Better Access to Community
WASH Services through the use of
Social Accountability Mechanisms

WaterAid

Introduction

Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA)

Nepal is among the least developed countries in the world, with about one-quarter of its population living below the poverty line.[1] The rural areas of Nepal have extremely low socio-economic and human development conditions as indicated by the Human Development Index (HDI). The Karnali province of Nepal is far behind the development matrix with respect to access to safe water, improved sanitation facilities, and good hygiene practices. The Hima and Palata rural municipalities (RMs) of Jumla and Kalikot districts respectively of this province are among the most deprived rural areas of Nepal where the lives of the marginalised people and those in vulnerable situations are even worse.[2,3]

The Constitution of Nepal 2015 in Article 35, Sub-article 4, clearly protects the right to drinking water and sanitation for all, but the status of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) is in a very fragile condition in this area. Only 29 percent of the total water supply schemes are fully functional (47 percent in Hima RM, and 11 percent in Palata RM).[4] The budget allocation for WASH in both RMs was inadequate for the services required. Information gaps on WASH-related rights and the required roles and responsibilities of the communities led to limited engagement in managing the existing systems and holding duty bearers accountable. In addition, the duty bearers themselves had limited capacity to deliver quality services and meet the service gaps. The WASH governance mechanism therefore had to be strengthened in order to make the right holders responsible and the duty bearers accountable.

Realising the need for intervention in the area, a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA)[5] was adopted as shown in Figure 1. The specific intervention or Sustainable WASH Project aimed to strengthen the WASH-related rights of the marginalised communities and people in vulnerable situations by empowering them through capacity building. On the other hand, in order to make the duty bearers accountable, the capacities of the supply side were also built up through technical support, so that the right holders receive quality services. A manual on 'Right to Water and Sanitation' (RTWS) was prepared and capacity building of both right holders and duty bearers was undertaken. This manual contains an introduction to the rights, human rights and responsibilities, along with the different elements of the Right to Water and Sanitation, roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, sector performance monitoring on RTWS, social accountability, etc. Attempting to undertake a broader influencing of the stakeholders and institutional setups at both ends of the spectrum, the intervention conducted capacity building exercises for elected representatives from the local bodies, media persons, WASH stakeholders, Water and Sanitation Users Committees (WSUCs) and the community people.

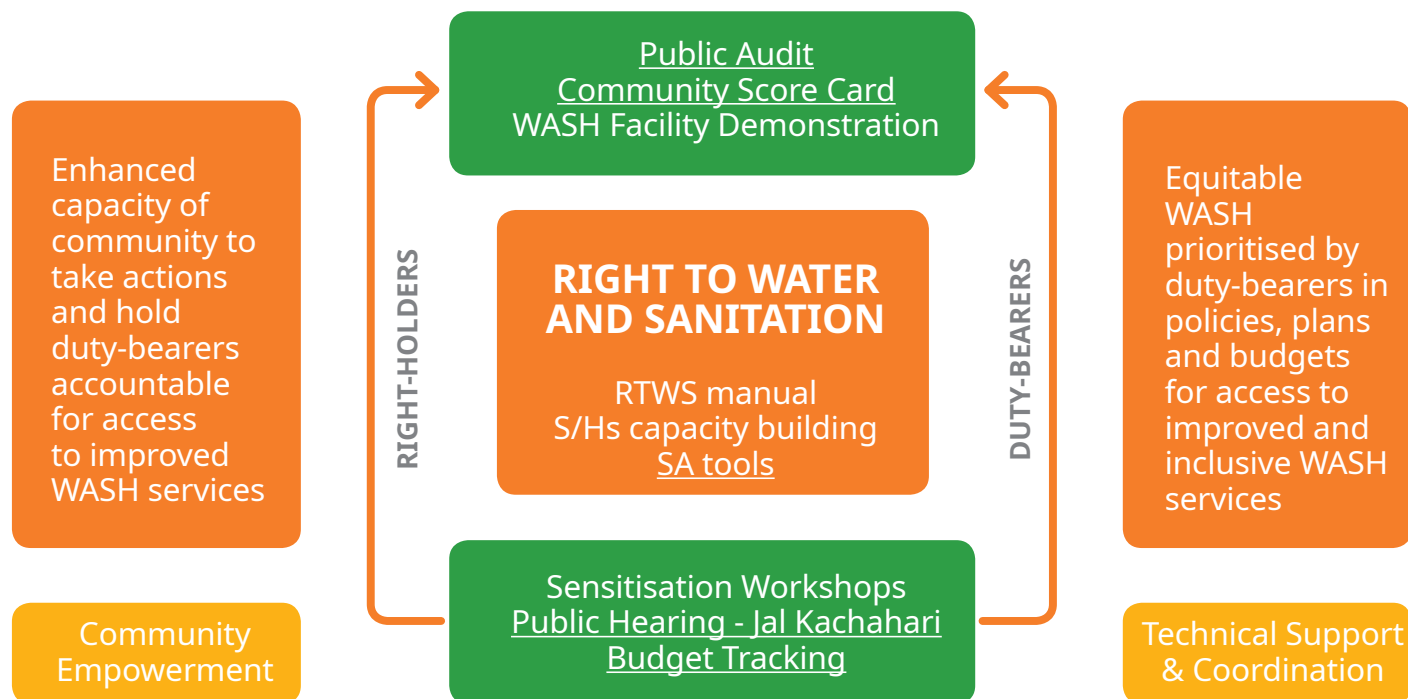1   Nepal Economy 2019, available at: https://theodora.com/wfbcurrent/nepal/nepal_economy.html

