



The Achievements

of the “Improved WASH Governance in West Nile through Local Dialogue” Project, UGANDA

How we structured and organized multi-stakeholder learning and action research to support the Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH) sector to account and perform better

1. Introduction

In 2008-2010, IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC), Network for Water and Sanitation Uganda (NETWAS) and Community Empowerment For Rural Development (CEFORD) partnered to implement a project on improving governance in the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector through local dialogues in the Uganda’s West Nile region. This initiative, which is referred to as “West Nile Project” in this document, was carried out with support from the 9th EDF Support to Decentralisation Programme (SDP). Its overall objective was to improve health and productivity in communities as well as school attendance and educational results in three districts (Adjumani, Moyo and Nebbi) arising from more accountable and responsive WASH service provision through local dialogue. In each of these districts, the project was piloted in two sub-counties (S/Cs).

Project aimed at more accountable and responsive WASH services

..... through local dialogues

The West Nile Project methodology had four main elements: multi-stakeholder dialogue sessions that brought together representatives from the district and sub-county levels, capacity building, action research, documentation and advocacy. All these elements were embedded in learning platforms at various levels. The project supported “learning from practice” by promoting joint analysis by all stakeholders of their initial attitudes and practices, as well as testing of innovative approaches to enhance good governance in the delivery of WASH services.

Learning platforms doing joint analysis of attitudes and practices

This paper shows that a multi-stakeholder learning process can make a difference. It presents some of the activities and practical results – ACHIEVEMENTS – that participants attribute to the West Nile Project. These relate to increased information sharing, coordination and transparency among stakeholders; raising the priority of water, sanitation and hygiene; community empowerment and increased involvement of users; and generally better performances in the WASH sector at district, water service level and in primary schools.

Learning for better local WASH performance

2. Background, Objectives and Principles of the West Nile Project

In Africa, Uganda is one of the frontrunners in the decentralisation process. Transfer of operational responsibility to the local level, greater involvement of water users, involvement of the private sector along with improved donor coordination and basket-funding mechanisms contributed to improve efficiency and increased coverage and sustainability of WASH. However, some problems and challenges remain, and many are directly related to Effectiveness, Responsiveness and Accountability under decentralised WASH governance.

WASH is a complex sector that touches upon **various sub-sectors**, with a **multitude of stakeholders** involved, from public sector, private sector and civil society, all having their own roles, agendas and specific interests. When designing the West Nile Project, project partners identified a number of issues that were confirmed by a situation analysis undertaken at the beginning of the initiative. In a given area, NGOs, bilateral agencies and the local government often **work in an uncoordinated manner**, without a commonly agreed approach and/or financial mechanisms. Local stakeholders are usually not encouraged to work together as a team and ensure that services are harmonised and institutionalised. Elected leaders and district technical staff are often biased towards provision of water supply without the integration of training for proper operation and maintenance (O&M) and no support structures to ensure community ownership and sustainability. And despite the demand-driven approach and decentralised planning cycle, **communities are rarely involved** in decision-making, and communication between users and planners/implementers remains limited. All this led to growing disparities in water service delivery, lack of transparency in spending and unequal access, lack of quality in water services and a low level of community ownership.

The numerous stakeholders of the WASH sector often work in an uncoordinated and non-harmonised way.

Community involvement is still limited.

Though these various issues had been acknowledged by WASH actors, sector undertakings agreed to improve accountability and transparency, and some project ideas developed to address these problems, in many cases challenges remained and stakeholders continued to work in isolation and blame each other when sector performance was not satisfactory. **A different approach was needed.** The West Nile Project rests on the assumption that, rather than isolated interventions, partnership building and creation of a dialogue between the various stakeholders can help to overcome these problems, and in particular sector fragmentation and lack of harmonisation. The initiative hence brought together stakeholders from different departments (water, health and education), different groups (councillors and other leaders, district heads and S/C chiefs, technocrats, local Civil Society Organisations and NGOs, associations, private sector and local media) and different levels (district, S/C and community levels).

