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Building partnership for participatory sanitation and hygiene planning: lessons and experience from Tanzania

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Tanzania, like much of sub-Saharan Africa, is rapidly urbanising and small towns are developing without sufficient planning. The Cities of Tomorrow research project is using participatory approaches to work with stakeholders in Babati, Tanzania to build the evidence needed to help develop and inform a town-wide sanitation and hygiene plan and to feed into the development of the Babati spatial master plan. This paper describes some of the lessons learned through the development of the partnership between government, academic and non-governmental institutions working together on this project. Mixing research outcomes with operational planning has been a new experience for all partners but the perceived value of research has increased through the use of interactive research tools. Understanding the governance of each partner, carrying out institutional priority mapping and improving communication channels were among the identified improvements that could be made to strengthen the partnership further as the project progresses.

Introduction

Tanzania, like much of sub-Saharan Africa, is rapidly urbanising. Approximately 27 per cent of the total population lives in an urban area and cities are growing at about 5 per cent a year – nearly twice the rate of the country's annual population growth (UNICEF 2012). Small towns serve as critical receiving centres for rural migrants seeking urban livelihoods but due to rapid growth and spread of these towns, many develop without planning for adequate infrastructure. Additionally, institutional and policy frameworks for sanitation are lacking meaning that urban sanitation is lagging behind (WSP 2011). The JMP estimate that 32 per cent of urban households in Tanzania have access to improved sanitation.

Understanding how to provide sustainable universal sanitation as small towns continue to develop will be key in creating healthy urban centres. Planning frameworks in the sanitation sector are shifting from the traditional top-down masterplans to more participatory and bottom-up approaches. This shift is guided by participatory theories such as collaborative planning theory that anticipates that the knowledge and experience of the local people and relevant stakeholders is as valid as expert knowledge (ISF-UTS & SNV 2016).

The Cities of Tomorrow research project

The *Cities of Tomorrow* research project (full project title: *Achieving universal access to adequate, sustainable and equitable sanitation and hygiene services in the Cities of Tomorrow*) aims to work closely with the main stakeholders in Babati town, Tanzania to build the evidence needed to help develop and inform a town-wide sanitation and hygiene plan and also the development of the Babati spatial master plan. The project is a participatory action research project led by WaterAid in partnership with the Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology (NM-AIST), Babati Town Council (BTC) and the Babati Water and Sanitation Authority (BAWASA). This partnership is central to the project and its success and it is this partnership which forms the subject of this paper.

The first phase of the project was the inception period, which provided time to:
- understand and build a partnership and working relationship with the research institution, the municipal and regional authorities,
- to define roles and responsibilities within the project team and to create space for discussion among local government and various ministry representatives.
- understand the governance structures within Babati and the roles of various government authorities and the local government institutions.
- understand the water, sanitation and hygiene situation in the town and the circumstances and challenges affecting sanitation and hygiene services in Babati from the stakeholders.

As part of this phase, participatory workshops were organised in collaboration with agreed project partners to refine the vision, finalise the research protocol and to conduct a rigorous stakeholder analysis, the simplified results of which are shown in Figure 1. The project was then introduced to all stakeholders and the project team set objectives to see behaviour change in those stakeholders through the life of the project.

