



The Inside Story

Process Documentation

Experiences from EMPOWERS



Produced by EMPOWERS, a project co-funded by the European Union MEDA Water Programme

**Ton Schouten, Buthaina Mizyed, Rania Al-Zoubi,
May Abu-Elseoud, Firas T. Abd-Alhadi**

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Published by the Inter-Islamic Network on Water Resources Development and Management (INWRDAM) the host of the Regional Information Programme of the EMPOWERS Partnership

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Thank you from,

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May Abu-Elseoud
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1. Introduction:

Why document the EMPOWERS project?

Process documentation in the EMPOWERS project

EMPOWERS was a four-year (2003 to 2007) regional project at governorate, district and village level in Egypt, Jordan and Palestine to improve long-term access and rights to water for underprivileged populations in local communities, within a context of improved local water governance. In 2002, even before the EMPOWERS project was under way, the partners realised that a project with the aspiration to change planning and decision-making processes in water management and to include marginalised groups would encounter resistance and would clash with cultural traditions and existing social patterns and power constellations. The idea of process documentation was introduced to identify and track the traditions and patterns that help or hinder the changes that EMPOWERS aimed to bring about.

There was not a huge body of knowledge about process documentation at the time, and there were no manuals or tools. A background paper was written to guide process documentation in EMPOWERS, a simple toolkit was developed and, most importantly, three process documentation specialists were recruited, one in each of the three countries in which EMPOWERS was working. You will find their voices in this publication: May Abu-Elseoud (Egypt), Rania Al-Zoubi (Jordan), and Buthaina Mizyed (Palestine).

This publication reinterprets the EMPOWERS background paper to process documentation in the light of three years of experience of making it happen. It answers the questions, what is process documentation and why, how, with whom and when should it be conducted? This publication also describes some of the ways and means process documentation was applied in the three countries to study meaningful processes and the responses of stakeholders to the changes a project tries to realise. It tells the inside story of change and resistance within the context of people's cultures and traditions.

Different interpretations of process documentation

This publication is not a manual but it does provide guidance for those who think that tracking the obstacles and opportunities for change is important. It does not pretend to present the only definition of process documentation or a one and only way of doing it. Since we began, process documentation has generated a lot of interest and a lot of different interpretations. Some would like it to be a tool for qualitative monitoring in projects; others consider it to be a tool for learning in action research projects, while others see it as a way to strengthen communication strategies in projects. Some have stressed the importance of documenting processes together with stakeholders and using it to give a voice to citizens. Probably, we derived some of each of these benefits, but at the start of EMPOWERS none of these perspectives was considered in much depth. Our most important aim was to try to reveal some of the hidden social and cultural patterns that EMPOWERS would encounter on its way: the patterns that hindered or

helped concerted action, the participation of marginalised groups, and empowerment and shared decision making, which were the key objectives of EMPOWERS. Our thinking was that, by documenting and sharing these factors, public debate about key obstacles and opportunities to change water governance could be stimulated.

What happened to our original ideas? Which were useful and which were not? How was process documentation applied in the three countries by the three process documentation specialists? What new insights did they add? The experiences of the three process documentation specialists have been included through comments and conclusions that greatly enrich this publication. They have not only reflected on the change processes amongst stakeholders, within communities and inside the project teams but have also reflected on their own roles and how that contributed to the whole.

Outputs of process documentation in EMPOWERS

Process documentation in EMPOWERS generated a range of outputs: a story book "Doings Things Differently", three documentary films on water governance produced by local filmmakers in Egypt, Jordan and Palestine and one compilation film "Nor Any Drop to Drink". There were also case studies, interviews and stories published in EMPOWERS newsletters and in magazines. All these outputs are described on the EMPOWERS website <http://www.empowers.info/>. Since the EMPOWERS project came to a close in August 2007, the website, outputs and future activities to advocate improved governance of water resources and water services are managed by the EMPOWERS Thematic Group (ETG), the same partnership of international and local organisations that implemented the EMPOWERS project.



2. How development has changed its focus

From technical solutions to water governance

Over the last two decades, development projects have changed their focus. In the 1970s and 1980s, most development projects were technical and focused on imported technologies from the West. The numerous breakdowns of these technologies led to a new style of intervention. In the water sector, the focus changed from the pumps, pipes and boreholes to the process of setting up and training water committees and associations of users to maintain the pumps and the pipes. Methods such as participatory rural assessment (PRA) were developed to ensure the participation of end users in decision making about water services. This switch of focus from the technology to the social and managerial aspects of development was designed to increase the sustainability of water systems. But even trained water associations and participation by stakeholders were not enough. Some water associations succeeded in delivering a constant water supply, but many others failed. It was unrealistic to expect water associations in communities to do everything by themselves, especially to operate and maintain a water service through major technical and managerial problems. The enabling environment also needed to be supportive. Policies, legislation and institutions to support the water committees and associations were needed, and these institutions and community level bodies needed to interact effectively. There was an increasing understanding that sustainable solutions required all stakeholders - communities, public and private sector institutions - to be included in decision making.

So, the development sector shifted from technical interventions, to social interventions, to interventions in the wider enabling environment, and now seeks to intervene in what is often called the governance of water resources and services. In the EMPOWERS project water governance is defined as “the set of systems that controls decision making with regard to water management and water service delivery.” (Moriarty, P. *et al.*, 2007; page 5).

