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SUSTAINABILITY OF WATER AND SANITATION SYSTEMS

**Decentralisation as a strategy for sustainability***Fred Kato Semogera and Joseph M. Kiwanuka, Uganda*

MPIGI IS ONE of the 38 districts of Uganda situated in the Southern part of the country just off Lake Victoria shores. It is 6.377 sq. km with a population of 1.020.000 people. It consists of five counties which are subdivided into 33 sub-counties. The district surrounds Kampala which is the capital city of Uganda.

People are generally peasant farmers although those residing along the Lake shores go fishing as an additional economic activity.

About 90 per cent of the population depends on surface water (Lakes, springs, streams, water holes and swamps) and about 10 per cent go for underground water. By the end of 1994, safe water coverage was 14 per cent while safe sanitation coverage was 31.2 per cent.

Before 1994, the district had only 2 small water and sanitation projects operating in only 3 subcounties. In January 1994 a water and sanitation project covering all the district started; it was funded and implemented by AVSI, UNICEF, Central Government, District Administration and local Communities.

**Situation before introducing decentralisation**

During the first period of the project, we realised that our system of operation was not adequately involving the user community and the grassroots Health and Community Development staff. The water and sanitation improvement activities were initiated, planned and implemented mainly from the district headquarters. Therefore there was not enough mobilisation, involvement and responsibility shared at all the stages of the project with the grassroots beneficiaries (county, subcounty, parishes and communities). As a result, we experienced the following problems which have partially hindered the projects steady output and the maintenance of facilities constructed.

- Transportation, construction and supervision costs were high.
- Supervision of facility construction was difficult as a small team of supervisors from district headquarters cannot cover all construction sites.
- Output has been noted to be below the potential capacity as there was little community participation and involvement.
- A big part of the community was still unknowledgeable on WATSAN activities, facilities and procedures, as evidenced by the community's improper use and maintenance of facilities provided.

- Follow up for proper construction, use and maintenance by the district level staff was inadequate as they are too far from the facilities. Lower level staff were also often inadequately involved. This resulted in poor maintenance of the facilities provided.
- Capacity building was still lacking. As a result, the community depended on the limited district level resources for the construction and repairs.
- Latrine slabs, blocks, concrete rings etc. to support the WATSAN activities are produced at the casting yard located at district headquarters. They are distributed to construction sites by project trucks. This does not only increase on operational costs, but is also inconvenient and a risk to safety of transported items.

Having realised this, we decided to decentralise some of our operations to sub-county and lower levels to make the project more community based. Under this arrangement, initiation, planning and execution is done at community level supported by construction/repair and supervisory structures at sub-county level. The district level structure provides some offshore materials, logistics, policy and plan guidelines, support supervision and monitoring and evaluation. This is in line with the district council policy of decentralisation of the social and administrative services to sub-county level.

**Strategies for decentralisation**

The following strategies have been developed together with the beneficiaries in order to decentralise as much as possible the project to grassroots level, using the existing administrative and political structures (R.C. system)

***The district council advocacy***

The district council composed of councillors from sub-county levels have been mobilised and convinced to value WATSAN project as an essence for development. It is now one of the capital development projects in the district and received a budget of Uganda shs. 75 million (about 80.000 U.S. Dollar) in the financial year 1994/95. This supplements budgets at lower levels.

***Mobilisation and training***

Project activities begin with mobilisation and training of county and sub-county field staff (Health and Community Development), community and opinion leaders by the district level staff to sensitise and give them skills for project activities. After this, they are capable of mobilis-

ing the community and give them advice on health/hygiene education, technical issues and procedures of the project.

#### **Capital development budget at sub-county level**

The sub-county councillors have budgeted for water and sanitation as a capital development project in their respective sub-counties. Some sub-counties like Makindye, Wakiso, Katabi have budgets as high as Uganda shs. 12 million (about 13,000 U.S. Dollar). The budget at sub-county level is used to supplement purchase of local materials, training of pump mechanics and local masons and payment of allowances for field Extension Staff.

#### **Water source maintenance fund**

An operation and maintenance fund is established per water source protected through user contributions. It supports construction, operation and maintenance of the water source.

#### **Formation and training of committees**

Water and sanitation committees are formed at sub-county, village and source levels to plan, implement and monitor water and sanitation activities in their respective areas. The water and sanitation committees at source level is responsible for development and maintenance of the source and supervision of sanitation in the user community. These committees are trained to make them aware of their roles and functions and equip them with the necessary skills to perform effectively. The training of these committees is done by the sub-county Health and Community Development staff following a standard training curriculum which was developed for the district.

#### **Establishment of construction and maintenance structures at sub-county level**

Local masons and pump mechanics are selected by the community through their leaders and trained by the district project staff in construction maintenance and repair techniques for water and sanitation facilities. After this, they are left in the respective sub-counties to carry out construction and repairs that may be required. Their remuneration is met from either the Capital Development Fund at sub-county level or operation and maintenance fund at source level.

Supervision of facility construction is done by the area Health and Community Development staff. The district level staff provide support planning, supervision, monitoring and evaluation.

#### **Establishment of casting yards at county level**

To increase on output and reduce on the distribution distances and transportation costs, casting yards for water and sanitation requirements are being decentralised to county level.

#### **Achievements**

- There has been increased awareness and sense of ownership and responsibility for safe water and sanitation facilities provided as evidenced by the following:
  - 25 out of 33 sub-county councils have budgets for WATSAN activities.
  - There is a steady flow of applications from the community to headquarters asking for assistance in the form of materials not locally available.
- The field staff have become more responsible. They work with the community to construct, maintain and repair WATSAN facilities.
- 213 Water source and sanitation committees have been formed.
- 71 Water Source and Sanitation Committees have been trained and are active.
- More women are gradually getting more involved as evidenced by the following:
  - Six women groups in three sub-counties (Wakiso, Ngando and Makindye) actively participate in WATSAN activities.
  - 46 per cent of the total membership of the established WSSC are women
- County level casting yard has been established in one county (Busiro) and another is under construction in Gomba county.

#### **Constraints**

- Some WSSC, though established, have failed to meet regularly to review water and sanitation situation in their localities and thus fail to plan for maintenance of their water and sanitation facilities.
- Some community members, more especially where WSSC are not active, still expect total dependence on donors to solve their water and sanitation needs.
- Some counties are very remote and small in size with less population. The revenue generated is too small to cater for all development requirements for such areas and as such very little money may be allocated to the WATSAN sector. Such sub-counties have to depend largely on the district headquarters for improvement of their water and sanitation.
- Some areas are lacking competent trained staff. This has as a result led to failure of establishing the system in some sub-counties.