# WASH Councils and Community Based Mechanisms

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Research Paper

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**Abstract**

The paper examines the performance of WASH councils as actors, power relations, socio-institutional dynamics, and context in supplying water in Kvemo Kartli municiplities. Using a preliminary survey, key-informant interviews, focus groups, secondary data, and insights from the community-based mechanisms (CBM) literature and common-pool resources (CPR) theory, the paper argues that WASH improvements can be implemented in the context of power plays, participation and empowerment.

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# Chapter One; Introduction

Lack of access to water sources is a growing problem throughout the world. Coupled with the effects of climate change, the water bodies suitable for exploitation in terms of water filtering and human use are ever regressing (Luo et al, 2019). Even though the adoption of the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), which was followed up upon by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), many countries and communities still lack access to clean water as we are still experiencing the loss of ecosystem services not only in the water sector but in many other areas as well (Seager, 2010; Vorosmarty et al, 2018)

Huge populations in various areas of the world are relying on polluted water as their single water source. Such water access increases health risks that cannot be borne by the poor as well as it can become very costly for governments as well, who are responsible for containing any possible epidemic outbreaks, cleaning up pollution, not to mention increasing mortality rates that can hinder the country’s economic output (Williams, 2013).

In peri-urban areas, where the lack of access to water is challenged by additional barriers such as undeveloped water infrastructure affecting water provision services, uncertain land tenure rights, populations stricken by poverty, WASH becomes even more inaccessible (Bartram, 2010).

In addition, due to high investment risks and low probabilities on cost recovery, the

Governments and utility providers abstain from infrastructural developments in the poor periurban areas and cherry pick large cities and rich neighborhoods where the return on investments can be high (Bakker, 2013). With such landscape, the focus has been turned to Non governmental organizations (NGOs), public-private partnerships (PPPs) and water users to establish various types of partnerships that often times focus on the creation of informal institutions and/or local action groups (LAGs). However, such partnerships that entail community mobilization have been most effective in rural areas, where the PPPs are not very effective due to many reasons (logistics, insufficient funds, etc) (Dressler et al., 2010;).

Even though there are many studies on the community based mechanisms and how informal institutions can be achieved (World Bank, 2006) in rural areas, there is less focus on how these mechanisms and local action groups can achieve the facilitation of water provision services (Matson, 2014).

Georgia, gaining independence in 1991 from the Soviet Union, broke off from a 70-year socialist rule, where a top down, centralized decision-making was the only system that governed all soviet republics. The state was the owner of all natural resources, including water (Mukhin and Kryvda, 1976). Following such an inherited institutional and governance tradition, now independent Georgia faced challenges of transitioning to democracy and open market economy. The country was confronted with numerous hurdles: corrupt institutions, insufficient information on natural resources, low institutional capacities, lack of research in water sector and public participation in community based mechanisms, etc. In addition, Georgia’s willingness to politically associate and economically integrate with the EU through gradual approximation aimed at the EU membership, led to the changes in the legal framework of the country, causing numerous fluctuations within the communities that had to abide to the rising costs of communal payments.

Currently, unsustainable resource use is one of the most challenging issues in Georgia. Coupled with centralized governance systems and insufficient funds, natural resource depletion (partly due to climate change) causes economic losses for the country (Inasaridze, 2013), with dangers of complete ecosystem service disappearance in some areas. In this sense, good or sustainable resource governance is characterized with interactions between organizations, people, resource management, instruments, etc. (Kishor and Kenneth, 2012), where institutional settings on various levels of interaction are embedded within transparent legal framework, followed by decentralized decision making (Mislimshoeva et.al 2014).

The objective of this paper is to examine how the formed WASH councils from local stakeholders of the republic of Georgia facilitate the implementation of water and sanitary pilot projects within their communities. The stakeholders that the WASH councils include are the

Schoolteachers, Municipality representatives as well as community leaders and NGO employees. As Agrawal,2001 and Dressler et al., 2010 state, implementing community based mechanisms in local communities more often than not, fail to succeed as the power play within the communities is uneven, resulting the more strong capturing the majority of resources or directing the development strategies to their own, personal benefits (Ahlers and Zwarteveen, 2009). What is more, failures can be attributed to other reasons, such as political elitist interventions, inadequate incentives that lower the interests of the communities to participate, insufficient attention to power dynamics within the communities as well as the mistake of perceiving a community as a single entity, disregarding the multiple social layers that operate within (Wilson, 2013).