2   National Planning Commission (Government of Nepal) (2018) Nepal's Multidimensional Poverty Index: Analysis Towards Action 2018. Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), Government of Nepal, available at: https://www.npc. gov.np/images/category/Nepal_MPI.pdf

3   Nepal Human Development Report (2014) Beyond Geography Unlocking Human Potential, available at: http://www.hdr. undp.org/sites/default/files/nepal_nhdr_2014-final.pdf

4   WaterAid Nepal, KIRDARC (2017) Baseline report, Sustainable WASH project

5   WaterAid Guidelines Embedding and integrating a human rights-based approach into WaterAid programmes. Available at: https://washmatters.wateraid.org/sites/g/files/jkxoof256/files/Guidelines%20on%20embedding%20and%20integrating%20a%20human%20rights-based%20approach.pdf (A human rights-based approach to development is rooted in the central idea of empowerment. It seeks to change the relationship between development actors and poor or vulnerable people from one of charity and powerlessness to one of obligation and rights.)

FIGURE 1: Schematic diagram showing how HRBA is embedded in the Sustainable WASH Project design

Enhanced capacity of community to take actions and hold duty-bearers accountable for access to improved WASH services

RIGHT-HOLDERS

Public Audit
Community Score Card
WASH Facility Demonstration

RIGHT TO WATER AND SANITATION

RTWS manual
S/Hs capacity building
SA tools

Sensitisation Workshops
Public Hearing - Jal Kachahari
Budget Tracking

DUTY-BEARERS

Equitable WASH prioritised by duty-bearers in policies, plans and budgets for access to improved and inclusive WASH services

Community Empowerment

Technical Support & Coordination

Social accountability tools such as public hearings, public audits and community scorecards were promoted and used as major tools. Jal Kachahari, a public hearing platform with face-to-face dialogue and interaction between the right holders and duty bearers, organised at the RM and ward levels helped to establish a strong platform to promote RTWS, for communities to share their issues, and for duty bearers to respond. This initiative triggered right holders to claim their right and duty bearers committed to deliver the services. The local municipalities have owned such Kachahari platforms and have now taken the initiative to organise it themselves.

Based on the commitment by local authorities, budget allocation in delivering WASH services increased in 2019 to 20 percent in Palata and 10 percent in Hima RMs from 6 percent and 5.6 percent respectively in 2017.[6] Use of the community scorecard as a tool has been highly appreciated by the community as it led to the preparation of an action plan to improve the existing WASH situation. The action plan included use of safely managed water supply, payment of water tariffs for the functionality of the system, construction and improvement of existing latrines, and non-discrimination while delivering WASH services. Use of the public audit at the community level has not only informed community people about the budget plan and expenditure, it has also increased their understanding of programme quality and monitoring. The public audit has increased financial transparency and the quality of delivery among the service providers and right holders; and ensured completion of targets on time. Overall, the project has established a meaningful participatory mechanism to ensure accountability of the duty bearers, defined the roles and responsibilities of the right holders, and ensured the right to water and sanitation for all.

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[6] Programme and Budget, Hima and Palata RM, 2019

Empowerment of the Marginalised Groups

Community people raising their unheard voices on WASH during a public hearing – Jal Kachahari

The rights-based approach has focussed on empowering marginalised groups of the community. Women, people with disabilities, adolescent girls, and Dalits are the key beneficiaries. The formation of a 'woman's group' for conducting hygiene sessions as well as an orientation on the Right to Water and Sanitation (RTWS) led to the rising of the collective voices of the unheard and the unserved. As *Ratna Prasad Upadhya, a local woman from Thulo Chiudi, Hima RM* said during the orientation on RTWS, *"We have high water scarcity in Patharkhola. We are happy to know that our right to water has been ensured in the Constitution."* This initiative served as an information-receiving platform for the beneficiaries. Community members shared existing practices and took leadership for self-initiative processes for WASH improvement. *"During menstruation, women and adolescent girls were not allowed to touch the water tap. Now, we are aware of our right to water and sanitation,"* said Sabina Bam, a local woman from Palata RM sharing her enhanced awareness after attending an orientation on RTWS. Formation

of the 'woman's group' triggered the community to represent themselves in the vital positions of the committee. The evidence can be observed where women are leading as key members of the WSUCs, are key members of WASH Coordination Committees (WASH-CCs) at various levels and are playing leading roles in different advocacy initiatives such as rallies, interaction and triggering. At least 33 percent women have participated in any committee formed in the project area.

