

# Collaboration or collision course? NGO/government partnership in Tanzania

by Julie Jarman and Catherine Johnson

**NGOs equate government with red tape, while government officials don't always take NGO initiatives seriously. These attitudes need revising, say Julie Jarman and Catherine Johnson, because 'the dynamic, participatory approach of NGOs, and the resources and long-term mandate of government are equally essential to achieving the goal of water and sanitation for all.'**

NGOs OFTEN CONSIDER government organizations inherently unsuited to community-based development work. Governments are typically perceived as bureaucratic and inflexible, using inappropriate working practices and lacking empathy with poor communities. Similarly, governments are frequently frustrated by NGOs, finding them unco-operative, amateurish and anarchic. But the collaboration between the Tanzanian Government and WaterAid illustrates that NGO/government partnerships can promote community management successfully.

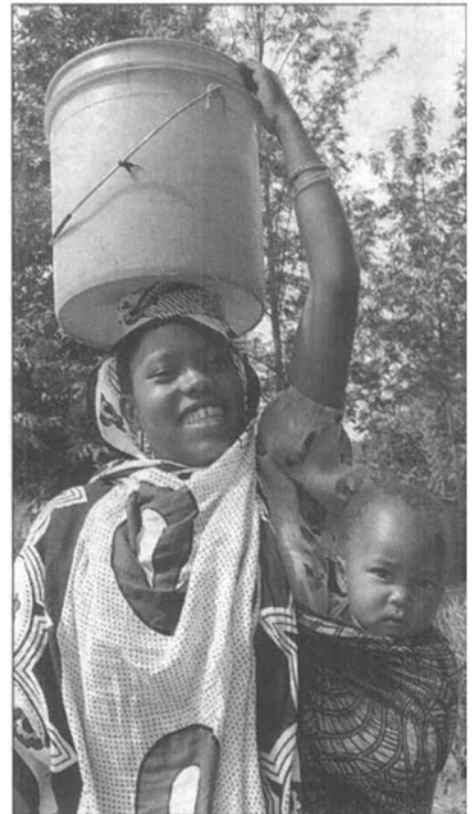
## Partnership in Dodoma

Tanzania has 25 administrative regions. Each region has departments represent-

and least developed, with most of the population reliant on subsistence agriculture. It has over 400 villages, varying in size from about 1500 to 5000 people. Some are inhabited by one ethnic group, other villages are mixed. Although some people are cattle-keepers and have wealth in the form of their herds, they too live at a subsistence level.

WaterAid is a UK-based NGO which supports local organizations in Africa and Asia to help poor communities improve their drinking-water, sanitation, and hygiene. It began working with the Dodoma Water Department in 1989, initially providing technical training and funds for the physical improvement of village water supplies.

In 1991, after consultation with



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*Now, Tanzanian villagers have a say in their country's water policy.*

shifting responsibility for operation and management from the Government to the villages. Communities establish water committees and collect water funds to pay for the recurrent costs of their water supply.

To try and implement this radical change in policy, WaterAid and the Dodoma Water Department established, over a period of 18 months, fieldwork teams for each of the four districts of the region. Each team has four to six members, both men and women, who are government employees assigned from each of the Departments of Water, Health and Community Development. These district teams have become the most essential part of the water and sanitation programme, providing the link between the villages and the government system. The teams explain the National Water Policy to villagers and help them decide if they want a project. The type of water project depends on the water resources available but is, typically, a simple gravity-flow system, a number of shallow wells, or a single deep borehole. Each project also has hygiene education and sanitation components. The district teams involve the community in project planning and implementation



WaterAid/Caroline Penn

*Mbabala, Dodoma. Koletta Chiwanga fills a gourd while Margaret Mpalanga fills a bucket from a traditional water source.*

ing the national ministries at local level, such as health and water. Dodoma is one of the driest regions of the country, and also one of the poorest

bilateral donors, the Tanzanian Government produced a National Water Policy. This advocates a community-based approach to rural water supply,

and assist them in preparing for long-term operation and maintenance. Once the project is completed, the team carries out regular follow-up visits to support the community management of the water-supply system.

This approach has proved extremely successful. In the first three years, 88 community-managed water projects

fieldwork teams were established, their remit was gradually broadened by the fieldworkers themselves to the point where they now have a major role in managing the entire project cycle, including donor funding. WaterAid initially stressed the importance of a participatory approach to working with communities, but the methods and

has evolved in response to the needs and ideas of the communities.