## Problem Statement

Community based mechanisms in rural areas have been crucial to achieve the desired resource allocation results and/or form formal or informal institutions to attain a certain level of community livelihoods. Considering the lack of funds and infrastructure in developing countries, community action groups created on the basis of community based mechanisms have been critical.

However, when the community groups are met with the challenges that are concerned with water distribution, sanitation and hygiene, power plays can be seen both within the groups as well as between the groups and the local governments that does not guarantee fair distribution of resources. If such circumstances were to be removed, WASH project implementation via communities would have been much more effective.

## Research Objective

The objective of this paper is to examine how the formed WASH councils from local stakeholders of the republic of Georgia facilitate the implementation of water and sanitary pilot projects within their communities.

To achieve the overall objective, the research will focus on the following sub-objectives:

* Examine WASH Council Responsibilities
* Examine community based mechanisms
* Examine the WASH projects implemented by the WASH Councils

## Justification and Rationale

The paper qualitatively addresses the WASH council formation and is to assist project managers and/or WASH proponents in successfully designing WASH community groups who are to carry out various activities on the ground, whether it be infrastructural projects, lobbying and advocacy or awareness raising campaigns.

## Scope and Limitation

The paper is limited to the data collected only from four municipalities of Georgia (Dmanisi, Tetritskaro, Marneuli, Tsalka), where each of the municipalities had only one WASH council (Four WASH Councils in total). In total, there are 67 municipalities in Georgia. All four WASH councils faced similar problems – lack of access to water and respectively, poor sanitary environment. In addition, the councils had no ethnical diversity.

# Chapter two; Literature review

## Common Pool Resources

Studies on Common-pool resources (CPR) theory have a strong impact on institutional dynamics, arguing that open access causes the tragedy of the commons (Hardin, 1968). Ostrom (1990), proposes the establishment of robust institutions whether formal, or informal, that regulate resource use in such manner that defend the resources from over exploitation, whether be it public or private organizations. As the legal rights over resources are given and the incentives are well perceived, the hypothesis continues to state that the users understand the costs and benefits of resource exploitation local resource users are likely to invest time and energy to collectively manage common-pool resources sustainably (Ostrom et al., 1999). What is more, Wade (1988) and Ostrom (1990) argue about the design principles that are important for the creation of successful community based governance systems. The core design principles are largely effective, improving the efficacy of many kinds of community groups (Cox et al., 2010; Wilson et al. 2013)

## Sustainability and the Markets

What is more, according to Daly (1996), leaving ecological sustainability to market forces will have detrimental impact on the environment, as businesses focuses on profit maximization. Similar thing happened in Georgia, when in 2004 Georgia plunged into neo-liberalism, to “westernize” the state by blindly emulating Western economic models. This unfortunately resulted in leaving stakeholders aside and focusing on short-term gains, neglecting environmental factors (Eradze, 2014).

## Community Based Mechanisms

Therefore, in such an environment as described above, having community based mechanisms (CBM) placed within the local communities can achieve a number of benefits such as efficiently manage common resources without overspending or overexploiting and producing environmental and social benefits as the resource exploitation costs and benefits are well internalized within the local governing bodies (Ostrom, 1990; Chambers, 1997; Blaikie, 2006; Nelson and Agrawal, 2008). CBM’s essential component is the implementation of the monitoring activities carried out by the community representatives. Monitoring is to prevent and/or mitigate the free riding behavior among the communities and increase the community empowerment, efficiency, equity and reduce the occurrence of social injustices (Chambers, 1997; Blaikie, 2006).

The CBM mechanism has become popular in the water governance sector as the community governance systems offers an alternative to the failing public and/or private water supply (Ferguson et al., 2005). The water supply agencies that lack funds for water delivery externalize their water costs to the users (ibid).

However, in the developing world. there are still many challenges and unknowns in the community based management related to water resources even though the community organizations show much promise (Adams, 2015).

The paper seeks to understand how water governance related community organizations seek to adapt and self organize in the rural areas of Georgia.

You are supposed to present this information using subtopics which are a reflection of the research objectives

## Theoretical Framework

An institution, as North (2005) states, is the rules of the game in a society. Institutions set a mode of operation between humans and environment and interact with other, already existing, formal and informal institutions (Corbera and Brown, 2008).It limits freedom of actions of individuals and communities to a certain extent within the institutional framework. Agents operating in the institutions will always seek to adapt to new exogenous circumstances, but it does not mean an efficient equilibrium will be achieved (Crouch and Farrell, 2004).

