Publish What You Pay

Information is power; or how PWYP Côte d'Ivoire took good governance to the local level

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Photo by Michel Yoboue

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Introduction

It may be a cliché, but it still rings true that natural resources often prove a curse rather than a blessing to citizens. This is particularly the case for those communities living near extractive sites. Not only does wealth generated by extractive projects rarely trickle down to them, but they suffer all the disadvantages of living near such a site: pollution, relocation, loss of land and livelihood, conflict and more. Their say over how these projects are managed is minimal; most - if not all - of the decisions are brokered between government and company. When it comes to engagement, communities are often an after-thought.

Communities experience twin difficulties - a deterioration of living conditions and a process of disempowerment as they lose control over their environment. A lack of information and communication, combined with differing expectations, exacerbate an already tense situation and communities often turn to direct action - barricades or protests for instance - to have their voices heard. These direct actions do get attention, but they rarely result in positive change for communities. More often than not, communities are subjected to repression and violence as a result of their actions.

The picture looks bleak. So what can a campaign such as Publish What You Pay do? The focus on revenue transparency can, to be sure, decrease corruption and mismanagement of natural resources, so that citizens eventually benefit from extraction. But what can be done about the lives communities are currently leading in resource-rich countries? Where does transparency and accountability come into play?

Increasing openness and transparency at the local level can do a great deal. For Publish What You Pay Côte d'Ivoire, working directly at the local level has four broad aims: to reduce conflict; strengthen the negotiating hand of communities; strengthen the credibility of communities as stakeholders; and create a platform through which citizens can engage.

This case study explores how PWYP Côte d'Ivoire sought to strengthen communities local to extraction by putting in place PWYP committees made up of local citizens; the study focusses on the experiences of Jacqueville, Côte d'Ivoire's oil and gas producing reigon.

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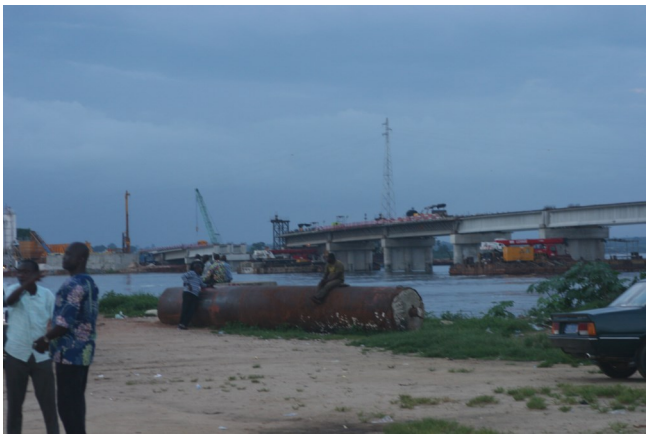
Jacqueville

Photo of Jaqueville, by Michel Yoboue



People wait for the ferry, unfinished bridge in the background

Let us take Jacqueville, Côte d'Ivoire's oil and gas producing region. Jacqueville is a small island off the coast of the country, with a population of roughly 50,000. It is made up of an eponymous capital and a number of villages. Extraction started in 1980 and although a lot of the project is carried out off-shore, several communities on the island are directly affected, with pipelines and works running through their villages. Whether it was women conducting a sit-in in 2010 that prevented access to the island, or marches by the youth of Adjue that same year, or the regular barricades or strikes, Jacqueville has seen its fair share of conflict.

The island is relayed to the mainland by a ferry and while the crossing itself is short, the queue is long. Saturday nights are particularly difficult and it may take up to seven hours to get across. No-one I spoke to had managed to make it in less than three hours. The government is completing a long-awaited bridge, to be finished by the end of 2014.

Despite being an island, the fish you eat in Jacqueville has been brought over from Abidjan. It used to be the other way around, but exploitation has made the lives of fishermen very difficult indeed. The cocoa trees too, are dying. Infrastructure is poor – when we asked communities at a consultation what they wanted for their villages and for their island, they stated a range of things: ambulances, a decent hospital, proper sporting facilities for their youth. With a majority of Jacqueville's residents being under 25, it is crucial for them to have activities and space. Most of all, they wanted the opportunity to work. Their fish and cocoa trees are dying, so what can they do? As one villager reminded, "What good will money be when all our fish and cocoa trees have died? You can't eat money".

