

Social Cases: Reaching Universal Access to Water Supply at Community Level

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Abstract/Summary

After the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the centralised water supply systems in rural areas in Ukraine were no longer allocated sufficient funds for their operation and maintenance. Many of the piping systems broke down and the level of service provision was low. Funds for establishing new water networks were lacking as well. Upon such conditions installation of the new piping system is planned in a way that financial contributions from households are required. Most families can afford such contributions. However, for families with very low income such conditions may block access to improved water supply. A “social cases” approach was developed by DESPRO/Skat and introduced in 20 partner villages. In this approach, the community is given with the task to identify the families with the special need and approve on special policy regarding their financial participation in the project. The approach as such considers equity and inclusion and contributes to universal access to improved water supply at community level.

Introduction

Situated in Eastern Europe, Ukraine is one of the largest countries in Europe. Its territory is about 603,600 sq.km¹, with a population of 42.6 million, with 30.8% (13.3 million) people living in rural areas² (*UKRSTAT, 2015-16*). Agricultural and industrial goods are important factors in Ukraine’s economy. This combination generated GDP per capita at 2081.04 US dollars in 2014 (*World Bank, 2016*). After the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991, lack of local capacities, clear institutional and financial set-ups for water supply at national level, as well as little experience of social mobilisation has led to a critical decrease of water supply in rural areas. Over years of independence, coverage of piped water supply in rural areas has dropped from 50 to 22 percent (*WHO/UNICEF, 2014*). DESPRO is a Ukraine-based project on decentralisation, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by Skat, Switzerland. In the period between 2007 and 2013, DESPRO supported implementation of around 80 water supply projects in three regions in Ukraine. The projects were aimed at construction of water network connected to one or more deep boreholes, supplying the households with water with at least backyard connection (75% of households, in fact, installed in-house connections afterwards). The different community-based solutions for project implementation, as well as further operation and maintenance have been used, e.g. public associations, service cooperatives (*Sorokovsky, Olschewski, 2012*). Community-based solutions showed good results in terms of equity and inclusion. Those families with low incomes but willing to have improved water supply were provided with different “participation schemes”. Resultatively, the coverage with improved water supply of households located on target territory averaged 92-96%. The post-construction monitoring showed that nevertheless there were households (obviously 4-8%) for which the requirement to make a financial contribution³ has become a killing factor in obtaining better water supply. We refer to cases when households having an obvious need to have better water supply are unable to make neither a financial contribution for the water supply system construction nor pay for the connection (at least a service pipe to the yard).

¹ Since spring 2014 territories of Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol city have been annexed by Russian Federation. A part of Ukrainian territory in the East is controlled by illegal armed groups – self-recognized “Donetsk People’s Republic” and “Luhansk People’s Republic”.

² Number of population on territories of Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol city are not taken into account.

³ Depending on project the size of financial contribution is different, however in most cases it is around 3’000-4’000 UAH (CHF 120-160) per one household.

Context, aims and activities undertaken

So, how to identify *social cases* properly? In terms of a need to have better water supply the opinions of the householders could be different. Such cases, in fact, should be considered separately.

“Need but not capable”

The attitude of such households to the participation in the water supply project may be characterized as follows: **“I need it, wish it, but I am not capable”**. Such households may subjectively assess their own needs as “do not need” or their wish as “do not wish”. *“How much water do I need? Maybe one bucket a day will be enough for me,”* similar excuses can be heard often. Actually, a person has to agree to continue using water from the shallow well, often compromising with the quality of water. Objectively, the quality of ground water in the most territories of Ukraine fails to comply with the quality standards of drinking water.

Thus, the very reason of not taking part in the project is not the absence of need, but the lack of money.

At the end, such households actually fall out of the target group.

“No need but capable”

If improved water supply is continuously lacking, some households arrange it for their own need using more or less modern technologies. For instance, construction of a mini centralized system comprising a pumping station, inlet water supply system to the house, in-house distribution network to service the kitchen, toilette, bathroom, etc. Such householders may think the matter of water supply is resolved for them. And very often at initial stage of the project implementation such households are not motivated to contribute additional funds. However, it also happens that after the project is completed such households nevertheless connect to the centralized water supply system, paying the contribution to the cost of the network itself and also for the connection. Since for such households financial contribution is not a killing factor to participate in the project, they should be singled out and not considered as *social cases*.

How to access the level of income?

In practice, it is not easy to reveal *social cases*. The level of income earned by a household may be one of the indicators. At the same time, especially in rural areas it is difficult to determine the real level of income on the basis of formal indicators only. In our opinion, it is not worth determining the low-income level strictly in accordance with formal criteria.

The limitation arising in the determination of this parameter is the fact that information on the average monthly income of the households is usually based on the responses of residents of the household. However, there are evidences on a break-down between the income so declared and the actual amounts earned).

Firstly, there exists a tendency of individuals to understate the level of earned income if there is no need to provide a documented evidence of such income.

Secondly, it is not uncommon that the individuals may only determine the salary (or pension) or similar types of income (for instance, for one-off job or contract work) as their income. *Thirdly*, unofficial income which may especially occur in the rural areas (for instance, for the land cultivation services by one's own machinery, construction and repair works, fishing, renting of dwellings in resort areas, etc.) as well as the income earned from individual household farming may be concealed or not reported (see Box 1).

