

THE ROLE OF HAND PUMP MECHANICS ASSOCIATIONS IN IMPROVING OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE OF RURAL WATER AND SANITATION SERVICES

INTRODUCTION

In 2011 the Ministry of Water and Environment adopted a strategy of establishing district based Hand Pump Mechanics Associations (HPMAs) to strengthen Operation and Maintenance of rural water systems and increase functionality of rural water sources.

Whereas the Hand Pump Mechanics (HPMs) have been actively working on functionality of water sources, the Hand Pump Mechanic Associations (HPMAs) are new players in the Water and Sanitation Sub sector in Uganda. Their role is to coordinate and regulate activities of HPMs and other local artisans involved in operation and maintenance of rural water systems at district level.

The decision to roll out HPMAs was well received by district local governments and NGOs active in the WASH sector. As of October 2012, Ninety two percent (92%) of rural districts had established HPMAs¹. The directive from the ministry also strengthened the operation of HPMAs which already existed such as in Kasese, Kabalore and Kyenjojo. However, operationalisation of the HPMAs has been mired by several issues including size of available maintenance works, institutional capacity, financing HPMA operations among others.

HPMA ACTIVITIES SO FAR

The International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC) and SNV Netherlands Development Organization are developing institutional capacity of HPMAs in the districts of Kabarole, Lira, Arua, Kasese, Bundibugyo and Kyenjojo. On top of their regular duties of repairing water sources, HPMAs in the six districts have taken up several activities such as;



Hand Pump Mechanics attend refresher training in Lira district

Collecting data on functionality of point water sources:

HPMAs are supporting District Local Governments (DLGs) in collecting functionality data which informs planning and updates district management information systems.

Assessment and Rehabilitation of non-functional water sources:

In Kabarole and Lira districts, HPMAs have used the monitoring data to conduct assessments of non-functional sources in five sub counties to establish the nature and cost of repairs. The assessment reports have been shared with the respective district water offices and will be used to inform planning for major repairs. While in Kasese the HPMA rehabilitated 7 boreholes at a cost of UGX 30 million.

¹ Water and Environment Sector Performance Report 2012

Extension of Gravity flow schemes: In Kabarole district, the HPMA was contracted by an NGO, HEWASA to conduct extension of two gravity flow schemes in Bukuku and Kicwamba Sub Counties. The extensions involved construction of tap taps, break pressure tanks, rain water harvesting tanks, and installation of a pipe network and they cost UGX16 million and 66 million respectively.

CHALLENGES

HPMAs are not clear about how they should work as a private sector entity. They seem to be locked in the CBO mindset and often demand to be facilitated before doing any work. This limits their ability to scout for and take advantage of business opportunities.

The HPMAs expected to get contracts from the District Local Governments for maintenance and repair of water systems. This has not been the case since a number of districts are still grappling with how to engage the associations. On the other hand most HPMAs have not yet acquired the technical expertise to manage contracts.

The amount of work and money from routine maintenance and repair of water systems is often too low to sustain operations of the HPMA. Moreover, water users are not willing to pay for minor repairs. A study conducted by IRC in 2012 in 8 districts² in Technical Support Unit 2 and 6 showed that less than 15% of water users contribute towards operation and maintenance of point water sources. This has prompted HPMs to look out for more lucrative works.

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE HPMAS

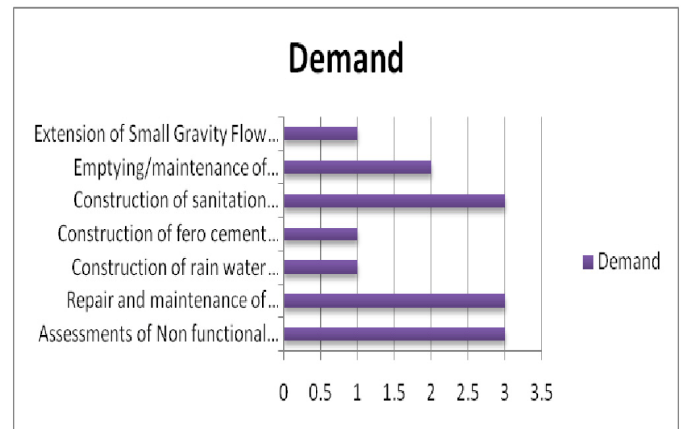
IRC and SNV are providing capacity building services to strengthen institution capacities of HPMAs to enable them grow into sustainable entities capable of providing a range of water and sanitation services. The specific capacity building activities include;

- Mentoring of the executive and individual HPMs on how to work in Associations & manage contracts
- Linking up the different HPMAs to promote peer to peer learning between Associations
- Mentoring and coaching the associations on business development

² Kabarole, Kasese, Kamwenge, Kyenjojo, Lira, Alebtong, Nwoya and Kitgum

- Market analysis of HPMA services to help association to develop appropriate products and skills

The HPMs and technicians have a mix of skill sets from repair and rehabilitation of hand pumps to plumbing and masonry skills, but these are underutilized. At the moment their work has been focused on repair and rehabilitation of hand pumps. The figure below shows the range of services that HPMAs would to offer and also ranks demand from potential clients according to perceptions of Kabarole & Lira HPMAs.



Source: IRC 2013: Report on development of Business models for Kabarole & Lira HPMAs 2013

FINANCING OPTIONS FOR HPMA ACTIVITIES

Financing of the HPMAs still remains a major challenge. Presently, HPMA services are being financed through a mix of public financing and membership fees, and share capital contribution. The average membership fee is 50,000 shillings. Share capital contribution is also being considered. HPMs are willing to contribute up to UGX 100,000/= per share for a minimum of (2) shares and maximum of five (5) shares.

HPMAs will require external support to help them build systems and structures. Business Development services are also required to enable them develop a range of low cost WASH products. Micro finance institutions provide opportunity for products such as self supply options for water and sanitation. These can be explored once the HPMAs have developed business plans.