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**PAR outcomes Nyakerato in Kenya**

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**• Introduction**

The Nyakerato River has a source on Ibencho Hill, and the river stretches as far as the eye can see. The Abatabori clan lives west of this river and has to walk up the hill to fetch water, a burden that caused them to initiate the Nyakerato gravity scheme. A small group of families requested a cover to protect their existing spring. The engineers suggested adding an underground pipeline with public taps down hill to increase the number of water users .

The Nyakerato community has water from springs, a shallow well (broken down long ago), a protected spring and the gravity scheme. Many people wish to get service from the piped gravity scheme, even when they live on higher ground that can not be reached by the gravity pipelines. This issue has not been addressed sufficiently and people are not properly educated about its implications. Hence you find people living higher than the

water source, contributing money and time to the management of the water system in the vain hope that one day they too will be considered to be connected. They do not realise that water will never flow up hill. It is interesting to note that whereas these people living on higher ground gave money and time to the gravity scheme, they neglected a shallow well that had been built on their plateau to give them some source of water.

On the sloping hills of Nyakerato, in Kisii District in Kenya, a trumpet is blown and people stream from all directions to attend the meeting. The District Officer has sent a message that he will come to the area to resolve a water conflict. The 'Abakione' clan of the Ogembo division crouch on their side of the meeting. The 'Abatabori' clan of South Mugirango constituency hurry up the steep hill, stumbling over the rocky boulders in their path. Soon all are gathered, each clan crouching on their own side of the arena like lions ready to pounce on each other.

**Figure 1. The magic of the Nyakerato meeting in Kenya (Photo: M. Lammerink)**



## • The 'magic' of the Nyakerato meeting

Women in colourful dresses sit behind the men of their clans, some with their children still strapped to their backs, talking in low voices and whispers. Many times these two clans have met in this arena to discuss issues of water. Many meetings have ended in disarray, each clan not willing to give in to the other. There is an air of anxiety.

'How can the 'Abatabori' clan take all our water?' burst the 'Abakione' clan, who live on the high ground, where the Nyakerato spring, the source of the gravity scheme, starts. The government has tried to pacify the 'Abakione' clan by providing a shallow well, but this has proved ineffective in quenching the fury of the people living on the hill. They feel cheated and robbed. The shallow well only worked for 2 months. Their anger is unquenchable: 'They ask us to dig trenches for a gravity scheme, why didn't the engineers tell us that gravity will never serve us as we live higher than the source?', one of the villagers asked. The bitterness of the people of Ibencho hill is deep. They see themselves as having been used as labourers without pay.

The PAR team arrive, one walking with a few women, talking and laughing and the other member staying behind with a few old men, also talking and feeling at home. They sit down with the people on the grass. This surprises the Chiefs and DOs, who ask why they are not sitting with them on the 'high table' which has been reserved for them. The members of the team are happy where they are, and say they are part of the community. 'Order!' bursts the officiating District Officer. 'Order!' There is hushed silence. He starts to talk: 'Ladies and gentlemen, we are gathered here today to talk about your water supply. Could we have suggestions on how to resolve the conflict between the two clans? Between those living on the hill and those living on the slopes'. The District Officer Ogembo stands up to talk. The Kisii District Water Engineer gives his speech. The people only stare, as though looking at some distant object, hidden from their sight. Sitting day-dreaming, no response, no movement. There is a road block. The people are afraid to talk; they fear being

victimised, they fear being labelled black sheep in their respective clans or areas, the hills and the slopes. It is stalemate.

The PAR team takes the stage amidst the people, and starts by telling them a story and making a few jokes to break the ice, and people start laughing. 'We have worked together for many months, we have visited your homes, we know that your women walk through steep rocky paths to fetch water. Those who live on the hills were involved in digging trenches. Digging trenches hoping to have water they have not received and will never do from the Nyakerato gravity scheme. YES! your bitterness is understandable'.

