



INTEGRATING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN PROGRAM DESIGN: EGYPT'S SUSTAINABLE RURAL SANITATION SERVICES PROGRAM EXPERIENCE.

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Introduction: Citizen engagement is not a new concept in the world of development. Notions of social accountability, citizen participation, voice, have been around development programs for many years. Adopted in 2014, [The Strategic Framework for Mainstreaming Citizen Engagement](#) in World Bank Group operations was developed to systematically mainstream citizen engagement by including beneficiary feedback in WBG-supported operations. The Strategic Framework defines citizen engagement as a two-way interaction between citizens and governments or the private sector within the scope of WBG interventions. This approach gives citizens a stake in decision-making to improve the intermediate and final development outcomes. Evidence suggests that engaging citizens can improve accessibility, coverage and quality of service delivery.

Egypt's Sustainable Rural Sanitation Services Program for Results - aims to strengthen institutions and policies to increase access to and improve rural sanitation services in the governorates of Beheira, Dakahlia and Sharkiya. The program also demonstrates an innovative model for WBG's commitment to citizen engagement. With high level buy-in and ownership from the Government, the program's design and implementation challenged the conventional centralized model of service

delivery solely oriented to investments in infrastructure.

Lessons learned in Egypt and elsewhere demonstrated that this was not enough and institutions and behaviors needed to change.



Project Beneficiaries
Personal Photos by Project Staff

Therefore, sanitation service delivery for over 800,000 people in 155 villages under Egypt's Sustainable Rural Sanitation Services Program for Results, also included a strong reform component to strengthen local operations. The program incorporated robust social

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accountability and citizen engagement measures and was one of the first World Bank Program for Results (PforRs) to have citizen engagement measures embedded from its very inception. It was also the first program to actively implement decentralization in all program components. It also integrated capacity building for government institutions to make them more accountable to citizens.

Within the program's architecture engaging citizens and establishing a grievance redress mechanism were put forward as requirements linked to financial disbursements.

Citizen engagement was embedded through various channels, including:

Reshaping Institutions: The government has sent a strong signal of support by creating a ministry-level committee on citizen engagement. The Ministry of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities (MHUUC) assigned a team from within the ministry to be responsible for citizen engagement, and hired social development specialists to support the efforts. Representatives from the local Water Service Companies (WSCs), which as part of decentralization efforts took over the responsibility for implementing the program (including planning, budget, and construction) and regularly visited program sites. The team developed community engagement guidelines and manuals, and training for WSC and local staff, the most recent one focused on citizen report cards (you can read about them [here](#)).

For teams involved in the program this meant a mindset shift, reflected in a remark made by a senior MHUUC official: "I'm an engineer; Now I talk like a social specialist."

Setting up a Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM): An active grievance redress mechanism is operational on the local level to capture any program -related impacts, including but not limited to land-related impacts. It offers multiple options for filing complaints: through a hotline, by visiting a branch, online, and via community committees. Before the program, the hotline number #125 was mainly used for reporting

water-related emergencies, and was neither widely publicized nor widely known.

The program set up **local committees** as avenues for discussing community concerns, and to respond to questions and general inquiries. These committees are important channels for grievance redress. They were provided with forms which residents can use to report issues, complaints, general concerns or suggestions related to the program. Previously, all types of feedback were relayed verbally to technicians or local leaders, and were rarely captured or reported.

All these are stored and dealt with using a redesigned complaints management system (CMS), a database which is the backbone of the program's GRM. Interconnected, comprehensive, and available to employees at all levels - from branch offices all the way to the ministry - the database has undergone many improvements. It now stores all different types of feedback - received through the hotline, WhatsApp messages, Facebook, email, or in person.

Engaging the Community: Local citizens are now involved in the planning process, for example, village residents participate in the selection of land plots for various facilities, including pumping stations and treatment plants. Land owners and villagers actively play a part in the process of land allocation and land donations. WSC social officers are getting more closely engaged in the process of documenting the land donation process and are actively engaged to ensure that the core principles related to voluntary land donations are fulfilled and that community members who contribute to the process are not coerced.

Transparency and inclusive practices engender trust among residents, assuring them that they are members of the program team. This was especially evident when it came to land acquisition, which has always been a challenge with similar programs. With this program, it was different. Integrating citizen engagement into the program design and actively implementing its measures resulted in residents proactively reaching out to the PMU and donating their land

for establishing the program facilities (e.g. pumping stations and wastewater treatment plants). To date over 50 plots of land have been donated.

When asked about the program's outreach and engagement efforts with the community, Mohamed Ibrahim, a member of the Beheira governorate community committee said "This is the first time the Government comes to us and asked for our contributions. We usually have a lot of unanswered questions and it is really great to find someone to answer them in these meetings".

Next steps: By dedicating resources to carry out the citizen engagement work, operationalizing a robust GRM system, creating a transparent channel of communication with citizens and allowing citizens to participate in the design of various program related activities, the accountability of the service providers has been significantly strengthened. The level of citizens' trust in the program has been enhanced and a new inclusive and accountable model has emerged for the water and sanitation sector.

The program team has put together a [report](#) detailing the citizen engagement experience as a guiding reference to other programs who would like to implement the same approach. Citizen report cards, to be rolled out this year (and repeated annually) to monitor performance will offer a systematic way for engaging the citizens in providing feedback.

As the program advances, all these efforts – successes and lessons learned – will help shape the preparation of its second phase, and inform other projects in the region.

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