

Inter-cultural Competence

Case Study 1 – Lack of Ownership

Background Information

With a lot of excitement, Aguas de Potes, a local Spanish water utility, together with Bwana Water Company, a local Kenyan utility have signed a WOP agreement. The scope of the WOP includes training of technical staff on leak detection and repair with the idea to reduce technical losses of Bwana Water in order to support the financial recovery of the utility.

The WOP agreement has been signed by all parties in April 2016 with an intended starting date of August 2016. In June 2016, however, Mweni Mwangi, the Managing Director (MD) of Bwana Water has been promoted as a Technical Director at the Ministry of Water in Nairobi, due to her good performance as the MD of Bwana Water. As her replacement, Nelson Okoth has been selected as the new MD of Bwana Water as from 1st of July 2016.

As planned, the WOP kick-off workshop happens in August in Kenya together with the technical team from Agua de Potes. Unfortunately, the new MD cannot join the workshop due to a last-minute visit to the utility's warehouse. During the first weeks of the WOP project, the project team realises that needed decisions, support and meetings are not happening.

After the initial weeks have passed on the project is far behind the anticipated workplan, the project team finally managed to get hold of the new MD. During the short conversation where the project team indicated their frustrations, Mr. Okoth mentioned that the agreement has been signed by his predecessor and he feels that the utility currently has other urgent priorities and unfortunately, he cannot dedicate time for the WOP project at the moment. He is, however, thankful for the support and optimistic that in the near future he will be able to take the necessary decisions in order to advance the project.

Challenge

With the change of the leadership of the local water utility, the new MD does not feel ownership on agreements signed in the past. What would you recommend as a way forward for the project team and the WOP agreement as a whole?

BEST PRACTICES

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Potential Steps

- Immediately inform responsible project managers and stakeholders about the challenge encountered.
 - An intervention from a higher level within the project structure may help to stress the importance of the WOP project.
 - The funding agency / implementation agency may be able to stop all related activities if reaching the intended project goal is at risk. The project may continue at a later stage.
 - Project scope may be adjusted together with the new MD in order to get ownership.
- Try to transfer decision-making from MD to somebody who was involved in the design process of the project (e.g. Technical Director).