The mood starts to change, as people slowly respond and start to ask questions. The District Officers, District Water Engineer, Chiefs and Assistant Chiefs have a surprised look on their faces. Women start moving closer to men showing interest and they too start to ask questions. A lot of people ask irrelevant questions, but they are tolerated and brought back to the subject by the PAR team. At times, the two clans are almost fighting with words, but that, too, is allowed to continue to let the steam out. They are all accepted as they are.

Today the District Officers, District Water Engineer, BKH, (Bongaerts, Kuyper and Huisward Adviesbureau - the Dutch engineering consultancy firm active in this region) and the PAR team have come to hear the cries of the oppressed. Oppressed by nature, oppressed by the steep hills, oppressed by the rocky paths, yes! The government officers are here, not to seek trouble, but to bring a new birth to Nyakerato. The Swahili saying goes 'Ajuae uchungu wa mwana, mzazi' (the pain of giving birth is only known by the one who gives birth). The meeting resolves that there will be three new water committees, each representing their own area, and one central water committee. The District Officer then suggests how the elections for the members of the committees will be conducted, but the PAR team says that the community itself should decide. The PAR team then facilitates the elections.

The Nyakerato community was the slowest in perceiving the need for looking into management issues in the PAR project. Like in

the other PAR communities, men took the lead. Physical improvements were easily accepted, while leaders were manipulating everything to their own advantage. The earlier water committee was more inclined to be accountable to the donor agency than to the community. Focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were extensively used during general community meetings. Village walks, observation and village maps were used to identify and understand the community context within which the system operated. Membership was mainly by clans and not by the ability to benefit from the improved water system. Transects were used to map out the gravity pipelines, while the exchange visit between the four communities participating in the PAR project: Nyakerato, Sigomere, Kiveetyo and Yanthooko provided impetus and motivation for the whole community to get involved in the PAR project (see Box 1). The local administration of Nyakerato was stimulated when they realised that in Sigomere, their counterparts played a significant role in the management of the water

system without interfering. The other actors, especially the government departments, are now interested in advising and guiding community management in Nyakerato. In the past, the chairman took all the time trying to convince people on why it was important to get involved, yet he gave them no opportunity to contribute ideas on how to improve the management. Currently, he spends most time in meetings allowing and obtaining views rather than instructing people. This has increased motivation, mutual respect and commitment of the community. Ownership is taking root, operation and maintenance is receiving funds by way of monthly water tariffs. Now the people have a view to what the functions of the committee and each of the offices are, both the roles, obligations and skills and attributes required. The local Research Assistants ('Bell Ringers') in Nyakerato undertook a door to door campaign educating the community on the role and responsibilities of the community and the water committee.

#### BOX 1

##### **RESULT OF THE EXCHANGE VISITS BETWEEN VILLAGES INVOLVED IN PAR**

The Kenyan PAR team asked the Sigomere management team to allow one person from Kiveetyo, Yanthooko and Nyakerato to attend the annual general meeting. These communities were impressed with the large turnout of the Sigomere community. In Sigomere the constitution has been reviewed and was planned for adoption by the annual general meeting. Due to a heavy agenda, some items were deferred to a special general meeting to be convened later by the new management committee, which was elected at the annual meeting. The community appreciated the guidance of the PAR team because, as they said, the constitution enhances fair and free participation as 'Kwa mjibu wa sheria' (rule of law). For the three community members from Kiveetyo, Yanthooko and Nyakerato, the meeting provided an impetus to develop and finalise their own constitutions.

