

# Learning Initiatives in the water and sanitation sector in Uganda

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## **Summary**

Decentralization of services started in 1995 in Uganda and in 2002 the ministry of water and environment adopted the sector wide approach to planning to achieve effectiveness and efficiency in program implementation. The implication was that sector actors needed to achieve better coordination and harmonization and several platforms were established to make this a reality. However, the opportunity of multi-stakeholder reflection to improve action was utilized on a very small extent. NETWAS Uganda in partnership with IRC and other sector actors have since 2007 been at the forefront of promoting structured learning in the water and sanitation sector in Uganda at different levels through use of multi-stakeholder processes.

## **Sector Background**

Decentralization sets out the overall service delivery and sectoral development framework in which the local governments are responsible for the delivery of the majority of public functions and services. It's also the framework within which Uganda is implementing its PEAP (Mugabi, 2003) now transformed into the 5 year national development plan. Uganda adopted the decentralization approach in 1995 and the roles and responsibilities of each sector stakeholder in the water and sanitation sector are in line with the decentralization policy and strategies. The enactment of the Local Governments Act of 1997, defined roles for the different levels of governance in the provision and management of water and sanitation related services and activities. Local Governments (Districts, towns, Sub-Counties) are empowered by the Local Governments Act (1997) to provide safe water with the support and guidance of MWE and MoFPED (MWLE, 1999). After the implementation of the decentralization policy, all services are decentralized in Uganda including water and sanitation services.

## **Mechanism for Learning in the Sector**

In 2002 the Sector Wide Approach to planning (SWAP) was adopted to achieve effectiveness and efficiency in programme implementation. SWAP is a mechanism through which major actors (including the national institutions, local governments, donors, NGOs, and communities) agree and recognize a common approach, adoption of innovations and best practices, to achieve improvement in sector performance, increased resource flows, more effective use of resources and leading to positive outcomes for the poor in society (MWE, 2002). This sector development also gave rise to mechanisms for learning and support. According to the MWE, Learning is reflection of experiences in order to improve the situation or future action. Several meetings or workshops are used as platforms for sharing and learning and these include the following;

### **Joint Sector Review**

The Annual Joint Government of Uganda – Donor Water and Environment Sector Review, known as the Joint Sector Review (JSR) is a forum that allows a broad spectrum of stakeholders to get insight into, discuss and influence sector developments. It draws conclusions and makes

recommendations on the overall developments in the sector. The JSR is attended by representatives from local Governments, development partners, NGOs, government Ministries and other stakeholders (MWE, 2007).

This forum is very important for the assessment of the performance of the previous year and it is also used to get broad consensus on strategic policy issues and specific annual undertakings to improve the sector performance in service delivery. To a very large extent this forum has achieved its objectives since the inception of JSR in 2001 and it has improved over time.

Tracking of functionality, access and overall sector performance is done prior to the review. The performance in terms of access seems to stagnate compared to the earlier registered increases. Therefore how are the systems sustained might be one of the causes of this stagnation. In 2009 the joint sector review was also expanded to include environment and it is now referred to as the joint water and environment sector review. This has not only reduced the time and the space to for the reporting but also the reflection at the JSR.

### **Joint Technical Reviews**

Joint Technical Reviews (which meets six months after the Joint Sector Review) to discuss progress in regard to the undertakings agreed upon in the Joint Sector Review. The Joint Technical Review is attended by representatives from local Governments, development partners, NGOs, government Ministries and other stakeholders (MWE, 2007). This review is very important for midterm assessment and sector learning of the progress regarding the sector undertakings.

### **Water Policy Committee**

The Water Policy Committee (which meets every six months) provides policy advice to the Minister of Water. Members of the Committee, which is chaired by the Permanent Secretary- MWE are specified in the Water Act Cap 152, article 9, and they include heads of key sectors related to water resources management.

### **Annual General Assembly**

The Annual General Assembly, which sits prior to the JSR, is intended for analyzing operational progress and constraints and defining the way forward for Local Governments. The objectives include review of operational and performance issues in the sector, identification and prioritization of areas to be addressed for improved sector performance and providing recommendations for consideration at the Joint Sector Review (JSR). Participants include Local Government (chairmen, CAO, DWO, and DHI, Town clerks, line ministries, MWLE /DWD, development partners and NGOs (MWE, 2007). The assembly provides a platform for multi-sector and other partners to feed into the Joint Sector Review. However it was not held since 2009. On the whole, it can be argued that learning to a great extent takes place at the national level. This is because, all sector actors [Local Government, Central Government, Development Partners and NGOs] get to share experiences and devise ways forward.

### **Development Partners' Group**

This Group has increased joint donor participation in Water Sector Working Group and WASH processes and activities. The Development Partners' Group meets monthly and makes efforts to reach

harmonisation and coordination on sector development issues in line with the Parish Declaration. In the development partners' annual two-day retreat reflection and learning on key issues in the WASH sector takes place. The limitation remains that this Group only focuses on the development partners/donors.

