

**Study to Improve Efficiency and Effectiveness of
Learning and Reflection Processes in and
between the Different Coordination Platforms in
the Uganda WASH Sector**

A Consultancy Report

**Submitted to Triple S
Kampala**

By

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ACRONYMS

ADA	Austrian Development Agency
CLTS	Community Led Total Sanitation
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
DWD	Directorate of Water Development
DWSCC	District Water and Sanitation Coordination Committee
DWSCDG	District Water and Sanitation Development Conditional Grant
HEWASA	Health through Water and Sanitation
HPMAs	Hand pump Mechanics Associations
JSR	Joint Sector Review
JTR	Joint Technical Review
IDM	Inter District Meeting
LeaPPs	Learning for Policy and Practice in primary school and household sanitation and hygiene
LR	Learning and Reflection
MWE	Ministry of Water and Environment
MwUws	Mid Western Umbrella for Water and Sanitation
NETWAS	Network for Water and Sanitation-Uganda
NGOs	Non Governmental Organizations
NSWG	National Sanitation Working Group
PILS	Performance improvement through Learning in Sanitation
RWA	Rwenzori WASH Alliance
SCWSCC	Sub County Water and Sanitation Coordination Committees
SPR	Sector Performance Report
Triple S	Sustainable Service at Scale
TSUs	Technical Support Units
UWASNET	Uganda Water and Sanitation NGO Network
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
WRM	Water Resources Management
YY	Yahura Yehoze (a savings and credit approach)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This study was planned within the context of the memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) and IRC for the Triple-S project. The Triple-S project (Sustainable Rural Water Services at Scale) is a six year learning initiative with the overall goal of improving sustainability of rural water services and bringing about greater harmonization through increased sector capacity. It is an initiative of the IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre. The purpose of this study was to establish the efficiency and effectiveness of existing coordination platforms in the Uganda WASH Sector in facilitating learning and reflection processes in the sector

The study adopted a predominantly qualitative methodology. Study participants were purposively selected at national level from the government sector and civil society based on their involvement and knowledge of the learning and reflection processes in the Uganda WASH Sector and their contribution to Sector planning and decision-making. Secondary data for the study was collected through an extensive review of key WASH sector documents.

Existing learning & reflection in the WASH Sector

Conceptualizing learning and reflection in the WASH sector

The existing knowledge and understanding of the terms *learning* and *reflection* (LR) as well as learning and reflection platforms is varied. This highlights the existing ambiguity in the understanding of these terms. As advocates of LR continue to intensify their efforts to have LR incorporated in the existing coordination platforms, there is a need to appreciate these existing varied perceptions of the role of these platforms. For instance, whereas the WASH sector Development Partners (DPs) consider the JTR and JSR as accountability forums, MWE considers the two platforms as serving a coordination function. As such the evaluation of the contribution of the platform to the sector is intuitively conditioned by what is perceived as its principal role.

Learning and reflection approaches in the WASH sector

LR approaches being used in the WASH sector in Uganda can be grouped under two broad categories. The first one is the workshop setting approach (workshops, meetings & seminars) and the second category are approaches that have field based learning component (field trips and learning journeys). Coordination platforms that have a large number of participants tend to adopt the workshop type of learning and reflection. Platforms with a smaller number tend to adopt field based learning approaches. Time and financial resources are aspects that determine which LR approach to pursue. Where there is less time to afford field excursions and/or lengthy discussions in small manageable groups, there is a tendency to use workshop approaches. Further, constrained financial resources—including cost of hiring a consultant to facilitate a learning event—also weigh in on organizers to choose a workshop approach.

In both of the above LR approaches, reflection on causes of specific sector challenges and mapping of action points and follow up of progress of implementation are learning aspects that are emphasized. Process documentation is another aspect of the learning approaches, though less

emphasized in the workshop setting approaches. Process documentation entails a deliberate tracking of the progress of an action point agreed upon in the LR platform from inception to end.

Existing coordination platforms in the WASH sector

The existing coordination platforms at national, regional and district levels, largely deal with reporting, review and information sharing on sector performance with actual learning and reflection happening on a limited scale.

Learning & reflection in coordination platforms

Efficiency of existing coordination forums in promoting LR

A combination of factors minimizes learning and reflection in coordination platforms. These include, lack of time, inadequate resources and the fact that these meetings are considered a routine activity which does not inspire preparation and thought. In terms of time, almost all the coordination platforms that this study reviewed, meet for three days, with exception of the district and sub county platforms which meet for one day. Whereas three days are planned for most sector coordination meetings, especially at the centre, this time is mostly used for reporting review and accountability aspects of sector performance and very little time accorded to LR on lessons and actions to improve sector performance.

