

# act:onaid

## *Unleashing Women's Leadership Potentials and Sustaining Water Supply*

**For the CSOs Good Practice Day Competition**



**December 2012**



## Background

As per its organizational commitment to address the needs and priorities of the people and women in particular thereby ensuring community ownership of projects, ActionAid Ethiopia has demonstrated excellence in mainstreaming women's needs in all its anti poverty works. This is so evident through its integrated works in improving peoples' access to potable water; initiating women led water development associations where women's leadership potentials are exercised and use the platform to address gender issues.

The good practice we hereby present elaborates one of model institutions initiated where women's potential to lead and manage a huge water project is empirically demonstrated across the last 16 years. The case in point is the Dalocha Women Water Development Association (DWWDA) that manages water project that has a network of 3 springs, 7 bore holes, 8 reservoirs, 75 kms pipeline complex and 48 water distribution points (kiosks) benefiting 108,000 people. The project was initiated in 2002 and covers the whole of Dalocha woreda, Silti Zone of SNNPRS. Realization of the association has responded to immediate and strategic needs of women that go beyond mere access to potable water. Since the initiation of the project, the experience of institution building around such schemes was appreciated and owned by many relevant government bodies and contributed for the emergence of similar women led organizations.

### 1. Innovativeness

DAWWDA's case contains new dimensions in the development discourse in light of integrating hardware works (the water scheme) with software aspects (institution building) in a gender sensitive perspective.

**Demonstrating women's leadership:** - Initiating women led organizations such as DAWWDA around water projects is an alternative way of ensuring community ownership and empowering women. Here, women are organized in Kebele Water Committees, General Assembly and Board and set a coordination office to regularly provide the service.

**Fostering voluntarism:** - Women here work voluntarily to serve their community with no personal benefit. Likewise, beneficiary committed in contributing their labor and finance so as to sustain the project.

**Changing societal perceptions:** - The existing patriarchal system gives little recognition to women's potentials to independently act, make decisions and lead development schemes. This was unfounded in the past 16 years as Dalocha women have efficiently led the huge water project maintaining the service for so long.

**Integrated approach:** - In forums created by DAWWDA, women regularly discuss about HIV/AIDS and customary practices that negatively influence women's role in development and take actions.

### 2. Scalability

Thousands of water projects with having varying scale are constructed every year by multitude of organizations and the government across the country. Hence, initiating the model has fertile grounds



Experience sharing forum among women led water associations drawn from various corners of the country (18 December 2012)

for replication. Introducing the system, ensuring communities' appreciation and enhancing women's capacity lays grounds all of which do not cost much.

ActionAid has been sharing the experience to other actors so that the model is scaled up. As a result, many such institutions were emerged such as the Vicky-Lera Women Water Development Association (20,000 beneficiary), Janamora Women Water Development Association, (9,300 beneficiary), Fofa Women Water Development Association (6,300 beneficiary), Saja Women Water Development Association (3,000 beneficiary) and Gofer Giba Women Water Development Association (9,000 beneficiary). The Taytu Women Water Supply and Management Association (constructed by the government) was adapted from the DAWWDA model. These are empirical instances that indicate possibility to replicate the model widely by the CSO sector and the government.

### **3. Sustainability**

The Dalocha water project has been serving the community for 16 years. Because of the demonstrated experience, Dalocha communities and women in particular consider the project and the association as theirs.

Every user of the water service pays fees at a reasonable rate and makes financial contributions to sustain and expand the service besides committing voluntary community labor.

As a result of availing access to potable water, people's health status has improved that has contributed to their holistic development at household level which in turn enhanced peoples' capacity to pay for the service. The association's technical capacity to undertake maintenance is enhanced. Above all, DAWWDA is empowered to demand support from the government and other actors.

Initiating women led institutions like DAWWDA is backed by government policy too. The association is legally registered entity and has legitimate right to deal with all matters concerning it including enengaging in resource mobilization. The government's water sector policy also favors women's participation in and leadership to such schemes.

