

FOSTERING DISTRICT OWNERSHIP OF EAST BANK WATER SUPPLY GRAVITY FED SYSTEMS IN CHIKWAWA

Thokozani Kaitane
July 2019

Introduction

Water For People in Malawi is implementing its WASH programs in Chikwawa. One of its main cornerstones is to ensure that the Service Authority, in this case the Chikwawa District Council, has the capacity to sustain the delivery of water services in Chikwawa. In order to reach Everyone in the district, Water For People is rehabilitating the East Bank gravity fed water supply schemes (GFS). This paper will discuss key elements that will ensure ownership mechanisms by Chikwawa District Council to sustainably operate the East Bank GFS.

Background

Water For People commenced its operations in Malawi in 2000. Water For People's efforts are focused in three main geographical areas, namely Blantyre peri-urban areas and the Chikwawa and Chiradzulu rural districts. Water For People's programming approach stems from its Everyone Forever model which aims to bring inclusive, permanent water service solutions to Everyone - at the community, household, and government public institution levels, including schools and health centers. This strategy focuses on full coverage and empowering households and communities to manage their own water supply systems and sanitation facilities with long-term, local solutions. The strategy is aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal Number 6 (SDG 6) of ensuring universal availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation.

Water For People's program implementation approach has always prioritized meaningful collaboration with implementing partners at national, district, and community levels. In line with SDG 6, Water For People aims at strengthening the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management. This local strengthening is achieved in several ways, including co-financing and leveraging resources by asking local government, communities, and public institutions to contribute toward their water and sanitation systems so that they have a responsibility to the investment and long-term functioning of the infrastructure and supporting systems.

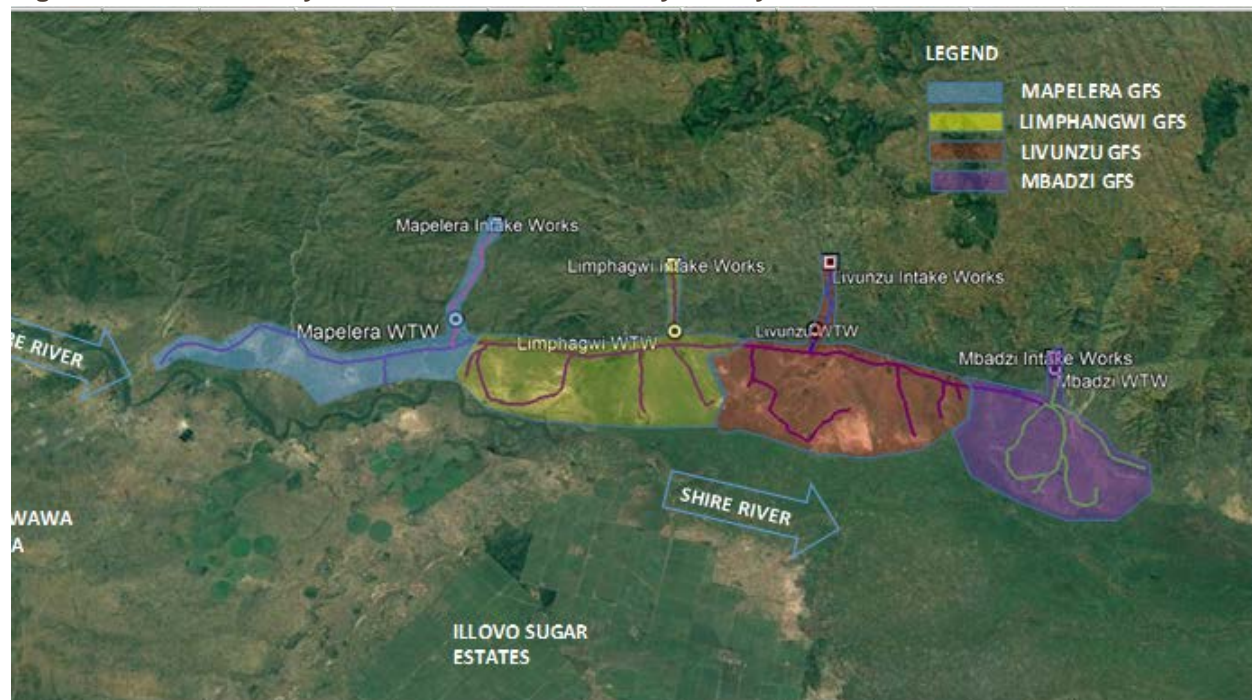
In Chikwawa, Water For People's primary implementing partner is the Chikwawa District Council (the Council) with whom we have a five-year partnership agreement to achieve the Everyone Forever goal by the year 2020. Water For People believes that for the WASH investments in communities and public institutions to last, the Council must take the lead in implementation of activities at a community level. Water For People has been supporting the Council through infrastructure development as well as quarterly subventions for the operations of the District Water Office which includes supervision, trainings, and logistical support.