Box 1. Example of difference in household income data depending on sources of information

During the Customer's Satisfaction Survey on the quality of water supply service (DESPRO, 2012), there was assessed the share of the family's income spent on water supply. The data on average monthly water bill was compared with the average monthly aggregate family income.

According to the **responses of representatives of households**, in Vinnitsya Region, the average monthly aggregate family income totaled UAH 1,354, and in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea - UAH 1,351. In fact, this data significantly differs from the **state statistics** data. Thus, the actual average monthly income per capita for 2011 in general totaled UAH 1,770.8 in Ukraine. According to the DESPRO data, the average number of members of one household in target communities was 2.77 persons: in Vinnitsya Region, 2.4 persons, in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, 3.1 persons. Hence, in terms of one household, in general, the actual average monthly income totals UAH 4,911.00, and by regions: in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea - UAH 5,472.00, in Vinnitsya Region - UAH 4,250.00. As we can see, the difference between the own assessment and the statistics differs by more than three times.

Who and how shall make a decision on social cases?

Therefore, as the practice proves, the determination of *social cases* in villages takes place according to the principle: "in community, they know who is who".

The following procedure on identifying and dealing with *social cases* has been introducing and testing in DESPRO partner villages since 2014.

Step 1. The Project Management Group⁴ shall analyze the needs and capabilities of all households in terms of their participation (including financial contribution) in the project.

Step 2. The criteria of assigning households to the category of *social cases* shall be established by the Project Management Group and approved at the general meeting of the community.



Step 3. According to the established criteria, the Project Management Group shall collect the information and data regarding any potential *social cases*, analyze the information and data obtained, draw up a preliminary list of households to be assigned to the category of *social cases*.

Step 4. The decision on the assignment of households to the category of *social cases* for the purposes of the project implementation shall be made by the general meeting of the community, with the mandatory entry of information about that decision in the minutes.

⁴ *The Project Management Group* is a formal body to be established by legal act of the village council (local self-government body). The Project Management Group is an auxiliary body for the village council in the course of the project implementation, one of the mechanisms of social mobilisation. The Project Management Group, as a rule, is composed of both representatives of the village council and activists delegated by the community.

Step 5. The decision on special conditions regarding financial contribution in the project implementation as agreed with specific households shall be made by the general meeting of the community, with the mandatory entry of information about that decision in the minutes.

Among other, the special conditions may include: full or partial exemption from the payment, payment in instalments, replacement of financial contribution with the in-kind one etc.

“Checks-and-balances”

It would be too optimistic to expect that the community will fairly decide on *social cases* in absolutely all situations. Who can defend the households that according to apparent characteristics have to be assigned to the category of *social cases* but which interests are not evidently taken into account by the community? On our opinion, the final word should be with the Village Council⁵. So, if the general meeting fails to make the decision regarding *social cases* not taking into account evident conditions, such decision shall be made by the Village Council. In this connection, the Village Council which has made the decision shall have the right to allocate, within the limits of budget financing, a portion of funds that will be channelled for the coverage of a contribution for the construction of and/ or payment for the connection of households to the water supply system instead of the households falling under the category of *social cases*.

Main results and lessons learnt

The *social cases* approach has been introduced and implemented in 20 partner villages in five regions of Ukraine. The requirement on considering and deciding on *social cases* by community was set as one of the criteria to get co-financing from DESPRO. Eventually, in most situations the community could resolve the issue of social cases on the general meetings. In 2 villages, however, the decision had to be made by the Village Council.

The number of social cases differs from 3 to 7 families per village. Considering that a typical project covers between 150 and 200 households, the share of social cases in total target group is less than 5 per cent. This figure shows, in fact, the share of households not capable to cover financial contributions at the beginning of project implementation. It corresponds with the results of post-construction monitoring (see Introduction chapter). It can be concluded that if these households were not considered as social cases they would have been hardly ever connected to the network.

Social structure of households assigned as social cases includes: families with many kinds, single elderly people, disabled people, and families with kids that lost their farther in military conflict on the East of Ukraine.



Many partner communities also reported on positive side effect occurred during consideration of the social cases, such as better community cohesion, conflict resolution and closer interaction among community members, on the one hand, and between community and local council, on the other.

⁵ The *Village Council* as a local self-government body which is responsible for the arrangement of provision of public services, including in particular, water supply in the relevant territory. It is also responsible for the distribution of funds appropriated for the implementation of measures aimed, in particular, at the water supply. Within project implementation modalities by DESPRO the village council is the implementing agency of the project for improvement of water supply.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The social cases approach presented in the paper has proven to be an important component of social mobilisation. In project approaches where financial contribution from households is required, social cases approach can help targeting universal access to water. The approach as such doesn't have any national specificity, so it can be applied widely. The differences in application may fall into set of criteria that has to be established in a concrete community. At the same time, proper introduction and use of the social cases approach may require certain "maturity" of the community. In other situations, some facilitation might be needed to support the community in reaching common understanding and agreement.

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