

## triple-s

### Strengthening the learning and adaptive capacity of the rural water sub sector

#### MAIN MESSAGES

##### → Findings

- Learning forums increase collaboration and trust among sector stakeholders and have contributed to scaling up innovations and good operational practices.
- Deep reflection and analysis of driving forces behind successes or failures is often missed, making it difficult to derive concrete policy actions.
- Facilitation skills are weak, particularly at district and regional levels, and mechanisms to ensure cross-platform learning are missing – for example, feeding lessons from district-level to national and vice-versa.

##### → Recommendations to strengthen learning in the WASH sector

- The Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) should support capacity building of Technical Support Units (TSUs) to facilitate learning processes at regional level.
- MWE water liaison department can appoint an existing organisation to serve as a national Knowledge Management Hub. The Hub would be responsible for supporting ongoing action research, communication, documentation and synthesis of emerging issues to harvest policy actions and feed into the sector review process.

To meet existing and future challenges in delivering rural water services, numerous actors involved – service providers, authorities, regulators, development partners, private sector enterprises and NGOs – must learn and adapt together.

Triple-S/ IRC conducted an assessment of the effectiveness of the numerous multi-stakeholder learning forums in Uganda and developed a framework for institutionalising learning to ensure that sector data, innovations and lessons learnt are documented, analysed, and used to trigger innovation as well as changes in practice and policy. This brief outlines the main lessons and recommendations from that work.



Learning journey in Lira (Photo: S. Mirembe/ IRC Uganda)

The Uganda policy framework for Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) provides for a series of multi-stakeholder forums at district, regional and national levels that bring together actors to share information, analyse performance of WASH services, and coordinate stakeholder actions to improve efficiency and effectiveness of WASH service delivery.<sup>1</sup>

Stakeholders at different levels – national, regional and district – have different learning needs that should guide the form and structure of learning processes. The national level forums deal with policy and strategic aspects of the sector, while those at district and regional level deal with operational issues.

**FIGURE 1** OBJECTIVES FOR LEARNING AT DIFFERENT LEVELS



The Triple-S assessment of multi-stakeholder learning forums mapped the knowledge and information flows among actors at district, regional and national level; analysed strengths and weaknesses of sector learning initiatives; and identified opportunities and resources required to institutionalise learning in the sector.

## MAIN FINDINGS

Work on learning facilitation at decentralised level has strengthened collaboration of district local governments with civil society organisations on action research, learning and testing innovations. A number of joint collaborations were initiated by Kabarole and Lira district local governments on capacity development of

Hand Pump Mechanic Associations and scale up of Sub-county Water Supply and Sanitation Boards (SWSSBs). At regional level, learning forums have influenced the scale up of approaches, such as SWSSBs and Water Source Committee (WSC) savings and loan initiatives (Box I).

### BOX I SCALING OF THE YY STRATEGY TO FINANCE MAINTENANCE AND REPAIRS

Yehora Yeguza (YY Strategy) is a savings and loan initiative that started with a single WSC in Rukooko village, Kamwenge district in 2006. Experience with the initiative was shared at the Rwenzori learning forum in October 2010. Kamwenge district local government then scaled up the initiative to 112 water points. The initiative has also been adopted by the local governments of neighbouring districts Kabarole, Kasese, Kyegegwa and Kyenjojo. The approach is now recognised in TSU6 Western Region as a relevant component for WSC training and has contributed to improved functionality of water supply facilities (Bey, et al., 2014).

Information exchange across different platforms at national level is systematic and consistent. The Joint Water and Environment Technical Review is a good example, with a clear agenda to follow up on implementation of agreed actions from the Joint Sector Review process in respect to quality, value for money, delivery time and compliance with sector policies and standards.

On the other hand, platforms at district and regional levels still operate as standalone events without a streamlined process of information exchange in between events. There is growing awareness among sector stakeholders that for learning to trigger change, an ongoing and structured engagement process is required (Kahangire, 2012).

## ACTIVITIES AND SUCCESSES

IRC/ Triple-S supported the establishment of regional learning forums in Technical Support Units 2 and 6 in partnership with NETWAS, UWASNET, SNV, and local CSOs in the regions. Three annual regional learning forums were organised in each of the TSUs. After the first forum, district local governments in TSU 6, convinced of the forum's value, adopted a resolution to incorporate costs of their participation in the forums into their annual budgets.

<sup>1</sup> Triple-S and partners strengthened the forums at district level and supported the establishment of regional-level learning forums in TSUs 2 and 6.

The national level meetings contributed to shaping the HPMA guidelines and the National Self Supply Strategy. UWASNET has continued to facilitate annual civil society forums, now recognised on the Sector calendar.

## CHALLENGES

Despite the perceived value of a dedicated and structured sector learning function, funding for this role remains highly dependent on project initiatives from CSOs or occasional development partners. Inconsistent funding disrupts the continuity of facilitation, documentation and information dissemination activities across sector levels and impacts upon the potential for effective ongoing sector learning. In addition, there are limited skills among partners to facilitate and manage multi-stakeholder forums to trigger reflection and analysis of emerging issues persistent problems.