Status of the East Bank Gravity Fed Water Supply Scheme

Chikwawa District has two Rural Gravity Fed Rural Water Supply Schemes, namely the East Bank GFS, comprising of four intakes (Mapelera, Livunzu, Mbadzi and Limphagwi) and the Chapananga GFS. Each is designed to supply water to different Traditional Authorities (TAs) within the district.

The schemes under the East Bank are interconnected and supplies an estimated population of over 25,000 people in TA Makhuwira. According to the Malawi Housing and Population Census report of 2018, TA Makhuwira has a population of 79,933 (NSO, 2019). The population signifies the importance of the East Bank gravity fed schemes as far as potable water is concerned. According to the 2014-2020 Malawi Rural Water Supply Investment Plan, Mapelera, Limphangwi and Livunzu schemes were earmarked for major rehabilitation (DMC, 2018). In 2018, Water For People rehabilitated the Mbadzi gravity fed scheme, and in 2019, Water For People is rehabilitating the Livunzu and Mapelera schemes. Limphangwi will be rehabilitated in 2020. The four schemes are all interconnected as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Schematic Layout of the East Bank Gravity Fed Systems



Problem Statement

Over the past four years, Water For People has been supporting Chikwawa District Council as a main partner in the implementation of the WASH program in Chikwawa. This support has covered different aspects ranging from technical, financial, and administrative. In East Bank, Water For People has provided support in the design and implementation of the rehabilitation works. In

addition, Water For people has also worked on system strengthening for the Council, the Water User Association (WUA), and the communities to ensure the effective flow of water.

However, despite all the efforts in empowering the partners, especially the Council, there is still observable lack of ownership in all the efforts that have been undertaken so far. It is evident that Chikwawa District Council still considers Water For People as the main driver of water supply operations and maintenance in Chikwawa. This is evidenced through the following:

- i. Lack of routine and preventive maintenance plans of the GFS – Despite the full knowledge that the East Bank gravity fed scheme lies in a flood prone area, the district does not have a preventive maintenance plan and emergence recovery plans. If plans are available, such plans have not been used to the expected output. Despite all reports of non-functional water points, the Council has not taken a step on its own to assess the situation and relies on Water For People to provide logistical support for the same. This is despite the Council having allocations for supervision in their quarterly subversions that they receive from Water For People.
- ii. Lack of supervision visits for the ongoing projects – In 2019, Water For People is rehabilitating Mapelera and Livunzu schemes. Since the commencement of the assignments, senior and technical officers have not taken time on their own to supervise the ongoing works at Livunzu and Mapelera. The Council claims that they do not have allocation to go monitor the works and hence requires Water For People to provide funds for that.
- iii. Rampant vandalism and theft of pipes – During the implementation of the Livunzu rehabilitation, it was observed that there was rampant theft of pipes by the communities. This is despite having a functional WUA board within the schemes.

Defining Community-based Water Supply Projects

Community based programs are social interventions leading to social processes targeted to change the existent social structures and institutions simultaneously without altering social behavior of its members. This means that community water supply programs are meant to improve the lives of people around that community. That was the intention of the East Bank GFS, to improve the status of water supply thereby contributing towards reaching Everyone in Chikwawa.

