

# Community Participation in Sustaining Safe and Clean Water: The Case of Kyampisi Child Care Ministries Water Project in Mukono District, Central Uganda

By

*Shelin Kasozi, Kyampisi Childcare Ministries email; [shelindanielle@gmail.com](mailto:shelindanielle@gmail.com)*

*Tel: +256774558004*

*Dr Emmanuel Mutungi, Kyambogo University email; [emutungi@kyu.ac.ug](mailto:emutungi@kyu.ac.ug) Tel;  
+256772502553*

## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine how community participation can support the sustainability of community-based projects in Uganda, using Kyampisi Childcare Ministries clean water project as a case study. The clean water project in Kyampisi sub county, Mukono district in Central Uganda is implemented by Kyampisi Childcare Ministries (KCM) and provides the community with bore holes and protected wells. Although safe water has been emphasized and promoted as a human basic need by several agencies such as WHO, UNICEF and other UN agencies, this has only worked in some parts of the world while others are still in need of safe clean water. This has kept the communities with unsafe water which has resulted in several atrocities such as child abductions and sacrifices that happen when children go looking for safe water. The objectives of the study are; to investigate the perceptions of the community at the stage of project inception, to examine the role of the community during implementation of the project, and to analyze the community preparedness to maintain the project after the hand over by Kyampisi Childcare Ministries. Data was collected from 10 community members, three local leaders and two staff members of Kyampisi Childcare Ministries purposely selected. In-depth interviews were used to gather views from the selected participants. The results revealed that there is need to involve the community members at the inception, planning and implementation of the project so as to create a sense of ownership which will result in continued maintenance.

**Key words:** *Community participation, safe and clean water, sustainability, community based projects*

## Introduction

World over sustainability is becoming one of the most important project management areas. Project managers need to take care of sustainability issues (McKinlay, 2008 as cited by Silvius, & Schipper, (2014). Sustainability and projects are interconnected, and sustainability should be incorporated at different levels of the project cycle (Linger,& Owen, 2012; Brown, Hanson, Liverman, & Merideth, 1987). It is believed that when sustainability is realized, projects gain reputation and can reduce financial risks, majority of corporate CEOs (93%) say that sustainability will be critical to the future success of their companies (Tharp, 2012). All in all, sustainability is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (United Nations General Assembly, 1987,

p. 43).A number of projects implemented at huge costs often tend to have trouble with sustainability. Major donors such as UN, World Bank, IFAD and other bilateral aid agencies are expressing concerns on this matter. In addition, despite putting in place a number of attempts to tackle the problem many still fail to maintain the flow of expected benefits over their intended project lifecycle. The idea of sustainability dates back more than 35 years. In the 1970s books such as Goldsmith's blueprint for Survival (1972) and the Club of Rome's limits to growth (1972) linked the concept of sustainability to human development. The concept sustainability was coined to clearly suggest that it is possible to achieve economic growth and industrialization without environmental damage. United Nations and other bodies have handled the issue of sustainability and demonstrated its importance in development (refer to; United Nations Conference on Environment & Development, 1992; Sustainable Development Goals, 2015; European Union, 1992; The Amsterdam Treaty,1999; The Johannesburg Summit, 2002)

Water is a fundamental right. According to UN-HABITAT (2003), nearly half of the earth's population does not have enough water to support human needs. Despite efforts made over the past few years, inadequate and poor water supply remains an acute problem in sub-Saharan Africa. Research shows that one of the reasons that has kept Africa poor include lack of access to clean drinking water (World Health Organization [WHO], 2015). Although water is an issue that relates to all aspects of human development in Africa, including health, agriculture, education, economics, and even peace and stability, Africa's water problem needs better water management systems (Naik, 2016).The problem seems to be much more serious in rural areas where most of the people are not provided with water services and maintenance of the available sources of water. Statistics show that by 2015 one out of three people using safely managed drinking water services (1.9 billion) lived in rural areas, 844 million people still lacked even a basic drinking water service, 263 million people spent over 30 minutes per round trip to collect water from an improved source (constituting a limited drinking water service), and 159 million people still collected drinking water directly from surface water sources, 58% lived in sub-Saharan Africa (World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2017).