They wanted better roads: the journey from Jacqueville to Addah is 25 km but took more than an hour by car. It is evident that Jacqueville's citizens have not benefited from their natural resources and that extraction has come at a cost. But added to those frustrations – the loss of land, the loss of livelihood – has been the loss of agency. Faced with changes happening in their villages without their consent, villagers had no one to turn to and no clear way of voicing their disapproval, and little basis for negotiation - which is why the situation has so often veered to conflict.

"There were often crises in Jacqueville" explains Julien Tinguain, co-founder of Publish What You Pay Cote d'Ivoire "each time, the population had not been properly informed or had not fully understood the latest development. There was a strong distrust of the extractive companies. This led to marches and blockades that prevented access to the site." As in many other cases, conflict was born out of miscommunication, mistrust and misinformation. PWYP wanted to provide information and advocacy tools to communities to help them, but they also "wanted to get closer to the communities to better understand what their needs and problems were". This would ensure that any action was a response to the community's genuine needs, rather than an imposition from the outside. It was also the best way to foster a sense of ownership over the PWYP campaign.

Publish What You Pay Côte d'Ivoire decided that the best way to serve the community's needs was to work with community leaders - and invite them to join the Publish What You Pay movement. "This way" said Julien Tinguain,

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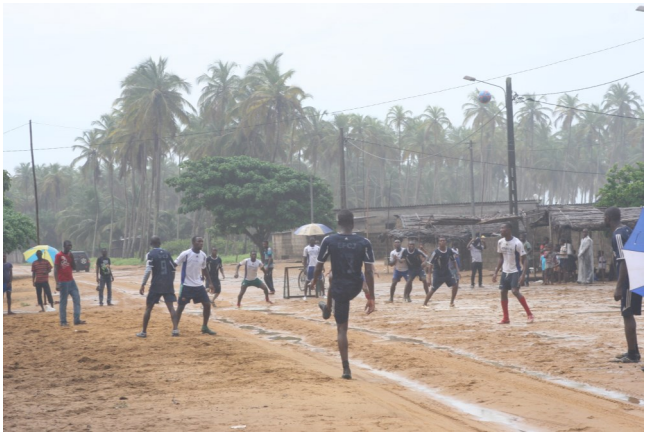
Jacqueville town



Youths playing football on the roads between villages

"we could tackle governance issues at the local as well as the national level"

In 2009, three Publish What You Pay members from Abidjan - Julian, Hyacinthe and Michel, approached Erneset Kounade from Jacqueville. Ernest is a teacher who has been living in Jacqueville for 19 years and is also the local red cross representative. A serious and passionate man, he explained why he took Julien and Michel up on their offer to join PWYP:

"When Julien and Hyacinthe explained what Publish What You Pay was, I saw that it fit into my ideals and what I aspire to do - which is to support my fellow man, to participate in raising their awareness, opening their eyes. I witnessed the recurring strikes and barricades and I wanted to change that. I believed in PWYP's idea for how that could be resolved, so I decided to join them".

Once Ernest was on board, others followed and the PWYP local committee was soon born. This committee would be able to follow and resolve a situation as it happened and, as it would be made up of members of the community itself, it would be in tune to their needs and taken seriously. Moreover, members would participate in trainings and information sharing sessions at Abidjan, so would be able to relay to the communities the latest developments at the national level that they should be aware of.

All members are made up of residents of Jacqueville who work on a voluntary basis, dedicating their time and resources to the role on top of their day jobs.

The PWYP local committee is an actor that plays many roles: mediator, interpreter, platform, counsellor – all intended to empower communities and reduce conflict. For Ernest, it is about providing the members of the villages with the tools they need to better formulate their demands. For Ange—also a member of the committee—, it is about reducing conflict and creating an alternative to barricades and violence.

The members of the committee visit each village affected by extraction roughly once a month, depending on their resources. Whether they can travel as a group or only one person can make it, they explained it was important to regularly visit each community to maintain trust and stay informed as to what is happening. But incidents don't run by a timetable, and Ange told me how she would sometimes visit villages more often if something had happened. "If they called me and it is urgent, I will do my best to go" she said. When villagers were concerned about pipelines going through their garden in 2010, it was to Ange that they turned for advice. Ange will try and give the communities information as to what is happening, or suggest what remedial actions they can take - whether this is writing a formal letter to the deputy or being put in contact with the company itself. PWYP local committee members will help translate an issue into a language the company, or government, can understand. If need be, Ange can contact her colleagues in Abidjan for advice or ask them to take the issue to a higher level. These meetings are, in a sense, troubleshoot clinics.

I was lucky enough to witness a meeting between the chiefs of Addah and Publish What You Pay, as the former had called PWYP the day before my visit requesting a meeting, to discuss the latest construction related to Foxtrot's oil and gas project.

