



## Networking water committee in Madagascar

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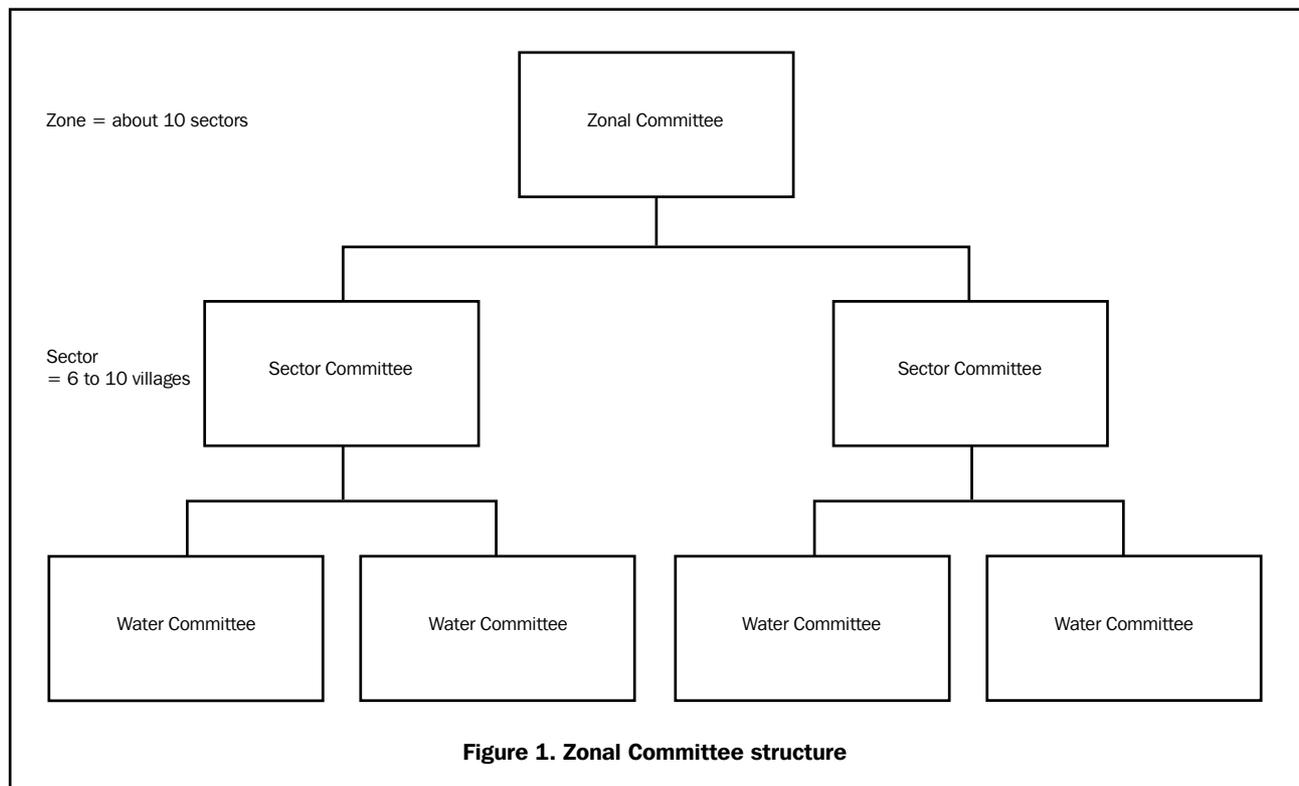
### How to involve the community?

SUSTAINABILITY BECOMES MORE and more the main indicator of the success of development projects. Most people believe that cancelling subsidies means that communities must contribute the whole cost of the project including investment. This is a narrow view because cost recovery is not an end in itself even though it is an important means of reaching the sustainability of the project. Without the community level structure, not only cost recovery but also other aspects linked to sustainability will be difficult to achieve. The main issue, therefore, is "how to involve the community?" In practice community level structure must be the first stage in community empowerment. In order to pass all responsibilities to the community including all details, this structure should be implemented before any action is taken by the community.

In the case of Madagascar, setting up Water Committees is quite common for those working in the water, hygiene and sanitation sector. Some people endeavour to combine committee strength through networking. In any case, empowerment occurs by building community capacity. This community capacity must be strengthened by

promoting a solid superstructure, because this superstructure will support and voice the concerns of the community to government and financial agencies. As we know this kind of advocacy requires the combination of many elements. One of the key elements is raising the profile of a Water Committee Network. This is possible by emphasising the working synergy within and outside the network.

As the community becomes more involved in addressing water and sanitation, the problems become more and more complicated and require a harmonization of all the actions, a stronger organization and the support and advice of other actors. Frequently they realize that these problems are beyond their capacities. They need to unite their forces, to extend and to reinforce the dimension of the organization in order to advocate for their interests. The combination of the documentation of water project experience and progressive setting up of networking allowed them to achieve this goal. Through networking they may take on the role not only of an authoritative voice vis-à-vis other development actors but even that of the real catalyst for the development of their zone.



## The Malagasy networking processes

Three Malagasy NGOs (SAF, CARITAS, TARATRA) have launched networking processes since 1997. The main idea is to get the Committees to work in synergy and to implement the structure step by step as shown in the diagram above.

These NGOs use two main water supply systems: the gravity system and wells. Each village has its Water Committee which is chosen directly by the community in a general assembly.