Path dependence (Ostrom, 2000; Greener, 2005) or path creation (Schneiberg, 2006) is a general theoretical framework to analyze institutional change. More specifically, path dependence suggests that in circumstances where various equilibria can exist, the early choices will determine the equilibria and affect the future. It is a theory which assumes that inefficient institutional settings can be stable and repetitive, where processes that had been initially started, even when ceasing to produce effective choices and advances, keep going on as the opportunity cost of changing the institutional path is too high for the actors to bear, therefore, nothing is changed (Crouch and Farrell, 2004). However, institutions themselves provide adaptation possibilities and coordination mechanisms, affecting the path trajectories (Pierson, 2000). Path dependency identifies how institutional processes respond to new challenge they face (Crouch and Farrell, 2004). Path dependence theory explains why inefficient institutions are durable, compared to economic theories where economically rational actors would lead to efficient institutions (Pierson, 2000).

Institutional changes in Georgia are mainly motivated by the country’s aspiration for joining the western institutions. For examining Georgia’s forest institutions, the paper applies path dependence theoretical framework to understand how current water related problems are embedded within the former Soviet rule and how, after the independence, with open market economy knocking at the door and new actors and social layers starting to emerge, the inherited “traditions” still continued to affect the current community management.

The above-mentioned theoretical framework of path dependence (or path creation) is beneficial for analyzing the developments in the Georgian water sector.

# Chapter Three; Methodology

## Study site

Georgia is located in the South Caucasus, bordering Russia, the Black Sea, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Armenia. The total area of the country comprises 6,949,400 ha. Accroding to the Green Alternative (2015), in Georgia, there are numerous diseases caused by contaminated water, vulnerable communities are often marginalized, most of the water tanks have not been repaired and restoration work has been done for a long time, drinking water is irregularly distributed in many populated areas of Georgia, due to the lack of laboratory controls the drinking water often does not meet the state requirement standards. What is more, in schools, especially in rural areas, there is often inadequate WASH conditions with small emphasis on the hygienic behavior.

## Research Approach

The paper was developed through qualitative research, using the path dependence methodology and WASH council meetings and workshops to hone the main arguments of the thesis

## Data Collection

The thesis draws upon the research carried out within the project “Georgia Community WASH

(Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) Initiative,” implemented by CENN with support from the Global Water Challenge and The Coca-Cola Foundation (TCCF). Within the project, a number of WASH Councils were founded upon the basis of community based mechanisms.

The paper analyses the WASH council actions between February 2018 and May 2019 in regards to WASH pilot project implementation and its relation to the local municipal actors., as well as workshops and meetings carried out with municipal representatives and WASH council members. In addition, a WASH Assessment was conducted in the target areas, which encompassed communities and schools in Kvemo Kartli region of Georgia. The Assessment was carried out with an adapted UNICEF methodology that included one on one interviews, focus groups, behavior observations and much more.

## Data Analysis

The qualitative data was coded and cross referenced in accordance to the thematic direction of each council.

The rest of the paper is as follows. First we discuss how the WASH councils have been formed and review literature on institutional dynamics, participation and representation, water power relations and WASH council performance in terms of water delivery and institutional design principles. This is followed by a brief methodology and a discussion on the key findings on the performance of WASH councils within the communities.

# Chapter Four: Results and Analysis

## Community Meetings

As a response to the grave WASH conditions in various regions of Georgia, four WASH councils have been created by CENN to facilitate community-led initiative through the council members. The council creation was preceded by a process of Community mobilization, which is “the process of building community capacity to self-identify priorities, resources, needs and solutions in such a way as to promote representative participation, good governance, accountability and peaceful change” (Mercy Corps, 2009).

A series of meetings were carried out throughout the region of Kvemo Kartli (Georgia), where a number of stakeholders have been met and informed on the WASH Council initiative and what the mandate would be. The stakeholders included Village governors, School directors, community leaders, spiritual leaders, farmers, municipality mayors and other local governance representatives such as infrastructure department managers, health center directors and more.

