit in discussions of increasing accountability through community engagement are the principles of fairness, empowerment and ensuring that rights<sup>e</sup> and needs are recognised. Raising community voice and demand may not only shift ‘normal’ power balances between implementers and communities, but also within communities. The challenge for LSPs is to know how to design and deliver community engagement strategies in an equitable way that does not further mask or reinforce deep-seated issues of power and control at the local level.

As highlighted earlier, the term ‘community’ rarely represents a homogenous unit or a specific set of individuals. Approaches for community engagement require catering to the needs of different sub-groups to ensure they are differentiated for women, for minority groups and for the poorest of the poor, for example. Recognising that hidden power relations and reasons for exclusion<sup>f</sup> may be based on many factors –age, class, cultural beliefs, ethnicity, gender, rural/urban background, political affiliation and health status– enables implementers to target their approaches more effectively and efficiently.

### Box 5: ACF Antananarivo

*The ACF programme in Tana focused on WASH project implementation in two communes (Bemasoandro and Andranonahoatra). WSUP helped organise communities by supporting the establishment of Water User Associations (WUA) who sign a contract to operate water kiosks in poor districts. A Project Steering Committee meets quarterly; it includes representatives from the donors, CARE, WaterAid, WWF, the water utility JIRAMA, CDC and the WASH Committees.*

### 3. WSUP-ACF approaches to community engagement

Under the ACF, WSUP set out to reinforce the capacity of service providers and local authorities to respond to community needs appropriately. Efforts made at different levels to embed better engagement practices with different stakeholder groups (see Table 1 and page 9 for specific approaches).

The learning review which provided the basis for the Topic Brief focused particularly on the three ACF projects in Tana, Kumasi and Maputo highlighting the range of approaches to community engagement used at the local level. The table below outlines the approaches used. It is not an exhaustive list of activities undertaken by each project, but rather reflects what WSUP did with different stakeholders in order to increase accountability and influence practices across the system.

Table 1  
WSUP tools and approaches  
for community engagement

	Antananarivo	Kumasi	Maputo
Design	Integrated approach (following initial context and stakeholder analysis) in each case to organize communities, consult about project design, and to support the development of existing and new community management structures.		
	<b>Water Supply</b> - Implementation and oversight		
	<b>Community</b> mobilisation including: planning consultation, selection and location of water kiosks, design of payment options and of communication messages on behaviour change and awareness-raising. Capacity building focusing on project management for <b>Community Development Committees</b> and <b>Water User Associations</b> (WUAs)	<b>Community</b> member involved in engineering design review team for decentralised water system (e.g. selection and location of tap stands as opposed to water kiosks). <b>Community</b> meetings held to discuss design of system to ensure that the facilities would be appropriate and accepted.	<b>Water Company</b> undertakes design; WSUP then facilitates contact with the community leaders ( <b>chefes de quarteirão</b> ) who indicate where the supply is needed and where it is possible. <b>CBO</b> and/or WSUP specialists provide information to the <b>community</b> about the project and their options for connection payments. Construction <b>contractors</b> have a clause in their contracts to include local labour.
	<b>Sanitation Provision</b> - Implementation and oversight		
	<b>WSUP</b> encouraged a sanitation marketing approach: initial surveys and stakeholder analysis were used to identify interested stakeholders and CBOs who can raise demand and manage a payment facility. CBO acting as a 'sanitation advisor' helps households choose the best technical option based on ability and willingness to pay.	<b>Community</b> -wide meeting to decide on toilet block design, usage and maintenance.	<b>Community</b> -wide meeting to decide on toilet block design resulted in sanitation blocks with different facilities for men and women. <b>Community</b> participation in construction. <b>Community</b> members guard equipment, manage services (e.g. as standpipe operators) and regularly make financial contributions for maintenance.
Recourse	Consumer recourse mechanisms are built in from the start through the development of local management committees/CBOs, paperwork (e.g. Constitution, MoU) and intermediary/mediation roles.		
	<b>Water Supply</b> - Feedback		
	<b>WUAs</b> sign a contract and operate water kiosks. WUAs have internal rules; they have to communicate with the community regularly and report on management. The <b>Communal WASH Committee</b> (CCWASH) takes part in the Project Steering Committee (meets quarterly). The CCWASH is also part of the National DIORANO WASH platform, at the level of the Commune.	<b>Community Management Committee</b> (CMC) Constitution developed: outlines CMC principles, representative composition and functions including mechanisms for sharing information such as CMC meeting minutes; financial reports; and system performance. It lays out the processes for annual community forums, suggestion boxes, and dispute resolution as well as sanctions for non-provision of services.	A ' <i>Term of Compromise</i> ' is signed by all the <b>beneficiaries</b> as well as the <b>community water committee</b> , the <b>local authority</b> and the <b>local councillor</b> . Shows that the beneficiaries also agree with the composition of the elected committee. <b>CBOs</b> maintained contact between the beneficiaries and WSUP staff. WSUP acted as intermediary with the <b>water company</b> ensuring complaints/problems are addressed (e.g. household invoicing processes).