The community voice of women during public audits and public hearings, especially Jal Kachaharis has been a tremendous step towards women empowerment. *"A Jal Kachahari had been facilitated by KIRDARC Nepal and will be soon implemented by Palata RM. For this, I would like to thank KIRDARC Nepal. I would like to assure that the RM will learn and conduct such Jal Kachaharis in the coming days,"* said Laxman Bahadur Bam, Chairperson, Palata RM, Kalikot district, showing his commitment during the close of the Jal Kachahari.

Likewise, the representation of people from the Dalit community as key members of the water supply

system wherever present has been mandatorily implemented. The representation of Dalits on such a platform has contributed to raise the collective voice of the marginalised Dalit community. The community people are continuously engaged in consultation and feedback collection. They are involved in the decision-making process and are able to access information from various sources. To ensure process sustainability, the duty bearers have been directed to serve the on-ground interest of the citizens.

While conducting the public audit, all the community people and concerned stakeholders are invited prior to the event. The major communication means include notices at public places, mobilisation of human resources, telephone conversations and announcement of the event while conducting other events like hygiene sessions, RTWS, triggering and advocacy-related events, promotional events and so on. The public audit has been conducted at least thrice in each scheme and the project practices disclosure of the financial budget plan versus expenditure after the completion of each event. Such practices have built trust between the community people, implementing agency, and the local level agencies. *"In our community, we have got access to improved water service in the yard of each household and we are glad to know the budget allocated for the construction of water supply. Everyone in the community knows the amount that the labourers received and how much has been saved. The public audit has made everything clear,"* reflected *Narendra Nath Yogi, Secretary, Jogibada WSUC, Hima RM* during one of the public audit events.

Similar events conducted in the project area, especially RTWS sessions, public audits, Jal Kachaharis, demand for water supply from the community and WASH related rights-based promotional events were covered by the local and national media in both digital and print formats.

Strengthening the System and the Service Providers

Water and Sanitation Users Committees (WSUCs) and local level representatives are the ultimate accountable duty bearers and the frontline agencies engaged in delivering WASH services in the project areas at present. In order to engage them to provide services, they were trained on the Right to Water and Sanitation (RTWS). This helped all the duty bearers internalise RTWS as a constitutional mandate. As the project area is highly remote and the existing WASH services are very poor, the duty bearers linked the water scarcity with the Right and have been motivated to be engaged.

Likewise, the conducting of the Jal Kachahari became the key event to enable duty bearers to respond. Here the demands for WASH services were raised, and the duty bearers committed by making declarations of taking actions and accordingly allocated budgets for WASH services in both RMs in the coming fiscal years. The demand for construction of the water supply system is being addressed by the local government. Meanwhile, the duty bearers have realized Right to Water as a basic human right. This has been a key political agenda during the local level elections, and addressing this issue was their election mandate. Besides budget allocation, Palata RM has also prepared procedural documents related to overall WASH in the RM, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and WASH in schools. Technical assistance was provided by the Project to the Palata RM to overcome and improve the policy and implementation- related hurdles in WASH. This has added value to their WASH procedural documents and to their organisation of WASH activities.

Since the area is very remote, there is a huge gap in technical and skilled human resource availability. In this context, the transfer of such skills from the project into the RM has enabled duty bearers to respond. The process has been established at the local level as the smallest unit of delivering WASH services and has been recognised as WSUC, which will be monitored by the ward WASH-CC and RM WASH-CCs. WSUCs are further capacitated on book keeping, operations and maintenance, system management and strengthening. This has enabled them to manage the financial portion of the system effectively. The recognition of the WSUC as a WASH governing body at the local level has triggered the committee to deliver effective services.

Conclusion

1. Social accountability tools (public hearings, budget tracking and community scorecards) were found to be participatory, user-friendly and locally adaptable during project implementation.

The tools improved the capacity of the right holders and duty bearers to perform effectively. This has improved accountability in the project area as demand for WASH has increased and parallel to that, the government has been addressing these issues as reflected in their budget plan. A 'one house, one tap' strategy has been adapted by both RMs. Jal Kachaharis have been owned by the local government as they have supported the RM in reaching the community.

2. The public audit tool has been very effective in ensuring transparency.

During the discussions, the community people demanded clarity on the expenditure, including the original bills. In addition, people filed a complaint if they were not satisfied and the public audit was conducted again. Public audits at each water supply scheme level with maximum participation from the community people are necessary to strengthen the transparency mechanism. User-friendly community scorecards are used as indicators and can be revised as per the local need and context.

3. The role of the local government and WSUC is crucial to sustain social accountability.

The sustainability of the existing local system of duty bearers such as WSUC and WASH-CCs plays a key role in improving accountability. They serve as the first touch-point from the perspective of the right holders but the mechanisms are not fitted with any kind of tangible benefits. Therefore, the stakeholder's performance needs to be linked with awards and recognition as motivation. Technical support enhanced the local capacity of the RM to address the WASH demand from the community. Financial gaps in the existing system are a major hindrance in sustaining the accountability mechanism, as the existing system could be non-functional at any time. Hence, establishment of a continued local level monitoring mechanism is required to monitor and track the progress on a regular basis.

Authors:
Sarbagya Shrestha (WaterAid Nepal)
Nabin Kumar Shahi and
Ashim Poudel (KIRDARC Nepal)

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