Much as project sustainability has been given attention, its incorporation in project management practices still desires efforts in East Africa. Rural water development projects are not new in East Africa, Uganda and Tanzania in particular, since they have attracted the attention, of both the colonial and post – colonial administrations. For instance, during the independence period in 1960s the water policy of the government of Uganda and Tanzania was “free, clean and safe water for all”, the objective being to provide clean and safe water to all villages in rural Uganda and Tanzania by the year 2000. However, the policy failed because costs were borne by governments for maintenance and rehabilitation without involvement of the community. Following the Arusha declaration in 1967, water was recognized as a public good and the Government undertook to cover all capital costs of investment (Maganga, Butterworth, & Moriarty, 2002). Despite changes in policy introduced since the 1990s, people are still used to the old policy of free water and government intervention in all operation and maintenance. Sustainability of community projects, and of the benefits they deliver, has been a major concern (Onkoba, 2016). There is need for community participation for any project to survive.

In this study we adopted Paul's(1987) definition of community participation as posited by Bamberger (1986 p.5) that community participation is “an active process whereby beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of development projects rather than merely receive a share of project benefits".In this study community participation will be conceptualized as the engagement and involvement of the beneficiaries in the development projects that help them

solve community concerns. We argue that community participation promotes the spirit of ownership which is fundamental to project sustainability. When community members get involved at the different stages of the project for example at planning, implementation, maintenance and repair they eventually become part of the project. Involvement of the members can be recognized through attending meetings, making decisions, offering materials, offering skilled and unskilled labor, maintaining and repairing of the facility. The present study will concentrate on the communities in Kyampisi Sub-County.

Kyampisi Sub-County is found in Mukono district in the Central Region of Uganda. According to Mukono District Five Year Development Plan 2015-2020, Mukono district has 3094 water points of which 39% are protected springs and 19% are bore holes (Mukono District Local Government, 2017). Although such statistics may portray considerable safe water coverage, Kyampisi Sub-County is still faced with water scarcity. Even if several NGOs such Globe Med and Vision for Africa have constructed water facilities in the district, sustainability by the community is very low (Mukono District Local Government, 2017). Similarly, Kyampisi Childcare Ministries Water project which was put in place to increase accessibility to clean and safe water also noticed that communities were not fully involved in project maintenance. As a result, the community still experiences poor performance in areas such as water and sanitation, disease prevention and treatment, child abuse and sacrifice, economic and community development. The purpose of the study therefore was to examine the effect of community participation on the sustainability of Kyampisi Childcare Ministries Water Project in Mukono district.

## The Theory

The Ladder of Citizen Participation Theory by Arnstein (1969) explains the levels at which people in the community participate in development projects (Figure 1). The ladder of citizen participation shows the relevance of empowering the citizens and how citizens participate based on how much power they hold in the community (Schlossberg & Schuford, 2005). Arnstein declared at the outset that her typology was provocative and focused on the redistribution of power as an essential element in meaningful citizen participation (Connor, 1988). The ladder consists of eight rungs—two levels of non-participation (Manipulation and Therapy), three levels of tokenism (Informing, Consultation, and Placation) and three levels of citizen power (Partnership, Delegated Power and Citizen Control). In the levels of non-participation (Manipulation and Therapy) the power holders train the community members about the proposed project but the community members neither plan nor conduct any programs. In the three levels of tokenism (Informing, Consultation, and Placation), the community members have a voice but lack the power to ensure that their views and ideas are taken into consideration by the powerful therefore no assurance of changing the status quo, while in the three levels of citizen power (Partnership, Delegated Power and Citizen Control), there is power redistribution, dominant decision-making over plans and full managerial power over the project. This theory was deemed relevant to Kyampisi Childcare Ministries Safe Water Project because the rungs clearly show how the community members were involved in the project cycle and how they could participate in its sustainability. Although the theory is criticized that it fails to recognize that some people participate for example targeting a goal or as a social impact (Tritter & McCallum, 2006; Collins, & Ison, 2006), the theory functions as a catalyst in hastening development projects planning (Parker, 2003; Lithgow 2008 as cited by Kisumbi, Omboto & Nassiuma, 2017).



Figure 6. The Ladder of Citizen Participation as explained by Arnstein (1969) *source: www.georgejulian.co.uk/2013/01/22/social-media-and-citizen-engagement/*

## Method

Case study research design was used in this study to logically guide the process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting data in relation to project sustainability and participation (Yin, 2011).

The study population was the beneficiaries in Kyampisi where the water facilities were constructed. The respondents were ten community members, three local leaders and two staff members of Kyampisi Childcare Ministries all purposely selected because of the knowledge and experience they possess (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). In-depth interviews were used to gather views from the selected participants. In addition, several documents were reviewed to collect secondary data from documents such as minutes for meetings and reports. The data was coded and thematically analyzed.