## “ Getting local government buy-in from the start helps embed community engagement ”

### 3.1. Coordinated approaches – by stakeholder group

As highlighted earlier, to increase sustainable impact and the possibilities for success with community engagement practices, the ACF programme adopted a coordinated approach with different stakeholders to get buy-in and build capacity. Beyond the community mobilisation aspects for design and recourse purposes, there has been a strong focus on ensuring that the institutions involved –local authorities, service providers and CBOs– will be able to carry on working together once the WSUP programme finishes. To this end, WSUP has played a variety of roles at the local level to institutionalise community engagement approaches and to build stronger local relationships:

**Providing direct support to communities and CBOs** – Work has included capacity building of CDCs and WUAs in Tana; supporting communities to manage sanitation facilities and developing CBO ability to organise and manage contract paperwork in Maputo; technical back-stopping support to the CMC in Kumasi to enable them to demand improved services.

**Forging and monitoring provider/community relationships** – As there are few open or easily accessible existing complaint mechanisms between the community and the utility GWCL in Kumasi, WSUP have supported the development of a local forum bringing the community together directly with the water company, thereby facilitating frank exchanges. In Maputo, WSUP has been facilitating connections and then monitoring invoicing as well as working with the provider’s low-income community unit to reduce billing delays for consumers.

**Supporting local service providers** – It has proved useful to encourage LSPs to adopt and replicate engagement approaches (especially as ‘the community’ may change over time) and to see them as a tool for service expansion and increased customers. This includes, for example, working with the Communes in Tana –and with bureaucrats in Kumasi– to build their capacity and knowledge of community participation, and supporting the company incentives to maintain connections to the poor in Maputo.

**Influencing local authorities to see engagement as their mandate** – From the experiences of the ACF projects it is clear that getting local government buy-in from the start also helps to support and embed community engagement processes. In Kumasi, the ACF project worked simultaneously with the LSPs and the bureaucrats who are not used to dealing with communities directly in such innovative ways.

*“Typically they are government representatives and bureaucratic in nature and they didn’t see the need for community engagement. But through our engagement process they’ve now understood the need for it. These discussions created a platform for engagement with them both.” (WSUP interview, 2011).*

In Tana, the local authority was trying to understand its incentives for engaging in capacity building sessions and workshops at the beginning of the project. Once the WSUP team had managed to demonstrate the benefits of engaging the community development committees (and through some negotiation and advocacy) the Communes saw that the project was part of a wider development process that also benefited them. In Maputo, WSUP has supported the reactivation of the water and sanitation commission at the local neighbourhood (bairro) level, so that community members can report problems or complaints closer to home.