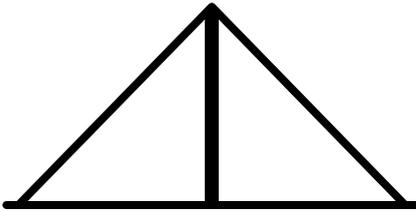
This shift towards intervening in the set of systems that control water management decision making has started to touch on the social, cultural and political foundations of societies in a way that installing a handpump does not. “Such decisions often contain a profoundly political element, particularly where there is competition for limited water resources”. (Moriarty, P. *et al.*, 2007; page 5).

Learning from change and conflict

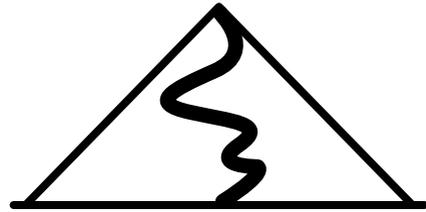
“Success is wonderful, but we learn the most from adversity and failure. That which makes us uncomfortable or is controversial gives us clues about how to be successful in a much deeper way.”
Annie E. Casey Foundation 2003; page 1.

Development projects that address governance issues may clash with deep-rooted traditions and constellations within societies. This often takes those who plan and implement projects by surprise. Indeed, sometimes it appears as if projects are designed from academic text books

without any sense of reality, not understanding how things are done traditionally or simply ignoring them. The ambitions of projects sometimes are so high that clashes with existing social and political patterns are unavoidable. This may then be interpreted as project failure. However, these clashes could also be seen as an opportunity to learn and as an opportunity to make projects more realistic.



The project as planned



The actual course of the project

Change never comes easily, especially if change is targeted at empowerment, stakeholder participation, sector integration or improved governance. Academic analysis may reveal that these are indeed the ways to achieve sustainable water resources and improved water services, but such targets could also be seen as over-ambitious or even naive. Projects often look at deep-rooted social patterns as stumbling blocks and barriers on their way, instead of seeing them as opportunities to learn and to increase the impact of the project. There is often not enough time to look back or to look deep, and not enough patience to step back and observe, and there is no emotional space to acknowledge setbacks and failure and to learn from them.

Projects are just moments in a much longer process of development. They arrive, set up, they try to achieve change, succeed in part, present results nicely, hide their failures and go ... and then societies move on. Long and van der Ploeg phrase it as follows: "Intervention is visualised in existing models as a discrete set of activities that take place within a defined time-space setting involving the interaction between so-called 'intervening' parties and 'target' or 'recipient' groups. Such an image isolates intervention from the continuous flow of social life and ongoing relations ... intervention never is a 'project' with sharp boundaries in time and space as defined by the institutional apparatus of the state or implementing agency." (Long and van der Ploeg, 1989; page 228).

Projects have a short life. Three or, at a maximum, five years. Most of the structures, traditions, beliefs and attitudes that projects aim to change are much deeper rooted. That is why it is important to document the context, looking beyond the project in time and in space. What is the history of the structures, beliefs and attitudes? How did it get to this stage? Is this restricted to the project area or can you find it in the whole country?

Understanding the continuous flow of social life and how societies move and change, will make projects more relevant, particularly if they are focused on empowerment, participation or integration. With this understanding they will better relate to and communicate with their 'target' societies and have a better chance of stimulating reflection and debate on issues that go beyond the time-space setting of the project. Process documentation aims to increase the understanding of project staff and stakeholders and generate reflection and debate. It aims to learn from the clashes with existing social patterns and power constellations, from the curves and the bumps on the project road.



3. What is process documentation?

Process documentation is a valuable tool in action research, learning alliances and multi-stakeholder platforms which are all methodologies that recognise the impact of cultural traditions and power constellations on development. Process documentation is a tool that helps project staff and stakeholders to track meaningful events in their project, to discern more accurately what is happening, how it is happening and why it is happening.

In the context of EMPOWERS, process documentation set out to document and describe why and how existing systems of decision making hinder or enable changes towards more shared and transparent governance of water resources and services, since EMPOWERS was a project that aimed to change local governance of IWRM and WASH. From the start it was clear that such an ambition could very well clash with how things were done traditionally in governorates, ministries, villages and CBOs. What would happen when different stakeholders were asked to make plans jointly for water resources management? What would happen when governorate officials were asked to discuss water management problems with a community based organisation (CBO)? What would be the reactions of stakeholders when they found out that EMPOWERS aimed to improve governance but did not intend to invest in infrastructure? Documenting and sharing these local responses was thought to increase the potential for learning and for opening debates on key issues in improving local governance of water resources and services and to address bottlenecks.

Every project has an agenda, a programme and a list of tasks that usually outweigh the time available to do them. The main actors are busy, engaged and struggling to reach their targets. They need to respond to changing events and think creatively about how to overcome problems. In a project with many stakeholders, there are many perspectives and different amounts of power. When there are disagreements, some people voice their objections, while others may not put reservations into words, but simply become less involved or even obstruct the work. One purpose of process documentation was to help the process of learning and to tease out those silent views and conflicting emotions. Process documentation specialists were part of the team but able to stand back from day-to-day decision making and become the eyes and ears of the project. They captured change and reactions to change by watching and noticing, talking to people, taking minutes of meeting, taking photographs and listening to people's life stories. While the main actors were closely focused on the tasks, process documentation specialists were able to act more intuitively, ask questions and synthesise the process. They could focus on a particular aspect of change in an individual and on the bigger picture in a community.