The specific objectives of the West Nile Project were that:

1. *Multi-stakeholder learning and knowledge management (KM) are taking place at district and S/C level;*
2. *WASH decision-makers and service providers are more accountable;*
3. *Local Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are empowered to demand WASH services and become active.*

The project was based on the following principles that made it different from other existing initiatives in the pilot districts:

- involving stakeholders from different levels, including community members
- making use of multiple/ diverse perspectives
- being responsive to participants' wishes and requests
- building on existing structures
- carrying out participatory action research
- focusing on *learning for change*



Group work during an inter-district session, August 2010

3. The learning process

“Learning” is understood as analysing performance and methodologies and using experience and knowledge to improve a task, a project or sector performance. Learning is best done together with others. The West Nile learning process was designed as comprising four main elements: **multi-stakeholders dialogue (learning) sessions, capacity building, action research, and documentation & advocacy.**

These elements were not separate, but worked together. For instance, capacity building took place in the dialogue sessions as a result of sharing of experiences and concepts, analysis of challenges and action planning. The dialogue sessions provided an opportunity to present solutions from other districts or other countries as well as from participants' own experience. The focus of the action research also emerged from the various dialogue sessions.

For ensuring sustainability and replication, direct links were established with the District Water and Sanitation Coordinating Committees (DWSCCs) and the S/C Water and Sanitation Coordinating Committees (S/C WSCCs), which were established by the Ugandan WASH sector so that local government and NGOs active locally could meet and coordinate. Upwards, the initiative also fed into the national level through a National Learning Event and links with the national Good Governance Working Group.

The learning process comprised **5 phases:**

1. Inception phase
2. Establishment of the learning process
3. Implementation of local actions/practical learning (action research)
4. Evaluation and lessons learned
5. Development of actions and strategies for replication and scaling up

During the inception phase, the project team analysed current information and knowledge exchange channels and assessed initial stakeholder interest in participating in the initiative. The initial dialogue sessions brought all stakeholders together to jointly identify commonalities, analyse the current situation and collaboratively agree on a common vision as well as on process steps, opportunities and constraints for achieving the vision. In the following phases the learning process was given shape through regular dialogue sessions (on average 3 per year at district and S/C levels) as well as follow-up and capacity support. Once the learning process was well established and participants started being more conversant with action research methodology, the actual implementation and testing of local actions, tools and strategies in district and sub-county started. In each workshop, participants agreed on actions for follow up. They reported on their actions and analysed challenges and success factors.

Learning and sharing is not an end in itself; it should enable change. An initiative like the West Nile Project can have many benefits, such as:

- strengthening the linkages between planners, implementers, regulators and communities
- giving communities and users a voice
- facilitating the replication and scaling up of good practices and innovations, and minimising the repetition of ineffective approaches and errors
- enabling more effective and efficient use of resources

4. Achievements

The project team monitored change in various ways: (i) through feedback during the dialogue sessions, including analysis of “most significant changes”, (ii) interviews with participants, (iii) documentation of good practices together with the participants, (iv) independent monitoring studies against a baseline, (v) external evaluations. In each dialogue session, attendants reported activities and challenges. These combined methods provide a picture of achievements of the West Nile Project; in this paper the main achievements – as reported –are presented.

4.1. Increased information sharing, coordination and transparency at all levels

The learning sessions fostered open discussions on accountability between WASH users, providers and local leaders. Through a constructive and non-blaming dialogue approach, relationships between stakeholders improved, which in turn had some impacts on the performance of WASH services delivery.

MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS FOR INFORMATION SHARING, COORDINATION AND TRANSPARENCY	
WHAT ACHIEVEMENT?	WHERE ACHIEVED?
1. More active DWSCCs and S/C WSCCs	1. District and S/C level
2. Enhanced inter-departmental communication, information sharing and coordination	2. District and S/C level
3. Improved communication and transparency towards users	3. Districts and S/Cs to users
4. Water Source and Sanitation Committees (WSCCs) more transparent and accountable towards users	4. Water point level
5. New School Management Committees (SMCs) and School Health Committees formed and increased coordination between teachers, SMCs and surrounding communities	5. Primary schools

Improvement in dialogue and coordination, initiated in the learning platforms spread to existing coordinating structures. DWSCCs and S/C WSCCs have become more active: the DWSCC in Adjumani was revived, while the ones of Moyo and Nebbi were strengthened; in Moyo, S/C WSCCs were also resuscitated in all S/Cs, including the ones outside the project pilot area. Water and Sanitation Coordinating Committees were even established in two Parishes of Nebbi district.