Our meeting was with the *chefferie* (elders) who were con-

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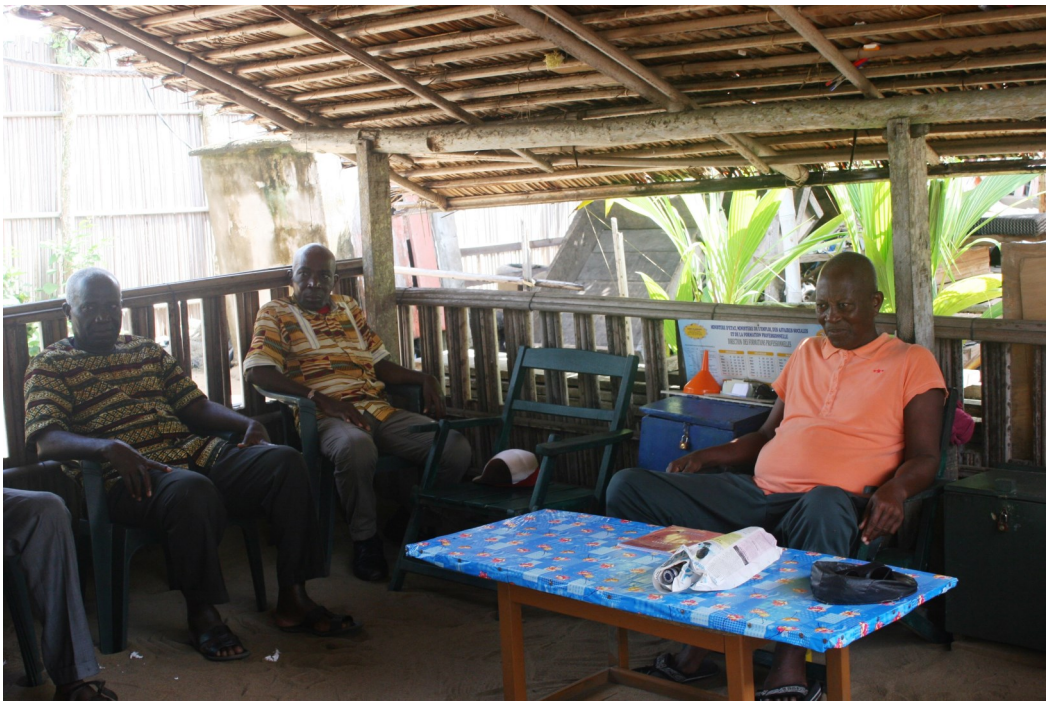

cerned about the latest construction being carried out in their village by Foxtrot's subcontractor, Freedland. "They turned up and asked us if they could work for four days and borrow some men for work" explained Bousson Sebastien, the village chief, "some people were displeased, as they had simply turned up rather than asking in advance or going through the protocol. As it was just four days though, we said yes". "But then", continued Bousson, "they said that they needed even more workers and even more days. We don't know what this work is about and we don't know what the effects might be".

The problem wasn't that Freedlander were doing work - the chiefs were glad to be able to provide work to at least some of their youth, the problem was that they felt they were in the dark about what was happening. "Can we ask for an Environmental Impact Assessment?" Bousson asked. "Is the work they are doing dangerous for our village? For our youth who will be working?" Another source of miscontent was that they did not feel they had been fully consulted, but rather asked after the fact. One chief admitted that a few years ago they might have set up a barricade to the village to block the company from coming in and try to elicit a response, but now they called PWYP to solicit advice. PWYP representatives advised the chiefs to contact the subcontractor or Foxtrot to find out what work was being carried out and state their worries, and offered their support in arranging this contact.

Julien explained "You can't just ask for an EIA without knowing exactly what work they are doing, or they won't take you seriously. From their point of view they don't understand why you are unhappy about this, as you are always looking to provide your youth with work. They don't understand that your concerns are that you do not know the details or impact of this work, and you worry about your environment and your young, or that you are worried about allowing more changes. We will support you in reaching out to them and we will help in obtaining better information".

Here, PWYP acts not only as an advisor but as an intermediary, or perhaps a marriage counsellor. They can help explain to each party how the other is interpreting the situation and find a common ground on which they can work from. Our visit took place at the home of one of the dignitaries, but they can also take place in the local village hall. While we spoke with the "chefferie", the PWYP local committee will also speak with representatives from women or youth union and the administration. These representatives act as focal points and are in contact with the local PWYP committee, if there are issues and problems, these focal points will call the local PWYP committee.

