

triple-s

Sub-county Water Supply and Sanitation Boards to strengthen O&M for rural water supply facilities

MAIN MESSAGES

→ Findings

- Boards have contributed to increased participation of water users in O&M activities through revival of WSCs and registration of users per water facility.
- Mobilising funds for O&M continues to be a challenge at the level of WSCs and sub-country Boards.
- Indicative set up and operations costs for one year are estimated to be around UGX 8.3 million (US\$ 3,400) per sub-county.

→ Recommendations for supporting sub-county Boards

- Umbrella Organisations and Technical Support Units should provide direct support to the Boards to strengthen their capacity.
- MWE should review the allocation formula in the District Water and Sanitation Conditional Grant (DWSCG) to balance investment in new infrastructure with that of major maintenance and rehabilitation.
- District Local Governments should allocate 80% of the DWSCG at the sub-county level.
- District leadership and further investment in outreach to WSCs and communities are needed to increase fee collection.

Water Source Committees (WSCs) are not able to collect sufficient funds at the community level to cover operations and maintenance (O&M) of water facilities. Weak administrative capacity, distrust on the part of water users, and unwillingness of users to pay for water are all contributing factors.

With the Ministry of Water and Environment and local governments, Triple-S/ IRC piloted the concept of expanding the mandate of Water Supply and Sanitation Boards to include O&M responsibilities over point water sources. The Boards provide management support to WSCs and enable pooling of O&M funds at sub-county level.



Treasurer of Okello Odwar borehole shares record books (Photo: Lydia S. Mirembe/ IRC Uganda).

Annual Water and Environment Sector Performance Reports for 2012, 2013 and 2014 indicate that functionality of WSCs has stagnated at 71%. Even in the case of functioning WSCs, low user payments make it difficult to cover O&M costs. For example, in Buheesi, one of the 15 sub-counties in Kabarole district, the average collected for each water facility is around UGX 160,000 – less than 50% of the actual costs for preventive maintenance and minor repairs.

In an attempt to address this issue, Triple-S undertook action research to broaden the mandate of the Water Supply and Sanitation Boards of pipe schemes to cover O&M of point water sources and develop Sub-county Water Supply and Sanitation Boards (SWSSBs) in the rural areas without piped schemes. The rationale for piloting the Boards is that they enable the pooling of resources mobilised by WSCs at the sub-county level and they provide a structure that can manage O&M funds transferred from DWSCG.

MAIN ACTIVITIES

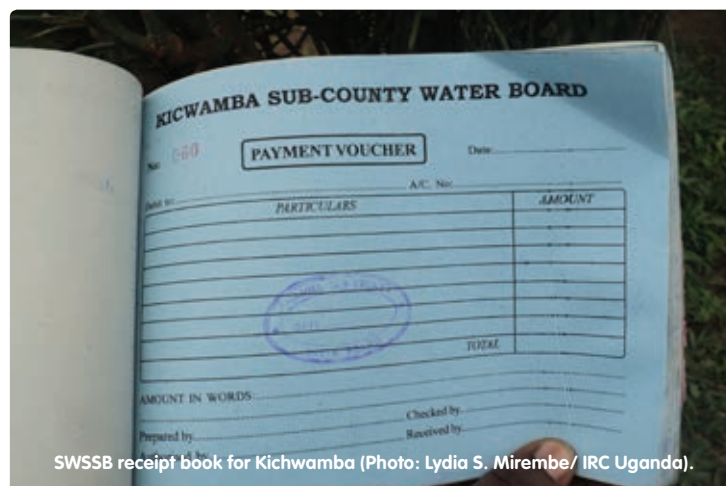
The piloting of SWSSBs was undertaken in July 2013–August 2014 by the District Local Governments of Lira and Kabarole with support from IRC/Triple-S. Under this model, the SWSSB is the overall O&M provider of rural water facilities and is appointed by the sub-county council to provide management support to WSCs.

Sub-county authorities formed interim Boards, which are still serving. In areas where Boards for pipe schemes already existed, their roles were broadened to include O&M of point water sources. Members of newly created Boards received training on their roles and responsibilities and were supported to work with sub-county authorities to reach out and sensitise WSCs in their areas. Water users were brought on the Board through parish dialogues conducted in each of the sub-counties.

Building on the experience of SWSSB testing, Kabarole and Lira district local governments scaled up SWSSBs to six additional sub-counties (four in Kabarole and two in Lira) without support from Triple-S. This brings the total number of sub-counties piloting the model to 14.

EMERGING RESULTS

The level of success of SWSSBs in pooling resources from WSCs varied across sub-counties. Two sub-counties, Lira and Kichwamba, stand out with 40% of their WSCs subscribing to the Board and those remitting 30% and 60% of collected fees respectively. However, this is still low as WSCs are expected to remit at least 80% of the funds collected.



SWSSB receipt book for Kichwamba (Photo: Lydia S. Mirembe/ IRC Uganda).

The new Boards have contributed to increased participation of water users in O&M activities through revival of WSCs and registration of users per water facility. Functionality of water supply facilities in the districts has increased from 73% to 74% in Lira and 80% to 82% in Kabarole; but there are a number of other interventions in the districts, such as the Hand Pump Mechanics Associations and Mobile for Water (M4W) initiative, that could also have contributed to the increase.

SWSSBs have supported WSCs to manage pooled funds and ensure accountability to communities through parish dialogues. In Kichwamba sub-county, at the end of the month, WSCs meet with the Board to remit 60% of the collected funds, and account for the remaining 40% whilst receiving reports from the Board on how remitted funds were utilised.