Effectiveness of existing coordination forums in promoting LR

There seems to be limited benefits that have, so far, accrued from learning and reflection on a general sector level, there are notable contributions at national, regional and district level. Coordination platforms improve coordination among partners. For instance, during the coordination platform meetings there is dissemination of best operation practices in the sector and new innovations and strategies. In the national learning forums especially those organized by NGOs aspects like functionality of WASH facilities, school sanitation, good governance, etc have been discussed and case studies shared, which in turn inform policy formulation and sector performance improvements.

Cross learning among coordination platforms at different levels

Cross-learning among different level platforms exists but needs to be encouraged to ensure systematic follow up and reporting. The JTR stands out as an exception with a clear agenda to follow up on the progress of implementation of the agreed key actions from the JSR in respect to quality, value for money, delivery time and relevancy in terms of an intervention being in compliance with sector policies and standards. In lower level platforms, participants report on the outputs of the platform meetings they attended, which is largely an accountability requirement. For instance, IDMs act as conduits for feedback from the centre to the district staff on performance and developed strategies for remedial action.

Further, coordination platforms are used to disseminate sector policies, guidelines and review of progress, identification of implementation challenges and developing strategies for addressing them. Where a new approach (e.g., Yehoza Yehora [YY]) is being reported, cross-learning takes the form of dissemination of innovations in the sector and in such a case those who choose to take up such an idea come up with clear plans for implementation. Cross learning is therefore reflected in inter-platform reporting and reviewing of the outputs of each other's meetings, with

varying degrees of emphasis placed on drawing up a plan to track the implementation of those outputs.

Limitations and threats to LR in the WASH Sector

Amidst the ambiguity of conceptualization, learning and reflection takes place, but is sometimes not noticed, nurtured and therefore less supported at policy level. In general terms, learning and reflection is one of the components that make up the less supported software aspect of WASH sector programming in Uganda. Learning and reflection starts with an individual appreciating the role of LR in improving sector efficiency and effectiveness. Yet, most actors in the Uganda WASH sector have not yet appreciated LR as necessary to incorporate in their programming. It is worth noting that such appreciation of LR is a function of knowledge and awareness of the utility of LR, which, as this study showed, is inadequate. LR champions are needed at all levels, crucially though at the national level, to influence budget and policy alignment in favour of integrating LR in the sector.

Opportunities for scaling up LR in the WASH sector

Opportunities for mainstreaming learning and reflection exist in the coordination platforms from the national level through to the sub county level. In some of the coordination platform meetings e.g., the JTR, TSU Review Meetings, IDMs and DWSSC meetings, aspects of learning can be discerned. For example an agenda that covers relevant sector issues, documentation and reporting of discussions held in the meetings and sharing of this information. Another significant LR aspect noticeable in these coordination platforms is the review of the action points (also called undertakings in the Agreed Minutes) of previous meetings, which is an indicator of the learning and reflection process. The coordination platform meetings therefore offer valuable opportunities to nurture learning and reflection in the WASH sector.

One of the most conspicuous opportunities for scaling up LR in the WASH sector is the lead role and enthusiasm that CSOs have displayed in the uptake of LR. Under UWASNET—the sector CSO umbrella organization—CSOs have spearheaded the uptake of LR in the sector. The most prominent role has been played by SNV, IRC/Trippl S, NETWAS and Water Aid Uganda. CSOs are active in a variety of ways ranging from participating in LR platforms, hosting and sponsoring LR events to production of the LR materials and generally facilitating the LR processes. For instance, in 2010, four CSOs came together and formed the Rwenzori WASH Alliance (RWA) which covers seven districts. The alliance has so far organised two regional learning forums in partnership with district local governments, IRC/Triple-s and other actors. In northern Uganda, CSOs held the first Northern Uganda Learning Forum which among others highlighted the possibility of effective LR even at lower levels of governance like the Sub County. Another example of CSO activity is provided by NETWAS which has implemented learning programmes in 7 districts namely, Kyenjojo and Kamwenge in western Uganda, Koboko and Arua in the west Nile sub region and Pader, Gulu and Kitgum in Acholi sub region. The organization helps in setting up learning agendas, case documentation and actual facilitation of learning and reflection events.