### **Inter-District Meetings**

Inter-District Meeting (IDMs) enable Districts to share implementation experiences and mechanisms of cooperation, usually at regional/multi-district level. They are facilitated by MWE/DWD personnel (usually Technical Support Units staff) and held bi-annually. The IDMs bring together political and technical heads of the Local Government, Private Sector, and NGOs. They enable MWE/DWD to explain policy related issues and provide an interface between DWD and the Local Government where views that affect implementation are explained and shared (MWE, 2007). The challenge is that much as they IDMs are supposed to be held bi-annually, this has not happened consistently, leading to inadequate space/ opportunity for learning at Local Government level.

### **NGO coordination**

Ministry of Water and Environment spearheaded the formation of a national NGO Network (Uganda Water and Sanitation NGO Network- (UWASNET) after recognition that only a well organised Civil Society sector will be a strong stakeholder and contribute to sector development. Currently the network has over 150 NGOs with 4 regional coordinators.

UWASNET has Working Groups whose mandate includes experience sharing (of

member activities), learning on government policies and guidelines for use implementation and/ or advocacy; and documentation. Working Groups enable UWASNET to influence sectoral operations, and promote dialogue (UWASNET, 2001). UWASNET also has a fully fledged communication desk where members are updated on the sector developments (monthly through the UWASNET monthly updates, quarterly Newsletter: UWASNET News; and adhoc as information flows in). There is need to support UWASNET and UWASNET Working Groups to continually live up to the water sector challenges in Uganda.

### **Subsector Working Groups**

The water sector also has various stakeholder Working Groups that provide oversight. The overall is the Water and Environment Sector Working Group (which meets quarterly) and has sub sector working groups on Water and Sanitation, and Environment. It reviews past performance and reports, as well as policy strategies. It also approves plans and budgets within the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF). The Water and Sanitation Sub Sector Working Group (WSSWG) is further divided into thematic groups of sanitation, software, water for production, Monitoring and Evaluation, and Good Governance. The thematic groups follow up on the implementation of the undertakings set at the Annual Joint Sector Review. Chairpersons and Secretaries of these thematic groups present progress reports during Water and Sanitation Sub Sector Working Group meetings.

The WSSWG, chaired by PS/MWE, is very active providing policy and technical guidance for sector development. The

Government sector stakeholders and donors are part of Sector Working Groups. Therefore technical consensus is often reached in dialogue between GoU and donors. There is also increasing understanding of the areas within which GoU and partners can work together, which facilitates policy dialogue. Transparency and accountability have improved due to more openness. The sector is more coordinated despite being dependant on many donors. Donors are increasingly using joint diagnostic instruments and this leads to coordinated capacity building efforts.

### **Local Government Mechanism for Learning**

Mechanism for learning at the district level are through the district water and sanitation coordination committee and the sub county water and sanitation coordination committees as indicated below

### **District Water and Sanitation Committees**

The DWSCC operate at District Level. It provides a platform for coordinating and overseeing the activities of the water and sanitation sector in the Local Governments and strengthens collaboration across sectors and between different players. The DWSCC comprises all political leaders, relevant district departments (District Water Office, the Planning Office, the District Directorate of Community Based Services, the District Finance Office, the District Directorate of Health Services, the District Education Office), NGOs and development partners at the Local Government Level (MWE, 2007). DWSCC are an important step forward in enhancing collaboration.

### **Sub County Water and Sanitation coordination Committees**

Sub County Water and Sanitation coordination Committees (SCWSCC) are another structure that is expected to enhance coordination and collaboration at the lower level of Local Government SCWSCC, which are chaired by the Sub County Chief, are expected to make decisions based on information and action plans from the Local Councils. However they are largely un-functional. Instead it is Sub County Technical Planning Committees that are functional and their membership doesn't comprise of all members of the SCWSCC (NETWAS, 2009a). SCWSCC are largely non-existent,. However, NGOs like SNV are supporting their establishment in Arua District. There are high chances that water and sanitation issues are not adequately addressed in the Technical Planning Committee (TPC) since the agenda includes issues such as health, environment, production, works, agriculture etc. In such cases it is difficult to make water and sanitation a priority and discuss it in-depth (NETWAS, 2009). Therefore the SCWSCC would help in bridging the information gap from communities to District and also inform the TPC on technical issues of Water and Sanitation

### **WASH Cluster**

Numerous partners in Northern Uganda implemented humanitarian Water and Sanitation projects since the onset of the GoU/LRA conflict over 20 years ago. In 2005, the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Cluster approach was established in Uganda as part of the UN Reform Agenda. The approach aimed at better coordination of International and National partners working in humanitarian situations. In line with a global decision of IASC partners (the United Nations, Donors and NGOs); UNICEF was requested to

assume the leadership role for the Water and Sanitation Cluster in Uganda. All implementing agencies in the WASH sector in Northern Uganda including Government, Districts and NGOs now work under this umbrella (UWASNET, 2008). The existence of the WASH Cluster provided a coordinated response to water and sanitation needs in emergency situations