Participatory programme development is, inevitably, a slow process, with few tangible outputs in the initial stages. This lack of outputs initially led the fieldworkers to feel that their hard work was not appreciated by their government managers. One fieldworker said 'If they came with us to the villages more often instead of sitting in their offices they would see how we eat dust (work hard).'

### Training and motivating fieldworkers

At first, the government fieldworkers lacked community-development skills and were reluctant to visit the villages; they needed training and motivation.

The most important aspect of their training has been on the job, in the villages. WaterAid colleagues accompanied the district teams on their field visits to help them develop their communication skills and make effective use of participatory techniques. Working for long hours together in the field has helped to establish a group identity amongst the members of each team, and the close working relationship between government and NGO field staff has fostered a sense of commitment to the programme.

After about a year's practical fieldwork experience, the teams attended a three-week course in participatory methods. This led to regular six-

were completed and, between them, held US\$45 000 of village water funds. Dodoma went from having the lowest number of water committees in the country to the highest. Five years on, many government staff involved in the programme continue to be enthusiastic and committed to their work. Officials from other regions have visited the programme to study its methods, and more international donors have started to fund water and sanitation projects in Dodoma through the district fieldwork teams.

The programme's success to date rests on three key areas; a participatory approach, competent and committed fieldworkers, and sound project implementation. Its continued success depends on ensuring it is sustainable within the government system. Whilst there is a great deal of overlap between these areas, specific factors have led to success in each individual case.

### Developing a participatory programme

The programme did not follow a pre-determined plan, but has developed organically out of the ideas and activities of the government staff and their NGO colleagues. Once the district

training workshops used in the villages have been developed jointly by the fieldworkers and their WaterAid



Tanzanians meet to discuss their water-supply needs. Officials' input and response to villagers' initiatives should be the norm, not the exception.

colleagues. The teams plan and monitor their own work through monthly meetings attended by their departmental heads. This bottom-up participatory approach to developing and managing the programme greatly empowers and motivates the government staff involved, and also means that the work

monthly meetings attended by all the district teams together. These meetings are used for further training sessions, as a forum to debate policy and implementation issues, and to solve problems collectively.

Training has given the fieldworkers practical community-development



Programmes should develop organically — this PRA village mapping in Kikilo Kati was developed jointly by fieldworkers and their WaterAid colleagues.

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skills, built strong teams, and helped foster a sense of commitment. But their motivation comes mainly from their full involvement in all aspects of the programme. Most importantly of all, their behaviour in the field has changed. They are now willing to listen to villagers and are able to gain their trust. One of the fieldworkers commented that, in the past, Water Department engineers designed village water schemes in their offices and kept the plans locked up in their desks, but now even the old ladies can draw the layout of their water project with a stick in the dust. In short, once the fieldworkers were themselves listened to and empowered, they, in turn, were prepared to work respectfully and participatorily with villagers. Getting credit for the success of their community work has helped to sustain their motivation.

### Implementing community-managed projects

A fully functioning water scheme is essential to justify the villagers' hard work, and persuade them to continue contributing to the community management of the project. Technical training, to help achieve sustainability ranges from seminars, on topics such as sanitation technologies, to on-site discussions of construction work in progress. The programme has also put considerable effort into establishing a government-run system to train and supervise volunteer maintenance technicians. This system includes running a shop in each district where water com-



WaterAid/Sean Hudson

*Training in pump-engine maintenance (above) — a system that does not function fully and sustainably is a waste of both government funding and the villagers' efforts (below, left).*

water committees are chosen by the villagers to manage the water project, experience has taught the fieldworkers the importance of also involving the village council. Otherwise, these established and powerful local leaders can undermine the water committee and subvert the project to serve their own interests. In several villages, water committees who had collected large water funds were unilaterally dismissed by the chairman of the village council who then installed his friends so they could 'loan' him the funds.

### Making the programme sustainable

Initially, the programme needed a certain degree of freedom from government bureaucracy to develop its innovative approach, and to experiment with different methods of working with communities. This was provided by the presence of the WaterAid team who had control over the major portion of programme funding. Both the government staff and their WaterAid colleagues knew, however, that the programme had to become fully integrated within the normal government system for it to continue in the long-term. It was essential to wait until the programme was well established, and then to integrate it into the government system slowly and carefully so that the participatory, field-led approach was not lost.