Figure 1. Stakeholder analysis
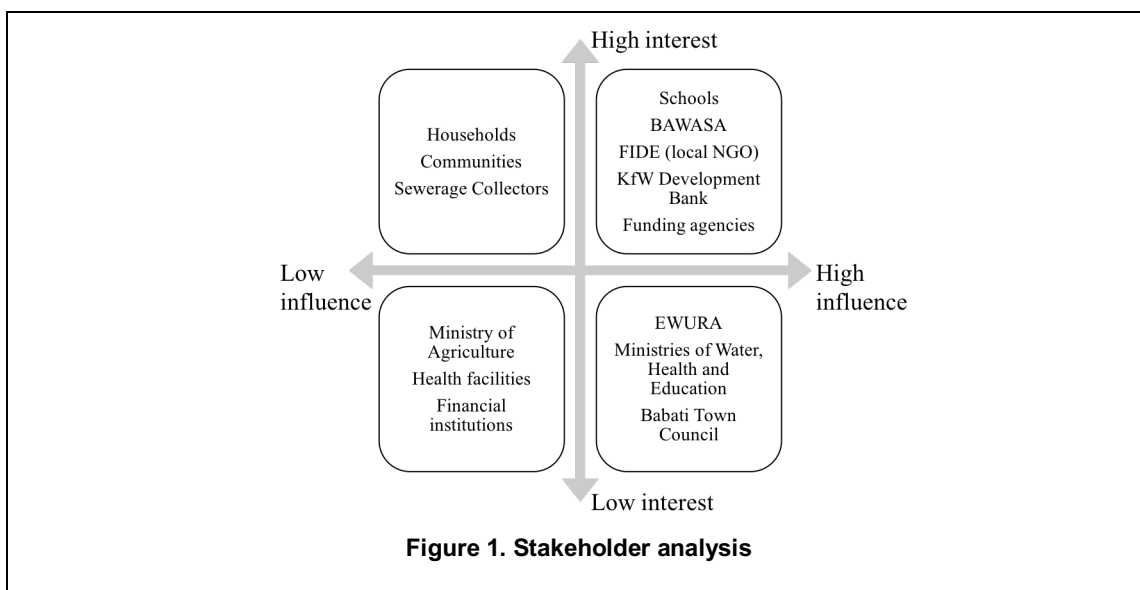
The second phase will include a participatory planning process that will help to develop a series of scenarios for sanitation and hygiene in Babati informed by the research. These scenarios will help to prioritize the town's needs and key strategies and actions related to sanitation and hygiene coverage and services. In the third and final phase, stakeholders will explore and challenge the proposed scenarios and together identify those that can be taken forward. Since the beginning of the project, a spatial masterplan for the town of Babati has been drafted externally to the project. Consequently, the team has also been able to feed results from the research phase into this masterplan. The scenarios will seek to build on the content of this spatial masterplan to provide more specific, detailed guidance for sanitation and hygiene services.

One of the objectives of this project is to demonstrate the conditions under which municipalities and citizens can co-produce and implement a town-wide sanitation and hygiene plan that can deliver inclusive and sustainable sanitation services to all through "participatory planning". As part of documenting this process, a study was set up after a year of project implementation to understand some of the lessons learned and experiences across the partnership in the first year of working together. These findings are presented in this paper and may be helpful to those in the sector working across similar partnerships.

The study
Representing an INGO, town council and an academic institution the partners involved in the *Cities of Tomorrow* project represent a variety of interests, perspectives and priorities. As part of the larger research project, a small study was set up to help gain insights around the challenges and highlights of working in partnership for urban sanitation and hygiene planning. In particular mixing research outcomes with operational planning has been a new experience for all partners and the study helps to explore how the

different stakeholders came to value these different perspectives and priorities. This study took place in the second year of the project.

In order to understand the development of partnership three key questions were asked:
1. Has the value of investment in research materialised?
2. What has driven the municipal partners to engage (or not) with the project?
3. What can be done to improve partnerships as the project progresses?

Methodology

In order to answer the three main questions, meeting minutes from quarterly reviews, partner reflections and other team meetings, and key project documents were reviewed, and key informant interviews were conducted. These interviews were held by an independent consultant on behalf of WaterAid with staff from the Babati Town Council (BTC), Nelson Mandela African Institution for Science and Technology (NM-AIST) and WaterAid Tanzania, in July 2017. Interviews with project partners were carried out using a prepared question guide through the use of Skype and phone calls and the interview guide was shared prior to interview sessions. Interview participants were selected purposively. Information was generated from interviews on partnership roles, experience, working relationship, level of engagement, evidence of engagement and motivation of engagement and this was then further analysed.

Results and discussion

Has the value of investment in research materialised?