It may be possible with a gravity system that the Water Committee manages commission for each tapstand. The Committee organises the community during the implementation of the supply water system. Committees are then in charge of the following up of the project and its sustainability. Thus its main tasks are to collect household contributions and to maintain the system. Each household pays from 250 fmg<sup>1</sup> to 500 fmg per month plus 10,000 fmg per household. A survey based upon *contingent evaluation* carried out in South of Madagascar (Isalo) has concluded that the rate of *consent for payment* is 80.1% of households and the *median consent for payment* is 9500 fmg<sup>2</sup> per month. If communities understand the need for Committees, they will be willing to pay more and financial autonomy for the Committees can be reached.

The Committees form the basis of a network, whose profile depends in great part on their capacities and on the coherence of their policies. The advantage of building the network from the bottom up is that the Committees can test their enthusiasm and develop their ability to reach objectives, by working first at a local level before engaging in sector and higher level activities.

The Water Committees with the support of an NGO create the foundation of their networking in setting up a Sector Water Committee. This sector Committee regroups from six to ten villages. The members of these Committees elect two representatives who play the role of spokesmen and facilitators of several activities in the sector area or “Commune” according to the territorial division in Madagascar. When the Sector Water Committee acquires enough experience and is regarded as a pillar of the higher structure of the Network, the Water Committee members in a zone<sup>3</sup> can choose their representative on the Zonal Water Committee. Two selection methods are used in Madagascar: firstly each locality has its own representative in the superstructure; secondly each local water-related activity can have a representative at zonal level. The water supply in the villages gives rise to new activities linked with water such as vegetable cultivating, craft for women, micro credit and tree nursery. Usually the Zonal Committee is comprised mainly of the chairmen of Village Water Committees.

The Zonal Water Committee aims to be the interface between the community and all the development activities in their area including public administration. To achieve

this they ensure communication and mediation between the various activities which enables them to develop their region.

So they intend to reach the following objectives:

- Design projects (with those who conduct the activities);
- Carry out the projects with the community;
- Evaluate the projects; and
- Promote and Follow up Water Committees activities.

As two of our partners (SAF and CARITAS) work closely with Churches, their Zonal Manager is a member (*ex officio*) of the Zonal Committee. Taratra’s zonal team and the zonal Water Committee have their own separate organisations. Nevertheless both of them work in real partnership with the committees. For the NGO this superstructure allows them to reinforce their policy of entrusting many responsibilities to the Zonal Committee:

- Physical representation of the local groups;
- Passing on the Water Committee meeting reports<sup>4</sup> from the village to the NGO;
- Being the conduit and guarantor of demands for projects from communities;
- Empowerment of Water Committee; and
- Advising the NGO on resolving socio-organisational and cultural constraints.

Apart from traditional communication channels like meetings in the weekly market place and mail by “bush taxi”, the Zonal Committee has four formal meetings per year and since 1997 has met annually with Zonal Committees of other organisations. The meeting topics focus on water but the discussion may take into account other areas. Over two days, every three months, the Committees inform and debate about the zonal situation, resolution of emergency problems, and the launching of new ideas. A field visit is planned each year for the members of the Zonal Committee. This satisfies their needs to share experiences with each other and it can sometimes be complemented by occasional visits of experts or the Manager from the Headquarters of an NGO. The Zonal Committee hopes to enrich their knowledge and build their management and technical capacities through these actions. At the very least they can extend and improve the development actions in their villages.

## The impact of zonal water committee

During the past four years the Zonal Committee was looking for the best process to ensure the sustainability of its system. This process has had its ups and downs. They can now document many positive experiences like the four annual meetings at national level which have benefited all members. This has been partly possible because of the water contribution system that they have set up at village level. In two regions, for example, 40% of water point system contributions are transferred to Sector and Zonal Committees to finance their costs during meetings, workshops and field visits. In gravity systems, the tapstand users deal with operation and maintenance of tapstands, the village committee looks after the network and reservoir,

and problems with the spring and catchment are the responsibility of the zonal committee. Water contributions are divided into three parts to provide for the costs of these three levels.

Even though it is a small amount, the Zonal Committees have succeeded in obtaining other financing from the water fund such as community pharmacy and reforestation.

However the Zonal Committee has several problems both in its structure and its functioning. For cultural reasons the women are almost excluded in spite of their effective participation at village level. The lack of capacity and equipment creates also a dependence of Zonal Committee on the NGO. Their takings for example are always managed by the NGO Zonal Manager and they have a tendency to consult the NGO before making decisions.

If we want the Zonal Committee to really play its lobbying and advocacy roles, we must address these problems by focussing on the following solutions:

- A networking ethos must be achieved in setting up the top tier at national level;
- Motivating the community to pay more to provide higher margins for the Committees to manoeuvre and convince committee members of the value of working voluntarily;
- Supplying appropriate equipment especially the means of communication to the Committees;

- Reinforcing the training given by NGOs which are insufficient;
- Considering networking as an opportunity for transmitting new and innovative ideas;
- Documenting the experiences of each village;
- Increasing contact with other players; and
- Considering how the NGOs can reduce influence on the Network in order to empower it.

The National Water Committee can thus become the lever for development in the villages covered by its members.

## References

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- RANDRIAMIARANA Zazà Burton, April 2001, *Valeur de l'amélioration de l'alimentation en eau dans les Communes rurales.*

1 £1 = 10 000 fmg and the wage per day in rural area in Madagascar is about one pound.

2 Valeur de l'amélioration de l'alimentation en eau dans les Communes rurales cas d'Isalo, Burton Randriamiarana, April 2001.

3 Which can regroup about ten sectors

4 Three monthly report

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