District Local Government staff in all three districts also mentioned that Inter-departmental communication, information sharing and coordination have been enhanced. The District Technical Planning Committees (DTPC) and Departmental meetings were reported to have improved in deliberation procedure and regularity. Fixed meetings schedules encouraged reporting and information sharing of field issues that need joint action.

In Moyo district, a NGO forum has been formed, where budgets and plans are shared. The forum also organised a multi stakeholder event to discuss WASH issues.

In addition to better information sharing and coordination among planners and service providers, the West Nile Project also contributed to improving communication and transparency towards users. This was achieved through various channels and tools that for some of them were tested during action research: maps and Gantt charts published on notice boards, meetings, regular visits of S/C technical teams to communities, etc. Nebbi district staff feel that now community members and water users trust the sub-county leadership more, as illustrated by a reduced number of cases being reported to the district for arbitration; these are now directly handled by S/C staff.

Water Source and Sanitation Committees (WSCCs) are also reported to be more transparent and accountable towards users. In most pilot S/Cs the occurrence of monthly meetings gathering WSCCs members and water users is seen as a major achievement.

In many primary schools, School Management Committees (SMCs) and School Health Committees were formed or revived, and in some instances security committees to prevent vandalism of sanitation facilities by outsiders were set up. Coordination between head teachers, teachers and

SMCs has improved, while relationships between schools and surrounding communities in cases of shared water facilities are also better.

4.2. Water, sanitation and hygiene are prioritized

The learning sessions and related actions also aimed at raising the political and technical profile of WASH, and in particular of software activities – community mobilisation and participation, training and post-implementation support to communities.

MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS FOR PRIORISATION OF WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE	
WHAT ACHIEVEMENT?	WHERE ACHIEVED?
1. More funds allocated to improvement of sanitation and hygiene	1. District and S/C level
2. Budget allocated to mandatory public notices on WASH provision	2. District and S/C level
3. Mainstreaming of WASH activities	3. District and S/C level
4. Political leaders get more involved in WASH	4. District, S/C and community level
5. Sanitation and hygiene included in SMCs’ plans (incl. budget); establishment of School Health Committees	5. Primary schools

All district and sub-counties gave a higher priority to WASH in their development plans and budgets. For example, in Itula S/C (in Moyo district) the fund basket for WASH was doubled. Zombo district, a newly created district that separated from Nebbi during the course of the project, allocated funds in its 2010-2011 budget for mandatory public notices in the Water Sector. This measure, which was passed without reservation by the Zombo district’s Works Committee, will further promote the generation and flow of information on WASH. In Adjumani district, Dzaipi S/C council voted for the allocation of 2 million Ugandan Shilling (UGX¹) for improving sanitation in 2009/10; as a result this sub-county recorded an 8.2% increase in latrine coverage, from 57.6% in 2008/9 to 65.8%. Nebbi Sub-County increased its allocation of funds for sanitation and hygiene from UGX 200,000 to UGX 700,000. It was also reported that WASH activities were integrated and mainstreamed in other government programmes such as Community Driven Development (CDD), the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) and health sector monitoring.

Politicians and other community leaders play an important role in mobilizing support for water, sanitation and hygiene. Through their involvement in the West Nile Project, LC1, LC3 and LC5 Politicians have become more involved in WASH. For example, some political leaders have facilitated the formulation of hygiene and sanitation by-laws or ordinances and helped to enforce them. WASH has gone onto the local political agenda.

In many primary schools sanitation and hygiene was also set as a priority and included in SMCs’ plans, with some funds allocated, while some School Health Committees were established.

¹ In 2009: US\$1 was some UGX 2,000.