Conclusions

Existing coordination platforms are largely for sector coordination, performance review and accountability and do not focus explicitly on learning and reflection.. Nevertheless, these national level platforms provide great opportunities for learning and reflection. While it is true that most coordination platforms in their present form and content, offer less learning and reflection, if these platforms integrate learning and reflection into the conceptualization of these meetings, the content in terms of the agenda and its participative process will eventually change. The stakeholders in the WASH sector appreciate and actually use coordination platforms as a forum to disseminate new sector policies, guidelines and sometimes new approaches like the formation of Hand-pump Mechanics' Associations to ensure strong and sustainable O&M programs for water sources. This is a fertile ground to nurture learning and reflection in the sector. Like any other aspect of the sector, LR needs champions at various levels, to enable its uptake.

Recommendations

General recommendations

- 1) There is need to have a harmonised definition and understanding of LR in the sector which should be matched with the relevant awareness creation to ensure buy-in by all the stakeholders. Thereafter, efforts and strategies can be put in place to make it part of the key platforms such as the JTR and JSR and others
- 2) MWE along with CSOs that have active LR programs should jointly develop indicators of LR outcomes, to enable tracking and documentation of LR outcomes, including evidence of LR in coordination platforms.
- 3) Cross learning among coordination platforms can be promoted by encouraging review of action points recommended by different platforms, during such coordination meetings. This review needs to be coupled with documentation and sharing of such documents.
- 4) Considering the significant strides that CSOs have made in adopting LR in their platforms, their expertise and experience is an excellent opportunity for MWE and generally the sector to draw on and scale up LR. CSOs can be play a role in:
 - a. Facilitating LR sessions
 - b. Helping coordination platforms with documentation and follow up of action points
 - c. Dissemination of new approaches in the sector
 - d. Setting up of LR alliances where they do not exist
- 5) There is a need to identify individuals and interest them to be champions to advocate for scaling up of LR in coordination platforms and indeed for LR to be entrenched in sector programming. Champions can include the Ministers, Permanent Secretary, Director of DWD, heads of Directorates and Departments, LCV Chairpersons and CAOs. Individuals can also be identified among the Development Partners. One way of interesting such persons is putting them at the centre of LR activities, inviting them to LR events, including making them chief guests asking them to endorse key documents produced by the LR platforms.

- 6) Define clear learning indicators for the sector. This will be strengthened with an appropriate monitoring and evaluation framework for the application of learning in the WASH sector.
- 7) Strengthening the sub-national coordination (DWSCCs/TSUs/WMZs/WSDFs) and the feedback mechanism into the national level processes
- 8) Instituting learning after sector review processes to deliberate, review and agree how to take forward the learning, follow and feedback.
- 9) Explore innovative ways of undertaking learning to maximize on participation with limited resources. Innovative learning platforms/ways e.g. e-learning through use of blogs, webinars, knowledge nodes could be created and popularized to attract many people.

Specific recommendations for JSR and JTR

- 10) For the JSR: discuss and pass mechanisms for incorporating learning in the sector and ensure the learning aspect of the JSR is incorporated in the TOR and Agenda.
 - a. Modalities for involving and encouraging learners in the platforms
 - b. an inclusive and participative process of drawing up the JSR agenda and program
 - c. should focus on strategic instead of operational issues
- 11) Ensure maximum participation of the different groups and minimize parallel sessions to ensure that the learning feeds into the final agreed actions/undertakings.
- 12) For the JTR: consider how to organize the available 3 days and facilitate the meetings to ensure dedicated reflection on specific themes e.g. undertakings & proposals for improving action based on evidence.

Specific recommendations for other coordination platforms

- 13) MWE should consider one annual meeting of TSUs to review their performance of their geographical areas (for efficiency). The meeting should:
 - a. Be held before the JSR and JTR such that the outcomes of the TSU meetings feed into the JSR/JTR. The meetings to have clear LR items, in addition to performance review.
 - b. Include participation of CSOs with proven experience in LR, and who should facilitate LR in such meetings. This is a temporary measure up to the time when TSUs have the LR expertise, should CSOs relinquish their LR facilitating role
 - c. Meet for 4 days and apply a mix of LR approaches including group detailed discussions and fieldwork/learning journeys. Circulate outcomes broadly and monitor implementation of recommendations.
- 14) IDMs should:
 - a. be held annually as well is the current practice, but adhering to a regular timetable (for effectiveness)
 - b. Again, for effectiveness, more time should be devoted to these meetings
 - c. their agenda needs to be focused on fewer issues that reflect the sector and regional priorities, but also those which can realistically be covered within the time available to the meeting

