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# BRINGING CLARITY TO TROUBLED WATERS

How Oxfam is facilitating change in water and sanitation management in Tajikistan

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**In Tajikistan, water is a key resource in emergencies and for irrigation and drinking water, yet its management is chaotic, which often leads to breakdowns in water supply systems. Many communities have resorted to taking drinking water directly from irrigation canals and rivers. Oxfam has been working for nearly three years with the government and key water sector players to tackle long-standing problems with rural water supplies. We are helping communities achieve sustainable access to drinking water and sanitation, and to challenge decision makers on water issues.**

### **1. What change(s) was this programme intending to influence through its leverage strategy?**

The programme intended to bring about policy changes in relation to water supply systems through multi-stakeholder engagement. It sought to link people on the ground to policy makers at national level. Oxfam's ability to play a neutral facilitation role in this work was bolstered by its position as an INGO, rather than a donor.

### **2. What, if anything, was new, innovative or different about the way this programme attempted to bring about change?**

The different components of the programme provided a more holistic approach around particular problems within the water sector. For example, by inter-relating the various approaches, we ensured that policy-making is informed by beneficiaries and not just policy makers in Dushanbe.

Central to the new programme is that its work is not framed as a project, but rather about building sustainable institutions. Improving the communications between government actors and other stakeholders in the water and sanitation sector all contributed to building a better environment for decision-making.

### **3. Recognizing that leverage can be achieved in different ways, how did the programme leverage change?**

The programme created a network of key players in the water sector, the government, and donors to bring about changes in water and sanitation policy from the bottom up. It also harnessed the support of head office and programme teams to deliver the change process. In addition, Oxfam's programme review helped to draw attention to programming issues in the water and sanitation sector.

### **4. What worked well and not so well with efforts to leverage change through this approach?**

A lot worked well. Oxfam realised the need for programme change and acted on it. Conducting a review and research enabled us to 'zoom out', and create an environment and appetite for change. The research on the water and sanitation sector was significant in shaping changes to the programme and publishing the findings led to the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC) committing long-term financial resources to making this change happen. Oxfam was seen as a leader in the field by SDC and other donors.

Building the capacity of the programme team and involving them in the early stages of the review enabled them to have ownership over key elements of the change process. This commitment enabled staff to move from a different type of programme approach – from working directly with communities to being able to engage with the government structure. That is a big challenge – at field level we tend to like repeating things we have done 15 times already; we don't look up and out enough. Conversely, for the policy-oriented person, the challenge is how to ground activities in the reality of the situation.

When we started this project, we realised we needed skills in networking, policy, institutional capacity-building, media, research, and the law – skills that might exist at head-office level but not necessarily at country level. We found they did exist in the local market when we went looking. But we should have involved the support function at head-office level earlier on, such as lawyers and advocacy staff, etc. By harnessing the support

from head office, the programme was seen as an organizational priority and had sufficient resources to make change happen.

Involving donors (SDC) and key water stakeholders in the early stages helped to secure funding and support for the new programme direction. Rather than just being funders, they played a critical role in formulating solutions and responses.

Using participatory techniques and forming task groups helped Oxfam to bring the voices of poor people to the table of decision makers. One network member said, *'It is the only forum in town where a CBO [community-based organization] leader presents and can challenge a minister.'*

What did not work so well was being aware of and managing all the political sensitivities involved. It would be useful to do a proper power analysis to avoid these issues in the future.

While there have been changes at policy level, more analysis is needed around whether poor Tajiks have actually benefited from cleaner water as a result of the programme. Our hope is that by August 2013 at least 30,000 people will have gained access to sustainable water provision.

#### **5. What capabilities, knowledge or skills were helpful when implementing this approach?**

Communication, analytical thinking, and political sensitivity were needed and existing staff members were able to adapt, as well as hire new recruits, to fill skill gaps for the programme. To support staff to develop these new skills, a staff development plan was put in place with training and other development opportunities.

#### **6. What has changed as a result of the programme and how have you measured this? (Where possible, quantify the scale of programme success in terms of outcomes and reach, and relate this to inputs and cost.)**

As a result of the programme, there have been numerous successes at a policy level. For example, a previously shelved Water Law has been instigated, which establishes who is in charge, who regulates, and who is the service provider. This law also targets monopolies. Previously there were no laws on drinking water and no quality control. In addition, the government has agreed to co-finance the construction of new systems and the rehabilitation of existing water supply systems.

We were able to create the Inter-ministerial Co-ordination Council with 11 Ministers, which meets four times a year to discuss policy and make decisions. We facilitate the meetings and help the chair (who is the Minister of Water). Without our facilitation, this council would not exist.

Another major breakthrough can be seen in changes around construction permits for rural infrastructure. Previously, it took a minimum of two years to get a permit, but Oxfam called to simplify the process and pushed for a fast-track procedure for small-scale infrastructure. The Inter-ministerial Co-ordination Council has approved this and there is now a presidential decree, and an implementing group with membership from 14 ministries and government agencies to develop policy for the water sub-sector. Oxfam played a key role in convening and brokering this agreement, bringing together key players to build trust and make changes in public policy.

## **7. Are there any other lessons you have learnt about how to effectively leverage change?**

This is the future – a small budget, work focussed on policy advocacy, partners implementing, not us. If we stick to implementing, what is the difference between us and a local NGO? The reason we can convene others is our credibility and knowledge, but also our international brand. Before meetings, people look up Oxfam and when they see what we are doing, it gives them confidence. It also matters that as Oxfam we are not vulnerable to pressure, whereas a local NGO might be.

Crucial to this whole process is transparency. We do not have a political agenda. We tell people what they want to know. We are honest.

The new programme approach of multi-stakeholder engagement in water and sanitation policy has challenges. For example, actors can oppose changes or affect the mandate or powers of certain bodies. There are always winners and losers and the losers try to push back by any means they can. Some ministers get frustrated and hamper the process. We deal with this on a case-by-case basis – we have to be patient and diplomatic. By creating forums to tackle contentious issues, the programme has been able to function well. Risk management is key.

At a policy level, building on existing legislation, such as the shelved Water Law, can be a faster route to achieving change. But what did not work was when the water bill was passed, we submitted a policy paper on improving ownership – this was seen as us trying to change the law as soon as it had been passed. In addition, good research and relevant facts (e.g. on permit procedures) can create conditions for policy change.

The government is enthusiastic about this work. They went to the World Water Forum in Marseilles and talked about this project and their experience in 'reforming the drinking water sub-sector'. So it is good for them; they get credit. The government has now agreed to co-fund the water infrastructure programme with 30 per cent of the capital costs coming from the government and 70 per cent from SDC channelled via Oxfam. The first constructions are being built now and will be handed over to communities for service provision.

Going forward, there is a need to form an exit strategy to ensure that the network continues without our support and remains sustainable. Exiting the network has been tricky – we thought it could evolve into a local NGO or be picked up by the government but so far, this has not happened and we still need to be there.

Now we are trying to use the same approach to create a similar network for our work in the area of economic development. And we are already using this approach with our work on resilience in the humanitarian sector. Until last year, we were organizing and training village committees but, as with water, we found the sustainability of these local-level initiatives was at risk because they were not connected to an overall system. So we looked at the system and the gaps and we have been advocating for a legislative and institutional response system, including space for civil society. The European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) has funded this work – we warned them that their previous funding was at risk of creating isolated islands outside the system. The government is also engaged in this work, with staff from civil defence managing the network.

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This case study was written by Ghazi Al Kilani, Country Director, Tajikistan, and Caroline Berger, Regional Information and Communications Officer. It is part of a series of papers and reports written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

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