The MWE, through the Technical Support Units (TSUs) and Umbrella Organisations for Northern and Mid-Western Uganda, has embraced the concept of SWSSBs and is now trying to provide direct technical support to the Boards for this expanded mandate. The SWSSBs have been incorporated in the Sector guidelines for financial year 2014/15 (MWE, 2014a).

RISKS AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Financing of the SWSSBs continues to be a challenge. Almost 80% of the Boards' budgets are supposed to come from water user fees and yet the willingness of users to pay is low. Only 20% of water users pay fees according to an IRC assessment of the community-based management model for rural water supply in eight districts (Bey, et al., 2014).

WSCs have had a long history of poor accountability that discouraged the water users from contributing funds towards O&M. The SWSSBs have not been able to entirely overcome users' distrust. Various activities have

TABLE 1 COSTS FOR SWSSB SET UP, OPERATION AND O&M ACTIVITIES PER SUB-COUNTY

Item	Year 1 (UGX)	Year 1 (US\$)	Year 2 (UGX)	Year 2 (US\$)
Preliminary set up activities*	2,800,000	1,094	1,500,000	586
SWSSB board expenses				
Quarterly board meetings	1,440,000	563	1,440,000	563
Sub-county water technician	2,160,000	844	2,160,000	844
Office operations	960,000	375	960,000	375
Monitoring and follow up of WSCs	960,000	375	960,000	375
Minor repairs**	11,500,000	4,492	6,000,000	2,344
Major repairs (10 point sources per year)***	21,000,000	8,203	8,400,000	3,281
Total expenditure	40,820,000	15,945	19,920,000	7,781
Collection from user fees (UGX 1000/ household)	16,800,000	6,563	25,200,000	9,844
Remittance from district (Based on Kabarole DWSCG)	4,960,962	1,938	4,960,962	1,938
Total income	21,760,962	8,500	30,160,962	11,782
Deficit/ Surplus	-19,059,038	-7,445	8,740,962	3414

* Includes: consultative meetings, mobilisation/ coordination and capacity building.

** Projection is based on cost for addressing all point water facilities that require minor repairs — 23 in year 1 (actual) decreasing to 12 in year 2 (average).

***All point water facilities that require major repair — 10 facilities in year 1 (actual) decreasing to 4 per subsequent year (average).

been undertaken to address this: sensitisation of water users through parish dialogues, training of Boards in basic financial management, and supporting Boards to acquire relevant documentation such as user registration, receipts, income and expenditure books. The Boards' target is to achieve over 95% functionality and improve the service delivered by the second year to motivate water users to pay fees.

Some reports from Lira SWSSB indicate that WSC members who benefit from the O&M funds have opposed the SWSSB. Support from district leadership has gone some way to addressing resistance.

COSTS

Indicative costs for SWSSB activities presented in Table 1 are based on the figures for Buheesi sub-county, with 36,800 water users and 220 water supply facilities (hand pumps, protected springs and tap stands) – a reported 80% of which are functional.

The deficit presented in the table is due to the backlog in repairs, which if addressed, may help encourage payment of user fees. Year 2 reflects average repair costs for both minor and major repairs according the SWSSB handbook (MWE, forthcoming). Estimates are based on the current situation where only 20% of users are paying fees.

Recommendations

The Umbrella Organisations should invest in strengthening SWSSB management capacity while the TSUs should focus on facilitating SWSSB relations with other sector actors and the adaption of guidelines. Investment in capacity development should be for at least two years to allow for learning and further development of the SWSSB concept. A specific budget line, managed centrally by the MWE, will be required to ensure that capacity development resources are not lost in routine activities of the Boards. At the sub-county level, the Community Development Officer should monitor functioning of the SWSSB and ensure it is accountable to all stakeholders.

MWE should review the allocation formula for the District Water and Sanitation Conditional Grant to balance investment in new infrastructure with that of major maintenance and rehabilitation. The allocation for maintenance could vary for different districts depending on the level of access so that districts with a higher level of access (over 85%) invest more in maintenance.

The Rural Water Department of MWE should guide District Local Governments on how the O&M funds of the DWSCG should be allocated at sub-county level to finance activities of the SWSSBs. Given the financing gap, at least 80% of O&M funds should be remitted to the sub-counties.

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.

Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) 2014a. *Water and Environment Sector Performance Report*. Kampala: Government of Uganda. p. 39.

Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE), 2014b. *Guidelines for Local Government for engaging Hand Pump Mechanic Associations*. Kampala: Government of Uganda.

Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE), (forthcoming). *Sub county Water Supply and Sanitation Board Hand Book*. Kampala: Government of Uganda.

Additional resources available through the Triple-S website. See *Adopting sub-county model to improve operational maintenance*, at: www.waterservicesthatlast.org/experiments/uganda_experiments/adopting_sub_county_model_to_improve_operations_and_maintenance.

Access the Government of Uganda's *Water and Environment Sector Performance Reports 2012, 2013 and 2014*, prepared by the Ministry of Water and Environment, at: www.mwe.go.ug/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=15&Itemid=223.



Lira sub-county health assistant checks record book of Okello Odwar well
(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.

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About this Brief

The brief is authored by Robert Otim and Martin Watsisi, Triple-S learning coordinators for the Northern and Western regions, respectively, and Peter Magara, Triple-S National Learning Facilitator. 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

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