IRC Uganda

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triple-s

Assessment of the performance of Water Source Committees as a Service Delivery Model for rural water services in Uganda

MAIN MESSAGES

Findings

- Close to 70% of households in the eight districts surveyed are receiving a sub-standard level of service as defined by government guidelines.
- 35% of the interviewed water source committees were found to have a low or very low performance, and 26% were found to have fair performance. In general WSCs were weak on administrative tasks and ensuring accountability mechanisms, and were even weaker on operation and maintenance.
- 38% of sub-county authorities and 25% of district authorities received low to very low scores on their support to WSCs.

Recommendations for strengthening the Water Source Committee model

- Pilot WSC-managed savings and credit schemes.
- Revise the District Water and Sanitation Conditional Grant allocation formula to increase resources for post-construction support to service providers.

In 2012 Triple-S assessed the performance of Water Source Committees (WSCs) as a Service Delivery Model (SDM) for rural point water sources based on the norms and standards set in national policies and guidelines.

The study showed that most water users access sub-standard water services; many WSCs do not perform adequately; and structural weaknesses at district and sub-county levels limit the influence of local government's activities on the performance of WSCs.

Water Source Committee of St. John Chapel borehole during a water users meeting (Photo: Lydia S. Mirembe/ IRC Uganda).

Community-based management is the main service delivery model for communal rural water supplies in Uganda. It has two main variants: for point sources such as boreholes with hand pumps, shallow wells and protected springs, managed by WSCs; and for piped schemes, managed by Water Supply and Sanitation Boards (WSSBs). In both these variants, communities are responsible for the development and Operation and Maintenance (O&M) of their facilities, through their elected WSCs or WSSBs, who act as rural water service providers. Planning, supervision, monitoring and support to service providers are performed by districts and sub-county authorities.

The Triple-S assessment was triggered by the observation that for about ten years the functionality of rural water facilities in Uganda has been stagnating.[1] National sector performance data indicates that for five years the proportion of water points with an 'actively functioning' WSC has stagnated at around 70%. The 2010 Water Supply Atlas reports that functionality of WSCs is at 47%. These figures beg the question: why are so many water points non-functional, and why are management structures not functioning?

Performance of the WSC service delivery model was measured against a set of service delivery indicators (SDIs) specifically designed for this purpose. These SDIs describe how rural water services are delivered and supported across four levels: service delivered, user satisfaction and participation, service provider level, and service authority level (district and sub-county).[2]

The study was conducted in eight districts including: Alebtong, Lira, Kitgum and Nwoya covered by Technical Support Unit (TSU) 2 (Northern Uganda); and Kabarole, Kamwenge, Kasese and Kyenjojo covered by TSU 6 (Western Uganda). Data was collected and analysed from 1,434 households, 112 water user groups, 103 WSCs, staff from eight District Water Offices, and staff from 16 sub-counties.

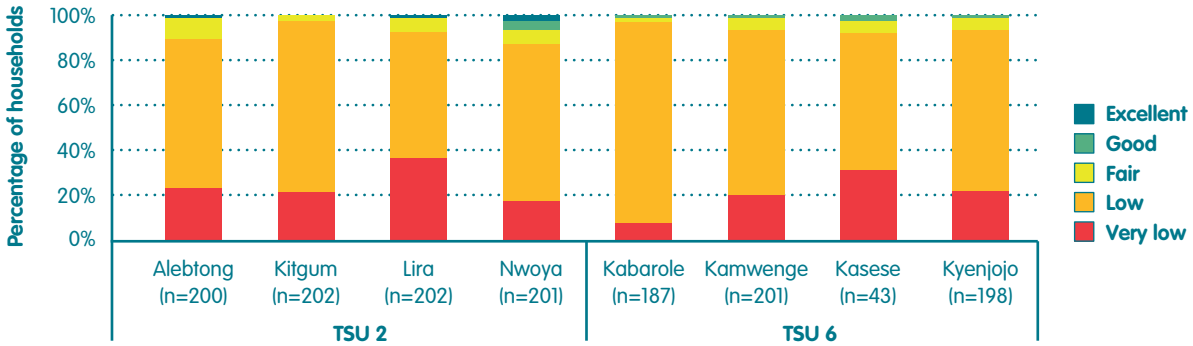
The study looked at the WSC Service Delivery Model, but also at two innovations at service provider level: the integration of community-led savings and credit schemes for financing operation and maintenance in Kamwenge district (YY strategy), and the involvement of a Hand Pump Mechanics Association (HPMA) in Kasese district.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Low service levels: Even when point sources are functioning, around 90% of users access a lower level of service compared to the sector's norms and standards (Figure 1). This low level of service is due to a great extent to the unreliability of many water facilities: only a third of facilities in TSU 2 and half of them in TSU 6 were found reliable, i.e., providing water at least 95% of the time over the year. Only Kasese and Kamwenge districts were found to have a high percentage of reliable facilities (72% and 82%, respectively). These are the two districts with innovations for O&M.