Process documentation uses interviews, newsletters, photographs, videos, story telling, and quick summaries of meetings – but whatever the methods, its essence lies in the process of recording change, resistance to change, conflict and resolution and in helping the actors to reflect and learn. Within the team, the specialists were not silent partners, but questioning and sometimes even annoying agents. Unlike a detached documentary maker who looks through a

lens at curious objects, the documentation specialists probe and engage and prompt people to react. They can be doubting but never cynical, questioning but never undermining. Sometimes you wish they would clear off and give you a break – but it is better that you pay attention to what they are recording.

We all register, reflect and analyse the processes of our lives. We do it when we drive home after a difficult meeting or during a walk in the forest or other moments where we look back at what happened, how it happened and try to understand why it happened. The Annie Casey Foundation says: “In many ways, process documentation of a social change movement serves the same purpose as an individual keeping a diary of his or her life. A diary allows daily reflection on events and factors framing those events in addition to creating a historical record. Over time, a diary, like process documentation, will reveal recurring themes and patterns that help or hinder progress towards transformation.” (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003; page 3). In other words, process documentation is a systematic way to reflect, analyse and discover patterns that help or hinder change.

Process documentation systematically looks at context, history and traditions, rather than being confined to what is going on during the limited lifetime and the spatial and institutional boundaries of a project. It looks beyond the project into the ‘real world’ that the project aims to change, into history, culture and patterns of power and decision making. That is why process documentation is important for projects with social or political objectives such as improved governance, empowerment or stakeholder cooperation. These projects have the ambition to change traditional patterns, attitudes, relationships, approaches and ways of thinking. They should therefore try to understand the context and background of these attitudes, relationships and approaches, and explore their impact on project objectives.

As well as capturing the process, this form of documentation also organises, analyses and disseminates findings in a way that makes them useful. It involves:

1. a structured, focused way of capturing the change process that a project aims to bring about – activities, interactions between stakeholders, issues and contextual factors;
2. organising information in such a way that stakeholders have an opportunity to reflect and learn about the process;
3. analysing information by looking at common themes, trends and patterns and placing the findings in the context of the project and the project’s theory of change;
4. disseminating information quickly enough to be useful.

To apply process documentation requires having a clear theory of change. This gives direction and focus to deciding what is important and less important to observe. All projects have a theory, most of them implicit, but some of them explicit, in particular those with the aim of social change. The theory could be that empowerment will improve access of poor people to water or that concerted action of all stakeholders will result in more sustainable and more effective

solutions to water problems. Acknowledging the importance of a change theory and making this theory explicit allows stakeholders to participate in discussions on the basic assumptions of the project, and to react positively or negatively.

The theory of change may be that a project will lead to integration between departments, disciplines or sectors, improve coordination between stakeholders, increase joint decision making and participation, and lead to changes in attitudes and empowerment. Key indicators of these changes need to be expressed in project goals to give a better understanding of what to document. A well-articulated theory of change encourages project leaders to explain what is meant by words that are often used too easily. What is empowerment? How will it look when people or groups are empowered? How does it show if they are not? What is meant by sectoral integration and what does this look like? What attitudes are you seeking to change? What are the indicators for successful concerted action? The theory of change provides a lens through which to observe the process; the indicators bring it into focus.

If we take all these elements together we can define the process as follows:

Process documentation provides a systematic way to capture what happens in a process of change and how it happens, and to organise and disseminate the findings. Process analysis allows those taking part in change to reflect and analyse why it happens, within the context of an explicit theory of change.

Adopting this definition does not mean that process documentation should be seen as conceptually difficult. As the Anne Casey Foundation puts it: "From my experience, process documentation is something that folks in the field do all the time informally - it just isn't systematic or written down. Once people realize that this is something they are already doing, and that this is a tool that will help a community reach their goals, they are likely to embrace process documentation." (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003)



4. Why carry out process documentation?

The first aim of process documentation is to improve the quality and impact of a project. It does this in three main ways. It allows those most closely involved to step back far enough to reflect on trends, patterns, opportunities and warning signs. It contributes to the collection of qualitative information on results that are not easy to capture quantitatively, and so fills out the story behind the figures. This includes information on who or what influences decisions, and whether certain attitudes help or hinder change. Thirdly, it encourages learning from mistakes and offers opportunities to celebrate impact.

This process also challenges assumptions. It brings the theory of change in touch with reality, leading to the theory being adapted where necessary and to a deeper understanding of crucial processes in society.

Documentation sets a project in its local context, helping those delivering a project to see the bigger picture, rather than having their horizons limited to their own interventions. It gives people a voice and shows their lives holistically, capturing significant and unique local background, including environmental and political factors. The project is therefore more likely to interact with the broader reality of people's lives rather than simply seeing them as functional project beneficiaries.

The benefits are not only confined to the project team. Process documentation helps to share, disseminate and encourage debate about important development processes in society with a wider group of organisations and individuals, who are then able to take part in the learning process by discussing and analysing successes and failures. It brings into the public arena the 'hidden' factors related to politics, power constellations, and relationships and helps to open them up for public discussion.

Finally, it should be noted that project documentation also adds to the internal life of the work of a project team. It leads to more intimate relationships with stakeholders for interviews, case studies etc., which in itself is rewarding and inspiring. Story telling is a nice thing to do, benefiting both teller and listener and leading to a heightened sense of the way that challenges and successes interact with people's daily lives. Giving people a voice is also a good thing to do; perhaps because it is only when they open up and talk about what has made a difference in their lives that people understand for the first time what has brought about changes, which changes are significant to them, and that their own experiences matter. For the story teller and for the listener it helps to complete the journey away from thinking of development as a technical intervention to do with pipes and wells, towards the development relationships and the way that communities and societies plan and take decisions. And, as a postscript, process documentation is also fun.