- d. IDM sub committees can be formed to start work earlier in their districts (coordinated by TSUs since these cover more than one district) and come to the IDM with a set of questions and action points for further discussion.
- 15) District coordination meetings be increased to two days instead of the current one day. This will ensure learning becomes part and parcel of the meeting. Another option can also be to hold one of the coordination committees in a year with the focus on supporting learning. Such meetings then can devote their attention to clear documentation and follow up of action points; participative processes of coming up with action points and evolve a mechanism of gathering evidence of LR outcomes and experience sharing.

16) UWASNET should:

- a) Strengthen its learning arm and overall coordination of the CSO learning platforms through her members who have an added advantage in terms of experience, capacity and commitment such as NETWAS, the lead agency on learning that would work with the secretariat to ensure the rest of the members are well coordinated and engaged. This will take organisational commitment in terms of leadership will, time and financial resources.
- b) Through its members, to plan for LR and organize, at least, one meeting a year dedicated to LR as basis to action and improvement of service delivery.
- c) Support documentation of LR processes and outcomes
- d) Advocate for LR in the agenda of JSR/JTR

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Background and context

Uganda government has committed itself to the WASH related Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and in this particular case MDG 7 target 10, which specifically addresses increased access to safe drinking water and sanitation. The water sector target for halving the percentage of people not accessing safe water and sanitation implies an increase of coverage to 77 per cent by the year 2015. Access to safe water stands at 65% (June 2011). Access to improved sanitation in the rural households is 70% while in the urban areas it has increased to 81% (June 2011). The national functionality of rural water supplies has stagnated in the range of 80% – 83% in the last 2-3 years, which is lower than the target of 90% by 2015 (MWE, SPR, 2011). Low levels of functionality of rural water facilities remains an issue of concern to the rural water sub sector. This is especially important considering that an estimated 28.9 million people (85.2%) of Uganda's population live in rural areas.

Among the strategies to achieve the MDG target, the WASH sector is focusing on increasing functionality by ensuring adequate attention to the software components of WASH. Moreover, the sector aims at encouraging coordination, networking and sharing of best practices to ensure optimal and efficient uptake of effective innovations in WASH. Recent efforts to scale up coordination have among others focused on promoting learning and reflection (LR) among various stakeholders in the sector. Learning and reflection entails “doing better by doing things differently i.e. to promote change” (Nanbigne & Kyeyune *et.al.*, 2012). Others have defined learning and reflection as involving:

“reflecting on what we do and then trying to improve our performance or change how we approach issues. We are thinking of how to do things differently so as to get results. Someone may know of an approach that can solve a problem. That approach, if shared could be used to solve a bigger problem. Rather than keep that approach as a domain of one individual or one organisation, it is better to share it widely. That is where learning plays a role” (Solomon Kyeyune and Lydia Mirembe, June 2012).

Within the context of the Ugandan WASH sector, aspects of LR have been identified as taking place in various forums, including coordination meetings at various levels of governance. In, Participants in these meetings discuss various issues that affect the performance of the sector, draw lessons and agree on a way forward to improve specific aspects of WASH. On the basis of what takes place in these coordination meetings, it is possible to assume that there is a fair amount of learning taking place in the WASH sector. Such assumptions ought to be tested to unravel key issues of efficiency and effectiveness of the learning processes in sector coordination structures. The focus of the current study is primarily the national and regional level coordination structures. However, an attempt was made to understand the learning processes at the local government level in order to understand how such learning feeds into the national learning processes.

This study was planned within the framework of the memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) and IRC for the Triple-S project. The

Triple-S project (Sustainable Rural Water Services at Scale) is a six year learning initiative with the overall goal of improving sustainability of rural water services and bringing about greater harmonization through increased sector capacity. It is an initiative of the IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre.