## COSTS

These challenges could largely be addressed by appointing a dedicated institution to support learning in the sector, with modest yet consistent levels of funding to ensure continuity and quality of activities and services. The estimated costs for coordinating sector learning through a dedicated institution – referred here as WASH Knowledge Management Hub – are shown in Table 1.

The Hub would support facilitation of learning forums at national level in collaboration with existing thematic working groups. At regional level, it would support TSUs in facilitating regional/ inter-district learning. The budget includes specific provision for capturing and communicating innovations and good practice in the form of one case study per TSU per year.

**TABLE 1** COSTS OF ESTABLISHING AND OPERATING A WASH KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT HUB

Activities	Costs (UGX)*	US\$	Assumptions
Office Equipment (set up costs)	5,000,000	1,887	An existing institution already supporting sector learning hosts, thus reducing set up costs. Costs would go towards data processing equipment.
National Learning Meetings (every two months)	5,400,000	2,038	Ongoing costs for hosting half-day working group meetings for 30 people
Support to Regional/ Inter-district Learning Facilitation (8 TSUs)	34,400,000	12,981	Covers staff time, transport, and accommodation in the regions (5 days for each region)
Case Study Development (1 x 8 TSUs)	13,200,000	4,981	Staff time (1 person)
Publications and Content Development	11,500,000	4,339	
Coordination and Management	5,500,000	1,245	Staff time (10 days)
Hosting Fees	7,780,000	2,936	10% of the annual budget for the Hub
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>UGX 82,780,000</b>	<b>US\$ 30,407</b>	

\* Cost estimates are based upon Triple-S experience of facilitating Regional Learning Forums in TSU 2 and 6 and projections for administrative costs.

## Recommendations

There is need to get leadership commitment from the MWE water liaison department to institutionalise learning through a dedicated Knowledge Management Hub. This commitment needs to be buttressed by modest, but consistent, levels of funding to ensure that the Hub can carry out its mandate.

There is need for MWE to build a cadre of skilled facilitators among the TSUs to enable them to strengthen reflection on existing practices, to adopt new ways of working, and to harvest and shape recommendations for policy actions. This can be achieved through on-the-job mentoring during planning and facilitation of inter-district/ regional learning meetings, and documentation of proven approaches/ innovations.

## REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Bey, V., Magara, P. and Abisa, J., 2014. *Assessment of the performance of the service delivery model for point sources in Uganda*. Kampala: IRC Uganda. Available at: [www.ircwash.org/resources/assessment-performance-service-delivery-model-point-sources-uganda](http://www.ircwash.org/resources/assessment-performance-service-delivery-model-point-sources-uganda).

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Nanbigne, B., Kyeyune, S. and Auma, M., 2012. *Decentralised learning in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Sector in Uganda, report of a round table discussion*. Kampala: s.l.

Netwas Uganda, 2010. *NETWAS Learning for practice and policy on household and school sanitation & hygiene*. Kampala: Netwas Uganda. Available at: [www.ircwash.org/resources/learning-practice-and-policy-household-and-school-sanitation-hygiene](http://www.ircwash.org/resources/learning-practice-and-policy-household-and-school-sanitation-hygiene).

Additional resources on learning and adaptive capacity are available through the Triple-S website. See *Strengthening learning and adaptive capacity through learning alliances*, at: [www.waterservicesthatlast.org/experiments/uganda\\_experiments/strengthening\\_learning\\_and\\_adaptive\\_capacity\\_through\\_learning\\_alliances](http://www.waterservicesthatlast.org/experiments/uganda_experiments/strengthening_learning_and_adaptive_capacity_through_learning_alliances).



Mozambiqan colleagues in a learning session about sub county water and sanitation coordination meetings, Lira district (Photo: Lydia S. Mirembe/ IRC Uganda).

### About IRC

IRC is an international think-and-do tank that works with governments, NGOs, businesses and people around the world to find long-term solutions to the global crisis in water, sanitation and hygiene services. At the heart of its mission is the aim to move from short-term interventions to sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene services.

With over 40 years of experience, IRC runs programmes in more than 25 countries and large-scale projects in seven focus countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It is supported by a team of over 100 staff across the world.

For more information about IRC, go to [www.ircwash.org](http://www.ircwash.org)

### About this Brief

The brief is authored by Peter Magara, National Learning Facilitator for IRC/ Triple-S in Uganda. It is based on research conducted under the Triple-S (Sustainable Services at Scale), a learning initiative to improve water supply to the rural poor, carried out in Uganda, Ghana, and Burkina Faso.

In Uganda the initiative is spearheaded by a consortium of partners: the Uganda Ministry of Water and Environment, the Network for Water and Sanitation (NETWAS), the Uganda Water and Sanitation NGO Network (UWASNET), SNV Netherlands Development Organisation Uganda and IRC Uganda.

For more information see: [www.waterservicesthatlast.org](http://www.waterservicesthatlast.org)

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