### **4. Community attachment, networking and partnership**

Communities voluntarily involved in labor works during the initial construction of the water project and subsequent expansion works in terms of allowing passage of pipelines through their farms, availing land for water distribution points and contributing labor beyond paying water fees. Communities often convene for meetings to discuss on the service and sustainability of the scheme. Participatory review and reflection processes have served much in this case. Realization of DAWWDA has instigated new form of partnership among DAWWDA, the women association, kebele administrations, the woreda and zonal government relevant bodies.

ActionAid Ethiopia has also initiated a forum where women water development associations including DAWWDA and respective water development offices (government sectors) across the country (Amhara, Oromia and SNNPRS) to come together to share experience, reflect on common problems and seek solutions in due course of leading and managing the schemes.



*We used to spend hours in search of water from unprotected water bodies, all what we could find at that time. We now have abundance of clean water thanks to AAE, (Tagay Rede, washing her floor mat at a water point by her home)*

Such networking sets grounds for enhanced collaboration among relevant actors.

## 5. Impact

Since the realization of the project and DAWWDA, credible and positive impacts were observed in the area.

- Women's capacity to lead huge projects was practically demonstrated despite suspensions from communities as well as some local government officials.
- As a result of experiences gained through the association, women's assertiveness has increased and DAWWDA's active members and leaders are elected to other key local government decision making positions.
- Girls' school enrolment rate has increased much because they are able to access water from their vicinity which otherwise could have inhibited them from participation
- The risk of violence on women and girls (rape, abduction etc.) and prevalence of customary practices that negatively affect women and girls have reduced substantially
- Peoples' vulnerability to water born diseases has reduced substantially as can be witnessed from data from health institutions.
- Peoples' knowledge on personal and environmental sanitation has also increased considerably.
- Community's perception on women's capacity and potential to lead and manage development projects has changed tremendously and women's recognition at household and community level improved much.
- Women also have got time to engage in other productive economic activities.
- Collaboration between communities and the government enhanced and the woreda government links any additional water development works with DAWWDA since its establishment. because of the enhanced recognition of the association



*We are able to access potable water nearby and engage in productive social and economic activities in and out of our homes because we institutionally own the scheme and the service.*

(Zinash Zele, a mother of five)

## 6. Gender sensitivity and addressing marginalized group

Women are the most disadvantaged sections of the society and hence the initiative has addressed their immediate and strategic needs. As the responsibility to fetch water rests on women and girls, they had to travel long distance which exposes them to various forms of violence such as rape and abduction. Realization of the water project and the women association has substantially contributed towards liberating women from these challenges. Women's leadership of the project has paved the way to address their strategic needs specifically their leadership and decision making aspirations.

Women's voices are not heard as their men counterparts at household and community level because of the age old tradition. As a result of continuous community sensitizations and education through the association and their demonstrated leadership competency to manage the scheme, women's recognition at households and community level has improved considerably.

The education and sensitization made on prevention of HIV/AIDS and traditional customary practices that affect women more than anyone else has brought behavioral changes among the community in favor of women.

## **7. Cost effectiveness**

The initial cost of the project was estimated to reach birr 12,000,000.00. Except for expansion and maintenance works, the cost incurred since then was not as such considerable. Though major construction and expansion works were performed by contractors, the community has actively involved in labor and mobilization of local materials. As a result of communities' participation in trench excavation, the initial work is performed within one months time less than the anticipated timeframe.

The voluntary commitment to lead and manage the scheme has numerous relative advantages in terms of cost. The value addition of women's leadership, management and ownership of the scheme and their ability to sustain the project for so long is made real through minimum overhead cost. The long lasting service of the scheme is live witness for least cost approach of the maintenance and operational costs that ensured the project's sustainability coupled with the empowerment of women in leadership position which is beyond valuating it in terms of monetary costs.

In a nutshell, when the size of beneficiaries (108,000 people), the project's geographic coverage (the whole woreda), and the women association model can generally be said cost effective.



Experience sharing