1.2 Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of this study was to establish the efficiency and effectiveness of existing coordination platforms in the Uganda WASH Sector in facilitating learning and reflection processes in the sector

The specific objectives of this study were:

1. Map the different government and CSO-led learning & sharing platforms and mechanisms for WASH in Uganda, their evolution and the extent to which they are linked to each other (formally and informally) at national level and vertically between the national and decentralised levels;
2. Analyse the efficiency and effectiveness in terms of uptake of learning by the sector induced by the platforms and mechanisms;
3. Investigate the extent to which the platforms provide appropriate dissemination mechanism of best operation practices
4. Investigate the extent to which national learning and reflection platforms can be used to follow up Uganda WASH Sector practices
5. Recommend steps to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the platforms for learning and reflection in the Uganda WASH sector.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Overall approach

The broad research questions of this study necessitated utilization of predominantly qualitative methods using participatory methods. Study participants were purposively selected at national level from the government sector and civil society based on their involvement and knowledge of the learning and reflection processes in the Uganda WASH Sector and their contribution to Sector planning and decision-making. Data for the study was collected through:

- A desk review of key documents related to the different coordination structures and an analysis of uptake in policies and practise;
- In-depth interviews with different primary stakeholders from government and CSOs
- Key informant interviews with identified secondary stakeholders
- The validation meeting with the Client also served as an opportunity to further refine the analysis in the report and deliver clearer recommendations

1.3.2 Study areas and participants

Most of the WASH sector stakeholders are based in Kampala, thus much of the work under this study took place in Kampala. Moreover, the large volume of desk reviews of secondary data further made it relevant to base the study in Kampala. Study participants included sector stakeholders that have been participating in sector coordination meetings and LR processes. Specifically, these participants were drawn from central and local government WASH sector

departments and WASH sector NGOs, especially those persons that have participated in the national and sub-national level coordination meetings and LR events¹.

1.3.3 Data collection techniques

An extensive review of key WASH sector documents was undertaken. This review had a dual purpose, namely to provide an input into research instruments/tools for collection of primary data, and secondly collection of secondary data.

Primary data was collected using qualitative methods of data collection. The methods included discussions with main actors in the WASH sector; both one to one meetings and where applicable, group discussions. Again, where necessary, telephone and e-mail were used to solicit for new information and clarify on what has already been collected.

1.3.4 Data management and reporting

Data collected were analysed using Content and Thematic procedures. The themes were based on the study objectives and data were scrutinized and classified according to these themes.

This report has four chapters reflecting the major themes. Chapter One contains the introduction and background information pertaining to this study. The chapter lays out the study purpose, objectives and explains the methodology the study adopted to respond to those objectives. Chapter Two is a survey of the existing coordination structures in the WASH sector. The chapter starts with a discussion of the concept of learning and makes an attempt to explain the learning and reflection terminology. The third chapter tries to answer the major question of this study, namely, exploring the efficiency and effectiveness of coordination structures as learning and reflection forums. Chapter Four, which is the last one, presents the study's conclusions and recommendations.

¹ A list of persons interviewed is attached in appendix 1

Guiding principles to the learning and reflection process

- + Principles that guided the learning process:
- + Involve stakeholders from different levels (both district and sub-county)
- + Build on existing structures (mainly DWSCC)
- + Value diverse perspectives (users, politicians, government, civil society, private sector)
- + Focus on learning for change (change for sustainability, cost-efficiency and effectiveness)
- + Focus on learning through practice (interactive learning sessions and capacity building)
- + Test approaches and technologies in participatory action research (link to evidence)
- + Document good practices to help institutionalise learning.

Adapted from Brenda Achiro, LeaPPs

2.0 EXISTING LEARNING & REFLECTION IN THE WASH SECTOR

2.1 Conceptualizing learning and reflection in the WASH sector

The existing knowledge and understanding of the terms learning and reflection (LR) as well as learning and reflection platforms is varied. In spite of the ambiguity in the understanding of these terms, below is an attempt to define the terms relevant to learning and reflection in the WASH sector.

a) Learning and reflection (LR)

According to one of this study's respondents, the key defining aspect of learning and reflection is the outcome; "learning causes you to act differently". Similarly, the sector considers learning as reflection to improve action. Existing documentation tends to use learning to refer to both learning and reflection. Indeed the two are used interchangeably, although there seems to be an overwhelming preference for learning. For purposes of emphasis to focus on both learning and reflection, this report chose to use learning and reflection. Learning entails reviewing what is known, asking questions on what is unknown (sharing knowledge, reporting), identifying obstacles on the desired path (reflection) and using the available knowledge to resolve those challenges and cause improvements (action). LR therefore presupposes that there is knowledge-existing in various forms including memory (what learners know and can recall), documents (what has been documented) and practice-what can be seen as a demonstration on a water point, e.g., innovative ways of maintaining the source precincts.