## Findings

### Community perception of the safe water project.

The community members were aware of the work Kyampisi Childcare Ministries was doing in the community. All the ten community members interviewed were aware and had visited more than one safe water project constructed by Kyampisi Childcare Ministries. Among the activities spearheaded by Kyampisi Childcare Ministries are clean water sources, schools, houses, church, health facility and protecting children from child abuses. One of the respondents observed that “My children no longer fall sick and fail to go to school. We now have clean water, not the one we used to share with cows. The springs are now protected, water flows from pipes. we are very happy”. Similarly, another respondent said that

The water project helps the community because the water is now safe and clean. In the olden days, springs were un protected, cows could drink, people would swim and eventually the community members would collect water from the same source which made most members especially the children to fall sick and miss school. Now the community members collect clean water from the protected water sources.

One of the staff members of Kyampisi Child Care Ministries who participated in this study observed that when they started work in Kyampisi area, they discovered that community members were sharing water with animals. He affirmed that many community members especially children were falling sick quite often affecting their performance. He further posited that Kyampisi Childcare Ministries realized that the community of Kyampisi could not develop unless issues that were hindering sustainable development were addressed. As an organization, they decided to start different projects such as safe water, schools, church, health center and construction of houses for the elderly. On the other hand, the local leaders pointed out that the work Kyampisi Childcare Ministries is doing in the community has improved lives of the households in the area. People no longer collect water from the shallow wells, engage in routine cleaning of the water sources, digging the trenches and removing mud from the wells because KCM Safe Water Project has provided a solution.

#### **The role of the community during the construction of the safe water project**

The staff of Kyampisi Childcare Ministries reported that before construction of the water sources, the community members are consulted. The official from KCM said that;

Whenever we are to start a project, we talk to the LC Chairman who takes us to different springs wells. This is because some spring wells dry up during the dry season. So, if you simply build one that has water in the rainy season, during the dry season it will not have water. The LCs and the community know those springs that have been serving people for ages and which never dry up. Once we identify one then we talk to the community through the chairman.

The KCM official further said that the community members participate in the project by digging the trenches and clearing the bush during the project implementation. However, the KCM officials reported that some community members do not fully support the development of some springs because they attach them to their gods. They do not understand where water comes from and therefore, they are scared of tempering with the water source or else it dries up. KCM then carries out sensitization to explain why they want to protect the wells and the benefits of doing so.

Although the KCM official argued that the community members are consulted in the planning process of the project, the community members and the local leaders were of dissenting opinion. The community members argued that the LCs are the ones that are consulted and for them, they there are only informed. One of the respondents said that he refused to have a project constructed in his place because he feared that people collecting water would damage his crops and create walk ways in his land. On the other hand, the local leader said, “the role of the community members is to provide labor because they do not have money.” The projects are only introduced to the community members, but they are never part of the planning.

The local leader posited that some members of the community may contribute ideas for example guiding us where to get local materials, others may contribute food stuffs during the construction



and others labour. However, some are not willing because they believe that “the bazungu (whites) have come to work because they have free money. No one invited them and they should pay for everything in the project” it was basing on such assumption that the community thinks that the sponsors of such projects have free money. One of the respondents praised KCM for paying his school fees and was not aware of other projects such as safe water project.

### **Benefits of safe water project**

The respondents reported that KCM safe water project has helped the community in various ways. Before the construction of safe water facilities in the area, collecting water was a problem. The available water sources were shared between people and animals. As a result, many community members suffered from different ailments as a result of taking dirty water. One of the respondents reported that his children hardly attended school because they were always unwell. The area leader concurred with the respondent that since the construction of the water sources, school attendance has improved.

The KCM leader reported that in their other project of child rights protection, they are handling several cases related to child abuse that happen as children travel long distances to collect clean water. One of the activities KCM is involved in is delivering justice for families who have become victims of child abuse. The most rampant vice in Kyampisi is child sacrifice where victims are children who are abducted as they go to fetch water and sacrificed. The perpetrators normally abduct the children as they walk long distances in the wilderness to fetch water. With the introduction of protected safe water sources, this vice is being handled because parents can easily trace their children.

### **Maintaining the constructed safe water projects after completion**

The official from KCM explained that once the project is complete, the local community is invited and the facility is handed over. The official explained that since the community are involved from the start, they expect them to take care of the facility. Maintenance of the project involves appointing the committee that looks after the protected safe water source. The role of the committee is; to stop children from playing in the water, clearing and opening the trenches to allow proper flow of water so as to avoid stagnation of water, slashing around the facility to avoid snakes and other biting insects and keeping the access way clear and clean. The committee is not appointed by KCM but the community through their local council leaders. The selected committee is also trained on how to clean the water tank in case the water becomes dirty. The KCM official reported that during the project planning process, they provide for Uganda Shillings 300,000/= annually for maintaining the water project. He mentioned that the money is usually enough because unlike the bore holes, the protected water source does not easily break down and if it does, repair costs are less. On the issue of planning and budgeting for maintenance, the official said that the community is not involved but they are always informed accordingly. The budget estimates are determined by a technical person in the organization and the community are taken on board to fit in the existing budget.