Another key activity is the seminaires organised once a year in Jacqueville (the city). In a sense, these are village visits writ-large: a state of play where each village can voice its concerns and where a debate is held. While Ange or Ernest will share any information they have during their monthly visits, these seminaires are an opportunity to reach a wide range of people about the latest developments and relevant updates. In particular, a member of the PWYP local committee can relay what she learned at the recent workshop in Abidjan - and what the implications are for the citizens of Jacqueville. The recently adopted mining code, for instance,

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View of Addah from the chief's house

PWYP Jacqueville local committee

contains a revenue sharing provision which could have a significant impact on the citizens of Jacqueville. There is a genuine thirst for knowledge: one of the chiefs at the meeting wanted a copy of the oil code so that they could better defend their rights. These seminaires are also a place to dispel myths and misinformation, another crucial aspect of the work if communities and their leaders are to be taken seriously by companies and government.

So what has been the impact of these clinics and seminaires? Have Jacqueville's citizens benefited?

"At first, it was difficult to convince the villages and chiefs not to take up direct action" explained Ernest. "But as they saw that advocacy was more effective than violence, their trust in us grew". PWYP has established itself as a credible mediator and counsellor and "Now, they call us when there is a problem rather than resorting directly to violence" he continued.

Indeed, a "key success has been that communities now know that they have a spokesperson with whom they can discuss and exchange" explains Michel Yoboue, co-founder of PWYP Cote d'Ivoire, "so that they can have support or help to negotiate with either the companies or the government".

Over the years, there has been a "marked reduction" in the number of incidents of direct action and barricades, explained Foxtrot's CEO Mr. Christian Sage. Particularly in the last eight months the company has witnessed a different attitude from the community. This is mainly due to the creation of a better dialogue with communities. An informed community is also "obviously more credible" as an actor to dialogue with and the role of a mediator to dispel myths has been very helpful.

While extractive companies benefit from dialogue and better informed communities, it is also communities who have a lot to gain. As one of the chiefs of Addah put it, "Before, we had to engage in barricades or strikes to get someone to speak to us. Now, we skip the violence and the retribution and go straight to dialogue, which is where we wanted to get all along".

Continue to next page for lessons learned and conclusion

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Lessons Learned

- Don't underestimate a community's desire to engage — PWYP Côte d'Ivoire was surprised by the enthusiasm with which communities responded to their outreach. Several of the communities had had bodies act as mediators previously (various committees and associations) but it had not gone smoothly. The coalition thought this might deter communities from further engaging with third parties but in fact they were very keen to develop a relationship.
- Deeds not words— Once you have the first success under your belt things get easier, as it enhances your credibility and communities trust you more. In Jacqueville this came the first time they managed to establish a dialogue between Foxtrot and the village chiefs.
- Managing expectations is key— PWYP Côte d'Ivoire discovered that as they worked with communities they had to engage in a new area of awareness raising – namely managing the expectations of communities over what the coalition could and could not realise. While the coalition has taken community concerns to the government in Abidjan (the needs of extractive communities fed into PWYP Côte d'Ivoire's advocacy on the new mining code) communities have sometimes expected too much of the coalition. Change takes time and even PWYP has limits on what it can realise. The coalition has to be clear to communities about what is in their power.
- Language and connection – It has been much easier to gain trust in a community when PWYP members spoke the same language. Not only are members more receptive and open, but they are more likely to treat you as one of their own. Furthermore, the only way you can speak directly to the chief at a meeting is by speaking his language. There are around 80 languages spoken in Côte d'Ivoire, so it hasn't always been easy
- A more credible PWYP – "If you have the community's trust, the government has to listen to you". If you have genuinely gained the trust of a community and are acting as their spokesperson you are more likely to be taken seriously by the government, who are less likely to believe that you are stirring up trouble.

Conclusion

By creating a platform through which citizens can constructively engage with communities, by acting as an intermediary and by creating channels of communications, PWYP has reduced tension and offered communities remedial actions that go beyond barricades and strikes. The fact of creating a local committee made up of members of the community ensured credibility and that efforts would be well directed and respond to the needs of the community.

In dispelling myths and misinformation, as well as providing information and training about rights, PWYP also increased the credibility of communities as stakeholders and strengthened their negotiation hand.

While the living conditions for Jaqueville's citizens can yet improve, there has been a marked decrease in incidents of violence and communities have been better empowered to regain agency over their lives. This is particularly important given the context of Cote d'Ivoire - a new revenue sharing regime introduced in the mining code will require communities to be united and well organised in articulating their needs.