

SUSTAINING WASH SERVICES THROUGH SAVINGS AND LOANS: A PILOT STUDY OF LANGA COMMUNITY IN MALAWI

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ABSTRACT: World Vision Malawi, through its Integrated Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (MiWASH) Technical Program (TP) in T/A Nthondo is presenting a promising approach in solving the sustainability challenge in the sector. Against the traditional approach where a Water Point Committee is trained for 5 days in transferable skills in community based operational and maintenance only; enhancing financial capacity of the community is being attached to CBM. World Vision Malawi is presenting a case study of Langa Gravity Fed System where functionality rate of the system has reached 98 %. The 2% being a caution factor due to the dependence of the pump on solar radiation which may not be available in significant quantities at times (in very rare cases). Langa is among the few communities under World Vision Malawi which have a mechanized piped water system. In 2011 WV Malawi through its WASH program mechanized a borehole in Langa village where 5 taps were installed in 5 villages. As one way of encouraging integration in its WASH programs, World Vision Malawi encouraged and drilled the people of Langa Village on the best ways to set up a water point savings revolving fund. The Water point Savings & Loans Initiative in Langa Village started in 2013, with an investment of \$160 and by March, 2015, the village had raised about \$2,072 with each members contributing about \$2.18 every year. Currently the savings have accumulated to over \$3,636 that is loaned out and \$74 in cash for emergency repairs.

Problem Statement

Sustainability has become one of the most over used and abused words in development vocabulary. Many organizations working in the rural water sector claim to be providing sustainable water points, but it is questionable whether they actually are. The water and sanitation sector suffers from unsustainable projects that fail into disrepair. Organizations often make too many assumptions and have unrealistic expectations of what community maintenance systems can deliver. Five days' training in community based management and a shop in the nearest town selling spare parts do not guarantee sustainability. Challenges still outweigh solutions and, as such, it may be time to re-think the approach. According to the Joint Sector Review (2009), water supply coverage is undermined because at any given time 30%-40% of the existing water facilities are not functional.

World Vision began working in Malawi in 1982 with community infrastructure projects including schools and water systems. By 1992, World Vision had established longer-term community-based area development programmes, and is now helping close to one million people in Malawi. Currently, World Vision is working with communities in 26 districts through 44 long-term Area Development Programmes (ADPs). One of which is Nthondo Area Development Programme. Though World Vision Malawi has been successful in its implementation of development activities, sustainability of these interventions has been a nightmare.



Success Story

Loveness & her husband took a \$115 loan in 2014, and opened a grocery store from they make about \$207 a month. Loveness is very happy with how life has transformed ever since they started their investments through the village savings.

"From the time we made the decision to take a loan from the Water point savings, we were just trying out. We didn't know it would turn out this way. Look at us now, we are able to send and pay for our daughter's tuition at secondary school and we can afford all our basic needs at our home. Life is really better now." Says Loveness

Asked about the overall change in their family this is what Loveness had to say: *"previously we could not afford a balanced diet on a daily basis but now we are to buy meat which most of the times is the missing component on our meals. Our yield in the field has increased as we can afford fertilizer and improved seed now"*

Loveness bears testimony at how the savings initiative is transforming the lives of the people as most of them are starting some small scale business. Currently Loveness and her husband have goods worth over \$460 in their grocery store and still growing. Langa village is one of the many villages that have successfully turned their water miracle into gold in Malawi under World Vision Malawi WASH integration.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Langa community in Traditional Authority Nthondo in Ntchisi District. The area is situated to the North East part of the district and borders with Nkhotakota District to the Northern part. The estimated population in the area at the time of the study was 5,466. (Unpublished Nthondo Area Development Programme Report, 2015)

Ntchisi district is located in the Central Region of Malawi, 96 km north of Lilongwe, the capital city of Malawi. The total land area of the district is 1,655 sq km with a population of 212,000, giving a density of 128 persons per square kilometre. Ntchisi lies at an altitude of between 1,300 to 1,700 meters above the sea level. The eastern and north-eastern parts are hilly whereas the north, western and southern parts are generally flat. The mean annual temperature varies between 22 degrees Celsius in low altitude areas and 18 degrees Celsius in high altitude areas. Annual rainfall ranges from 900mm to 1,500mm. Ntchisi District Assembly is a statutory body established under the Local Government Act (1998) Section 5.00 of the Laws of Malawi. It is headed by the Chairperson selected from among the 26 councillors each representing a ward in the district. The other members of the District Assembly include 7 Chiefs, 4 elected Members of Parliament and 5 Co-opted members. The District Commissioner is the controlling officer of the heads of the Assembly Secretariat or District Executive Committee which is composed of Professional Heads of Government Sectors in the district. The District is then divided into Area Development Committees (ADC) which are representative bodies of all Village Development Committees (VDC) under a Traditional Authority. Its membership could range from 25 to 60 under the leadership of the Chief. There are 7 ADCs in the district with a total population of 212,073. (Ntchisi District Assembly, 2008)

Agriculture forms around 80% of the district economy where 15% of cultivable land are estates producing mostly tobacco with the remainder small holder farms producing a range of crops such as maize, beans, groundnuts, potatoes and cassava (Ntchisi District Assembly, 2008). Livestock, forestry and irrigation are also important activities in the district. There is little private industry in the District and Government is by far the largest employer. According to Malawi government (1998) the poverty rate in the district was 76.3%.



Outcomes

✓ Operation and Maintenance of the System

With initial training on CBM for the tap committees it meant that the community acquired technical skills and identified locations where to get equipment and spare parts as the first step in ensuring sustainability of the system. The introduction of the revolving fund enabled the community to have funds available not only for repair but also for expansion. The community on its own managed to extend the system from 4 taps (448 people (246 female)) installed by WV to 9 taps (996 people (548 female) excluding 556 (306 boys) pupils from Katunthama primary school). These extra connections were done without any external assistance in both skills and funds. This is a huge achievement for a poor community like Langa and a clear indicator of community transformation.

✓ Economic Development

With the Revolving fund, households started businesses in agriculture, retail grocery shops, and vending of different items. Households improved their health and economic statuses through reduction of diarrheal diseases as a result of clean water (Ntchisi DHO data, 2015) and businesses as a result of the Water point Revolving fund; thereby improving health and wellbeing of 1192 children in these households. One of the community members who have benefitted from this initiative is Loveness Banda who owns a grocery store.

Methods and Approaches

Using the snapshot tool developed by the Water Engineering and Development Centre (WEDC) potential sustainability of a project has to be decided based on evaluation of three phrases most applicable with regard to whether the community:

- has the funds to carry out repairs (Financial)
- has access to the skills to carry out repairs (Technical Skills)
- has access to the necessary spare parts and equipment to carry out repairs (Equipment and Spare parts)

Financial

- Which of the following is applicable to the type of water point in question?
1. No funds available for maintenance when needed
 2. Funds available but not sufficient for the most expensive maintenance process
 3. Funds available and sufficient for the most expensive maintenance process

Technical skills

- Which of the following is applicable to the type of water point in question?
1. Technical skills not available for maintenance when needed
 2. Some technical skills for maintenance, but not for all
 3. Technical skills for all maintenance processes available

NB Available in this context means available to an average community member within a reasonable time.

Equipment and spare parts

- Which of the following is applicable to the type of water point in question?
1. Not available when needed
 2. Available but not for all repairs
 3. Available for all repairs