In Kiveetyo, the management committee redrafted its constitution, which will be reviewed in the near future by the general membership. In Yanthooko, the constitution was redrafted and is awaiting endorsement by the general membership. In Nyakerato the roles, responsibilities and obligations of the partners in the improved water system were defined. This resulted in the identification of three subcommunities: Nyakerato 'A' gravity, to serve lower Kiagware sublocation, Nyakerato 'C', to serve lower Sengera sublocation, and Nyakerato 'B', a shallow well to serve upper Kiagware and upper Sengera. The two upper subcommunities now have a shallow well. The three subcommunities have each elected a management committee, from which central management committee members are elected. The subcommunities have mandated their committees to draft a constitution that clearly defines the terms 'member', 'community' and 'user'. Emphasis is on the subcommunities, where ownership of the systems is vested. The whole process has been a major breakthrough in the understanding by the Nyakerato community of 'who's who' with respect to the water supply improvement within their community.

**Figure 2. Participatory diagnosis around a public standpost (Photo: M. Lammerink)**

They stressed that the communities should pay for the proper running of the water supply. The committee should regularly show how the money was used.

In the past, when the small gravity water scheme was constructed, the agency asked the communities involved to elect a 'water committee consisting of a chairman, secretary and treasurer'. However, most of those people elected to fulfill these positions were not very clear on their own roles and functions or that of the water committee. The same situation happened in all communities involved in PAR. During the participatory diagnosis, it became clear that this was one of the main management problems of the water committees. Then the PAR team facilitated training sessions, one for all chairmen, one for all secretaries and one for all treasurers. They also organised a workshop with the water committee officials from all four communities. The treasurers received their training in Nyakerato, to which the local research team and the Area Assistant Chief were also invited. This practical training was most revealing to the Nyakerato (A) treasurer. He had insisted on being treasurer, despite his inability to read or write. The community had elected a new treasurer, yet the old treasurer refused to hand over. Both attended this treasurers' meeting, at the end of which the illiterate treasurer agreed to hand over to the new treasurer. The PAR team acted merely as a catalyst in this process.

#### • **PAR outcomes**

*Attitude change/recognition of roles.* The exchange visits helped reflection of the Nyakerato community. Comparing their situation with that of the other communities, the women in Nyakerato are now getting more involved. The community has opened up, is much more co-operative, reflective and assertive, and they are trying a new management strategy. Ownership is greatly enhanced, fighting for recognition reduced, while the roles of the water office are starting to be understood.

*Improved leadership skills.* Conflict and fighting is reduced, and people are starting to see the 'common' good. The chairman is taking up challenges in his office, while the illiterate treasurer has allowed another one to take over office after a protracted resistance. The secretary had to accept that he is not equal to the community, a view he had tenaciously held on to.

*Improved communication.* The attendance in meetings of the combined areas of Nyakerato has improved significantly, as well as in the respective zones (A, B, C). People come to meetings on time and the agenda is sufficiently focused. This aspect has been enhanced due to increased information sharing, especially feedback from those who have gone for

training. The selection of trainees has been done at the general meetings, thus the community is enabled to demand feedback and accountability from their trainees. Meetings are called by way of invitation by letter and announcements in schools and other strategic places like shopping centres, health clinics, churches or other public gatherings. Information is sufficiently tailored, e.g. for a meeting of zone A, B or C, or a combination of the subcommittees, and is made specific to members attending.

Information sharing between the committee and the community in way of well-written minutes and books of accounts are regularly made available to the members through general meetings. The local chief, especially the one of Kiaware sub-location, is actively involved in the running of the water scheme by way of support, advice and sometimes arbitration in the water supply. Whereas in the past, leaders kept information to themselves, they now share this with their respective communities, and this has greatly enhanced honesty and reduced lies significantly. The number of community members who are ignorant of the needs and operations of the water supply in the three zones has reduced significantly. However, Nyakerato C has still more work to do to improve accountability and transparency. The current chairman needs to appreciate more the need for making informed choices by the community and not just by a handful of supporters.

*Better record keeping.* Minutes of meetings are kept and agreed in subsequent meetings. This is enhancing consistency, transparency and an increased level of knowledge and information in the community. At the same time, financial accounting is made more systematic (see Box 2). Attempts have been made to do annual budgets. Auditing of books of accounts is now seen as normal and acceptable.