Internal learning and external communication

It is clear from the above that process documentation can serve two purposes; improve learning within the project team and stakeholders, and improve external communications.

- Internal project learning and joint learning with stakeholders requires formats and methods to structure the process.
- Communication with the 'outside' world requires a communication strategy. With whom do we want to share which findings? What are the best formats and channels to reach out to these target audiences? Newsletters, books, academic articles, the Internet, posters, messages on TV or radio?

Can process documentation serve both purposes? Yes, because similar products – such as interviews, case studies, photos, video clips etc. are required for both purposes.



5. What should you document?

Which paths does the process documentation specialist follow? Which smuggler trails or freeways does the process documentation specialist take? Process documentation involves recording both formal and informal events, taking minutes, watching what happens in meetings and also talking to people outside meetings, listening to them describe how they understand what is happening and what they think and do about it. In deciding which paths to follow, which events, people and places to track, the documentalist must relate their progress to the theory of change of the project.

The aim of EMPOWERS was to change local governance of IWRM and WASH, with a theory of change that included better integration and coordination between stakeholders, joint decision making and participation to achieve concerted action, and changes in attitudes and empowerment, particularly to bring in those who were outside the decision-making process. This expresses the ambitions in general; however, the process documentalist needs to have a more sharply focused agenda with clearer indicators.

How the EMPOWERS theory of change guided documentation

Each area of change that was important to EMPOWERS could be broken down into a series of questions that help to guide process documentation, by making it clear what needed to be sought out and answered. The EMPOWERS theory of change focuses on four elements:

1. The decision making process:

- Who is part of the decision making processes in water management and who is not?
- How are decisions in water management taken – formally and informally?
- Are there conflicts in decision making – if so, what are they?
- Is there resistance to change in the decision-making process – if so, why and about what?
- Does every stakeholder have the same access to information?
- Do stakeholders consider shared decision making to be a better way of doing things?

2. The process of concerted action:

- How do stakeholders organise themselves (formally and informally)?
- How do stakeholders traditionally communicate with other stakeholders (formal and informal networks)?
- Are there dependency relationships – if so, what are they and how do they manifest themselves?
- Do all stakeholders have the same objectives? What are the differences?
- Do stakeholders follow up on agreed actions?
- Do stakeholders communicate with their constituencies?

3. The process of behavioural and attitude change:

- What are stakeholders' beliefs, norms and values in relation to water use and management?
- What are stakeholders' beliefs, norms and values in relation to working with each other?
- How do stakeholders describe each others attitudes/behaviour?
- How are stakeholders 'known' in the community (are there signs of stigma, prejudices, nicknames)?
- Is there easy contact between stakeholders or a large social and cultural gap?
- Which attitudes hamper or promote concerted action and shared decision making?

4. The process of empowerment:

- Which stakeholders consider themselves powerless and why?
- Who has the power in water management and who has none?
- Are there any power conflicts about how water should be managed?
- Which cultural or social traditions and patterns block the empowerment of groups?
- Are all stakeholders represented in the decision-making process?

The decisions about what to document are similar to the decisions that a film maker or a journalist takes when following a story. There is a need to go where the action is. Project teams know where the struggle of their project for change will be hardest. They know where encounters between the project objectives and real world traditions, beliefs, attitudes and power constellations may cause tension and friction. These are the encounters the process documentation specialist has to track. It is where the project life line makes the sharpest curves.

This does not mean only capturing 'events'. Because changes are often internal and take place over time there is also a need to capture reflection.

For example, how do you capture changes in empowerment in a real sense, rather than mechanically declaring someone to be 'empowered' because they now sit in a meeting? Buthaina Mizyed, process documentation specialist in Palestine, notes that there are often no good indicators for what she wanted to measure. She was often recording qualitative changes, rather than measurable quantitative changes, and this demanded a very different approach.

Buthaina Mizyed, Palestine

"I notice the change in empowerment but I can't measure it. An example is Fatima. She is a member of the women society in Qabatya. I observed her empowerment and how she changed since the first time I met her; how she is able to present herself and the other women in her community. But how to measure this change? I can't do it. So I feel that I am a story teller, rather than someone who is able to measure the changes according to exact indicators and scientific methods."

6. How do you document the process?

Process documentation involves three main stages, capturing the material, organising and analysing the material and sharing/disseminating the findings.

Capturing the process

The documentalist has three tools for capturing the process: observing (watching, and listening), asking stakeholders about their perceptions and actions, and learning about the background and context. Each of these processes requires considerable skills, and timing since there will be critical moments where shifts in thinking and ways of working can be captured.

Being present at events where project objectives meet traditional beliefs, relationships and attitudes in water management, allows those doing the documentation to observe tensions and conflicts and how they are addressed and resolved (or not addressed and not resolved).

The documentalist must also go to stakeholders and give them a voice, by interviewing them and framing them in photographs and/or video. This helps them to present their perspectives, especially if an interview is done sensitively and the stakeholder feels comfortable with the process. In some cases a focus group discussion will yield more information than a one-to-one interview, allowing a group of people to interact and exchange opinions.

Interviews and discussions may take place with others as well as directly involved stakeholders. Talking to 'wise people' in the community, such as professors, teachers, older people, mayors and traditional leaders helps to capture the context. Essential background knowledge will also be found in articles and books.