### 3.2. Building on assets and responding to need

In all of the ACF projects, WSUP has been able to build on existing community structures and assets. The communities have expressed a willingness to be involved that has both helped in the targeting of interventions and the participative design process. In all three cities initial context analysis and stakeholder surveys have helped in the identification of project sites; in assessing the community willingness and



ability to pay; and in evaluating the availability of existing CBOs (e.g. community development committees) that can be harnessed as local intermediaries. In turn, this has informed WSUP's approach to project design and subsequent management model options. For example, payment facilities have been put in place in Tana whereby funds have been allocated for use on a revolving basis to pre-finance credit facilities for the poorest. In Maputo communities were involved in the initial surveys so they could determine what facilities they wanted, where they should be located and how they would be used by different families. Recognising that community members are busy people and that meeting scheduling is difficult, the Kumasi project uses a monthly community clean-up session as a platform for engagement.

#### Box 6: Building on assets in Tana

*"We are trying to see if we can work with existing community development committees. In some areas there are already some committees in charge of development aspects. They don't focus only on WASH issues but could also focus on security, the environment, education, etc., it depends on the commune. If a committee already exists, we want to involve them in all stages of the project implementation. By the end of the community mobilisation phase we will then have several local development plans that include WASH components for each Fokontany." (WSUP interview, 2011)*

#### Box 7: Equity and inclusion in Maputo

*Stories collected from local women highlight the impact of their participation:*

*"As women, we have the right to participate in decision-making meetings, and contribute with our ideas... I cannot work alone. We women have to take the lead in this endeavour, and know why we are doing it." (Graça Muendane, Maputo, WSUP 2011)*

*"Water management strengthens me in my knowledge. I am truly a person safe and ready to assist and cooperate forever with my community. And I don't doubt my abilities." (Julieta Muinga, Maputo, WSUP 2011)*

### 3.3. Equity and inclusion

The ACF programme focuses on securing equitable access to services, and efforts are made in the projects to ensure that all stakeholders are consulted. Community consultation processes endeavour to involve women, men and children in the selection and adaptation of technical designs, and in the management of facilities.

Gender equity is strong both in the implementation and management aspects of projects (e.g. having women as standpipe operators or sanitation block managers). In Maputo, for example, if a water committee president is a man, then the practice is to ensure the deputy is a woman (and vice versa).

The WSUP teams highlighted that more would need to be done to deal more proactively with the needs of those with specific WASH requirements (such as those living with HIV/AIDS, disabilities, etc.). Indeed, to ensure there is an equitable participation of marginalised groups, community engagement tools must be tailored to their specific needs. The key challenge for all project implementers here is usually around whether their budgets can stretch to be able to afford this level of tailored engagement to achieve equity.

“ There are no ‘quick wins’. Community engagement takes time, effort and money ”

#### 4. Recommendations for programme managers

This final section provides recommendations for programme managers on how to work with, and respond to, the challenges that community engagement issues present for WASH implementation. These are based on experiences of the ACF programme but are applicable sector-wide.

**Build on assets** – Initial engagement efforts should be focused on where there is some existing interest and community goodwill, or a previous experience of other engagement activities (within the WASH sector or otherwise). By engaging with existing local community structures (such as community water groups, steering committees, platforms, etc.) different stakeholders can be brought together in a more systematic way, and the capacity of these existing groups can be enhanced.

**Understand the local socio-cultural and political context** – Proactive mapping of stakeholders and contextual analyses help identify what can be done, where and with whom. In some cases, community ‘ranking’ may be appropriate for planning interventions. Finding the right spaces, opportunities and platforms for engagement are also key. Using a variety of media-based and non-traditional methods of communication (e.g. SMS, radio, theatre, etc.) can be effective for getting messages out to communities. This is also vital for understanding the types and methods of communication with communities: for example, if illiteracy is high, visual messaging will be more appropriate.