Key Areas of Consideration for Systematic Capacity Building in Chikwawa

District Leadership

Leadership is a critical element in garnering support for a community water supply scheme. This leadership is essential in both technical and social aspects. In the case of East Bank water supply scheme, which is prone to natural disasters, strong leadership will ensure that there is no serious break in the water supply. Strong leaders will be visionary and become champions of all the water supply initiatives. They will be ready for any challenges that arise and assemble appropriate skills to counter any imminent danger.

While the Chikwawa District Council is a key partner in the implementation of the Chikwawa WASH Program and it is expected that they will lead and own the water supply scheme in the East Bank, it has been observed that the aspects raised above are somehow lacking in the district leadership. For instance, the Council has not taken an initiative of their own to conduct monitoring and supervision of all the ongoing rehabilitation projects currently in progress. Just recently, Water For People has completed the erection of a fence around Mbadzi treatment works and undertook a project to replace filter media in the slow sand filters at the same Mbadzi. It has been noted that in all these simple projects, there was not a single day that Council officials travelled on their own to the site to provide technical leadership in the works. It is for this reason that the Council should be empowered to realize their core responsibility. The Council must understand that all the water assets in the district belong to them.

During meetings with communities around East Bank, community leaders have also intimated the lack of the Council's commitment in the affairs of water supply in the district. It is therefore very critical that Water For People should consider a tailored capacity building to address the issues raised above such as:

- Technical and social leadership of the scheme
- Asset Registry of the water scheme
- Disaster preparedness – technical assessments, budget preparation, and resource mobilization

Water For People believes that, even in challenging times, the effective District Council leadership must provide motivation, commitment, and tenacity to other stakeholders in the water supply scheme.

Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) is an excellent example of a Service Authority that understands its mandate. KCCA has with support from various partners instituted a call center that manages and monitors all activities to do with pit emptying and faecal sludge management. It has established standards for pit emptying and provided a platform for easy regulation and signing of service level agreements.

The KCCA is a good example of a city that is looking ahead without being driven by donors. At the moment, it is working with Water For People and other partners to develop a strategic plan that will be used for sanitation planning and prioritizing investments to scale up sanitation improvements through 2040.

KCCA is a city and an authority that has been fully devolved in Uganda.

Excerpt from a paper titled "Initiatives by Water For People with Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA)" developed by Water For People's Uganda team in October 2018.

Under the flood recovery plans that were produced by the Ministry of Water, there are suggestions to have tailored capacity building to address issues of technical and social leadership. This will also help to create room for collaboration with other partners in the area of capacity building.

Collaboration

In today's world, key resources, time, energy, and funding are limited. In most cases, these are carefully allocated toward a specific need. Addressing water supply challenges in Chikwawa therefore requires adaptive leadership to understand concepts of collaboration.

While Water For People has collaborated with Chikwawa District Council and other stakeholders, there is a gap that needs to be addressed.

Over the past four years, Water For People has provided funding to Chikwawa District Council for its operations and administrative activities. In addition, Water For People has also provided technical support to the Council in various aspects, including infrastructure development. Specifically for East Bank, Water For People has and continues to ensure that the water supply scheme is functional at all levels.

Table 1: Extract of Budget Request from Chikwawa toward Water Supply

Serial Number	Budget line/Activity	Amount (MK)		
		Jun-Aug 2019	Mar-May 2019	Jan-Feb 2019
01	Institutional Support			
	WMA salaries	1,080,000.00	1,080,000.00	720,000.00
02	Borehole Construction			
	Verification		843,828.72	
	Community mobilization and pre-drilling		3,568,500.00	
	Borehole supervision	3,874,120.00	1,032,030.00	
	CBM Training	14,504,400.00		3,593,720.00
	Area pump mechanics		1,677,708.00	
	Shop owners		1,095,360.00	
	Progress review meetings	1,115,680.00		
	Borehole banking		932,972.00	1,222,240.00
	TOTAL WATER SUPPLY	19,494,200.00	9,150,354.00	4,815,960.00

Table 1 presents a budget extract that has been requested by Chikwawa District Council toward water supply for the period of June to August 2019. It also shows expenditures toward water supply between the period of January to May 2019. There is a good allocation of fuel and allowances toward supervision of drilling. Because the budget lines do not mention supervision of gravity fed schemes, the Council finds it difficult to withdraw some funds for the supervision of GFS even if at that particular period, they have not undertaken any borehole drilling supervision.