The key defining aspect of LR is its problem-solving nature and the inherent ability to lead to meaningful change. Whereas learning involves sharing of knowledge, the aspect of reflection incorporates asking the right questions, brainstorming on the questions—a process that leads to identification of action points to solve problems, initially identified by asking the correct questions. The process of setting the right questions, brain storming and agreeing on action points, involves reporting and sharing of experiences from different participants. Responsibilities are shared and the action groups take responsibility to solve specific problems and document their experiences. The last stages of the LR involve reviewing progress on the action points and documenting the whole LR process including indicators for the action. Documentation is crucial for furthering learning because it institutionalizes memory which contributes to institutionalizing learning. Moreover, documenting what approach works well goes a long way in reinforcing good practice.

LR does not preclude M&E, rather it encompasses all programming processes, ranging from planning and decision making to implementation and M&E. It is both a review of progress and a process of injecting new knowledge and innovations in the existing system. Further, it involves reviewing the innovations to confirm that they work well, adopting them and rolling them over as good practices.

LR also covers aspects that are essential for program efficiency and effectiveness including, advocacy, networking and coordination and documentation of best practices.

b) Learning and reflection platform (LR platform)

A Platform is a forum at any level within the WASH sector that regularly brings together various stakeholders within the sector to deliberate or discuss a wide range of sector related matters. In the context of learning and reflection, a platform that is formed for the explicit purpose of promoting learning, is therefore a LR platform. LR platform also means a platform whose business incorporates, supports, promotes or mainstreams learning and reflection, without its core mandate not necessarily being that of learning and reflection². Examples of LR platforms include the National Learning Platform for the civil society, regional platforms, and the Uganda Water and Sanitation NGO Network (UWASNET) Working groups.

Approximately 200 NGOs/CBOs are working in the water and sanitation in Uganda. These are coordinated at the national level through an umbrella organization UWASNET. The core mandate of UWASNET is to strengthen collaboration, networking, partnership and information sharing among Civil Society Organizations, governments and development partners as well as with other stakeholders in the water and sanitation sub sector. UWASNET has six thematic working groups that stimulate deliberations on thematic sector issues, articulate and advance common causes, promote sharing of experiences and lessons among members and foster co-operation among sector stakeholders. These working groups meet on a quarterly basis and also organize exchange visits. They identify best of practices to be documented and shared widely in the sector and assist the secretariat in organizing trainings for members in areas where need is identified. Members' key advocacy issues are channelled through these working groups to the sector working groups and ultimately the JSR. UWASNET Working groups include:

- The Urban Water and Sanitation Working Group (focuses mainly on urban related issues).
- Policy and Advocacy Working Group (focuses on policy analysis, policy monitoring, lobbying and advocacy).
- The Hygiene and Sanitation Working Group (focuses on sanitation and hygiene Promotion).
- The Women and Children Working Group (focuses on women and children issues).
- The Water and Sanitation Technologies Working Group (focuses on operation and Maintenance and on appropriate technology applications).
- Integrated Water Resources Management working group (focuses on the effective management of the water resources).

Other than the UWASNET working groups, there are Sanitation and Water Alliance (SAWA) as a loose network of organizations in the sector with a vested interest in promoting learning on key sector issues. Member organizations of this network include NETWAS, Water Aid Uganda,

² Some stakeholders in the sector consider the term LR platform an ambiguous one and recommend the use of a forum. In any case these two terms mean basically the same thing. Among most stakeholders in the civil society, usage of the term platform is common, which is less so among government stakeholders. In a way this is partly explained by the view that CSOs have so far had a longer experience with LR processes than their government counterparts. This unfamiliarity and ambiguity with learning terminologies is likely to fade away when LR takes root as a sector priority area.

Triple-S, URWA and UWASNET. SAWA has been organizing both national and regional learning forums and events on emerging WASH issues.

c) Coordination platforms

This is a forum which meets regularly and whose core function is to streamline activities and programs of various WASH sector service providers within a particular administrative area or across the country. National coordination platforms include the Joint Sector Review (JSR) and the Joint Technical Review (JTR) and Sector Working Group(s).

Potentially, all coordination platforms can be learning platforms, but in reality, not all of the existing coordination platforms are learning platforms. Learning and reflection is not coordination and vice versa. Learning and reflection can feature coordination as one of the LR areas, just as coordination can be focused on promoting LR among the different actors involved in LR.