During the meetings, two narratives were developed between the two major groups, the governance representatives and the non governmental population. The main issue discussed during the meetings was the insufficient water delivery, in villages, sanitation and hygiene problems and how to solve the incurring concerns. The responses were the following:

Governmental representatives stated that the local municipalities had known the developing WASH problems for a long time and were working on improvements. However, the detailed knowledge on the difficulties were not presented and stated that one of the major issues of not addressing certain difficulties was the low awareness of the major population (whilst taking no action to increase the populations awareness) concerning the maintenance of sanitation and hygiene, which would by itself render any water provision infrastructural projects to danger. In many cases, the municipality representatives stated that the school directors requested funds for a Gym or a better yard instead of renovating the school bathroom or water systems.

In some instances, the municipality representatives stated that there was a lack of funding so as to improve the WaSH conditions, whether it be in separate public buildings (Schools, hospitals etc.) or in whole villages. Nevertheless, the municipalities which did not have the budget for carrying out such improvements, in most cases, did not address the central government or other budgetary institutes for additional funding.

The second group of people, that were not involved in any governmental institutions had a rather different take. Even though the lack of awareness in their WASH knowledge was present, for example, not teaching children any hygiene practices in schools, most of the population expressed high concerns for the municipality with no hope that they would take any steps towards improvement. However, when asked about mobilization and addressing the municipality for a request to help, they expressed concern, as there would be no help and why bother. As it turned out, in most instances, there had been no common letter or complaint sent to the Municipality offices on the request of improving the WASH circumstances. This, coupled with small information on WASH in the hands of the Municipalities and low general awareness among all stakeholders, no substantive actions have been taken to improve any of the grave conditions that the people were living in.

However, at the end, all stakeholders were willing to cooperate and expressed their readiness to participate in the project and pave way to the WASH Councils. The communities were keen to internalize the WASH problems and the upcoming projects.

## WASH Councils

The formation of the WASH Councils happened in four municipalities of Kvemo Kartli (Tetritskaro, Marneuli, Dmanisi and Tsalka). The members were voluntarily signing up, and upon voting, selecting the council leader. A memorandum of understanding was signed between the councils and CENN, which outlined the exact responsibilities (see table 1) that the two parties would have for each other.

|  |
| --- |
| Table 1. Responsibility Contents of the MoU between CENN and WASH Councils |
| The purpose of this Memorandum is to support the development of close cooperation in the field of WASH in the following directions:  a) Establishment of WASH Council;  b) Effectively and efficiently carry out WASH pilot projects  c) Awareness raising of students and the society in the field of WASH  . |
| The cooperation of the Parties takes the following form:  a) Implementation of joint projects and programmes;  b) Arrangement of joint meetings, conferences, consultations of experts, In case of existence;  c) Exchange of scientific and technical information upon necessity;  d) Other mutually agreed forms of cooperation in advance. |
| **CENN’s responsibilities:**   * To provide technical and financial support to the WASH Council * To provide the WASH Council with respective coordination in meeting respective stakeholders |
| **WASH Council responsibilities:**   * Installation of WASH infrastructure * Maintenance of WASH infrastructure * Assistance in WASH awareness raising campaigns * Carrying out training for respective stakeholders in WASH issues |
| **Joint responsibilities**   * To have an active communication each other * Prior, in a week period and in a written form, inform the other party for the planned activities have to implement. |

The creation of such a unit marked a beginning of a never seen before cooperation between the local stakeholders and an NGO in the WASH sector. The WASH council members underwent extensive trainings in WASH, project management, budgeting, gender equality, lobbying and advocacy and proposal writing. Once the trainings were completed, a kickoff of the WASH infrastructural projects was started initiated. The Councils were responsible for identifying and carrying out all the preparation works as well as the projects them selves through contracting respective experts. The financial burden would have been borne on CENN and in some instances, the municipality (Co-financing conditions). However, in all works completed, permits from municipalities and / or Ministries were necessary, meaning that the WASH councils had to write letters to the above mentioned institutions. The effectiveness if each WASH council is outlined below in table 2.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Table 2. WASH Council Effectiveness | |
| 1. Marneuli WASH Council | Carried out zero WaSH projects |
| 1. Dmanisi WASH Council | Carried out two WaSH projects |
| 1. Tsalka WASH Council | Carried out one WaSH project |
| 1. Tetritskaro WASH Council | Carried out eight WaSH projects |

The reasons of low activity in the first three Councils can be many, however, one common trait was present in all three. Each of the councils happened to have a certain affiliation with the local elite. Meaning that the projects they developed would one way or another benefit their own circles rather than the whole municipality. It can only be argued that as the councils did not enjoy their full freedom, and therefore, did not have projects that would be justified to provide value to the rest of the population.

