
31st WEDC International Conference, Kampala, Uganda, 2005

MAXIMIZING THE BENEFITS FROM WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION

NGOs as software providers in Uganda: Lessons from Kichwamba pilot project, Kabarole district

C Baguma, Uganda

In a bid to improve the competence, efficiency and effectiveness of PAF funded programmes, leading to accelerated and quality delivery of services to the end user in the water sector, Government sought out the involvement of NGO's/CBO'S and the private sector in the development of the rural water and sanitation sector. This is envisaged to entrench the current gains, thereby maximizing benefits from the water sector through strengthening the software component of rural water and sanitation projects. Under this strategy, through HEWASA programme involvement, government implemented a pilot software component project on the Kichwamba gravity flow scheme whose findings are documented in this paper.

Background

One of the overall objectives of the 1997 Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) is improving the quality of life of the poor and one of the key strategies under this is provision of water and sanitation services with a special focus on the poorer sections of society. Accordingly, 1998 Poverty Action Fund (PAF) channeled resources resulting from debt relief of highly indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative to key sectors of the country including the water sector where government provided District Water Development Conditional Grants (DWSCG) to all districts. This targeted water supply and sanitation improvement in rural areas including rural growth centres/trading centres with a population of less 5000 people.

Government sought to improve the competence, efficiency and effectiveness of PAF funded programmes, leading to accelerated and quality delivery of services to the end user. Of the measures taken in the considerations to achieve the above is the involvement of NGO's/CBO'S and the private sector in the development of the rural water and sanitation sector. Terms of reference were in light of this developed to enable districts procure and engage NGOs/CBOs/private sector as consultants to carry out community mobilisation and organisation for operation and maintenance of water and sanitation activities.

Kichwamba software pilot project

Under the said terms, HEWASA programme implemented a pilot software component project on the Kichwamba gravity flow scheme during the period of February 2004 to April 2005. The project covered 13 villages with 24 public tap stands serving 1,167 households that house 5,955 persons of whom 2,900 are females and 3,055 males. HEWASA implemented the project to the satisfaction of all the stakeholders who included DWD, UWASNET, Kabarole local Government,

Kichwamba Sub County and the Kihondo parish community population. The total cost of the project was (UGX 32,000) thirty two million Uganda shillings.

Coordination

The need for proper coordination between hardware and software is so paramount especially where software events must precede hardware implementation namely community awareness raising, sensitization, mobilisation and capacity building phases. Capital contribution raises an even more profound concern because it may never get realised at all and its purpose of creating ownership lost if it ever was not gathered before the physical constructions are seen in the community. The pilot was constantly plagued by the fact that the hardware private sector partner is a contractor, it is time and speed that tends to matter most to contractors. The fact that donors for hardware and software were different and all with different timing requirements immensely encouraged the uncoordinated flow of events. Many times hardware contractor was found to zoom ahead of the software in order to beat deadlines of the donor, yet software persons wanted to spend a little more time to complete software issues on community mobilisation.

It is important in this regard that the funding sources for both hardware and software are properly synchronised or best still if it is one source to avoid situations where the hardware contract has to zoom ahead as a requirement from the funding source.

The other alternative could be that an NGO with capacities both in hardware and software be the one contracted so that the management of the NGO can be used to harmonise the activities of the two components.

It was also felt that the District Water Office other than the collaborative and support capacity to the two components, it lacked the power and authority to rebuke, reprimand or hold

payment in cases on none compliance with the day-to-day important aspects of co working, take the example of the traditional time concern of contractors. It is here proposed that a senior officer at the district, either the Chief Administrative officer, or the Assistant Chief Administrative Officer in charge of the host county be the coordinating authority. This way the hardware and software providers shall be under one command line so that one commander can call hardware into action after being satisfied that the software is ready for that hardware component.

The timing of funding could also resolve this by planning for the first three phases of the software to be funded in the financial year preceding the one where hardware is to be funded.

Adherence to steps

The Kicwamba experience has shown the need to strictly adhere to the courtesy of involving local communities much earlier than the traditional respected NGO timing doing this at the beginning of the project. Even for technologies so technical like the GFS their input is of paramount importance. The Mahyoro and Kaisula villages had been left out during the design stage. It caused so much upraising to the point that a mini gravity flow scheme had to be arranged to handle the potentially disastrous effects though it had a very convincing technical explanation that could not make any sense to the population up the hills. The downhill communities also had their fears of going ahead with a scheme that left out uphill communities explainable by historical issues between the two communities. It is believed that this could have been avoided if the local communities were part of the initial aloud thinking.

Bureaucracy

If funding could be sent directly to the NGO than through the Network, or if it should, let there be fewer committees, managers and bureaucrats to handle the funding process. This shall avoid delays and other regretted effects of the NGO having to constantly find other monies to keep the project afloat.

Facilitation

It may be important to facilitate the government staff that co-work with NGOs for the good of the work. These include the District Water Officer, the Assistant Water Officer for Mobilisation, the County Water Officer and the extension staff.

Flexibility

It is very important to keep flexible to allow for learning along the way or to take corrective action. Radio programme, Drama presentations and village record books were found to enhance the quality of work yet they had been left out but were later incorporated.

Capacity

Government may have to think of building capacity of NGO's to do this kind of work because the pilot showed that not any indigenous NGO could do this kind of work

General protection code

The pilot showed a need to establish an enforceable NGO code of conduct that can protect government funds in events of NGOs defaulting or mishandling funds. On many occasions funds were sent to HEWASA accounts and all there was to count on the side of government was the good will of the organisation. UWASNET could be assigned the duty of developing and enforcing this.

Need to reposition

Many time the programme pre financed operations to keep pace with deadlines and other related times. This clearly spelt that NGO' to properly deal with government in this kind of co work, NGOs may need to have their own money to prefinance operations. There is therefore a need to reposition from the traditional NGOs that spend donors' money on specific activities to using money to deal with districts including the situations where a district expects the consultant to carry on work and pay after a certain percentage of work is done.

Supervision

Government may have to build capacity of supervisors at the district and sub county to monitor and ensure quality of work by the NGO for them to effectively see things that are already clear to the NGO, else they are currently depending on the supervisee for what they should be looking for in quality work.

National standards

The pilot also showed a need for an evaluation mechanism for the impact of the software implementation and Visual aids and training materials and formats for uniformity across the country for comparison purposes

In this government will also have to establish clear-cut indicators and certifiers of software well done else, it is not as standardised as hardware

Contact address

Charles Baguma
Civil Society Officer
HEWASA Fort Portal Diocese.
Email: water@infocom.co.ug
