

Key Lessons Learnt

The Joint Wetlands Livelihoods (JWL) project was established by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) to tackle the problems of environmental degradation and increasing poverty caused by institutional failure in the management of land and water resources in one of Nigeria's major river basins.

As part of JWL's overall communications strategy, this paper is intended for sharing the experience of the project with a broad range of key players in integrated land & water resources management: donor agencies, project / programme managers & river basin authorities.

The lessons learnt papers provide key insights into a range of processes critical to the success of the JWL project, representing best practice & innovation in project management and working with partners.

*This paper deals with the process of **mainstreaming communications**. It provides a summary of key lessons learnt, tools used by the project to facilitate the process, and selected case studies of how these tools assisted in achieving the project's objectives.*



Summary

1. Every activity involving stakeholders is an opportunity to influence change – the challenge is to get them to communicate their demands or deliver their response more effectively.
2. The best way to influence other stakeholders, especially higher-level decision makers, is not to tell them about the problem but to take them to it, to meet it face-to-face: exposure tours and exchange visits work so much better than powerpoint presentations and reports.
3. Regular stakeholder analysis enables more strategic communications and influencing of stakeholders: knowing who to target and why, recognising their stake, and helping to identify the right incentives to bring them on board and/or spur them into action.
4. The creation of overlapping platforms for stakeholders to dialogue and act at different levels of the problem enables free and fast flow of information, formally and informally, driven by demand mainly from the grassroots – regular meetings are essential, but a database of all stakeholders' phone numbers and email addresses moves the process quicker: access to mobile phone networks in affected rural communities has become a powerful asset.
5. Driving (civil society) demand is not enough – strategies are needed for simultaneously stimulating parallel (government) supply side pressures, providing higher-level decision-makers with information and incentives to make better informed decisions in response.
6. Good information alone does not lead to better decisions – commitment and accountability loops are equally essential, provided internally: through regular meetings, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems, and connectivity, and externally: through media engagement and public broadcasting.
7. When opportunities don't present themselves, persistence pays off: multiple follow-ups and 'snowballing' serve to maintain and build pressure to achieve critical mass for change.

DFID Department for International Development



The project is managed by the UK-based Information, Training and Development

Ltd: the views expressed here are not necessarily therefore those of DFID.

JWL Project Setting

The project is based in the north of Nigeria, in the Hadejia-Jama'are-Komadugu-Yobe Basin (HJKYB), whose rivers cross the states of Kano, Jigawa, Plateau, Bauchi, Yobe, and Borno before flowing into Lake Chad. Particular attention is given to an area known as the Hadejia-Nguru Wetlands (HNWs). This is an inland delta situated at the centre of the basin, where a large proportion (1.5 million) of the basin's mostly rural population is concentrated. Prior to the project, this area was experiencing a dramatic increase in levels of poverty and land-use conflict.

The HJKYB, often referred to simply as the Komadugu-Yobe Basin (KYB), is home to an estimated 15 million people, and is a sub-catchment of the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) which extends across parts of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and the Central African Republic. The HJKYB is the most active basin within this wider region, providing livelihoods for over 60% of the projected 30 million people residing in the LCB, even though its share of water resources is less than 10% of the total for the LCB's full catchment area.

'Communications' ... is all about connections, interactions, relations, exchanges, contacts, etc, between stakeholders, as well as being about the various means or media of exchanging information i.e. public/private broadcasting through TV, radio, telephone, internet, print, slideshow, theatre, etc.

