

Drops of Transformation: Shafar's Tale of Water and Resilience



VOICES

"The generator has packed up again" were dreaded words that Mallam Abdulrauf Hamala heard frequently. This would silence the sounds of children brimming in excited banter as they fetched water effortlessly from one of the 20 water taps spread across the community. The numerous faults had become as routine as the weekly market day. Surely, more than a decade ago, when the project was initially implemented, easing the once arduous trek for water, the villagers were more than happy. For years, the diesel-powered generator worked without need for constant repairs. However, as time went by, all Mallam Abdulrauf had to look forward to were more shivers and anxieties over what would break next.

Mallam Abdulrauf Hamala, a middle-aged man, serves as the Village Head of Shafar, an agrarian community on the outskirts of Ringim in Jigawa State. As the Village Head, he carries the burden of the entire community. So, each time the generator pumping water for the entire village would breakdown, instead of relying on the government for the repairs, knowing that this could be a long wait, he would mobilise the community, soliciting funds to get it fixed.

The alternative for the community was to revert to times when they embarked on weary treks to the nearby stream, to often get unclean water. "The periods the engine broke down were quite challenging for the community. Our children had to embark on long journeys to fetch water from the nearest stream, and

water-borne diseases were rampant throughout the town" – Mallam Abdulrauf. So, for Abdulrauf and other inhabitants of the densely populated village of Shafar, this source of water had become a central part of their lives, providing potable drinking water, and for other home use.



Mallam Abdulrauf at the site of the newly constructed solar power system

Understanding that the community's shared problem required more than bickering with the authorities. The villagers organised themselves to prioritise and submit their needs through community engagements and town hall meetings planned by the government, a governance process introduced by the Partnership to Engage Reform and Learn (PERL). PERL, supporting the Jigawa State Ministry of Planning and Budget, instituted a participatory budgeting



Members of Shafar community at a public tap

process whereby citizens' prioritised needs are reflected in the state's budgets. The goal is to ensure that project choices are not solely decided by governments through its Ministries, rather, communities themselves determine what is most needed.

As the months passed, the community not wanting to get their hopes up, did not have much expectation for their project scaling through, but the wheels of change had begun to turn. In 2020, a more lasting solution was implemented as the government converted their existing power system to a clean and renewable source of energy. The solar power system installed is not only easier to maintain but is also more economical, saving the cost of purchasing diesel.

The impact of the project is felt in the streets of Shafar, where its estimated 5,000 inhabitants now benefit from free-flowing, uninterrupted, clean potable water from any of the 20 public taps, conveniently located around the community. Coupled with the reduced risk of water-borne diseases, they no longer have to bear the weight of water pots under the

unforgiving sun, and the revamped project has been a relief for Mallam Hamala, no longer fearing those dreaded words. The uncertainties of when the next supply of diesel from the government will arrive, when the next mechanical part will need replacement, or the worry of how to mobilise community donations for maintenance, have all dissipated. Now, the people of Shafar are not only enjoying a reliable water supply but also embracing a sustainable, renewable energy solution.

Shafar's transformation is more than a story about a water source, it is a change towards a more sustainable future. It echoes an era of responsiveness and collective responsibility. Whilst a lot of improvements are needed to bring water supply to the ideal, communities like Shafar can look to participatory mechanisms embedded by PERL in the planning and execution of government activities that give expression to their voice.

Contact Address:

- 📍 10 Bobo Street
Maitama, Abuja, Nigeria
- ✉ info@perlnigeria.net
- 🌐 www.perlnigeria.net
- 📺 Find us on Facebook
- 📘 www.facebook.com/perlnigeria



The Partnership to Engage, Reform and Learn (PERL) is a five-year public sector accountability and governance programme, funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. The programme provides support to governments in the core areas of policy development and implementation towards delivering public goods and services; supports citizens to engage with these processes and facilitates evidence-based learning and advocacy.

The opinions expressed in this leaflet are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.