Although some government managers supported the programme from

the outset, many were initially sceptical of its approach. As the programme became visibly successful such attitudes began to change. Senior officials became more interested and involved as the programme started to produce outputs which met their departmental goals, such as latrine improvements which are a Ministry of Health target. Interest expressed by other regions and at the national level has also helped to give the programme approach credibility.

Only the more enthusiastic officials were involved at the outset but, as the programme developed, management systems were established, such as channelling donor funding entirely through the government system. This institutionalization requires senior officials to be involved systematically as part of their normal work. The fieldworkers were fully consulted about the programme formalization. Together with their proven success, this has enabled them to ensure that they retain a major role in managing the programme and can continue to respond to community needs.

### Lessons

The partnership between the Dodoma Regional government and WaterAid has proved extremely fruitful for both organizations. The basic approach of NGO-government co-operation is not uncommon in Tanzania, but the degree of success at the community level and the motivation of the fieldworkers is unusual.

Economic conditions in Tanzania suggest that the Dodoma government departments are likely to continue to need external funding for their water and sanitation programme. The



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mittees can buy spare parts at cost price.

Apart from training maintenance technicians, all other aspects of preparing villagers for community management are undertaken by the fieldwork teams. This includes a series of workshops for water committees and village councils to learn about their respective roles and responsibilities. Whilst the

programme is now attracting such funding from other, larger, donors through its ability to implement community-managed projects. WaterAid's financial contribution is, therefore, gradually decreasing, as is its role in other areas. It is slowly withdrawing professional support in engineering and community development, and reducing assistance in the procurement of equipment and materials. Eventually WaterAid will simply monitor the use of any funds it continues to provide.



Paul Weinberg/Panos Pictures

## Compromise

It should be stressed that the NGO-government partnership has required considerable patience and hard work by all involved, and also has needed a sustained and substantial level of financial commitment from both organizations (WaterAid in the form of programme funding, and the Government in the allocation of significant numbers of staff). Tensions continue to arise, from using a participatory, bottom-up approach within a rigid, hierarchical system. For example, the Health Department adheres to rigorous national standards for latrines. This conflicts with the fieldwork teams' preferred approach of discussing with villagers simple, step-by-step improvements in their sanitation. Compromise on both sides has reduced this tension. The fieldworkers have agreed to collect data for the Health Department on the

numbers of 'satisfactory' and 'unsatisfactory' latrines in villages, whilst obtaining the more detailed information that they require for incremental improvements. Complying with the Health Department's reporting requirements has paved the way for discussions about broadening the range of sanitation technologies used.

Analysis of the WaterAid and Dodoma regional government experience suggests that partnership between NGOs and government organizations to promote community management should be possible in other situations, provided that the following pre-conditions exist:

- national policy permits a community-based approach;
- the government organization makes some fieldworkers available;
- at least one senior official is prepared to support a community-based approach;
- the NGO has sufficient resources to sustain its contribution to the partnership;
- NGO staff are prepared to prioritize community-development work;
- both organizations are prepared to be patient for outputs; and
- at least one of the organizations has substantial community-development expertise.

The Dodoma success stems from the full involvement of the government field staff in the development of the programme approach. Whilst the general approach can be replicated, the details cannot; there is no definitive blueprint for participatory programmes.

## A valuable partnership

There are many advantages to involving government in the promotion of community management. It has a unique mandate to provide services systematically throughout the area for which it is responsible, and can achieve a level of coverage rarely manageable by any other agency. Lessons learned in one area of the country can inform policy and lead to replication nationally. Governments have the potential to provide sustained long-term support to community-managed projects, both through follow-up visits to water committees and technical support of maintenance volunteers. Government staff are likely to have the authority to resolve conflict between village councils and water committees. Most governments have many under-utilized resources, such as trained staff and equipment, which can be put to work effectively with relatively small external inputs of funding and technical support.

Only international NGOs are likely to be able to offer funding to government partners. But both international and local NGOs have attributes which complement government strengths. NGOs typically have energy and enthusiasm; they are generally flexible, innovative and responsive. They are usually committed to community-based approaches and have staff skilled in participatory techniques; and local NGOs almost always have close relations with individual communities.

NGOs and government should be more willing to take up the challenge of partnership. NGO dynamism and community orientation may be the key needed to unlock government's enormous potential to promote community management.

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