**‘Sell’ the benefits of community engagement** – Since some LSPs and LAs do not see community engagement as their mandate, it is essential to show them the benefits. This may include advocacy activities at the policy level or more general public awareness raising and campaigning. Stakeholder advocacy networks and CSOs can be useful for getting such messages across. Beyond advocacy, however, there is a need to gather and use financial (e.g. non-revenue loss data) and other evidence to influence LSPs and to educate them on the costs of ‘doing business’ without an engaged community. Programmes must find the right incentives for LSPs to embed engagement approaches by highlighting the potential for expansion and a wider customer base, as well as LSP risk reduction and conflict management (i.e. community interlocutors can bring issues to light before they transform into wider operational failures). On the other side of the equation, it is also vital to continue to engage with communities to highlight what role they have to play and to empower them to play it.

**Monitor progress** – To embed engagement as a process (and not as one-off activities) and to encourage sustainable changes to the system, different approaches can be taken to monitor the progress of all stakeholders. Communities and CBOs need encouragement to monitor LA budget allocations and LSP performance (through scorecards for example). These longer-term participatory processes and feedback mechanisms can have a sustained impact, especially if connected to a regulator’s activities or NGO advocacy initiatives. Key Performance Indicators for stakeholder engagement can serve as a means for LSPs to monitor progress in this regard.

In summary, this Topic Brief has highlighted various benefits and challenges of engaging communities in water and sanitation service delivery. Clearly, there are no ‘quick wins’ when it comes to ensuring good community engagement: rather, it is a process that takes time, effort and money, as well as requiring tailored approaches in different areas with different demographic or marginalised groups. However, multiple tools and methodologies do exist –as witnessed by WSUP’s experiences– that can be tailored for use. To maximise impact and to improve sustainability, it is preferable not to undertake activities in isolation but rather to consider undertaking several complementary actions with different stakeholder groups. In this way, a more systematic approach to engaging communities can be fostered across the WASH service delivery sector.

### Annex: Dealing with non-engagement

Low or non-participation could suggest that individuals/groups are:	In which case a project may need to:
<b>Indifferent</b> - Benefits are unclear and/or there may be disinterest in efforts perceived as unlikely to yield results	Identify, clarify and review incentives for participation among these individuals/groups
<b>Intimidated</b> - Feel unwelcome and/or lack confidence	Examine operational culture in order to find ways to encourage them
<b>Disenfranchised</b> - Have no 'say' and have not been asked to participate in the right way	Reassess partnership structures and channels of engagement
<b>Unrecognised</b> - Invisible and unacknowledged; have not even been considered	Revise approach and activities in order to incorporate 'missing' stakeholders
<b>Under-resourced</b> - Lack time, money, seniority, educational level, etc.	Examine implicit criteria for participating e.g. timing of activities, resources and capacity-building needs.
<b>Waiting</b> - Need to be convinced that participation is worthwhile	Anticipate triggers for participation through focused consultation and/or early tangible results
<b>Distracted</b> - Preoccupied by more important issues/concerns	Review focus of, and priority placed on, the partnership; explore immediate context to see what is distracting
<b>Hostile</b> - Unhappy with the idea of the partnership because it is seen as too risky or threatening to particular interests	Explore the historical context and related power dynamics to identify blockages and see if they can be addressed
<b>Weary</b> - Tired of 'development' initiatives that have had little or no impact and of being 'researched'/'sensitised'	Change approach, explore incentives for participation and find ways of ensuring these groups have genuine 'voice'

## References

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**Credits:** This Topic Brief was written by Tracey Keatman with input from WSUP staff in Antananarivo, Kumasi, Maputo and all WSUP staff at the Horsley Planning Meeting (March 2012). It forms part of a learning review commissioned by WSUP and led by BPD Water and Sanitation with funding provided by USAID under the ACF Programme. The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government. Series Editor: Guy Norman. Coordination: Gemma Bastin. Design: AlexMusson.com. [Version 1, January 2013]