Similarly, the leaders and community members reported that although they are in charge of maintenance, they do not determine the cost of maintenance. They further reported that most of the community members are poor and do not have sustainable incomes to contribute in case the committee requires money to fix a broken water source. One of the respondents narrated a story of how their previous experience of forced collection of repair funds hinders them to be

effective in contributing repair money. He argued that the local leaders used to ask community members to contribute money to repair bore holes. This was before the coming on board of KCM safe water project. The repair costs would go beyond Uganda Shillings 1 million (1,000,000/=) which scared the community and this was happening quite often. As a result, when projects were handed over to the community, members felt it was to be the same case as it was for the boreholes. Many community members then opted to remain using their old un protected water sources. He argued that during the borehole time, those who contributed money for repair would own the boreholes and start harassing those without money.

## Discussion

Setting out what to do and how it's going to be done is very important in project management. Planning is the first activity to do before any other activities. In project management, planning determines what should be done in the project and calls for early community involvement. The intensity of community involvement in the facility development is influenced by the willingness of the project manager to involve the community from the early stages of the project. (Ngowi, & Mselle, 1998). Although the community in Kyampisi was aware of the safe water project, they were not part of the initial planning and hence their perception was detached from ownership. The fact that the project implementers confirmed that the community was brought on board after the project inception may be used to explain why the community members in Kyampisi are not fully committed to the maintenance of the safe water project. The local leaders some of whom are part of the maintenance committee revealed that they do not determine the money KCM puts in place for maintenance. In addition, neither KCM leaders nor the community leaders talked about how long that money was going to be provided. Basing on the past experience of the borehole where community members were asked to contribute money despite the poverty levels, we therefore argue that communities do not want to face the same challenge as the one of the boreholes. KCM needed to have empowered the community on the onset of the project through a series of meetings to enable them to appreciate that the project benefits the community not the implementers. This is a key factor of planning in project cycle as Howard- Grabman (2000) posit that meetings are a platform for community members to discuss issues that relate to the project.

KCM could have brought the community on board by allowing the community to identify they need and then support them. Although the community leaders were involved early, it was the same community leaders that were responsible for the boreholes which community members were not happy with. KCM would have built their entry point on resources in the community. Resources in a community are anything that can be used to improve the quality of a community life. They are several resources available in a community that can be used for the project to be successful. Those sources include land, labor, in-kind donations, finances, supplies, sand, bricks, services and skills like training, mobilization and coordination this leads to community engagement. The community willingly offers resources to be used on the project. Gibbons, Kennedy, Burgess, & Godfrey, (2012), argue that there is a need for the community and the technical team to understand how resources will be deployed and how best aligned to maximize their value. Community resource consultations is significant because it helps in identifying, mobilizing community assets which will enables the community members to gain control over the project which will create ownership of the water facility. When the community dedicates it's time talents and resources to the project the people feel more positive about it leading to its sustainability. In order to know the resources available and offered by the community the organization must engage the community members, in the short-long run the project will be maintained because of the interest that the community has towards it.

At project implementation. "Information is knowledge, knowledge is power, sharing knowledge is empowerment" (Rifkin, &Pridmore, 2002).Sharing ideas is done when the organization mobilizes the beneficiaries' in order to know what they think about the project and also provide vital information. Information given by the community members is key to delivering what the community needs as identified in the need's assessment, offering efficient services coordinated around the needs of the community; this enables intervention in case of a problem and, preventative work which promotes wider public protection. Information sharing is important as it increases the organization efficiency and project performance in the community.

An organization to remain competitive in its environment, information sharing is an important ingredient (Moberg et al. 2002 as cited by Hatala, &Lutta, 2009). During information sharing the organization helps the community to identify their problems, find solutions and understand their roles and responsibilities to solve the problem.The cooperativeness and fairness of the organizational procedures have a significant effect on the willingness to share information (Lin, 2006).Information is shared through communities attending village meetings, conducting focus group discussions and interviews of the beneficiaries. Those meetings involve different stakeholders; these include local authorities, medical personals, religious leaders, village elders, children, educated people, and semi and skilled personals who contribute different ideas about the project.

### Conclusion

It was evident that community participation is vital to the sustainability of the water projects. Emphasis should always be put on participatory approaches with the aim of promoting sustainability. Project sustainability can only occur if members of the community own the project. The project can only be owned by the members if they are involved from the inception of the project.

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