4.3. Community empowerment and increased involvement of users

Through the dialogue sessions, to which they were invited, and subsequent action research activities, communities and users have been empowered. They know about their roles and responsibilities, and also about their rights. Now, not only are some of them holding their leaders and/or service providers accountable, they also are requesting services.

The increased demand for services is, for example, very obvious in Nebbi district, with more requests for water and sanitation facilities coming from the two pilot sub-counties. There is also an increased demand for sanitation programmes, with some communities asking for technical support to establish model villages. Planning of service provision has become more bottom-up and community members also hold people accountable at every level. A technocrat recounted:

“They are approaching us for services, when you are ‘hard’ they go to another. [...] They write letters and dispatch them to several offices expecting that at least one person will take action. They even follow up physically....”

In Moyo district, contractors doing shoddy work would be reported by community members and requested to improve quality.

4.4. Improved performances in WASH services delivery

A key assumption of the West Nile Project was that increased accountability should in turn help to increase investment-effectiveness and sustainability of WASH services provision. As described in previous sections, the initiative contributed to improving planning, budgeting and implementation in the sector in the pilot areas. This includes the construction of better quality facilities, as communities do not hesitate to report unsatisfactory works. The project also had positive impacts on post construction services provision.

MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS IN WASH SERVICES DELIVERY	
WHAT ACHIEVEMENT?	WHERE ACHIEVED?
1. More and better functioning and trusted water management entities (WSSCs)	1. Water service provision level in communities
2. Regular payment of water users fees improved	2. Households using water points paying service provider
3. Water systems better constructed	3. Water point level
4. Better cleaned school latrines	4. Primary schools
5. Better planning, budgeting and implementation	5. District and S/C level

In all districts, stakeholders reported that the number of functioning Water Source and Sanitation Committees (WSSCs) increased. Their roles are now clearer and they perform them more effectively by holding monthly meetings with consumers, collecting users’ contributions for maintenance and repairs and banking them, keeping records (minutes of meetings, financial records) and ensuring

that Operation and Maintenance (O&M) of water facilities is performed. In all three districts, payments of water users' fees increased in response to enhanced performances of the WSSCs and trust in them. In some S/Cs like Itula, capacities in O&M were also strengthened through training of pump mechanics.

The West Nile Project also stimulated local government staff to perform follow up and report on specific responsibilities within their mandates, such as monitoring of hygiene at water points or repairs of boreholes in case of major breakdowns. In Akworo S/C, sub-county stakeholders carry out frequent monitoring of WASH activities.

In primary schools, many stakeholders reported that latrines are now cleaned regularly, reducing smells, while pupils' hygiene practices such as hand washing after visiting the toilet also improved, through hygiene promotion and the construction of some hand washing facilities.

4.5. How sustainable are the changes likely to be?

The process was externally facilitated; however, aims of the project were that changes be sustained and the learning mainstreamed and budgeted for by local stakeholders. The latter requires and illustrates true ownership and would ensure sustainability.

Changing behaviour is a long process that often requires longer than the 2 years of the project. At this stage we can only record indications of the possible sustainability of the changes and new practices adopted.

All stakeholders were very positive towards the accountability methodologies and tools piloted during the project and expressed their willingness to continue applying them not only in the WASH sector, but also to integrate them in other government programmes. This appreciation and ownership of these simple tools is a very positive sign, as it suggests an important change in service providers' mindsets and their acknowledgement of the importance and benefits of communicating with the various stakeholders.

Towards the end of the West Nile Project, district and sub-county stakeholders prepared sustainability plans outlining concrete activities, timeframes and persons in charge. These planned activities range from the continuous use of accountability tools and their integration in the sub-county and district development plans, continuous monitoring and follow up by a wide range of stakeholders (Community Development Officers, Health Assistants, LC3, S/C and parish chiefs, WSSCs, etc.), to documentation of best practices and their sharing both during quarterly review meetings and through public media.

Further reading and Links:

Reports and other documentation are available here:

IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre: www.irc.nl/page/49682

Water and Sanitation Resource Centre, Uganda: www.watsanuganda.watsan.net/page/545

A toolkit on accountability is available here: <http://www.irc.nl/page/52603> or <http://goo.gl/Ch5Bg>