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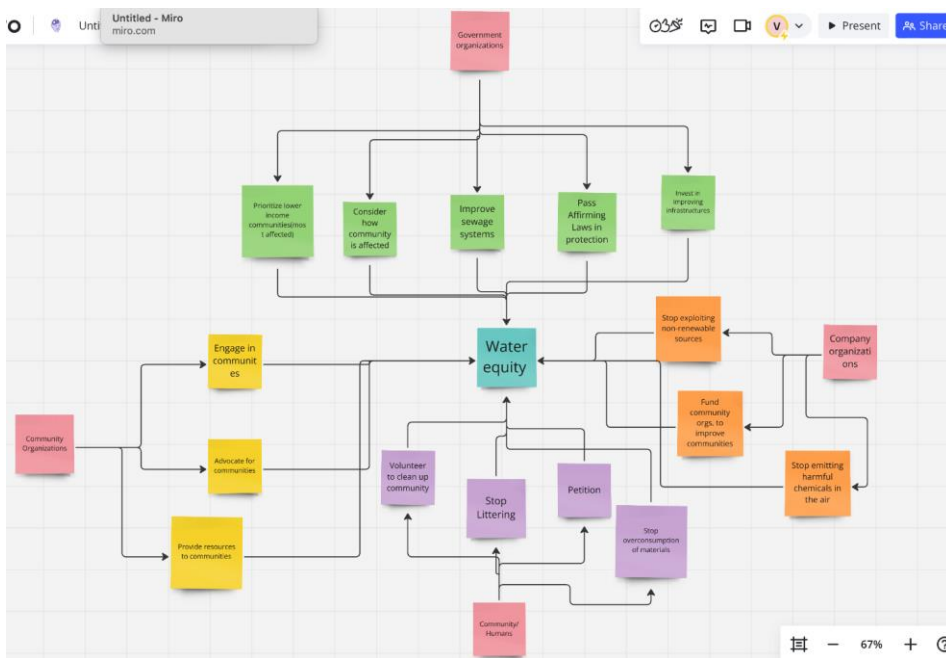
24 October 2024

The Affects Organizations Have on Communities

A community is a group of people who live cohesively. There are many possibilities of what they may share, but a prominent one is resources. Unfortunately, not every community has the same access to resources, depending on economic status, race, location, etc. For communities who face a lack of proper resources, non-profit community organizations are influential. These organizations do a lot of diverse work, but importantly, they fight to advocate for these regions, either implementing solutions themselves and/or communicating with governmental agencies to change the current state.

In St. Clair and Madison counties currently (2024), there are many community organizations who enact this. Two of these organizations are the Jackie Joyner-Kersey Food, Agriculture, and Nutrition Innovation Center (JJK FAN) and Heartlands Conservancy. They work to help surrounding communities facing significant problems, one of which is water equity. Water equity is an issue where everyone doesn't have the same access to affordable and clean water. This primarily affects low-income and Black/Brown communities, which is applicable to our local context of Southern Illinois and St. Louis, Missouri. Direct drivers for this issue include poor infrastructure (e.g., faulty sewage systems/roads/housing/storm management), lack of environmental protection (e.g., laws/funding), and consistent environmental damage (e.g., chemical emissions/fracking/littering). These drivers unequivocally affect water equity. Indirect

drivers to this system include company organizations, government organizations, but more importantly, community organizations and communities themselves. These drivers have opportunities to influence the effectiveness that the direct drivers hold.



Within any given system, there is a group of people known as stakeholders who can impact the resolution of wicked problems, and/or are impacted by the wicked problem itself. In dealing with water equity issues, local organizations are major stakeholders that will often try to address an issue within a given community, leading to the government providing resources or passing laws, which then causes other communities to start to develop methods to fix similar problems within their city. It is also the job of local organizations to not only identify other stakeholders in the community, as well as to find ways to influence them to make changes to help combat wicked problems like water inequity. Why does this influence and community

connection matter? Simply working independently to fix the issue is not enough. Organizations working to do good often need the funding and support of an outside stakeholder, such as city and state governments. After a resourceful stakeholder is involved, the organizations will have the ability to turn their projects from future goals into real plans. Once the project of these companies begins to take off, other communities that face similar issues may start to follow in their footsteps. This brings about a whole new set of challenges, since approaches that might have worked in one community do not always promise results for another community. Regardless, actions in one city can easily cause nationwide movement as these organizations and their goals become more and more popular.

Let's zoom in to look at the organizations working to combat the wicked problem of water inequity in the Southern Illinois and St. Louis, Missouri region. Two vital stakeholders helping the community, and their water sources are JJK FAN and Heartlands Conservancy, both on a mission to help the community prosper. JJK FAN's mission is to provide the youth and community of East St. Louis with food, STEM education, agricultural innovation, better nutrition, physical activity, and entrepreneurialism. Some important ways they are connected to water are that they use water from rain and flooding of the Mississippi to nurture plants that are given to the community and are very aware of designing their land in a way that reduces flooding risks in East St. Louis. Heartlands Conservancy has many missions, a big one being to conserve land around Southern Illinois and create spaces for community enjoyment of nature. Some important ways they work with water include X and Y.

Both organizations are fighting to improve the community and their surroundings, but there are things standing in the way of their missions. Firstly, JJK FAN receives conflicts from their own community. For example, a plot of land by their greenhouses is filled with trash, and

Commented [SJ1]: If a main issue is the owner of the land, have we verified that he is an East St. Louis community member? If he isn't, I would add "landowners" before "their own community" and specify if he is local or not!

though JJK FAN wants to use it to expand their propriety, the owner will not sell it just because they disagree with their mission. Heartlands also has conflicts with people in the community. For example, they have issues with people on conserved land who don't follow the rules and disrespect the entire process Heartlands has gone through to save that land.

Commented [SJ2]: We can't prove this, and the first part is also not super provable! If you got this from a representative at JJK FAN, and they know you are writing this in a paper that will be posted on a public website, I would caveat this by saying "According to a source at JJK FAN"

Commented [SJ3]: Ditto--see the comment above!

That said, even though JJK FAN and Heartlands have pushbacks from the community, they also have a lot of help from them. Both would not be possible without people from the community speaking out on the importance of the work these organizations do to help our spaces improve for the better. They also receive a lot of help from donor organizations. For Instance, JJK FAN received over 26,900 dollars from the Illinois Arts Council Agency to further the impact of their mission in September of 2023. Heartlands has also received a whopping 832K from Illinois EPA to conserve water quality.

Just like wicked problems, the organizations formed to solve these issues have layers of complexity to them. It is not as simple as spotting an issue and immediately planning out a solution for it. These organizations are forced to comply with rules or demands made by local governments and by the communities in which they reside. JK FAN and Heartlands are amazing examples of companies that want to help us but are sometimes stopped by our own selfishness. If we could manage to show both the public and local governments the benefits of these organizations, it would allow them to start enacting their plans and push for future goals.

Commented [SJ4]: At this point, what is your call to action? I feel like it's to community members to engage more in these organizations, but it could be something else. Think on this!

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Commented [SJS]: Cite each reference in text next to the sentence(s) where you included information from them