For capturing the process, it seems that a wide range of qualitative methods will be needed:

- interviews with individuals;
- focus group discussions;
- observation of meetings (formal and informal);
- documentation of anecdotes, jokes, and stories which reveal stereotypes and attitudes;
- diaries of project team members and/or stakeholders;
- photography and video;
- 'Most Significant Change', a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation, in which people's assessments or stories of the most significant changes flowing from a project reveal insights and common denominators.

Who should the documentalist interview and observe? Attention will focus on the individuals and groups identified in the change theory as the direct stakeholders. Depending on the context, examples could include department heads, politicians, farmers, women, community leaders etc. It is also good to talk to the people who look from outside the process, such as teachers, religious leaders, elderly people, children or youth.

It is important to take opportunities when they arise and not to be too formulaic about who is interviewed and how. For example, May Abu-Elseoud, the process documentation specialist in Egypt, planned a series of formal interviews with the same officials to measure their changing perceptions of the project. But she found that governmental staff changed jobs so rapidly that this was impractical. For example, three people were hired to head the irrigation directory in Beni Suef within the same year. So the idea of doing interviews with fixed people every six months for the whole project duration to monitor changes of opinions and behaviour fell through. The staff turnover was just too high. "We did not really have a solution for this," she says. The same holds true for how interviews are conducted. Different people will open up in different ways. Officials may be used to and prefer the official interview. Community members may require a much less formal approach.

May Abu-Elseoud, Egypt

"An interview is usually considered a good documentation tool. But we soon had to recognise that formal interviews made community members nervous. Their answers were short and formal. They said what was supposed to be said. We decided to do the interviews in a very informal setting and in a conversation kind of manner. In this setting people felt at ease and expressed their opinions more freely and openly."

Organising and analysing information

Amongst the key roles for the process documentation experts are those of organising the materials that they have collected and to put in place moments and systems for the project team to step back from daily business, reflect on issues and analyse trends and patterns.

Organising materials

Organising the information itself has two components:

- Filing the captured information: interview notes, sound cassettes and files, video sequences and photos need simple filing to avoid complete chaos. All these materials must be described and put into a file with dates, names, subjects etc.
- Information and materials must be organised into articles, photo books, video bites and films, case studies, columns, written portraits etc. One of the pillars of process documentation is that these products should be uncomplicated to produce and easy to distribute. Short memos, diaries, murals, photo briefs and video bites are more effective than long reports that arrive too late and are not widely distributed or read.

Analysing findings

Time and methods for reflecting on and analysing information often become lost in busy projects. Project staff think in terms of arriving at solutions, but the intermediary steps of

reflection and analysis are not sufficiently valued. Tools, methods and procedures are therefore needed to ensure that project teams systematically reflect on and analyse the material that has been collected. Internal learning is one of the most important benefits of documenting the change process.

Rania Al-Zoubi, Jordan

“We systematically tried to use process documentation for internal learning. Project field staff had to write monthly reports with reflections on their work using the issues in the change theory as guidance for their reporting. It was not easy to convince them to do this. They complained about the workload and did not always write their reports. I also made notes immediately after every meeting we had with the stakeholders. Just to capture immediate responses. I also wrote my own diary. Each month I wrote a report based on all these observations and reflections. This report was discussed in monthly project team meetings. The discussions were very lively and we also often decided to change things in the project. As reflection and creating distance from the daily work became a more integral part of the project, learning became more explicit and useful.”

However, although much of the analysis is done within a project team, there is an extra benefit when it also includes significant stakeholders in the process.

Buthaina Mizyed, Palestine

“The information that we collected through interviews and observations was analysed to search for common themes, trends and patterns. Analysis was done by the project team with the objective of reaching a joint understanding and agreement. Sometimes stakeholders, in particular those from the governmental offices, also participated in the analysis. It increased their understanding of the factors behind problems in water resources management and planning.”

Disseminating information

Think broadly about how you disseminate findings, reflections, interviews, photographs. The purpose of sharing them is to use them to stimulate debate. They must therefore reach your target audiences and be read, seen or heard.

The benefit of organising materials into easily accessible bites is that they can be used in many different ways. The project itself can create its own channels for dissemination with support from stakeholders. Photo montages can be put up in all the project meetings, key stakeholders can allocate space on walls for short newsletters and posters. The documentation expert can take video materials to show in communities. People are always readier to attend events if they see themselves reflected in the outcomes.

Public channels can and should also be used. Short videos can be shown on television, materials can be put on websites. Case studies can be published in magazines, inside and outside the sector. Mainstream media will be interested in anything that is new, interesting and involves people and their concerns. New technology channels, such as e-mail and Internet, can be managed easily by project staff themselves. However, it is important to remember who has access to these channels – in poor communities these will probably be out of reach.

Keeping written materials short and presenting them well, with pictures, gives them a better chance of being appreciated and read.



May Abu-Elseoud, Egypt

"We used many different methods for disseminating EMPOWERS stories: a printed newsletter, a website, we produced items for television and a 30 minutes documentary film; we made photos which we gathered in photo albums for the website. One of the most rewarding dissemination channels was a wall-newspaper. This included 'cut and paste' extracts from newsletters, other news snippets and community contributions. It was a cost-effective method to spread the project news in the villages. The wall-newspaper could usually be found hanging in the office of the village Community Development Association. We made four of them."

7. Who documents the process?

There is no single answer to who documents the process. A process documentation specialist is essential, while stakeholders themselves play a critical role in learning, and outsiders too can become part of the documentation process.