Further, coordination platforms like JTR, JSR and the District Water and Sanitation Coordination Committee (DWSSCC) can mainstream learning and reflection in their core business. Thus, there is no need to form distinct LR platform; instead LR can be incorporated as one of the agenda items of the coordination platform. Incorporation of LR should not cause the platform to alter its core mandate. Further the LR methodology has to be aligned with the design of the platform's meetings, in terms of the number and nature of participants, the agenda for the platform meeting and the duration of such a platform meetings. Currently, there is limited LR in the JSR, JTR and SWGs because of the scope and diversity of the agenda.

2.2 Learning and reflection approaches in the WASH sector

LR approaches being used in the WASH sector in Uganda can be grouped under two broad categories. The first one is the workshop setting approaches (workshops, meetings & seminars) and field based learning approaches (field trips and learning journeys). Coordination platforms that have large numbers of participants tend to adopt the workshop type of learning and reflection. Where the participants in the platform learning event are few, field based learning approaches are pursued alongside workshop ones. Time and financial resources are aspects that determine which LR approach to pursue. Where there is less time to afford field excursions and/or lengthy discussions in small manageable groups, there is a tendency to use workshop approaches. Further, constrained financial resources—including cost of hiring a consultant to facilitate a learning event—also weigh in on organizers to choose a workshop approach.

Learning journeys denote a field visit to a location where a WASH problem has been identified. The participants in the LR platform visit such a location and engage in a discussion with the stakeholders in the activity around which LR is focused. For instance, a learning journey on O&M of a water source involves participants visiting the water point, inspecting it and having discussion with members of the water source committee who explain what they do and how they do it. Later participants draw lessons and map action points for use in their own local context.

There is a narrow margin of difference between a learning journey and a field trip. Whereas a learning journey is designed to study a particular aspect and gives the host (e.g., the water user

committee members) the lead facilitator's role, the field trip does not necessarily rely on narratives and explanation of the host. Field visits are mainly undertaken to provide a practical experience of what has been discussed in the workshop setting. An account of the field visit undertaken by the TSUs during their annual review meeting is worth citing:

The meeting was preceded by field exposure visits to the districts of; Bundibugyo, Kyenjojo and Mityana in the TSU 6 region. The visits were intended to expose the participants to the real life experiences in the water and sanitation sector projects/services. All of the participants were constituted into 3 groups. The visits targeted water and sanitation facilities for both rural and urban. Participants were provided with a checklist to guide their field work aspects. These checklists would position the respective groups into composing an issue list, areas of success and challenges in situ as well as evoke the group to propose the relevant actions essential for making improved performance of the visited projects/investments. Thereafter, extensive presentations were made comprising of results from the field visits and other topics. These would progress into plenary discussions; experience giving (where possible case studies were given) and finally developing action areas to be used as guiding steps to evoke the relevant improvements in performance of TSUs³.

In all the above LR approaches, reflection on causes of specific sector challenges and mapping of action points and their implementation, and follow up of progress of implementation are learning aspects that are emphasized. Process documentation is another aspect of the learning approaches, though less emphasized in the workshop setting approaches. Process documentation entails a deliberate tracking of the progress of an action point agreed upon in the LR platform from inception to end.

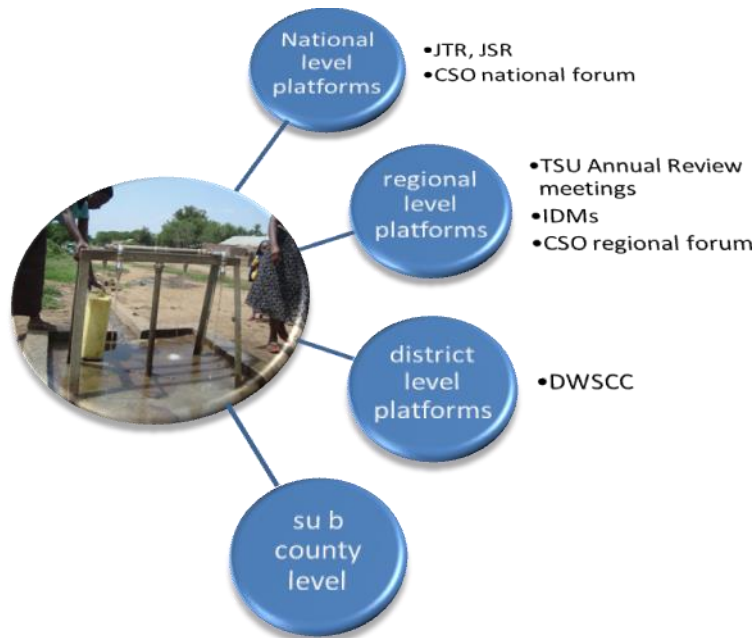
The challenge of LR processes is the linkage with each other, either horizontally or vertically for effectiveness and leading to the desired actions/changes. Do these processes include loops that offer opportunities for LR process and lead to action or they are essentially, isolated processes which may link up or not?