## BOX 2

**EXPERIMENTING WITH RECORD KEEPING**

In Yanthooko, the committee treasurer gained confidence in her financial management abilities. She now keeps her records up to date and shares them with members on a regular basis, at least once a month. The effect was increased confidence among members, who have in turn been paying their contributions on time. Minutes of meetings are now kept, and are helping to reduce repeated deliberations on the same issues. This has reduced the length of meetings, which has greatly improved the attendance.

In Sigomere, the records of water production and sale revealed huge losses of revenue in the past. Actions are being taken to address this mismanagement. In Kiveetyo, the treasurer kept her financial books haphazardly, causing ripples in the management. The PAR team took time to discuss this with the management committee in order to improve the accountability of the management committee to the membership. In Nyakerato, greater scrutiny of records has ascertained the contributions of each of the subcommunities. Each has been credited with their respective contributions and advised to open separate bank accounts.

*Diminishing dependency.* Implicit obedience and complacency is rapidly diminishing in Nyakerato. People have realised that project funds and assistance are not provided as a favour from government extension staff, but as a voted and budgeted right. They have and demand a right to be informed of what the project is expected to accomplish, materials given to the project as well as their obligations. They now realise that it is not only digging trenches that is their role, but they also own the project. Nyakerato A has endeavoured to contribute Kshs. 300 (US\$ 5) per member to contribute to the amount of required capital for extension of the water system. Nyakerato (combined) is the only of the four communities in which the PAR team has been working that is trying out a management organisation that has autonomous committees, one each for Nyakerato A, B, C and a central committee. The community is now demanding that the committees account for what was given to them. Misdeeds, especially misappropriation of materials, has been cited and dealt with. Those responsible have been identified and cautioned against such future misdemeanors.

*Reorganisation of management structures.* Nyakerato has been reorganised into three distinct zones: Nyakerato A, B and C. Nyakerato is a gravity serving the eastern slopes of Ibencho, Nyakerato B is a shallow well serving those above the gravity scheme, while Nyakerato C is the second gravity line serving the eastern slopes of Ibencho hill. Each of these has now a separate management committee. A central committee to cover the gravity source up to the first tank was also formed, in order to co-ordinate the affairs of the gravity that are not specific to each of the lines.

Each of these committees is in the process of developing rules, regulations and their respective constitutions. The Nyakerato A, B and C committees each have a bank account. In its training, the PAR project laid emphasis in clearly defining and understanding by all community members of the need, the role, the responsibilities and obligations of the water committee, each of the office bearers, and the whole community as a means of demanding and providing accountability.

#### • **Reflections on limitations of community management**

It is disheartening to note that the agencies in the past constructed improved water systems in total disregard of any existing traditional sources and indigenous management systems. This causes conflict and puts the improved water system at variance with established community water management regimes.

Furthermore, the concept of membership, users and ownership were vaguely determined. Thus, in Nyakerato, community persons who live on top of the hill were elected to the management committee of the gravity scheme, although it did not reach them. Their main

agenda was to propagate for a share of the gravity scheme, which was technically impossible. In that situation, the interest and functioning of the committee is half hearted. Also, where the gravity system is possible, people that were elected for the management committee were way out of the area to be served in the near future. Therefore each delegate in the committee had, as his first priority, not the management of the water scheme, but the soliciting for extension to cover his area, without any regard to the physical limitation of the system.

Nyakerato and certain organisations, including NETWAS and the Regional Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation project (RDWSSP), have reached a common understanding on clearly delineating roles of each of the actors involved: agencies, the community water committee and the community. The District Water Engineer, South Kisii, is in support of the community efforts in Nyakerato. The National Reference Group, which guided the PAR project, also learned from it and has provided support. In a recent visit they gave valuable advice. It must be stated that the water committee has to address the physical limitations of the system and extend the system to serve the needy cases. For this, the PAR team needs to address itself and see how together with the community the donors can be convinced to help get new locally managed systems into Nyakerato.

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