It should be impressed upon the District Council that effective collaboration will also demand them to allocate time and even funds where resources are permitting to compliment the efforts done by Water For People. While Water For People provides the resources, in the spirit of collaboration, the Council must provide time to ensure that all technical aspects of the water supply schemes are met.

Community Engagement

Successful ownership of the community water supply schemes depends on the level of engagement of the communities. Community engagement is fundamental and vital for the ownership of the water supply scheme. This is grounded on the belief that the community has the right to participate and articulate their needs. This is a type of community participation that

involves people in problem-solving or decision-making processes and must be an ongoing process.

However, during the implementation of the East Bank gravity fed water supply scheme, Water For People observed that communities were only engaged during the start of the project. This process was also primarily led by Water For People as there is not a strong government presence in the area. This was also reflected in one of the site progress meetings that was held on 25th July 2019 at Livunzu treatment plant.

According to Mr. Daiton Chauta, the Board Chairperson for East Bank Water User Association, Chikwawa District Council does not offer 100% support to the WUA. This was attributed to inadequate funding of the Council and has led to a break in community engagement.

In addition, the only available motorcycle for the WUA is not functional. This impacts the ability to respond to instances of pipe theft and vandalism at Livunzu water treatment works where rehabilitation works are in progress. However, the WUA Board Chair is optimistic that once their mobility issues are solved and they get maximum support from the District Council, issues of theft and vandalism can be tackled completely as they will have more time for continuous engagement.

Evaluation

In Chikwawa, specifically East Bank, Water For People has invested in the water supply infrastructure. This infrastructure is meant to be permanent and satisfy the needs of the targeted communities. However, since the start of these rehabilitation projects, the Council has not taken time to evaluate the impact or the usability of the infrastructure provided. In 2015, the intakes of the schemes were washed away by floods after another rehabilitation by the World Bank. In the 2019 recent floods that hit Malawi due to cyclone Idai, a number of pipe river crossings were washed away, rendering a greater part of the East Bank scheme without water.

These situations that have affected the water supply in Chikwawa should have provided an opportunity for the Council to undertake a detailed technical and social evaluation of the system. Such an evaluation would have even set detailed and robust design standards that would withstand the effects of flooding.

It is therefore imperative that Water For People should quickly orient the Council on the Asset Registry for water infrastructure and empower them to take full responsibility of its operations. In addition, Chikwawa District Council must on annual basis carry out a routine evaluation process for the gravity fed system to continuously assess functionality.

Is it doable?

Chikwawa District Council has all it takes to operate the gravity fed systems in Chikwawa. With the quarterly grant it gets from Water For People, and support from other WASH stakeholders, reaching Everyone in Chikwawa is possible. However, sustaining the achievements is what is needed for Chikwawa to move to another level. Chikwawa District Water Office must take the

GFS in East Bank as one of its daily operations and develop a workable plan that will ensure both operation and maintenance.

Conclusion

Sustainable service delivery for Water For People is the core of its operations. It is for this reason that in living to this core, Chikwawa District Council must take ownership of the water supply schemes. When something happens to the water supply, it should be the Council coordinating the interventions and leading in technical assessments. This is where the issue of systematic capacity building is essential using the four elements of District Leadership, Collaboration, Community Engagement, and Evaluation. Water For People should take a deliberate effort to orient the Council and let them lead in the areas in question especially as we are approaching 2020, the expiry of the MoU with Chikwawa District Council.

References

1. National Statistical Office (NSO), May 2019. 2018 Malawi Population and Housing Census, Main Report.
2. Design and Management Consultants (DMC), July 2018. Detailed Design for Mapelera, Limphangwi and Livunzu Gravity Fed Water System of East Bank Schemes in Chikwawa District.