

In the rural village of Mande, located in the South-Eastern province of Tanganyika in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), households who want to have access to clean water need to pay 500 Congolese Francs per month, or an equivalent value in goods or services. Their contribution allows the maintenance and repairs of the water point, which was constructed with the support of Concern Worldwide within the framework of the DRC WASH Consortium. By paying monthly, they are not beneficiaries anymore, but clients.

The DRC WASH Consortium

Concern Worldwide is the lead agency of the DRC WASH Consortium, which is comprised of 5 international NGOs: Concern as the lead agency, ACF, ACTED, CRS and Solidarités International. Launched in 2013 and financed by the UK Government, the Consortium was created to improve the health and productivity of the rural Congolese populations through the reduction of morbidity and mortality from waterborne diseases. The Consortium's activities contribute to the goals of the National Programme "Healthy Villages".

Since 2013, the Concern Worldwide teams have been working closely with the Central Office of the Manono Health Zone, to support them in the implementation of the 12 steps identified in the Consortium program which allows villages to reach the standards set by the national program. Mande is one of the 26 villages in the Manono area which will soon be certified as "Healthy Villages" with the support of Concern Worldwide.

Most of the 500 men and women of the village of Mande, located in the Manono territory, are active in the agricultural or breeding activities. Before the construction of the water point in 2015 by Concern Worldwide, the only water source was a traditional well, which was used by both the community members as well as animals. But since 2015, the water point of the village has a fence and the users have to support the financing to have access to the pump.

By paying for the water service, the residents of Mande are responsible for financing the operations, maintenance, minor and major repairs. But in this role of paying customer, they have expectations of a minimum service. In Mande, it is the Water Management Committee that manages the water point, and is responsible to offer quality service to its members, while ensuring strong administrative and financial management. During the opening hours, it is Mukalayi Muvumbu, administrator of the water point, that ensures the good functioning of the pump and that the users respect the rules.

The Water Management Committee

Eric Nsenga, president of the Water Management Committee, explains that they use several administrative and financial management tools to ensure the proper functioning of the Committee and the water point. The roles and responsibilities of the Committee members, who are elected democratically by the community, are described in a constitution and their names are displayed on a chart pinned on one of the walls of the Committee's office.

Other tools are also visible on the walls as a memory aid, such as a "virtuous circle", which explains the logic of service delivery, and the action plan of the Committee. During the monthly meetings of the members, the action plan allows them to assess the progress according to the targets set in the business plan for the water point. They are all in the local language, and are adaptations of the tools found in the training manual that was developed by the WASH Consortium DRC.



The president of the Water Management Committee of Mande, Eric Nsenga, was elected democratically to oversee the activities of the Water Management Committee. Photo : Concern Worldwide

Affordable, but sustainable prices



Kyungu Ngoy, treasurer, and Célestin Kabila, secretary of the Committee, ensure that every contribution by community members is registered in a Cash book.

The financial management of the Committee is ensured by the treasurer, Kyungu Ngoy, who also oversees the daily accountancy. Every transaction, incoming and outgoing, has to be registered in the cash book or the book of receipts. When the community members pay their monthly contributions, she is assisted by Célestin Kabila, secretary of the Committee. Every household who pays the 500 Congolese Francs or the same value in goods or services receives a token that gives them access to the water point for a month. The decision to fix the price at 500 FC per month is the result of a participatory process, which took into account several socio-economic factors. An economic analysis was done by the community on their ability to pay the contributions, but taking into account the vulnerable members, such as people with disabilities, who are exempted to pay the monthly contribution.

While calculating the possible prices, a “life-cycle costs approach” is also applied to ensure that not only the operational and maintenance costs are budgeted, but also to pay technicians in case the water point needs repair, and the purchase of spare parts when needed. In the context of the DRC, the purchase of spare parts is an important aspect to take into account, as the supply chains for spare parts are very limited. This means that most spare parts need to be imported from neighbouring countries or from Europe, which significantly increases the repair costs and can be a risk for the sustainability of the water point.

Eric admits that applying the long-term economic/cost approach has been a learning process for the community, but he is confident that today everyone is convinced of the need to invest. The users realize that their contribution guarantees a good use and maintenance of the water pump by the Committee. They can afford to buy tools which are helpful for the water point management, such as padlocks or water containers, and with the surplus the committee can invest in income generating activities. In June, for example, the community invested in the purchase of a considerable amount of smoked fish from the local market, which is located at 15km from the village. The Committee sells it back in the village at a fair price, which generates more revenue for the management of the water point.

The life-cycle approach

The Concern team works with the communities in Manono to ensure that they are aware of what the installation of a water point truly means, through the promotion of a life-cycle approach. By calculating in a participatory way the costs based on three levels, which take into account the operating costs, maintenance, repairs and complete rehabilitation, this approach improves the sustainability of the water points in rural areas.

The level of the community’s financial capacity and willingness to pay influences the type of water source that can be installed, as well as the rates to be fixed by the community members to ensure that the inevitable costs can be covered in the long term.



Water point in Mande, Manono, Tanganyika. Photo: Concern Worldwide

“Young and old people of the Mande community understand now the concept of the Life-Cycle approach of a hydraulic infrastructure, and this understanding is crucial to ensure the sustainability when they decide to invest as a community in a water point”, Felix Kabemba, project Manager WASH Concern Worldwide.

For more information on the WASH Consortium DRC and Concern’s Work in the DRC, click [here](#).

The WASH Consortium DRC is comprised of:



And financed by: