

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN WATER SNAPSHOTS



MOROCCO |
Oum er Rbia
Sanitation Project



Local government representatives and residents living near the wastewater treatment plant. Photo credit: Jean-Martin Brault

CONTEXT

The objective of the Oum er Rbia Sanitation Project was to increase access to sanitation services and reduce wastewater-related pollution in selected small and medium towns in Morocco's Our er Rbia river basin. Approved in 2010 and implemented by the *Office National de l'Eau Potable et de l'Electricité* (ONEE) – the national water utility, the project aimed to finance wastewater collection and treatment infrastructure in 13 rural and urban agglomerations of 7,000 to 200,000 people. The political context showed signs of openness towards participatory and inclusive approaches to engage with the population. For example, in 2005, the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH), launched by the King of Morocco, systematized local participatory development. In 2011, in response to the Arab Spring events, the Constitution stipulated access to information, consultation with, and participation of the population as requirements in the development and monitoring of public policies.

INTRODUCING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

Citizen engagement activities were added in an organic and gradual manner, in response to the project's needs – they were not part of the original design. At first, the Oum er Rbia Sanitation Project faced many problems affecting its implementation. The Project required land acquisitions for wastewater treatment plants, pumping stations, and large pipes, which municipalities were not always capable of processing, especially when faced with people opposed to the transfer of land. Buoyed by the enabling context, affected populations were more prone to voice their concerns (and sometimes outright opposition) stemming from anticipated bad odors emanating from treatment plants, illegal connections and complaints related to connection costs, and temporary inconvenience related to works. Challenges and delays encountered during the project preparation led ONEE and the project team to address the community's concerns by rethinking its approach, and to adopt an array of tools to engage with the local community and all stakeholders, as discussed below.

Land Acquisition Focal Point

A "Land Acquisition Focal Point" was appointed at ONEE to facilitate the social and land aspects of the project, in order to coordinate and accelerate land acquisitions and compensation. The Focal Point was responsible for building the capacity of and assisting municipalities in charge of acquiring land, and in the procedures to be followed. Landowners had to be informed of their rights and of potential compensations. In essence, the Focal Point managed to create a unique, personalized interface between landowners, local authorities, and technical teams, and facilitate the convergence of technical and social solutions, such as modifying the layout of transfer pipes on the basis of consultations with landowners.

Local Monitoring Committees

Local monitoring committees were established, comprised of local authorities, contractors, external technical assistance, ONEE, and influential and trusted local actors, including traditional leaders. These committees would ensure a clear and continuous flow of communication between citizens and project authorities. The committees were set up at each work site, holding weekly meetings open to the public, with all parties to communicate consistent information to all stakeholders, respond to citizens' demands and grievances, and make joint strategic and technical decisions to alleviate concerns and reduce the social impacts of land acquisition and the risk of opposition. When local communities and committees included local populations and communities, ONEE ensured that its designated staff could speak the local dialect or language (e.g. Berber) to facilitate interactions.

Meaningful Consultations and Public Information Campaigns

Providing accurate and timely information formed a key component of citizen engagement. The regional *Communication Cells* of ONEE were in charge of ensuring smooth interactions with populations, and contributing to the proper functioning of the citizen engagement mechanisms. They were made up equally of men and women in order to better interact with the community during door-to-door activities, consultations, and meetings. To raise awareness, the *Communication Cells* organized large community events such as debates, and sport and cultural events, distributing flyers, t-shirts, and hats. They also managed social teams, mainly in charge of door-to-door interactions, to present the content, objectives, and potential impacts of the project, including its benefits in terms of health and hygiene. The social teams informed the populations living nearby wastewater treatment plants about the mitigation mechanisms set up to reduce odors, and would follow-up with them once the plants came online. They also closely tracked the progress of sewerage networks, to consult connecting households just in time to explain benefits and payment facilities. Any of those interactions became an opportunity to inform local populations about the existence of different channels for gathering grievances and respond to any water, sanitation or water-related issues, concerns, or complaints.

Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM)

A GRM system was put in place progressively first in two pilot towns, then across the project. The design of the GRM was largely adapted to the local context. It established multiple ways of collecting grievances, taking into account the long tradition of orality in the project areas. The ONEE Communications Directorate (at the central level) and its regional *Communications Cells* provided strong technical support to strengthen local ONEE teams, while also capturing effective local practices and sharing them across ONEE offices. Tools and channels for collecting, recording, and monitoring grievances (including oral grievances) were developed. Roles and processes were well-defined for each actor, and training was provided regularly. Complaint logs were redesigned and improved, and the information collected was consolidated by regional ONEE offices and reported to the project team in Rabat. The team analyzed the data to identify trends, emerging issues, or areas of improvement, and then fed it back to local teams. By addressing the actual needs of local teams to respond to citizens and resolve their grievances, the GRM system successfully built local support, which enhanced its effectiveness.

A MODEL FOR OTHER PROJECTS

The project's integrated approach to citizen engagement covered specific issues (e.g. for land acquisition) as well as process tools (monitoring, grievance redress, and communication), and its citizen participation mechanisms became an example for other operations. The outcomes showed that keeping local communities involved in project preparation and implementation can prevent delays and improve service quality and citizen satisfaction.

Sources and additional information:

<http://projects.worldbank.org/P098459/morocco-oum-er-rbia-sanitation?lang=en>

Note prepared based on inputs from consultants Najat Mjid and Nicolas Collin Dit de Montesson, as well as Richard Abdounour, Jean-Martin Brault and Daniel Camos Daurella, Task Team Leaders

More engagement, better solutions

Community members can provide valuable contributions to technical designs. For example, during consultations, participants proposed changes to a draft layout of sewerage networks. Their suggestion to use public roads instead of crossing through several private parcels saved substantial amount of money and time.

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Water Global Practice

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