

Enhancing Collective Action in Spring “Development” and Management through Negotiation Support and By-Law Reforms

Negotiation support, multi-stakeholder engagement and by-law reforms can promote collective action in spring development and management.

Provision of safe drinking water to rural populations throughout much of Ethiopia has been hindered by failure to consider the management challenges of newly developed springs. Failure to consider water for domestic use in watershed management programs has also led to lost opportunities for catalyzing community interest in other integrated natural resource management (INRM) activities. The Water Resource Department operating in the area around

villages who don't contribute to spring maintenance may lead to poor management unless agreements are reached for all spring users to invest in upkeep. For example, many farmers contributed to spring development, yet a wider group of people (neighboring villages who are passing by, non-contributing farmers) use the resource for livestock and domestic use. Ongoing investments in maintenance were needed, requiring that these diverse groups of people

Box 1. Key Steps in Negotiation Support for Spring Development and Management:

1. Watershed characterization to determine the status of natural resources in the watershed
2. Participatory problem identification and prioritization
3. Formation of spring committees at village level based on spring location
4. Agreement on objectives for spring management, following identification of poor water quality and—to a lesser extent—decreased quantity, as top priorities
5. Identification of relevant stakeholders at Woreda, PA and watershed level
6. Consultation with different stakeholder groups on their views on the issue and its solutions
7. Participatory by-law development with watershed residents and spring users
8. Implementation of by-laws (which govern contributions to spring development and maintenance)
9. Periodic follow-up and participatory monitoring and evaluation (Plate 1)

Galessa (Ginchi benchmark site) is knowledgeable about what is required for spring management and upkeep due to years working with local communities. Yet the Galessa case is also unique. In efforts to pilot test a fully integrated approach to watershed management in a localized area, springs developed within the watershed constitute an “island” of protected water resources—with springs in neighboring communities remaining unprotected.

Due to a well-known collective action principle in which “free riders” (those benefiting but not contributing) undermine the incentives of others to manage/protect a resource, use of springs by non-watershed

agree on who will invest in spring upkeep, who shall benefit (preferably anyone who needs this vital resource), and how this shall be managed.

Negotiation Support for Spring Development and Management

The identification and consultation of different stakeholders is necessary to enhance equitable and sustainable contributions to spring development and maintenance. Negotiation support strategies to bring diverse different stakeholders to agreement were used for this purpose. Key steps in the approach are summarized in Box 1.

Successes and Challenges: Two Sides of a Coin

The approach led to a strong commitment by watershed residents to develop and manage the springs according to plan. Watershed residents contributed material, labor and money to spring development. By-laws were enforced in all watershed villages and farmers expressed their willingness to accept established sanctions. However, the Spring Committee has been less committed than the spring users due to the



Plate 1. Periodic follow-up and participatory monitoring and evaluation

efforts required on their part to manage the spring. Another challenge came from conflicts between spring users and two landowners with Eucalyptus woodlots near springs. Repeated negotiations between these two stakeholder groups have thus far been unable to bring the two parties to agreement on the solution, as the landowners are demanding compensation (financial or land)—both of which are beyond the capacity of the community. While earlier agreements had been reached between landowners and spring users, subsequent awareness that national policies support claims to prior land investments in the form of compensation has undermined these agreements. Yet the strongest challenge of all emerged from spring users residing outside watershed villages who have shown reluctance to contribute finances and labor to maintain structures located in other villages.

The inability to resolve the conflicts through informal negotiations called for vertical linkages with district as well as zonal levels of government. Relevant stakeholders from each level were mobilized to discuss the emerging conflicts. The issue raised by spring users residing outside the watershed

was discussed in detail. The zonal, district and PA level governmental institutions; NGOs; agricultural research and extension institutes; watershed residents and residents of neighboring villages came together to negotiate solutions related to their conflicting views or positions. As the negotiation continued, all realized the essential nature of dealing with the issues in a systematic manner. The point raised by the neighboring communities was that they are also entitled to government support for developing springs in their own villages. If they

receive such support, they have expressed their willingness to contribute both in labor and money. As the position of non-watershed residents became clear, other stakeholders from District and PA level participating in the negotiation assumed responsibility for assisting neighboring communities with the development of new springs. They also expressed their com-

mitment by issuing a letter demanding that the Eucalyptus be removed from springs, and through followup on the legal barriers hindering enforcement of earlier resolutions.

Conclusion

Linking diverse stakeholders and continuous negotiation are an unsurpassed alternative to handle natural resource conflicts and ensure sustainable management of water resources. Building sustainability into the spring development and management activities conducted thus far at Galessa through local negotiations, by-law reforms, institutional strengthening and monitoring has shown that these processes are essential in ensuring the sustainability of integrated watershed interventions. Continuous communication and feedback between District and local levels are required in implementing solutions and resolving problems, as successes and challenges are two sides of the same coin.

**—Shenkut Ayele, Amare Ghizaw,
Zenebe Admassu, Mesfin Tsegaye,
Getachew Alemu, Tessema Tolera
and Laura German**



African Highlands Initiative
P.O. Box 26416
Kampala, Uganda

tel:
256-41-220602
256-772-671152

fax:
256-41-223242

contact for details:
L.german@cgiar.org



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