



UGANDA WATER AND SANITATION NGO NETWORK

Strengthening water governance at community level for sustainable water supply and development

The Operation and Maintenance (O&M) of rural and urban water facilities is one of the key challenges of water supply in Uganda. Every year, government, development partners and non-government actors invest billions of shillings in construction of new facilities, as they strive to attain the national targets for access to safe water. While investment in new infrastructure continues, greater attention must be paid to the sustainability of those facilities.

As of June 2015, the population in Uganda with access to safe water in urban areas was 73% against the national target of 100%. The population with access to safe water in rural areas was 65% against the target of 77%.

Citing Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), the 2015 Sector Performance Report indicates that out of a total population of 34.8 million, 82% live in rural areas. With the current water coverage at 65%, nearly 10 million Ugandans in rural areas do not have access to safe water. In urban areas where 15% of the total population lives, nearly 1.5 million people do not have access to safe water. Moreover the population counted as served stands a risk of losing access to safe water as a result of operation and maintenance of water facilities.

The functionality rate of water facilities in rural areas currently stands at 88% and for urban areas at 89%. In rural areas, out of the estimated 109,000 rural water point sources in Uganda, 16,350 sources are not providing water as expected. Low functionality is a manifestation of operation and maintenance failures.

Poor O&M, apart from leading to breakdown of sources, contributes to contamination of water hence undermining the goal of improving the quality of life through provision of safe and clean water. When a community member goes to the water source and finds it non-functional, it impacts greatly on their health as well as their ability to engage in more productive activities. Often people will resort to unsafe alternative sources of water; or they will pay exorbitant prices for an alternative good service; or they trek long distances in search of the next good source.

In Uganda, especially in rural areas, the operation and maintenance of water facilities is largely a community responsibility as provided by the Community Based Maintenance Systems (CBMS). Water users are expected to own and manage their water supply facilities. Communities have a responsibility to contribute monies and labour

towards small repairs of their water facilities. Where a source has a major break down which the community cannot deal with, the Ministry of Water and Environment as well as the Local Governments, may come in to support.

A number of factors continue to undermine the effectiveness of the CBMS and hence O&M for water facilities. The factors range from inconsistent government policies; dysfunctional Water User Committees (WUC); inadequate numbers of Hand Pump Mechanics and lack of tools for them; unclear ownership of water facilities, inadequate community mobilisation and training and gender-related challenges that put women and girls more at risk.

In August 2015, UWASNET in partnership with IRC International Water and Sanitation in Uganda undertook a documentation exercise to gather evidence of the key issues surrounding O&M in different areas, with a view to advocate for increased funding towards O&M and effective management of water supply facilities.

Ten water sources were visited in four districts namely Pallisa, Namayingo, Gomba and Kalungu. It was found that in all districts, age-old challenges persist including ineffective management of water sources and inadequate funding for O&M.

Water governance issues documented at community level

The CBMS model recognises that community participation in water governance and management is essential for the successful implementation of water projects and eventual realization of universal access to safe water for all. Communities have a responsibility to manage rural water point sources including protected springs, shallow wells and boreholes.

Under the CBMS model, communities in rural communities assume control and responsibility for the day-to-day running of their water and sanitation facilities. As such they are expected to contribute a monthly user fee so that O&M funds are readily available when required for routine and preventive maintenance of their water facilities as contrasted to repair after break down. With such funds in place, communities can then engage the Hand Pump Mechanics and purchase spare parts. But with issues of household poverty and lack of accountability by the Water User Committees, user fees are hardly ever collected.

Where a water source has a major break down which the community cannot deal with, the Ministry of Water and Environment as well as the Local Governments, may come in to support.

However, a number of factors continue to undermine the effectiveness of the CBMS model and hence the operation and maintenance of water facilities.

For the effectiveness of the CBMS model, the attitudes and practices of water users are crucial. In the districts visited during the documentation exercise, some communities were positive and enthusiastic when it came to taking care of their sources and other communities were not bothered for a number of reasons namely;

- Dependence syndrome

In some areas, community members wait for hand-outs from the government and donors and others appeal to their political leaders to provide water. When they receive free water systems, community members do not pay adequate attention to the operation and maintenance of the facility because they know that the political leaders will provide monies for repair upon break down.

- Availability of alternative water sources within easy reach

In communities where there are alternative water facilities within easy reach, community members do not pay attention to the operation and maintenance of their water facilities. In comparison to areas where there is either a single borehole or spring well, the users will do whatever it takes to maintain the source.

- Technical breakdown of water facilities

In cases where water users see a different colour of water from the water facility, they are affected psychologically and end up abandoning the source. In such cases, the issues is often aging of water supply networks or wearing out of pipes. This point to the importance of using quality materials for construction and rehabilitation of water sources.

Recommendations

- There is need to focus on the management of water facilities. Well as the CBMS model gives water users the responsibility of managing the water facilities under groups such as the Water User Committees, there is need to sensitize the Water User Committees and community members on their roles and responsibilities so that they can proactively contribute funds and labour towards effective operation

and maintenance of water facilities. In other cases, Government should engage professionals to manage the delivery of water services.

- There is need to professionalise the CBMS to enhance the functionality of the Water User Committees and accountability of funds contributed by community members towards operation and maintenance of their water facilities. This can be done through scaling up the formation of sub-county water supply and sanitation boards' capacity to enable them be more efficient in records and financial management and accountability.
- There is need to support Hand Pump Mechanics Associations to turn into viable entities so that they are able to undertake timely monitoring and assessment of water sources before they completely breakdown.
- There is need to initiate market based approaches and allow private sector actors to play a more important role in the operation and maintenance of water facilities.
- Essentially, almost all activities around the Operation and Maintenance of water facilities require finance resources. The current financing for O&M is far from adequate. According to the second National Development Plan (NDP II), government aims to attain universal access to safe water by first of all ensuring that each village has at least one improved water source. But it is also important to invest time, financial and human resources to ensure that the gains are not lost when water sources cease to function and are not rehabilitated.

About UWASNET

Uganda Water and Sanitation NGO Network (UWASNET) was founded in 2000 as the national umbrella organisation for all NGOs working in the Water and Sanitation sub-sector in Uganda. UWASNET works through the Sector Wide Approach to contribute to the national development plan of poverty alleviation through universal access to sustainable, safe water and improved standards of sanitation and hygiene, through partnership with sector development partners, private sector, communities. UWASNET currently has a total of 256 members working all over Uganda.

UWASNET's mandate in the sector include; building the capacity of CSOs, documentation, Advocacy, policy analysis and lobbying, Sector coordination, strengthening collaboration for improved WASH service delivery, research, support learning and promote good governance in the sector.

With support from



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