

Tools for community-led project monitoring

Community surveys in Egypt Household Natural Gas Connections project

Introduction Community surveys can be a useful tool for gauging a range of experiences and potential concerns across multiple individuals, and for identifying potential issues for further follow up when monitoring the implementation of development projects. Community surveys were used by civil society groups in Upper Egypt to identify community concerns and experiences engaging with project implementers in the World Bank-financed Egypt Household Natural Gas Connections project.

Project description The Egypt Household Natural Gas Connections project aims to connect 1.5 million Egyptian households to natural gas lines for cooking fuel. The total cost of the project is just under \$1.5 billion, of which the World Bank contributed \$500 million in 2014 through an investment lending operation.

Problem This large project covers eleven governorates in Egypt, with 1.5 million targeted beneficiary households. World Bank and government officials have touted the project as directly targeting poor and middle-class families and especially beneficial to women who will have access to safer, more efficient, and more affordable cooking fuel. The Bank also claimed high levels of support for the project among beneficiaries. However, it was not clear from Bank documents how communities would be systematically engaged and informed about the project on such a large scale. Egyptian CSOs decided to gather information about how communities had been engaged in the project

through a series of simple surveys with project beneficiaries.

Methodology Egyptian research organization South Foundation for Economic and Social Studies developed a set of simple survey questions to gauge community knowledge of the project and how the project implementers were fulfilling their commitments to stakeholder engagement. South Foundation, along with the Egyptian Association for Collective Rights, and the Egyptian Center for Civil and Legislative Reform conducted surveys with a sample of project beneficiaries in communities in Sohag and Aswan that were targeted by the project, reaching a total of 15-20 individuals.

Limitations A survey of this size cannot give a clear indication of experiences for the large number of project beneficiaries or impacted individuals but shows an example of views from a small sample of those in this group, and identifies areas for potential follow up.

Findings:

- **Community support for the project**

The interviews showed that among those project beneficiaries and potentially impacted persons who were interviewed, the project does enjoy broad support, and communities are eager to see the project implemented. Communities are eager to move away from the uncertainty, price fluctuations, and black market for LPG cooking fuel canisters (amboba).

- **Concerns about pricing**

When asked if they have concerns about the project, several interviewees discussed their concerns about the price rising from what they were told (at the start of project implementation) would be the cost to install and the monthly cost for natural gas service compared to an increased amount that they were asked to pay. There did not seem to be effective communication or transparency to project beneficiaries around the reasons for this price increase.

- **Lack of access for tenants**

Community members who were interviewed reported that some residents who rent units in the buildings that were set to benefit from the project were unable to access the service because they are renting and their landlord was unwilling to transfer the cost to the tenant in the form of increased rent.

- **Room for improvement in stakeholder engagement**

Likewise, project beneficiaries were overall not knowledgeable about the elements built into the project to engage with stakeholders. World Bank documents indicate a commitment to engaging with project beneficiaries and stakeholders through a variety of instruments, including community service centers, an emergency hotline, and awareness-raising trainings for natural gas safety. Community members surveyed were not familiar with these specific instruments, showing that there is a need for greater communication and outreach to stakeholders. Most of those surveyed were also not aware that there had been consultations about the project, or information about the project available via the World Bank or implementing agency. In one town, community members asked the project implementing company about the increase in prices for the gas connection and the monthly service and did not receive a satisfactory answer, but did not file an official complaint on this matter. Those interviewed were aware of a formal complaints process, but were not aware of any complaints that had been formally filed.

- **Environmental and Social Safeguards**

Those interviewed stated that they had not observed any environmental or health issues related to the project. The community members who were interviewed expressed that no evictions had happened as a result of the project, but that some land was purchased for the purpose of the project and that compensation was provided for this land.



A group of women and children stand in long queue to buy LPG cylinders. Credit: World Bank.

Lessons learned Surveys or interviews can be used effectively as a tool for civil society organizations to gauge community/beneficiary support for a project and concerns that communities might have regarding the project, either in terms of proper implementation practices in the project or in terms of possible benefits that could be received through the project. If the responses from multiple beneficiaries and across different areas where the project is being implemented show similar results or trends, these trends can be used to provide anecdotal support in advocacy with the World Bank or implementing agency when reporting issues or concerns. Community interviews and surveys can also be useful for identifying concerns that are shared by multiple individuals or in multiple communities that could be further investigated by civil society, or could indicate an issue area that communities could systematically monitor and report on.

This is one of a series of examples of successful community-led monitoring of World Bank Group projects that Bank Information Center has documented. Please visit BIC's website for tools and resources about how communities can work together to claim their rights in development projects.

www.bankinformationcenter.org/monitoring