Low demand for improved rural water services: Low service levels are partly linked to a low demand from consumers for improved services. Where alternative water sources are available, many users fetch minimal amounts of water (11-12 litres per person per day) from improved facilities, accessing the remainder from unsafe sources. This was particularly observed in TSU6. The low demand for improved services is also seen in the failure to pay for water services: only 42% of users in TSU 2 and 5% in TSU 6 reported that they paid a water fee. Failure to pay for water does not mean that it is unaffordable. It was found that on average, users spend significantly more money on their mobile phones than on water – average monthly spending for mobile phones

FIGURE 1 LEVEL OF WATER SERVICE ACCESSED BY HOUSEHOLDS



[1] See the various Water and Environment Sector Performance Reports, published every year by the Ministry of Water and Environment www.mwe.go.ug/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=15&Itemid=223

[2] For more information, see IRC Uganda/ Triple-S policy brief on Service Delivery Indicators prepared by René van Lieshout.

(air time and charging costs) ranged between UGX 35,670 and 14,719, whereas spending on water fees ranged between UGX 1,167 and 0.

Performance of WSCs: Analysis of the performance of the WSCs provides a mixed picture: only 39% of the assessed WSCs were reported to have good or excellent performance. In many instances, WSCs performed well on committee composition, capacity and internal processes, but performed poorly on administrative tasks or ensuring accountability mechanisms, and worse on operation and maintenance. Having a trained WSC in place is no guarantee that it performs its tasks – the voluntary nature of the job provides little motivation: many became dormant. Aspects that positively influence the performance of committees include the existence of innovations like the YY strategy and support from district authorities.

At service authority level, in 7 out of the assessed 8 districts and in 10 out of the assessed 16 sub-counties, overall performance was fair at best on functions of planning, overseeing WASH activities and supervising WSCs. Three critical issues were identified at service authority level:

- There is no correlation between the performance of the WSCs and the quality of support provided by the sub-county authority. This may be due to a threshold effect, i.e., a sub-county would need to be above a good performance level to have any effect on the performance of WSCs.
- There are insufficient resources at sub-county and district levels to ensure the effective performance of service authority functions. Particularly, there is inadequate post-construction support to WSCs in the form of refresher training, monitoring, and facilitation of conflict resolution. At the time of the study, none of the District Water Offices in the eight districts had the full complement of staff required by sector guidelines.
- Coordination between stakeholders at decentralised levels can be improved. Only two out of eight districts have fully functioning District Water and Sanitation Coordination Committees.

CONCLUSIONS AND ACTIONS FOLLOWING THE STUDY

This study was a first step in getting a more in-depth understanding of the challenges around current service delivery models and in engaging sector stakeholders around these issues. The above findings highlight the existence of several structural weaknesses in the current SDM. First, there is a low demand for water services. Thus the revenue collected is too low to sustain a level of service that is in accordance with sector norms. This means that overall service levels go down, particularly in terms of reliability. This observation raises the question whether more efforts are needed to raise the demand.

Second, because WSCs are voluntary bodies, they cannot be legally held accountable for their performance and they cannot attract the required skilled staff to effectively deliver services. To some extent, support by sub-countries and districts could make up for the lack of skilled staff within the WSCs, for example by facilitating access to Hand Pump Mechanics Associations; but such support is still limited.

This study triggered Triple-S research into strengthening the WSC Service Delivery Model through Hand Pump Mechanics Associations (HPMAs) and Sub-county Water Supply and Sanitation Boards.

Recommendations

Further investigation and piloting of WSC-managed savings and credit schemes, which seem to encourage active WSCs and provide an incentive for water users to pay fees.

Ensure all districts have the required staff as listed in sector guidelines.

Review the District Water and Sanitation Conditional Grant allocation formula, increasing resources for post-construction support to service providers.

District stakeholders voiced several additional recommendations during the discussion and validation of results from the study:

- Strengthen the sub-county level for service delivery, with staff and budget dedicated to rural water; this also entails establishing a strong coordination structure at this level.
- Service authorities should hold to account implementers who do not attend coordination meetings or do not follow guidelines for the provision of rural water services.

REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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Additional resources on assessment of Service Delivery Models are available through the Triple-S website. See *Analysing performance of service delivery models*, at: www.waterservicesthatlast.org/experiments/uganda_experiments/analysing_performance_of_service_delivery_models.

(Photo: Lydia S. Mirembe/ IRC Uganda).

About IRC
IRC is an international think-and-do tank that works with governments, NGOs, businesses and people around the world to find long-term solutions to the global crisis in water, sanitation and hygiene services. At the heart of its mission is the aim to move from short-term interventions to sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene services.

With over 40 years of experience, IRC runs programmes in more than 25 countries and large-scale projects in seven focus countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It is supported by a team of over 100 staff across the world.

For more information about IRC, go to www.ircwash.org

About this Brief
This brief is authored by Valérie Bey. It is based on research conducted under the Triple-S (Sustainable Services at Scale) initiative, a learning initiative to improve water supply to the rural poor, carried out in Uganda, Ghana, and Burkina Faso.

In Uganda the initiative is spearheaded by a consortium of partners: the Uganda Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE), the Network for Water and Sanitation (NETWAS), the Uganda Water and Sanitation NGO Network (UWASNET), SNV Netherlands Development Organisation Uganda and IRC Uganda.

For more information see: www.waterservicesthatlast.org

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