

## 2.4. 'Conflict-sensitive WASH programme closure – exit and handover

Exit strategies are important for any project, but are critically important to consider from a conflict-sensitivity perspective. In the case of WASH investments, this is particularly pertinent when valuable assets and infrastructure must be handed over to local authorities or communities. Tensions can arise at the end of projects, particularly when communities do not fully understand the reasons why the project is ending or why an organization is leaving.

The following aspects are important to consider from a conflict sensitivity perspective, and integrated into participatory and representative programme decision-making and governance processes established to ensure early and sustained consensus about relevant risks and necessary mitigation measures – *see Programming Tool 3 'Conflict-Sensitive WASH Design and Implementation Tool' for guidance and examples of risks and mitigation measures to ensure a conflict-sensitive approach to exit/closure of programmes:*

- The exit strategy should be carefully designed before programme implementation begins in consultation with participating communities, implementing partners, and other relevant stakeholders, and should be widely shared paying attention to local language and culturally appropriate communication channels (ensuring all groups in the target community receive information and can participate), particularly in relation to plans for discontinuation.

### CASE STUDY

## The need for conflict-sensitive approaches to support exit and handover of water source identification



UNICEF Kenya supported a government-led and large-scale Water supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) programme in 2014-2018. The project funded 1,235 community water projects, mainly wells and boreholes, to improve access to safe water mainly in Western Kenya to mitigate persistent seasonal cholera outbreaks in the area. Community members later raised complaints with the local authorities that some of the projects were located on private land and had thus created conflicts over access and management of the water sources. Following the **handover of the water sources** to government counterparts, the conflicts over ownership and access persisted. Engaging a conflict-sensitive approach from the design stage, including a conflict analysis and stakeholder mapping, could have identified the potential risk of such contested ownership issues and a robust consultative process leading to a formal agreement with all stakeholders, including landowners, local authorities and water committees could have been integrated into the handover of each of the sites.

- The exit strategy should be subject to a conflict analysis and a scenario analysis and measures drawn up to mitigate against the risk of exacerbating tensions in the area through the way the project ends. Questions to be asked could include, for example, how are remaining resources shared or allocated within or across communities? How is the handover of assets/infrastructure being handled – by whom, who is the custodian? Is there a consensus on the mechanisms that have been put in place for operation and maintenance, and on the corresponding roles and responsibilities? After the project ends, what will be the security risks for local staff, partners or community members that have been involved in implementation?<sup>6</sup>

