

Drama and awareness raising to solve conflicts between different groups of users of sanitation and water facilities in Borno State, Nigeria

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Case study: Shitikam Community

The installation of water and sanitation facilities by the state government, individuals or a donor agency is meant to alleviate the hardship encountered by citizens of the state, so that people can have access to safe water supply and proper waste disposal. However, it becomes a source of conflict for most of the users when self-interest sets in and clashes with the collective interest of the community at large.

Shitikam is a community in Hawul Local Government Area in the Southern part of Borno State, Nigeria, on the plateau.



The people live in small hamlets and villages, mostly on the hill slopes all over the plateau. The villages are divided along ethnic and religious lineages and are relatively small (between 1000-3000 people per settlement). They are predominantly small farmers who practise irrigation and rain-fed farming for subsistence and cash crops. They also keep domestic animals.

Both men and women are engaged in farming all year round on small parcels of farm land located near seasonal water sources. The situation of limited water sources has created competition among different users. Conflicts were rising between them -man/man, men/women- with respect to the usage of the limited water resources for domestic and other purposes.

A water point and toilet facility was provided but initiatives to manage these facilities by the community members were lacking. It became a cause for conflict among community members and between husbands and wives.

One day, a man and his wife had a quarrel: the husband came back home from the farm and the wife had not finished cooking the food she was supposed to have taken to him on the farm. He asked why she had not sent his food to him. The woman explained that the water tap had been closed and that she had to go to the creek to fetch water. There was a long queue over there which she had to join. This made her not finish the cooking early. The man went out very furiously and headed for the Village Head's house.

On his way, he met with a neighbour and asked him why he was looking so annoyed. The other explained that the borehole had been locked again and up till now his wife had not finished cooking. His neighbour had complained of the same thing in his house yesterday and even now that man's wife had not yet come back from the creek.

Both proceeded to the Village Head's house to lay their complaint. On reaching they found several other people who had come for the same issue. There were also others who were complaining of the toilet facility that was always under lock and key, and most members of the community did not have access except for a few individuals.

Fortunately, one day the WASH officer went for a periodic monitoring visit to Shitikam. The issues were raised by the local people. They invited the officer to explain: are the borehole and the toilet constructed for use by the whole community or just a few individuals?

The officer addressed the whole community in front of the Village Head's house. He told them the Borehole and the Latrine were constructed so that everyone could access save water supply and have proper waste disposal in order to minimise diseases related to water and sanitation.

He then suggested they select people -including women- who are always in the area to take charge of these facilities, most especially the water point. For women, and children, tend to stay at home more often and are using such facilities most.

All community members agreed with this suggestion. They decided to choose people to be in charge of:

- ✧ The keys to the tap and the power house
- ✧ The key to the latrine
- ✧ The cleaning of the toilet and water point
- ✧ The maintenance of these facilities
- ✧ The number of times and specific periods the tap would run in a day

They also decided that all procedures should be spelt out categorically to the hearing and comprehension of the community and all must agree to the suggestions made by them in order to avoid further conflict.

This was how the conflict was resolved in that community.

LESSONS LEARNT –

I. Why are water conflicts a Gender Issue?

1. Water resources may be a cause for conflict when they are limited and access to it becomes more and more competitive.

Women, and children, are the most frequent users of water. Often, when queuing to fetch water that is scarce the women may get into a fight. Also, gossip and the like is rampant among them, and all this results in a conflict.

For men, scarce water resources may cause a conflict between husbands and wives at night (information from the village head): The women complain of being tired or having to wake up as early as 4 in the morning to go and queue for water in the creek. The men complain of late cooking by their wives.

2. For the poor, a conflict will continue to occur due to scarce water sources since they cannot relocate elsewhere. Neither can they afford to buy from water vendors.

As for the better-off, most do relocate to where they have access to water.

Interestingly, as far as ethnic or religious differences go, there is no cause for conflict as such with respect to water scarcity. In the case of Shitikam all belong to the same ethnic group and they settle issues within clans. And women are allowed to go out by themselves to fetch water.

Dramatising such conflict issues to raise awareness and help solve the conflicts is an important tool. The case of Dandalmari village in the same State (see *Text Box at the end*) is illustrative for the use of this tool in a conflict about water and sanitation facilities.

II. How did improvement of access to water and sanitation facilities help solve gender conflicts and benefit the people otherwise?

1. Some examples of conflict solving In the Shitikam community between men and their wives, and among men too (said the men):

- . The wives no longer complain at night about being tired
- . Food is always cooked on time
- . Gossip has reduced to a great extent among women
- . Children go to school on time

2. Improved access to water and sanitation facilities has promoted better hygienic practices among community members

3. There is peace, self respect and dignity among the people.

III. How has the provision of water and sanitation facilities influenced local power relations?

1. With respect to Gender:

It has changed local power relations because the plight of women is now considered in decision-making regarding water and sanitation facilities. Women have full control of such facilities, few were even trained as pump mechanics. This has made women independent from men in Shitikam community in relation to water and sanitation facilities.

2. With respect to Class:

It has changed local power relations in terms of class. When water scarcity became unbearable for the Shitikam populace the wealthy among them relocated to nearby communities (said the Village Head). However, it is a forgotten issue since there is water in Shitikam now.

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CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION ACTIVITIES IN DANDALMARI VILLAGE, BORNO STATE, NIGERIA

“...There is a settlement called Dandalmari comprising Kanuri, Shuwa and Hausa people. It is a rural community with a population of about 1000 inhabitants. The community is blessed with domestic animals like cows, donkeys, and horses. The horses and donkeys are used when fetching water because the community source of water supply, mainly an open well, is deep.

When latrines were to be constructed in that community, they were asked to locate a site. They all agreed on a site to build the latrine.

It was later discovered that Dandalmari A wanted all facilities to be built on their side. It was also observed that Dandalmari B had less interest in the project because they saw it to be pro-western and it would pollute their culture. They resorted to “bush attacks”.

After these findings, the WASH team visited the community and worked with separate groups regarding community (youth, women and men’s) participation and ownership. It was later observed that Dandalmari A did not allow the use of the toilet by the other group. Even those who had an interest in the facilities were denied access because they did not participate in keeping the toilet clean as they were supposed to.

However, the case was later resolved by the WASH team.

The groups were brought together and the issue was discussed. A mini drama was staged that broke the violence cycle within the people. An F- Diagram was explained on toilet use stressing the need to keep the toilet clean.

At the end of the meeting they decided to prepare a duty roster for the washing and fetching of water. It was to be kept in the toilet and the keys were shared between the groups...” (from information provided by Aisha Hamza)