Phase one of the project has a heavy research element, transitioning to a more operational approach in later phases. For NM-AIST the focus on research is very comfortable, but it is a new experience for the other partners. For the project to be successful it is important that all partners appreciate the value that the research phase brings. The main challenge in this regard came in the early communications about the project with the government partners expecting a more operational, outputs-based approach focused on finding solutions to challenges faced by the communities. However, the perceived value of research has increased throughout the project particularly for the town council. As they have seen the information generated by the research, and interacted with the various research tools chosen, for example a Shit Flow Diagram, their level of engagement has increased, and they see themselves as a crucial partner in the development of solutions once the research has been completed. The collected information has been used to influence an inclusion of sanitation chapter in the newly formulated adoptive master plan for BTC making it the first such document in the country to have a specific chapter for sanitation issues informed by research. The research showed that over 80% of sanitation facilities in Babati town were pit latrines which helped to move stakeholders' perceptions from being focused on sewers to exploring other sanitation options such as Decentralised Wastewater Treatment Systems and emptying techniques such as the use of the gulper. Evidence of this change in perception is the municipality's interest in also using research to supporting other elements of the town masterplan (as well as the WASH sections).

The research partners associated very strongly with the identity of being research leads and played that role well. The next challenge will be to ensure that the research partner remains engaged as the project moves beyond data collection and analysis – to the participatory planning scenario building phase. In this next phase, key stakeholders will be brought together to build these scenarios, informed by the research. As part of any research-into-use project, it is important to have the researchers also feed into the application of the results. At the time of writing, the project team, including the research team members, have been actively involved in feeding into this next phase of the project, including providing input into the town's spatial master plan.

What has driven the municipal partners to engage (or not) with the project?

Babati Town Council have a mandate for Babati Town and this project helps them to achieve their objectives. There may also be the possibility of becoming a flagship town, increasing their status within Tanzania. However, they also demonstrated an interest in public health as a priority before the project started so whilst any gained investment will help them and there are certain benefits to them from partnering with an INGO, the motivation around this issue was pre-existing. The council see this project as a new experience and also a way to fill a data gap. As the project has progressed they have increasingly engaged at an implementation level as they have seen the potential that it brings for the council and town. For the water

and sanitation authority an initial financial driver has, over the first year of the project, developed into a deeper motivation linked to gains in capacity. They are also increasingly looking to work with other partners including the private sector to develop context specific faecal sludge management options for Babati Town. Partners' reflection meetings and learning exchanges to other towns as part of the project has contributed to this mind shift.

It is also worth noting that the interlinking relationships between the various partners has also had an impact on the success of the partnership. For example, the project was built on an existing partnership between WaterAid and BTC which may have encouraged BTC to actively join from the beginning but for other partners, more engagement and collaboration effort and activities have been necessary. These have included additional in-person meetings and phone calls, discussions, and invitations to join events connected to the research. There are also additional inputs to incorporate from the donor and advisory committee funding the project and other staff within the project team based in the UK office and this makes the relationships more complex. However, direct links (both in the visits and in post-visit communication) between local partners with staff coming from the UK are highly valued and should be encouraged to continue.

How can we improve partnerships for participatory planning?
WaterAid's partnership toolkit (2017) has provided the framing for this section.

Governance
"Governance is needed to promote and maintain engagement internally, while demonstrating legitimacy and credibility externally" (WaterAid 2017). In the first phase of this project, significant time was put into building relationships across all the stakeholders, generating interest in the research and ensuring buy-in to the project. A series of launch workshops were held in Arusha, Babati town and Dar es Salaam, with all key project, community and national stakeholders, including government officials from local to national level, community representatives, private sector representatives, donors and NGOs. The goal of these workshops was to review the aims of the research, the research questions, project timeline, and expected outputs. The workshops also sought consensus on roles and responsibilities as well as feedback from stakeholders.

Whilst there are four partners involved in the project, there are many more individuals. This has the advantage of bringing multiple skills to the team from within the different organisations but also creates challenges in the way in which people engage, particularly when there is turnover of these individuals. There have been staff changes within the organisations during the course of the first phases of the project and it is also acknowledged that staff move around frequently within the government institutions.