The SWAP approach has been very instrumental in the development of mechanisms for learning in Uganda since 2007 the on-going and previous work carried out by NETWAS and IRC has contributed to facilitating learning in the Water Sanitation and Hygiene sector in Uganda. This has been to improve performance in the delivery of WASH services. The focus has been on enabling the process of sharing experiences, reflection and storage of information for present and future reference, facilitating change in strategy and approaches by embracing better approaches ultimately leading to sustainable, cost-efficiency and –effective service delivery. These have included the following

- Learning for change of policy and practice in household and school sanitation and hygiene

(LeaPPS) 2007 – 2009 through a partnership with SNV;

- LeaPPS Action Research I and II (2008 -2012) through a partnership with HEWASA, FORUD, Yodeo and Caritas Arua;
- Improved WASH governance in West Nile through dialogue (2008 -2010) in partnership with CEFORD;
- Performance improvement through learning (PILS) (2009 – 2010) in partnership with Caritas Gulu.
- National learning forums 2009 – to date through a resource centre consortium approach (NETWAS, SNV, WaterAid, URWA, MWE, UWASNET);

The table below provides an analysis of the various platforms in the sector including those facilitated by IRC and NETWAS

Initiative in the sector	What it does	Limitation
Water and Sanitation Sector Working group (WSSWG)	It creates a policy consensus, draws up investment programs, formulates sector strategies, prepares Medium Term Budget framework (MTBF) and budgets, and oversees the implementation of water supply	It is primarily a policy and strategy committee with limited time and space for reflection and analysis.

	and sanitation services.	
<b>WSS Development Partners' Group</b>	It makes efforts to reach donor harmonization and coordination on sector development issues in line with the Parish Declaration	This Group only focuses on the development partners/donors
<b>UWASNET Working Groups</b>	improve coordination, sharing of experiences in the WASH sector through quarterly meetings	Accessing funds required to meet the cost and the participants' expectation on facilitation remains a challenge. UWASNET is a network for NGOs only, therefore not reaching out to all sector stakeholders.
<b>Joint Sector Review process</b>	Joint GoU/Donor Reviews for the WASH sector are held twice in a year: Joint Technical Review (JTR) and Joint Sector Review (JSR). WASH sector performance is reviewed and broad consensus is reached on strategic policy issues and undertakings to improve sector performance and service delivery	The JSR and JTR are more monitoring and coordination events with limited reflection and learning; these events have limited time and resources to cater for sharing and learning.
<b>Annual Learning Events</b>	They enhance learning and sharing at national and District level	They have focused on sanitation and hygiene
<b>Reverse Expo</b>	This platform provided users <sup>1</sup> of WASH services a voice to air their concerns in the WASH service delivery mechanisms as well learning from the experiences of best and worst practices displayed. It also provided an enabling environment for interaction between the service providers: government, donors, NGOs and private sector and the recipients the communities	This only happened once
<b>Other Sector Learning Initiatives</b>	Inter District Meetings (IDM), District Water and Sanitation Committee Meetings, District Advocacy Meetings, the District Health	They mainly coordinate activities of the district technical staff

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<sup>1</sup> Focus was on Rural Water communities (24) from 13 districts in Uganda.

	Inspectors annual meetings	
<b>National Learning forum</b>	Provide a platform for reflection and analysis on the promising solutions in the sector	Limited government support and access to funding (mandate clarification needs to be addressed)
<b>Learning for change of policy and practice in household and school sanitation (LEAPPS)</b>	District based learning and sharing platform on household and school sanitation	It is externally facilitated with limited district ownership to ensure sustainability
<b>LEAPPS Action Research phase I</b>	Building evidence on what works in promoting household and school sanitation and hygiene including introduction of low cost and sustainable sanitation facilities.	Low ownership by districts
<b>Improving WASH Governance Through dialogues</b>	Provides a platform for dialogue at sub county and district level to promote transparency and accountability on WASH	Low ownership by districts
<b>Performance Improvement through Learning (PILs)</b>	Provides a platform for learning and sharing about improving sanitation and hygiene as communities transition from relief provision to development	Low ownership by district

## Conclusion

The approach used by IRC-NETWAS with its other partners concentrated on facilitating multi-stakeholder platforms as a means of creating an atmosphere of learning and exchange from both local and international experiences. It also focused on broadening the space for reflection and analysis of success factors. In the presence of several initiatives that coordinate actors this has been a daunting task exacerbated by the need to reach out to a wide range of stakeholders with varied interest per subject area such as water resource management, water supply and/or S&H, and rural versus urban. It is therefore clear that the achievements of these initiatives can not be undermined in improving sector performance. They need to be analyzed to better understand how learning can be improved in the Uganda context.