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ROLE

OWNER/MANAGER, WATER TRUCKS

The mayor dropped into your office unannounced early this morning before your office staff reported for work. Mayor Zambene informed you that your presence at next week's multi-stakeholder dialogue with the State-level Director of Public Works, Water and Sanitation is essential. The mayor did not leave your office until you confirmed you will attend next week's meeting.

After the mayor left, you reflected on what this new program might mean for your business. Last year's operations have been expensive and profits are falling. The industrial waste disposed of by the industrial complex in the nearby town has contaminated the groundwater. You had to dig for groundwater in new locations, and had to dig deeper underground to bypass the upper layers that have absorbed contaminants from the industrial zone.

It has been difficult to meet people's demand for clean water. You could not raise prices as people had already been complaining of the high cost of water delivered by your water trucks. People do not understand the level of investments you are making to make water available to them.

You also need to provide the profit margins that your investors demand. Without operating capital, you cannot remain in business.

You are caught in an extremely difficult situation. But you know you can count on the support of your high school classmate, the mayor. The two of you have been partners in business for a long time. You had been a co-investor in the mayor's farming business and the mayor has lent you money to start up the water truck business. Both you and the mayor have kept these dealings confidential ...as in this culture, people are too nosy and would like to pry into other people's business. It was particularly important to keep this information private when the mayor decided to run for political office. Your relationship with the mayor has become a strong bond of affection and practical necessity. Your hope is that this relationship will last long past your mutual political/business connection. And so far you feel this element of your relationship has been well hidden.

Your gut feel is that this program will lead to big losses for your business. But there are ways to delay the construction of community taps...so people will have to rely on your water trucks for a longer time. Perhaps you can support this effort to follow the national government's mantra of 'gender inclusive decision-making processes'....that will ensure the process of multi-stakeholder consultations take a really long time...and likely that no agreements can be reached by people who will pursue their own interests first.

You envision your role in the multi-stakeholder meeting as one of an empathetic listener. You provide a much - needed service – water – when the local government is unable to afford the expensive infrastructure needed to upgrade the broken-down water and sanitation systems. You foresee that the Director of the NGO (W.A.T.E.R.) will continue to attack your business for the purported atrocities committed by truck drivers and water truck operators. When challenged at the meeting, you will inform them of the commitments made by truck drivers and operators to desist from these behaviors. Many drivers have remained loyal employees because they have been able to count on you to look the other way, even defend them, when they are confronted by the community for abusive behavior. You will encourage citizens to report any untoward incidents to you immediately for action. You will cite the statistics showing that these unpleasant incidents are isolated cases and new incidents have dramatically decreased in the last 2-3 months. You will assure everyone that corrective steps have been taken and seem to be effective. You will remind them often that without the water truck service, people who have no access to clean water, will have no other option.