Insiders — the project team

There are good reasons to put overall responsibility for process documentation into the hands of the project team, so that it becomes an integrated project activity, and so that reflection and learning become more systematic. However, it is still sensible to appoint someone to do the job of process documentation, someone who is not involved in daily project work, but can concentrate on capturing the process, organising information, stimulating reflection and analysis, and disseminating information products. Combining process documentation with project work is likely to be counterproductive. Process documentation requires some distance from the project objectives, since the task of the documentation specialist is not in the first place to achieve project objectives, but to discover why the project is achieving its objectives or why it is failing to do so. The process documentation specialist must be able to go her/his own way.

Process documentation should be done both as part of the project and in parallel to it. That may sound as if it has the potential to be tense and conflicting; and that is just as it should be. If the process documentation specialist does not challenge the work and assumptions of the project team and create some tension then she or he does not have sufficient distance from the daily work. However, if the specialist becomes too distant from project objectives, then the project team will not learn and adapt the project as needed. The process documentation specialist has a double role in the team: to follow the project process at some distance, and to organise and stimulate internal learning and analysis, which may involve challenging the project team to have a critical look at its own assumptions.

Buthaina Mizyed, Palestine

“When I applied for this position I thought that my knowledge of communities would enable me to do this kind of work. But in the beginning, it was difficult to change from being a field worker to being an observer and to keep a distance from the actual implementation. Not being involved directly in project work was a challenge. It was also a challenge to keep silent and observe while discussions were taking place and I wanted to add something so badly. Now, after three years of doing this work, I feel that keeping this distance was good for me. I understand things better and am more sensitive to things going on behind the scenes. I see them much quicker. I also think it was good for the project. I fed the team with observations, so they were able to improve the way they worked. They were so busy in the field that they were unable to observe changes themselves. They needed an eye to observe and analyse information for them, not only about communities and stakeholders but also about the team itself, so it could adjust the way it works.”

Rania Al-Zoubi, Jordan

"When I was recruited, the project team considered me to be the solution to their problems. They needed technical support and someone to guide the work with stakeholders, which often was problematic. It was not clear to them what my actual role would be. Very soon, I became the source of evil. Because I posed questions, I forced the team to sit and reflect. They said, 'we do not have time and have more important things to do'. They all thought I was nasty. When my role became clearer to them and they saw the outputs from my work, they started to appreciate what I was doing and to appreciate the meetings in which we sat together to reflect and discuss. Now we see ourselves as a team. Process documentation has become an integral part of the EMPOWERS team work. It took two years to get there, but that is good."

Direct stakeholders

It is not only project team members who are involved in action research projects, learning alliances and multi-stakeholder platforms, but a much wider group of stakeholders. Involving these stakeholders in process documentation stimulates opportunities for learning and reflection. When a district engineer goes to a community to interview people about planning water service delivery, they are bound to become more aware of community realities and perspectives and this triggers personal reflection. However, means and procedures are needed to feed this personal learning back into the learning alliance and multi-stakeholder platform. Experience shows that these techniques give shape to activities in action research projects and that those taking part in learning alliances or multi-stakeholder platforms appreciate being given and learning from these concrete tasks.

Buthaina Mizyed, Palestine

"Government officials working with the EMPOWERS team were asked to support the process documentation. They too took photos, kept diaries, wrote minutes of meetings and documented their observations. They enjoyed this work and it raised awareness about the causes of problems in water resources management and planning. They also developed a much better understanding of the water problems faced by people in communities."

Outsiders

Involving outsiders in process documentation has the big advantage that they already have distance from the project objectives. That helps them to observe the process of the project more clearly and more critically. Involving an independent documentary film maker, journalist or writer will give good results, so long as they can work in freedom. Such professionals want to look behind the well-phrased project objectives, to know what others think of the project and to read between the lines so that they can produce good information products.

However, the relationship between the project and the outsider must be well organised. Projects do not only have the objective of documenting the processes they set in motion: they also want results. There is a delicate balance between achieving project results and looking behind the scenes to reveal power constellations and factors that hamper change. An outsider should not stretch the balance between the two objectives to the extent that the project results or even the continuation of the project are endangered.



8. What makes a good process documentation specialist?

A good process documentation specialist is curious and does not take every answer for granted. S/he is an independent thinker, who appreciates working on her/his own, and taking her/ his own decisions. The Annie Casey Foundation says that a good process documentation specialist:

- is non-judgmental and can listen to many perspectives without an 'expert' hat on;
- can ask questions that stimulate critical thinking and dig below the surface;
- is able to stay objective while also seeing the big picture and placing learning in the context of the larger vision;
- is culturally competent;
- understands the dynamics of human transformation;
- is trusted by the community, but can report findings without bias;
- can synthesise large volumes of information to identify key learning points;
- is skilled at communicating messages in a positive way.

Process documentation specialists must also have functional skills. Writing is a key skill. They should be able to put the kind of information into stories that people like to read. Other skills are helpful, such as taking photographs and simple video sequences, making a newsletter, composing a website, producing flyers, posters and murals. However, outside support can be called in for some of these.

The process documentation specialist should also be ready and able to acquire good (conceptual) understanding of the processes the project is aiming to address or change, such as concerted action, joint decision making or empowerment.



Rania Al-Zoubi, Jordan

"Gaining trust and having good relationships with people from different backgrounds is essential to do this kind of work. You must have good knowledge of the background of the target people and the local culture to understand the mechanisms in society and how people interact. Being open and transparent is a key to establish a good environment for work. I could never have written the stories about the changes that some of the local people working with EMPOWERS went through, if I had not had their trust and friendship."

