

# Social cases: Reaching Universal Access to Water Supply at Community Level

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## Abstract/Summary

After the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the centralised water supply systems in rural areas in Ukraine were no longer allocated sufficient funds for their operation and maintenance. Many of the piped systems broke down and the level of service provision was low. Funds for establishing new water networks were also lacking. In this context, new piped water systems require financial contributions from households, which most families can afford. However, for families on very low income such contributions may not be possible so they cannot get access to an improved water supply. A method of identifying *Social Cases* – households that require subsidised access at community level - was developed by DESPRO/Skat and introduced in 20 partner villages. In this approach, the community is given the task to identify the families with special needs and approve a special policy regarding their financial participation in the new water service. The approach considers equity and inclusion and contributes to universal access to improved water supply at community level.

## Introduction

Situated in Eastern Europe, Ukraine is one of the largest countries in Europe. Its territory is about 603,600 sq.km<sup>1</sup>, with a population of 42.6 million, with 30.8% (13.3 million) people living in rural areas<sup>2</sup> (*UKRSTAT, 2015-16*). Agricultural and industrial goods are important contributors to Ukrainian economy, which stood at Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita at USD 2,081.04 in 2014 (*World Bank, 2016*).

After the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991, a lack of local capacities, clear institutional and financial set-ups for water supply at national level, as well as little experience of social mobilisation led to a critical decrease of water supply in rural areas. Over years of independence, coverage of piped water supply in rural areas has dropped from 50 to 22 percent (*WHO/UNICEF, 2014*).

DESPRO is a Ukraine-based project on decentralisation, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by Skat, Switzerland. In the period between 2007 and 2013, DESPRO supported implementation of around 80 water supply projects in three regions in Ukraine. The projects built water networks, fed by one or more deep boreholes, that supply households with water with at least backyard connection (however, 75% of households have installed in-house connections afterwards). The different community-based solutions for project implementation, as well as further operation and maintenance have been used, e.g. public associations, service cooperatives (*Sorokovskyi, Olschenski, 2012*).

Community-based solutions show good results in terms of equity and inclusion: those families with low incomes but who want an improved water supply are provided with different participation schemes. Consequently, the coverage of households with an improved water supply, in the target territory, increased from a baseline of 0-15% to 92-96%. The post-construction monitoring done by DESPRO and local partners in 2-3 year after project completion showed that nevertheless there were households (obviously

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1 Since spring 2014 territories of Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol city have been annexed by Russian Federation. A part of Ukrainian territory in the East is controlled by illegal armed groups – self-recognized “Donetsk People’s Republic” and “Luhansk People’s Republic”.

2 Number of population on territories of Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol city are not taken into account.

4-8%) for which the requirement to make a financial contribution has become a limiting factor in obtaining better water supply.

### Context, aims and activities undertaken

At the initial stage of project planning households are usually asked to present their willingness to join the community project. Obviously, a motivating factor for this is a need to have a better water supply. So, what could be the reason for some households of not connecting to the network? Those households that have an obvious need for a better water supply but are neither able to make a financial contribution for the water supply system construction nor pay for the connection (a service pipe to the yard is the minimum) are referred as “*Social Cases*” and require special policy.

But, how can the community identify *Social Cases* properly? Below are some common cases where households may not wish to (initially) participate in the the water supply project for reasons other than poverty:

#### **“No need but capable”**

Where a municipal water supply is not available – or unreliable – some households meet their own needs using self-supply technologies. For example, a household, or group of households, may build a mini-system comprising a pumping station, a water main to the house, in-house plumbing to service the kitchen, toilet, bathroom and other water uses. Such householders may think the matter of water supply is fixed so often, at initial stage of the project implementation, they are not motivated to contribute additional funds. However, it commonly happens that after the project is completed such households nevertheless connect to the centralised water supply system, paying the contribution to the cost of the network itself and also for the connection. Since for such households financial contribution is not limiting participation in the project, they should not be considered as *Social Cases*.

#### **“Need but not capable”**

The attitude of such households to the participation in the water supply project may be characterised as follows: **“I need it, wish it, but I am not capable to pay a contribution”**. At the same time there are a mix of financial, social and pride/self-esteem factors that influence the behaviour of individuals and, in fact, prevent them saying: “Yes, I need to connect and I need help because I don’t have enough money”. Not wanting to admit their problem to others, such households may subjectively assess their own needs as “rather do not need” or their wish as “rather do not wish”. “*How much water do I need? Maybe one bucket a day will be enough for me,*” similar excuses can be heard often. Evidently, at the end such households would rather continue to use shallow wells than to ask for special financial support. Objectively, the quality of ground water in the most territories of Ukraine fails to comply with the quality standards of drinking water. So, the households not connecting the network would then compromise their financial problems with lower quality of water used. Such households may qualify as *Social Cases*, but if they are not willing to identify themselves and put themselves forward for support, then they need to be found through other means.

#### **How to assess the level of income**

In practice, it is not easy to reveal *Social Cases*: the level of income earned by a household may be one of the indicators, but – especially in rural areas – it is difficult to determine the real level of income only on the basis of formal measures. In our opinion, it is not worth determining the low-income level strictly in accordance with formal criteria because this information is usually based on survey responses from residents themselves and there is often a disparity between the income declared and the actual amounts earned because:

- (a) there is a tendency of individuals to understate the level of earned income if there is no need to provide a documented evidence;
- (b) it is common that the individuals may only consider the salary (or pension) or similar types of income (for instance, for one-off job or contract work) as their income;
- (c) unofficial income, especially occur in the rural areas (for instance, for the land cultivation services by one's own machinery, construction and repair works, fishing, renting of dwellings in resort areas, etc.) as well as the income earned from individual household farming may be concealed or not reported (*see Box 1*).