The fourth WASH Council carried out eight WaSH projects and it can be attributed to the following two reasons: First, the council members excelled during the trainings that they underwent; Second, they did not have any affiliation with the local elite, thus provided a full coverage of their given territory.

At the end, it must be noted that the very first WASH Council (Marneuli), did not even provide project proposals. This can be ascribed to the fact that during the proposal writing phase, the municipality elite was undergoing political turmoil due to alleged corruption, violence, etc. Therefore we can conclude that the council members were not independent from the processes going into the elite.

Emirbayer and Mische (1998, p. 970) identify a ‘chordal triad of agency’ in which there is interplay between habit, imagination and judgement that ‘reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations’. In referring to habit they allude to the iterational element of agency, which is aligned to Bourdieu and Giddens’s theories of practice. The focus is on past patterns of thought and action, the type of orientation built upon dispositions, experiences and social schema that help to sustain identities, interactions and institutions over time. In turn, they propose a projective element of agency which refers to the potential for the creation of ‘possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors’ hopes, fears, and desires for the future’.

# Chapter five; Discussion

Georgia is a signatory country of the SDGs as well as an aspirant country to the European Union (EU), currently having signed the Association Agreement with the EU. Therefore, the country has a lot of responsibility to improve its WASH conditions throughout the country.

As we saw, giving stakeholders more power in water management can provide adequate guidance and input for optimal resource distribution to achieve the most efficient results thus, preventing destructive one-sided decisions made by municipal governance.

With the government sector providing more information and changes in public participation, the civil society will obtain leverage in decision making process on how the water resources are managed. Their work will be public where the CSOs are to unite with other supra – national organizations to affect the decision-making processes of the government. With this increased political capacity, the challenge the government and CSOs are facing is to reach a point where policymaking will be participatory on many levels of the government as well as civil society sector.

The key here is to identify a relational link between the inclusion and/or exclusion of various actors and to adopt referents that can facilitate the power play among all actors. In such circumstances, where there is no information on the agents at play, community approaches can work, but there are tradeoffs between water supply and broader social goals and associated strategies. If the awareness raising campaign is effective, and the participating agents understand the matter well, the supply of reliable, safe and affordable water emerged more important than broader empowerment goals. These tradeoffs should be always anticipated and sometimes, may be even necessary to see the gap between the community and the elite.

Our findings do not mean that this WASH Council model or its implementation effective or innefective, the tradeoffs optimum, or compromised goals and CBNRM tenets irrelevant. Sustained success still requires concerted efforts to enhance balance between water-supply and empowerment goals or mitigate adverse impacts of the tradeoffs, and broaden socio-economic benefits beyond minor cash donations. Such benefits, if shared equitably through new locally agreed mechanisms, would add to gains in managerial capacity, legitimacy of WASH councils through formalization, and limiting political interference.

## Recommendations

CBM approaches relative value is still debatable in rural settings. We contend that success is attainable but requires flexibility in customizing community approaches to urban settings and CBM tradeoffs. Thus, despite the implied CBM assumption of universal participation, findings show that not everyone can or has to participate in WASH Council activities, or in/at the same manner and level. In reality many water users appeared content with being passive receivers of the services rendered by the activities of WASH council active members. To conclude, the WASH councils should have lower participation expectations while seeking more autonomy, and enhancing awareness of member rights and responsibilities, and information flow across actors and levels.

## Limitations of the study

The study comprised of WASH councils that were formed in only four municipalities out of 67 in total. What is more, there is no information on exactly what thought process and decision-making was taking place within the WASH councils so as to arrive to concrete decisions/solutions.

# Conclusion

We examined how the WASH councils were formed against the backdrop of CBM and how they were matched up against the WASH problems in their respective operating areas.

The WASH Councils can prove to be an effective entity when the local government sits passive to address certain WASH issues. They can serve as a lobbyist group or a hands on project implementer on the ground, however the Councils can become prey to certain power plays stemming from the elite groups. To avoid such circumstances, the WASH councils (or any unit that is based on CBM mechanisms), should seek more autonomy and more enforcement of their own agency within the institutions they operate in.

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