Buthaina Mizyed, Palestine

"As the process documentation specialist (PDS) in Palestine. I was stationed in the Jenin office of CARE West Bank Gaza. I am an agronomist with a Masters degree in environmental sciences. I have worked in the University and the Ministry of Agriculture and have some experience in development work with local NGOs and UNDP. My tasks as a process documentation specialist included:

- Accompanying the project team in its daily work in the field and documenting observations, asking a number of key questions:
 - How is cooperation within the EMPOWERS team itself? Are team members convinced about the approach? What are their doubts?
 - Is there real team work or is anyone marginalising the role of the other?

These observations were discussed during team meetings.

- In meetings with the local community, I took notes and I recorded the degree of diversity there was amongst those attending in terms of attitudes, gender, and family representation. My task was to:
 - Listen to the debate and document who participated and who did not;
 - See if there were changes in the ideas and convictions of community people;
 - Track where there was communal action and what was done merely for somebody's personal interest.
- Keeping a diary with observations and reflections.
- Processing the collected information:
 - For a range of outputs and communication channels such as a newsletter, case studies, posters, short video films, articles and the website;
 - To be used in the planning cycle of the project, in particular information about social, economic and cultural aspects in the community and the roles of the different stakeholders involved in water management.
- Providing an input into the team reflection meetings."

9. Planning a process documentation effort

The issues that have been raised in this short account can act as a guide for anyone who is planning to include process documentation in their project. The key steps in planning process documentation are to:

- Discuss and identify the purposes of documenting the process. As we have seen this may be for learning within the project team and with direct stakeholders. It may also be for communication with the outside world. A communication strategy is needed to define target groups and to decide on the communication tools and products.
- What is the project's theory of change and how will the indicators and criteria derived from the theory direct and give focus to the process documentation? Which processes should be traced, which individuals and groups should be followed through the process, and where and when will this take place?
- What tools are needed to capture the process, organise the information, analyse the findings and disseminate the information?
- Who will document the process (project team, a process documentation specialist, direct stakeholders, outsiders)?
- Will extra skills be needed (writing, video, photography, editing, website development)? If so how will they be developed or brought in?
- What will the outputs be for internal learning and for the communication strategy? A short synopsis should be written for each product to identify the key content of the case study, video clip, photo collection etc., showing which specific objectives it will serve.
- How will the process documentation be monitored? What would constitute success?

The last of these points is perhaps the most challenging – clear benefits can be seen but how can they be measured? It requires that some project activities continue after the process is over, so that the measurement of change, and the role of process documentation can be evaluated. This is rarely possible within time-bound projects.

Buthaina Mizyed, Palestine

"Changing water management is a long process. And because it is a long process you also need to measure and observe after the project finishes. Only then, can you see if the changes that the project aimed for are sustainable. The project just ended one day while we were still in the process of change. Nobody probably will go back to the communities and the governorates to see if the changes were maintained. So we lose an opportunity to learn about our work."

10. The politics of process documentation

Process documentation looks at factors that hinder or accelerate change. We look into context, history and how a project is rolling out. We discover things that everybody knows but not everybody likes to be published. These may include blockages caused by power constellations, political interference, traditional beliefs, attitudes or lack of transparency. Although most stakeholders know about these factors, nobody really likes to talk about them in the open. And although most stakeholders also know that these factors probably limit the project success, personal and organisational interests may be too big to bring these factors into public debate. So what can a process documentation specialist say and what can they not say? What can be published and what should not? How is it possible to steer a course between challenging stakeholders and/or project teams to stimulate reflection and debate, and harming the course of the project? Will the process documentation specialist endanger her/his own future job prospects? There are no easy answers to these questions apart from the importance to be aware of these dilemmas and have the "Fingerspitzengefühl" (sixth sense) to know what can be done and what cannot. No purpose is served by making key stakeholders walk away from a project, or endangering its future. However, nothing will change if every conflict is ducked.

Rania Al-Zoubi, Jordan

"There were several occasions where we clashed with stakeholders, and in particular with government officials. One occasion was at a workshop for Ministry officials. In our analysis of water management problems in Jordan, we said that some problems are caused by lack of capacity in the Ministry. There was an immediate reaction from one official telling us strongly that this was not true and that the Ministry had plenty of capacity to tackle water problems. Later, in a more informal setting the same person told us that capacity constraints were one of the biggest problems. When we asked him why he reacted so strongly in the workshop, he said: 'I can say it, but you can't'. It is clear that you just cannot throw your observations out in the open. All the time you must ask yourselves about the best tactic, the risks and how best to do it.

We made a film with two Jordanian filmmakers. It was our film; our story of water problems, and it was the people we worked with who gave their opinions on screen. It caused a lot of turbulence. Some people from the national Ministry were very angry. They said: 'You cannot show this without our approval'. So we had to change things in the film. However, in the end, it worked out well. Because of the turbulence, the Ministry became more engaged and wanted to be part of the discussion. They called us troublemakers, but in the end the trouble we made increased the attention paid to local water governance in Jordan, even at higher hierarchical levels. And you know, in Jordan these things are also resolved quickly. People do not stay angry for very long. They were scared of Jordan being portrayed negatively in the world. They are proud of their country. What can you expect?"

May Abu-Elseoud, Egypt

"We made two versions of our meeting reports. A formal report which was the proceedings of the meeting and was disseminated to everyone. We also made a report that was distributed within the project team. This included our own observations and reflections, e.g. about how stakeholders in the meeting responded to proposals, about their reactions, their resistance to change and how they interacted. We kept these to ourselves because we did not want to offend stakeholders."



