

## Understanding the service levels that people choose

Many rural water users value easy access to supply of water so highly that they do not see why they should travel further to an official safe source. Dodorkope is a rural community of about 1,200 inhabitants in the Ketu South District Assembly (KSDA) of the Volta region of Ghana. The main economic activity is subsistence farming and the KSDA considers it as one of the poor communities in the district. Dodorkope has four formal water point sources which include three boreholes with handpumps and one borehole with pedalflo pump. The community also has two communal hand-dug wells (HDWs).



One of the hand-dug wells

At the time of the visit, the pedalflo system had been broken down for over a year. By the sector norms, this community with four formal water facilities has 100% coverage and should be accessing potable water. However, the general impression from the community was that people access their hand dug wells more often than the formal water point sources. The wells are considered as unimproved water sources by the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA). The big question then is why then would people be still accessing water from unimproved sources? The reasons were found to be centred on quality, convenience of service, and other interrelated factors.

### Hand dug wells deliver same quality water pumps

Users are most likely to opt for what they understand to provide higher level of

service. Some users believe that the hand dug wells deliver same quality water as the formal sources and therefore see no need to fetch from the latter. "Ah, ah, the well has same quality like the pumps; why should we go and buy?" one household respondent asked. Another commented, "We are closer to the hand dug well; It has same quality as the pump and it is easy to draw from the well than pumping anyway." Users may not always give a single reason to opt for a particular service. Most rural folks seem to prefer sources that are closer to them as is shown by field experience from other regions. In one community a lake is highly patronised because users live too far from the only formal water point source. In another community a limited mechanised water scheme is not used because users see no need to buy from a facility when a dam at the same location can be used for free.

In Dodorkope, convenience of service involves ease of access by both distance and ease of drawing water. This community has "mobile water vendors" who fetch water for customers at the water points and bring it to their homes for a fee. The vendors say that they fetch water from the hand dug wells because: "the quality is same as the pumps"; it is easier than pumping water at formal water points and "customers are satisfied". They say that because the water is free they only charge for their services and do not have to sell the water itself.

The reality is that vendors would charge more if they got the water from boreholes with handpumps because they would have to buy the water and have the extra work of pumping. An old woman aged 65 commented: "I cannot pump the boreholes and my grandchildren are too young to fetch water".

The vendor services seem to be widely used. The community has 8 mobile vendors and it appears that close to half of households have subscribed to access this perceived higher level of service. A woman at one household of five people said they



Well has same quality as pump says a water buyer

spent an average of GH¢2 (US\$ 1.40) per week for vendor services. Her view was that this was affordable because it relieved her of undergoing any stress about her water supply. Another respondent indicated that for two years her household has not accessed any other water sources except their private HDW which was constructed at their own cost on the basis of convenience ("higher service level"). Generally, using vendor services and owning private HDWs in houses are perceived to be closely comparable to house and/or yard connections from piped schemes.

For rural water users, affordability and ability to pay may be crucial but will not always dictate their choice of source. Service levels determine households' choices of water sources whether improved or not. Clearly there is the need to understand the services that people choose before planning for new facilities provision in order to optimise resources. A community like Dodorkope may not necessarily need additional boreholes with handpumps. Converting one or two of their boreholes within appropriate reach into limited mechanised water schemes with higher levels of service than boreholes with handpumps may be a better way to satisfy their preferred level of service.

The story was developed from interviews the writer had with some household respondents and water vendors during a WASHCost field team visit.

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Pictures: WASHCost, 2010

## Your field story for Source contest still possible

This issue of Source Bulletin contains two more stories submitted from Cuba and Morocco for the 2010 Source field story contest. More of these stories are published on our "The Voice from communities blog" <http://voiceofcommunities.wordpress.com/>.

You can still submit your story that we will judge for the last Source Bulletin issue in 2010 to the Editor.