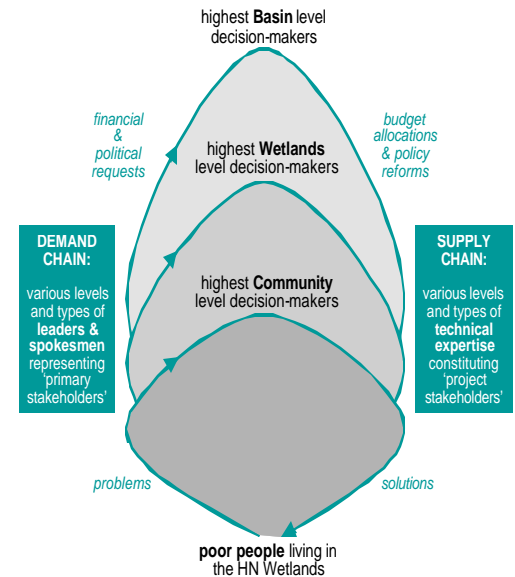
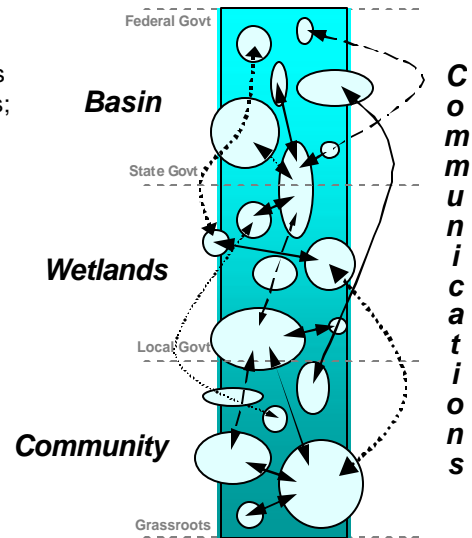
Key Tools

JWL's communications strategy is not to promote or institutionalise JWL as a project. The project's objectives are primarily focused on catalysing change through stakeholders own organisations and reforming their existing institutional arrangements. As such, the project actively plays down its own role in the process while promoting that of its stakeholders.

The core objective of JWL's communications strategy is 'influencing' for social and political change. To this end, 'communication' is seen as a tool for learning and sharing experience between agents/agencies who are in a position to influence, make decisions or implement change to improve management of shared natural resources. JWL's communications and influencing (C&I) strategy has these various agents/agencies, the users and producers of information, at its centre, rather than the communications activities or channels. The C&I strategy has four key strands founded on a detailed analysis of stakeholders needs:

(i) **communication for supportiveness** – supporting concerned stakeholders to raise awareness and understanding of the problems of the wetlands/basin and of possible solutions; for engagement and mobilisation of other interest groups; for building broad consensus; for developing a critical mass of support. Key tools used include: repeat PRAs; exchange visits; regular meetings; media tours; public campaigns; and pilot demonstration projects.

(ii) **communication for empowerment** – providing support and capacity for interest groups (e.g. members of the community who depend on shared natural resources) to lobby for action by those in decision making roles (e.g. local and state government) to improve their access to these resources and to other services. Key tools used include: catalysing stakeholder platforms and fora; joining those constrained with those better able to voice public interests/demands; developing channels/links between platforms/fora at each level; consultancy inputs, visitations, study tours, etc. for experience-sharing; addressing the same problem at different levels; representation of marginalised groups; leadership and management training; resource use planning; training in advocacy skills and in information management and communications skills; support in technical production; and development of participatory monitoring & evaluation systems.



(iii) **communication for increased accountability** – is about influencing and advocacy at all levels to institutionalise the processes necessary for better resources management. Key tools used include: overlapping membership, circulation of minutes of meetings and workplans (thru email), and establishment of an informal communications network (thru extensive use of mobile phones and maintenance of a stakeholder database) within & between all levels of stakeholder fora; daily policy analysis (political intelligence gathering); maintaining awareness among local elite and philanthropists; public exposure visits, courtesy calls and summit meetings to engage higher level decision-makers; strategic media coverage of stakeholder events; and promotion of resource use planning processes at all levels.

(iv) **communication for internal learning and information management** – identifying methods to improve internal and external information flows that enable lessons and cases of good practice to be shared and learning from these to improve processes. Key tools include: maintaining a photo and movie library, a media report file, and regular follow-up meetings with engaged media correspondents; training in the use of digital video cameras, document formatting, power-point presentation and internet search/email facilities; and development of suitable dissemination materials & media, including web-pages/sites.

JWL Project Objectives

As with all DFID interventions, poverty reduction is at the heart of the JWL project's overall objectives. In the Nigerian context, DFID's road to poverty alleviation is seen as a concerted improvement in service delivery, accountability, and pro-poor growth. All three are very weak in northern Nigeria.

This is particularly so in the sector(s) and the river basin in which the JWL project is working. River and wetlands dependent livelihoods span the mandate of at least three government ministries – water resources, environment, and agriculture – and three levels of Nigerian government, which allows most related service delivery to fall through the cracks between the plethora of different organisations concerned.

