

TWISA's Experience: Nurturing Constructive Engagement Step by Step

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If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together – Unknown

In 2014, Madina Aliberdieva, Deputy Country Director at Oxfam and lead of the TWISA Project in Tajikistan, [reflected](#) on her takeaways from the First GPSA Forum:

“[GPSA] projects will require us to challenge and overcome some deeply rooted dynamics, assumptions and behaviours in our countries. While striving to empower the poor, the focus should not only be on them, but also on finding ways to ignite the interests of all stakeholders, especially the decision makers, to take the voices of citizens seriously, despite their prevalent reluctance to accept changes. **We, as GPSA grantees, should therefore contribute to building and enabling an environment for constructive engagement between the government, service providers, civil society organizations and the community at large.** And this is how the ‘magic’ will happen!”

Madina’s words, at the time, anticipated a key strategic assumption of this project: building the capacity of citizens and CSOs to monitor water supply and sanitation (WSS) services and develop appropriate service standards requires **going a long-term, staged approach** (see Box 1).

To be sure **nurturing shared goals and strategies and productive multi-stakeholder working relationships takes much more of TWISA’s time than implementing a social accountability tool on its own. The project hypothesizes that this is a worthy investment in the way towards better service delivery.**

Building Capacities and An Enabling Environment for Constructive Engagement

Social accountability as a practice is a very nascent phenomenon in Tajikistan. TWISA recognized this knowledge and practice gap and decided to invest early on in the process of trust-building to increase the project’s chances of success.

Box 1: TWISA’s Staged Strategic Social accountability Approach in the Water and Sanitation Sector

The first stage secured the commitment to implement socially accountable indicators in water and sanitation at the national level. This includes getting all the responsible and regulatory entities at the state level at one table and review and improve the existing standards of service provision.

The second stage built the capacities of both service providers and communities to apply service standards through social accountability processes.

The third stage puts monitoring mechanisms to work through joint, constructive and effective dialogue between service providers and serviced communities.

An iterative stage is to channel direct feedback into policy dialogue, where the most pressing and persistent challenges identified through service provider – consumer dialogue are discussed and responded to through corrective measures in policies, regulations and water management.

Over the last two years, Oxfam Tajikistan along with partner Consumer Union of Tajikistan (CU-TJK), have taken a number of steps **towards developing capacities for and building an enabling environment for constructive engagement.** TWISA invested significant time to directly engage national and local

government stakeholders to achieve a shared understanding of what the initiative entails. **This work, in turn, eased access to sub-national governments in target communities. And it secured more and sustained engagement of all stakeholders in the process of improving and testing service indicators.**

At the local level, TWISA worked with World Bank staff to convince **local government officials and service providers** to agree on the importance of monitoring systems to improve outcomes in the water and sanitation sector – a challenge as these stakeholders often prioritized funding for infrastructure rather than social accountability (see the experience of our colleagues in The Kyrgyz Republic). TWISA also signed detailed MOUs with **the governors of the 5 pilot districts** in Kulyab, Voce, Muminabad, Farkhor and Rudaki at project inception. They leveraged local governments’ incentives to respond to a “flood” of demands for improving water access to communities as well as their need to decided on resource allocation over a number of competing service delivery issues, including but not limited to, water and sanitation.

Building a multi-level platform

Nationally, the central mechanism to navigate the long-term route towards problem solving in water and sanitation governance was the creation of a **national-level Working Group to develop Service Performance Indicators** (WG). The WG brings together key state actors (e.g. Sanitary and Epidemiology Control Agency, Agency for Anti Corruption and Antimonopoly, Agency for Standardization) as well as civil society (e.g. Consumers Union). It has been meeting monthly to advance their individual and collective, immediate and long-term goals around the reform in the sector.

This WG, along with brokering and coalition building efforts, became a platform through which TWISA had more chances to give voice to voiceless rural citizens in the design of sectorial systems that often work against them. Its members jointly mapped the **multi-level complaints landscape as well as considered how systems’ infrastructure limits responsiveness** - rural consumers are lost in finding their solutions to everyday problems with drinking water.

WG members discussed standard service indicators and the entire ‘regulatory compliance’ framework. All these steps helped in **co-producing a roadmap for monitoring and evaluating service performance of drinking water service providers in rural areas, including social accountability indicators.**

This on-going work has helped TWISA to build legitimacy and visibility at all levels. It has also taught the project important lessons to engage in politically smart collaboration and coordination between the relevant state agencies and civil society. For instance, TWISA learned that service providers are highly reliant on donors for co-financing. Unsurprisingly, when Oxfam approached service providers they were more interested in investments on water and sanitation infrastructure rather than on ‘soft’ components such as participatory monitoring of service provision. **A series of discussions with them around how social accountability can yield social and economic benefits turned them into close partners of project.**

Achieving multi-level policy changes

TWISA hopes to take advantage of these building blocks as it moves to the next phase of the project, including the collection of information as per the co-designed indicators and the use of that information in decision-making. Initial project analyses and fieldwork also allowed TWISA to better understand some essential gaps and shortcomings in current legislation and regulations in water supply and sanitation. Changing policy is a long and complicated process in Tajikistan. However, the bet continues to be to move

gradually, but steadily, with all involved across the sectorial and governance systems and building from the local to the national and on the work done to date.

This blog series will highlight key aspects of conversations between the civil society groups leading the projects and their partners, including World Bank project leaders, partner CSOs, government counterparts and the GPSA's Capacity Building Team. They offer key lessons about the project's implementation to date, including some examples of [adaptive management and learning](#) for [strategic social accountability](#). Curated by the GPSA Communications and Capacity-Building areas.