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Sustaining a Rural Water Supply: The Case of Ngere Kagoro Community Water Project in Nyando District, Kenya

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Abstract

The Ngere Kagoro Community Water Project located in Nyando District, Kenya supplies water to the rural community in Ngere Kagoro Village from a borehole and is managed by the rural community through a management committee that runs its day to day operations. GIS techniques were used to map out the water supply and households. Supply to individual homes with the ability to pay for own pipe and metre installation is successful though facing problems in monthly bill compliance. Several community water vending Kiosks are dysfunctional. The failure is attributed to inadequate attention to finance, cultural ties and stakeholder involvement and changes in Kenya's water sector. Many households get their drinking water from ponds that are health hazards if not treated.

The water supply tariffs do not reflect the service provision costs, including equipment replacement, staff salaries and electricity bills. This is due to the feeling that the water project was meant to be affordable to poor rural households. With time, pumping costs rose but is not reflected in the charges. Several households also get water for free from friends since the flat rate per household (Ksh. 300) does not depend on the monthly consumption. The project should re-valuate the unit for charging; either per unit of consumption (*e.g.* per jerrican) or per consumption unit (*e.g.* per household per month). If the latter is chosen, upper limits to consumption should be established, beyond which a surcharge is applied above 10,000 litres per household. With many homes having extended family households, there is need to create a third category of water users having units within one unit or having a compound unit rate. It should apply for a consistent annual subsidy from the Constituency Development Fund to offset its budget on maintenance costs. This will reinforce that service comes at a cost, preserve community and cultural ties and put the management of the service on a more sound financial footing. The study also recommends the exploration of solar power to subsidise pumping costs and invest in capacity building.

Keywords: Community perceptions, rural water supply, stakeholder involvement, water tariffs

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