DFID's approach in Nigeria includes: improving development coordination, governance reforms, strengthening service delivery, and protecting/promoting livelihoods. These all impinge directly on the situation the JWL project is addressing within the HJKYB and HNWs.

The standard approach to project 'communications' is oriented towards public relations, publicity, and promotion of a project's objectives/achievements. JWL's communications strategy is geared more towards 'influencing' the process of reform, mainly through capacity building of project stakeholders in strategic use of a range of suitable media, effectively downplaying the role of the project in public.

Case Study

Community Exchange Visits

A good starting point for helping people across a wide area to help themselves is to get them all talking to each other, to find a common understanding of their shared problems and suitable solutions to address them. In just six days, armed only with a minibus and a driver, JWL staff managed to conduct a series of exchange visits between representatives of clusters of villages in six different locations covering all the communities along two of the wetlands channels (one blocked, the other flooded) such that all got to talk to each other. Public gatherings were arranged in central villages for visitors and hosts alike to share their experiences of their channel's problems and their efforts (most in vain) to tackle them. After a brief introduction, JWL staff let the communities do all the talking. By the third day (return visits), discussions began turning towards collective action and possible sites to work first. By the final day, all had agreed to pay a visit to the most critical site, on which, within a few days, they all converged, over a hundred reps, from villages 60kms apart, eager to begin clearing the mouth of the blocked channel. It took several more meetings of this kind, and between a smaller number of elected leaders, to plan the financial and logistical details of the work required before it eventually began a month later, but the process had been set in motion. Over 1000 men, young and old, from more than 30 villages participated in the work that year. Three years later, they are all still out there, in force, keeping their channel clear.

Case Study

Media Engagement Tours

The public media are a formidable force for change when handled and harnessed correctly. In Nigeria their services are bought both by politicians and public demand. When engaged by projects, they therefore need to be able to differentiate between the two, to provide the right kind of service: stories 'in the public interest' attract certain concessions and support. Getting journalists to cover project activities proved an expensive business to begin with. It wasn't until they were encouraged and invited to tour the wetlands/basin with JWL staff, to see first-hand the problems we were trying to address, and to talk to the affected people, that their attitude dramatically changed. International radio broadcasts by well-respected correspondents on BBC, DV, and VOA Hausa Services, highlighting the problems and the communities' initial efforts, soon attracted the curiosity of the local & regional media: radio, TV and newspaper correspondents and editors. A one or two-day tour of areas affected within their own states, for groups of media men and women from the same state, in each state in the basin, quickly established a pool of highly supportive, influential and committed journalists on which the project has since been able to rely for accurate and advocative coverage of project-related events across the basin, promoting stakeholders' demands.

Case Study

Exposure Visits for Politicians

More impressive than any well articulated power-point presentation or technical report or TV documentary or newspaper editorial, highlighting the worsening environmental and poverty situation in the wetlands/basin, is to go there and see it yourself. The scale of the problem is simply unimaginable from anything else you might see, hear or read. Most politicians in Nigerian are faced with a barrage of personal and public demands to be addressed every day. Prioritising is a problem. The most immediate, most pressing are the most likely to attract their attention. Recognising this constraint and turning it into an opportunity, JWL has on several occasions invited and facilitated tailor-made visits (or else steered official visits) by politicians (i.e. Local Govt Chairmen, Councillors, State Governors, Commissioners, Federal Ministers, Senators, and even the President) to expose them to the extent of the problems in the wetlands/basin, and commit to making their resolution a personal or political priority.

Case Study

Public (Media-Covered) Courtesy Calls

Whether made in the field or in the office, public statements by politicians require 'follow-up' action to ensure the issues they relate to remain a priority (a thorn in the side) of those who commit to act on them, until that action is taken. When such commitments are made, JWL encourages concerned stakeholders to organise public 'courtesy calls', in the presence of a number of well-briefed, well-respected, already engaged media correspondents, to those who make them to thank them for addressing their problem. Having already publicly, only committed to act, this usually triggers further commitments with practical steps, aware of the potential for public embarrassment or popularity through the attending media.

Related Publications: *'JWL Communications & Influencing Strategy'; and JWL's 'Comparative Stakeholder Analysis'*