**Box 1. Example of difference in household income data depending on sources**

During the Customer’s Satisfaction Survey on the quality of water supply service (DESPRO, 2012), there was assessed the share of the family's income spent on water supply. The data on average monthly water bill was compared with the average monthly aggregate family income.

According to the **responses of representatives of households**, in Vinnitsya Region, the average monthly aggregate family income totaled UAH 1,354, (in 2012, 1USD = 8 Ukrainian Hryvnia (UAH)) and in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea - UAH 1,351. This data significantly differs from the **state statistics** data. Thus, the actual average monthly income per capita for 2011 in general equalled UAH 1,770.8 in Ukraine. According to the DESPRO data, the average number of members of one household in target communities was 2.77 people: in Vinnitsya Region, 2.4 people, in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, 3.1 people. Hence, in terms of one household, in general, the actual average monthly income totals UAH 4,911.00, and by regions: in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea - UAH 5,472.00, in Vinnitsya Region - UAH 4,250.00. As we can see, the difference between the own assessment and the statistics differs by more than three times.

***Who and how shall make a decision on social cases?***

Therefore, as the practice proves, the determination of *Social Cases* in villages takes place according to the principle: "in community, they know who is who".

The following, community-led, procedure on identifying and dealing with *Social Cases* has been introducing and testing in DESPRO partner villages since 2014.

- Step 1. The Project Implementation Group<sup>3</sup> shall analyze the needs and capabilities of all households in terms of their participation (including financial contribution) in the project.
- Step 2. The criteria of assigning households to the category of *Social Cases* shall be established by the Project Implementation Group and approved at the general meeting of the community.
- Step 3. According to the established criteria, the Project Implementation Group shall collect the information and data regarding any potential *Social Cases*, analyze the information and data obtained, draw up a preliminary list of households to be assigned to the category of *Social Cases*.
- Step 4. The decision on the assignment of households to the category of *Social Cases* for the purposes of the project implementation shall be made by the general meeting of the community, with the mandatory entry of information about that decision in the minutes.
- Step 5. The decision on special conditions regarding financial contribution in the project implementation as agreed with specific households shall be made by the general meeting of the community, with the mandatory entry of information about that decision in the minutes.

Among other clauses, the special conditions may include: full or partial exemption from the payment, payment in instalments, replacement of financial contribution with the in-kind one or another arrangement that is agreed by all parties.

***“Checks-and-balances”***

It would be too optimistic to expect that the community will decide fairly on *Social Cases* in absolutely all situations. Who can defend the households – which according to apparent characteristics have to be assigned to the category of *Social Cases* – but whose interests are not evidently taken into account by the community? Due to the approach, the final word is with the Village Council<sup>4</sup>. So, if the general meeting

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<sup>3</sup> The *Project Implementation Group* is an auxiliary body for the Village Council in the course of the project implementation. It is a formal body established by legal act of the Village Council (local self-government body). The Project Implementation Group is aimed to be one of the strong mechanisms of social mobilisation. As a rule, the composition of the Project Implementation Group equally represents both the Village Council and the local activists delegated by the community.

<sup>4</sup> The *Village Council* as an elected local self-government body which by law is responsible for the arrangement of provision of public services, including in particular, water supply in the relevant territory. It is also responsible for the distribution of

fails to make the decision regarding *Social Cases* not taking into account evident conditions, such decision shall be made by the Village Council as it possesses the ultimate responsibility for water supply in the community. In this connection, the Village Council which has made the decision shall have the right to allocate, within the limits of budget financing, a portion of funds that will be channelled for the coverage of a contribution for the construction of and/ or payment for the connection of households to the water supply system instead of the households falling under the category of *Social Cases*.

It is also important to mention that in Ukraine the issue of *paternalism* doesn’t take place at community level. It means that more powerful (and, in fact, richer) families in the village would not have a chance to propose themselves for financial support. Even being presented in the Project Implementation Group or having certain connection to the Village Council.

### **Main results and lessons learnt**

The *Social Cases* approach has been introduced and implemented in 20 partner villages in five regions of Ukraine. The requirement for considering and deciding on *Social Cases* by community was set as one of the criteria to get co-financing from DESPRO. Eventually, in most situations the community could resolve the issue of *Social Cases* in the general meetings. In two villages, however, the decision had to be made by the Village Council.

The number of *Social Cases* varies from 3 to 7 families per village. Considering that a typical project covers between 150 and 200 households, the share of social cases in total target group is less than 5%. This figure shows the share of households who are not able to cover financial contributions at the beginning of project implementation. It corresponds with the results of post-construction monitoring (see Introduction). It can be concluded that if these households were not considered as *Social Cases* few would gain connection to the network and an improved water supply.

As per reports of partner communities, the social structure of households assigned as *Social Cases* include: families with many children; single elderly people; disabled people; and families with children that lost their father in the military conflict in the East of Ukraine.

Many partner communities also reported that a positive side-effects that occurred during consideration of the *Social Cases* included better community cohesion, conflict resolution and closer interaction among community members, on the one hand, and between community and local council, on the other.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The *Social Cases* approach presented in the paper has proven to be an important component of social mobilisation. In project approaches where financial contribution from households is required, *Social Cases* approach can help achieve universal access to water. The approach as such doesn’t have any national specificity, so it can be applied widely. The differences in application may fall into set of criteria that has to be established in a community. Equally, proper introduction and use of the *Social Cases* cases approach may require certain degree of community development, such a minimum level of community cohesion, trust, decision-making and financial management capacity. In other situations, some facilitation might be needed to support the community in reaching common understanding and agreement.

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funds appropriated for the implementation of measures aimed, in particular, at the water supply. Within project implementation modalities by DESPRO the Village Council is the implementing body of the project for improvement of water supply.

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