Hierarchy, particularly in the government partners, can be helpful in terms of ensuring ownership of the project. One theory for the lack of engagement from one partner is that that the director was not very involved and all communication has been with field staff. Where directors have been engaged there has been good participation from the rest of the organisation. However, the directors are often pulled in many directions and do not know what is happening on the ground. Whilst they should remain as 'key contacts' for the organisation it would be useful to have a second representative with a specific coordination role. Directors must be copied into all communication and made to feel part of the project. Lack of feedback to the organisations by the field staff also contributed to low participation of these key decision makers in matters pertaining to the implementation and success of the project.

Whilst there are differences in the responsibilities of each organisation, in as far as it is possible equal emphasis should be put on the opinions and involvement of all partners. This is more of an attitude shift than a practical action. The feeling from partners that they are not 'equals' was found to be a barrier to active engagement in the partnership. How partners are selected and involved right from the beginning is critical in how they feel engaged in the project. In this case, the town was selected after the project was initiated and therefore, although not intended, an 'order' of partners was established which experience is showing is very hard to break down. The relationship between each partner is currently perceived as a linear hierarchy but developing a model which demonstrates the interlinking relationships between each organisation and the skills that they offer would be helpful. This could include an initial analysis of what different partners bring, what their incentives are, and what roles and responsibilities they can share. This should then be regularly revised as the project and the partnership evolve. A clear governance structure and decision-making processes help to make sure the right level of staff are involved in decision-making, as appropriate: eg a steering group or advisory group with members from different partners to give guidance, with others working on the day-to-day activities. Regular partnership reviews are also needed to refresh the objectives

and roles and responsibilities in a partnership as partnerships evolve over time as partners learn more about each other, with staff turnover and with changes in the project.

Ensure cohesion at every stage

Partnerships require members to have a unified vision for a project. As the project and partnership evolve, this will require continued reviews across the partners. One of the challenges that was observed was that not all partners were involved with creating the initial MOU and it later transpired that it was not understood by all. It is essential that all involved parties understand all aspects of the contract, as well as the technical details of the project itself. It may be helpful to have all partners involved in some way at crucial project milestones even where their specific expertise is not needed. In the case of this project, in order to ensure all felt involved in the MOU, additional meetings were held to clarify the MOU and provide a space for partners to raise their concerns and make any needed changes.

Communication

Communication needs, systems and styles need to be considered for an effective partnership. It is important to ensure that all project team members from directors to field staff have the opportunity to be heard. In the case of this particular project, whilst meetings are currently being held quarterly for the project team, they tend to be very technical and there is reportedly not enough space to discuss wider partnership issues. It was suggested that perhaps a monthly reflection and catch up meeting, perhaps via Skype, would be useful to do the day to day catching up on progress and to agree actions for the month, leaving the quarterly face to face meetings open for strategic discussions. This would also encourage active engagement from staff at all levels of their organisations. It is vital to continue to question whether the communication methods being used are still effective and if there are barriers to communication, how can they be addressed? Throughout this project partners have also noted that each partner communicates in slightly different ways, and providing time for clarification and understanding why something has or has not been communicated is crucial. It is therefore important to have a communication plan in place.

Link with organisational objectives

The peaks in participation and engagement throughout the first year of the project have come when organisations can see the project objectives aligning with their own. At one point, a partner was going through a process of creating organisational targets so this would be a key time to see how the project can link in with their targets and thereby further engage with that organisation as a whole. Each partner will have different motivations for their involvement and will bring different strengths – a good understanding of these from the beginning would facilitate a good working relationship. Thinking about how to achieve the vision of the project whilst also meeting the objectives of those involved would help to motivate everyone to be a part of the project plan. This would hopefully also mean that each partner knew what they could expect to gain from the project and remove unrealistic expectations which cause disengagement when they are not realised. Institutional priority mapping needs to be done in the early stages of the project, alongside the stakeholder analysis to ensure active participation during the life of the project.

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