1 1 Conclusion

Clearly there is still a lot to learn about process documentation, and each time it is included in a project, there will be learning points that should be shared outside the project. However, we may conclude that process documentation may help projects to break through their limitations of having sharp boundaries in time and space. It may help projects to engage with what has been called “the continuous flow of social life and ongoing relations” (Long and van der Ploeg, 1989). It may enable projects to raise issues of general interest and stimulate reflection and debate in wider society. Process documentation tries to address the external factors that are often taken for granted or treated as nasty assumptions. Process documentation recognises these external factors as realities of life and tries to learn from them and respond to them. Process documentation is a tool that seeks to make research projects more relevant.

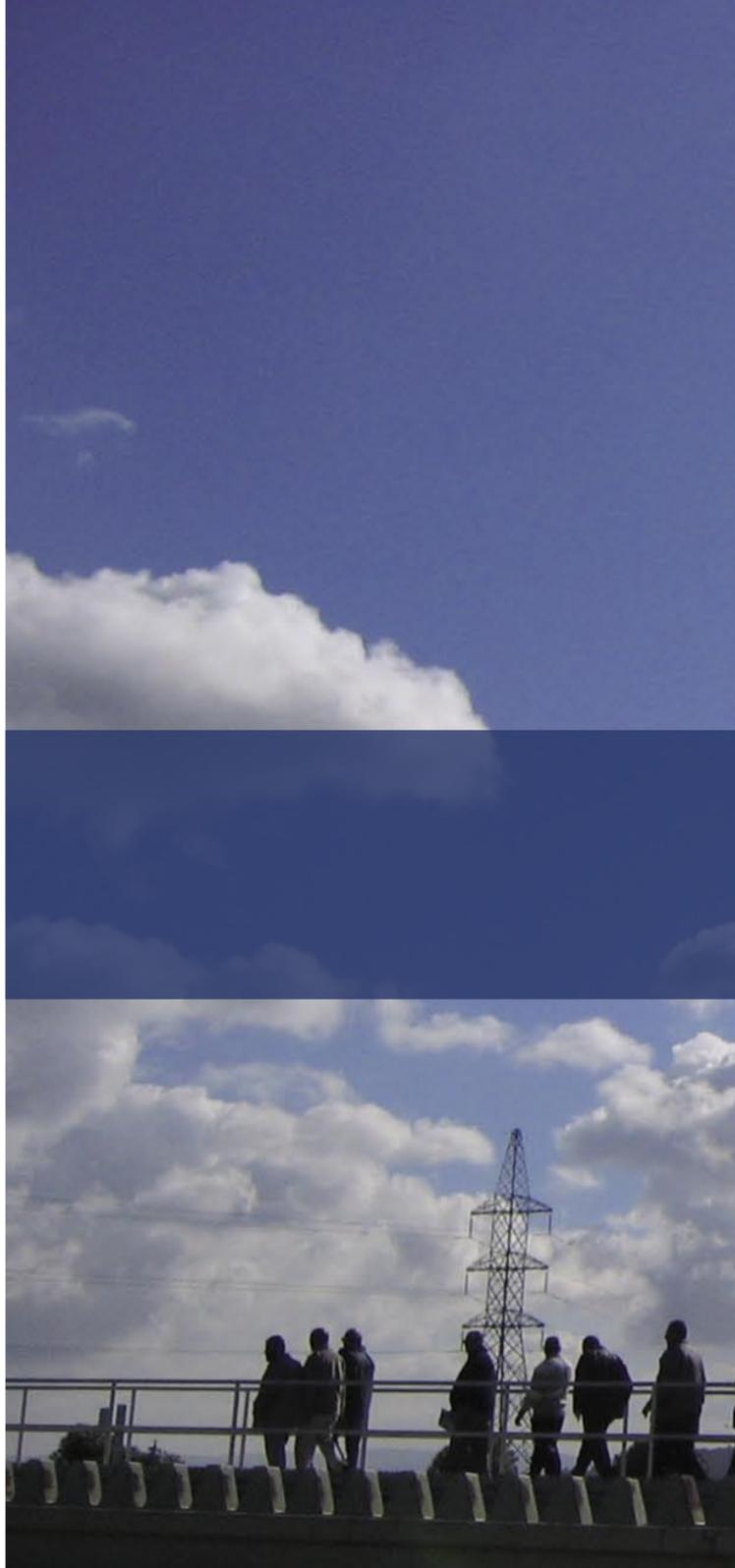
Rania Al-Zoubi, Jordan

“Did the process documentation in EMPOWERS make a difference? Yes, for internal learning it has been very important. Why? Because it helped to reflect immediately on what was going on in the project. You do not wait for two years to look back and reflect, but you do it while you are implementing. You are continuously searching for causes. You are continuously trying to understand what exactly is going on. Technical implementation teams do not normally do that. Process documentation made reflection an explicit and continuous activity in EMPOWERS. It made learning more mature. Because we did it as a team, it also contributed to the team building, to having common ground. And yes, it did encourage debate in the country. Our reports did, our newsletters and stories did and the film did. They showed the missing link between communities and governorates. They showed that local solutions contribute to solving national problems. They also showed that there are lots of projects, but no coordination. In the governorate they do not know what is going on, because projects are still implemented through the national line ministries, and this lack of coordination is replicated at governorate level. These are issues that have come onto the agenda. This was not only because of process documentation, but documentation certainly helped to grab attention for the causes of water problems. Because of that, it was good that process documentation, as well as direct project implementation, was a part of the EMPOWERS project.”

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