2.3 Existing coordination platforms in the WASH sector

Coordination platforms exist at different levels of governance in the WASH sector; from the national, regional, districts, to the sub county (figure 1).

⁴ For instance, the mid western IDM covers districts in TSU 6, namely Kabarole, Kasese, Kyenjojo, Kibaale, Bundibugyo, Mubende, Mityana and Kamwenge.

Figure 1 Coordination platforms in the Uganda WASH sector



Overall, government has the ‘ownership’ or operational responsibility of the platforms, although CSOs play a key role in their functioning. Alongside their, predominantly, coordination functions, most of these platforms incorporate LR albeit intermittently and somewhat haphazardly. This study assessed the LR aspects within these coordination platforms in order to establish the efficiency and effectiveness of the platforms in facilitating LR.

2.3.1 National level coordination platforms

a) The Joint Sector Review (JSR)

The JSR is an annual forum for the government and donors for sector performance assessment which meets every year, around October. The JSR brings together stakeholders (200-400 people) principally, from the government and development partners, including ministers, MPs, technical and political leaders from districts, , representatives of CSOs (CBOs and NGOs) development partners and officials the sector ministry of MWE and from other line ministries and private sector service providers.. This forum is convened for 3 days. It provides information on sector performance and accountability related issues, and promotes transparency.

The JSR is based on the Annual Sector Performance Report for the year. Other objectives of the JSR is

to enhance involvement of different central government ministries, local governments, civil society, development partners and service providers in the sector management processes in the review of the performance, share the lessons and challenges and search for improvements.

In terms of LR, the JSR is presently not a strong platform for LR although it has opportunities to promote LR. Given the large number of participants and the short time allocated to this national meeting, the JSR is not designed as an affective LR platform. Further, the mandate of the JSR is coordination, accountability and reporting. However, JSR provides opportunities for mainstreaming LR in its sessions. Within its mandate of reporting and accountability, LR can be integrated. LR can for instance focus on rigorous reviews of evidence of performance along the set undertakings of the previous year before drawing emerging issues and setting new undertakings. Another opportunity exists in parallel sessions held during the JSR. The sessions can devote more time to discuss and distil ideas within a framework of learning and reflection. As a high level policy and strategic decision making organ, JSR is best placed to recommend adoption of LR and streamline its implementation in the sector. The LR need to be well documented and identify principal actors for their implementation-usually, the CSOs. The organization of the JSR, typically, has TOR with a Theme, Objectives, and outputs. In the case of the JSR 2012, had one of the objectives as, "To provide a mechanism for sharing experiences and lessons learnt from the regions, districts and Local Governments". under this agenda, JSR would guide the RL in the sector.

b) Joint Technical Review (JTR)

Like the JSR, the Joint Technical Review (JTR) is an annual event. It is held half-way during the financial year (usually in March/April) to follow up on the progress of implementation of the agreed key actions from the previous JSR, recommend actions for improved sector performance, and assess any other pertinent issues affecting the sector.. Each year presentations and contributions are guided by a pre-determined theme originating from recent sector policies and implementation experiences. Formal decisions during JTRs such as revisions of undertakings and action plans are taken up by the Water and Environment Sector Working Group (WESWG).

Unlike the JSR, the JTR meetings are held in regions on a rotational basis, though the actual location must meet some basic requirements including, accommodation facilities for the participants and the host district should offer relevant WASH infrastructure among other items of interest for the participants to see during the field visits.

Thus, the JTR incorporates field visits in its program. For instance, in the JTR of 2009 four Review Teams made field visits to Jinja, Iganga, Pallisa, Mbale, Bukwo, Manafwa, Butaleja and Busia districts. In the JTR of 2010, which was held in Kabarole, three Review Teams made field visits to Kasese district and Mpanga catchment area. The field visits were not only for exposure, but also for learning and to extract examples of good and bad practices with particular focus on the topical areas represented by various thematic groups. The field visits aspect coupled with the group work during the JTR meetings position it as a strong learning and reflection forum.

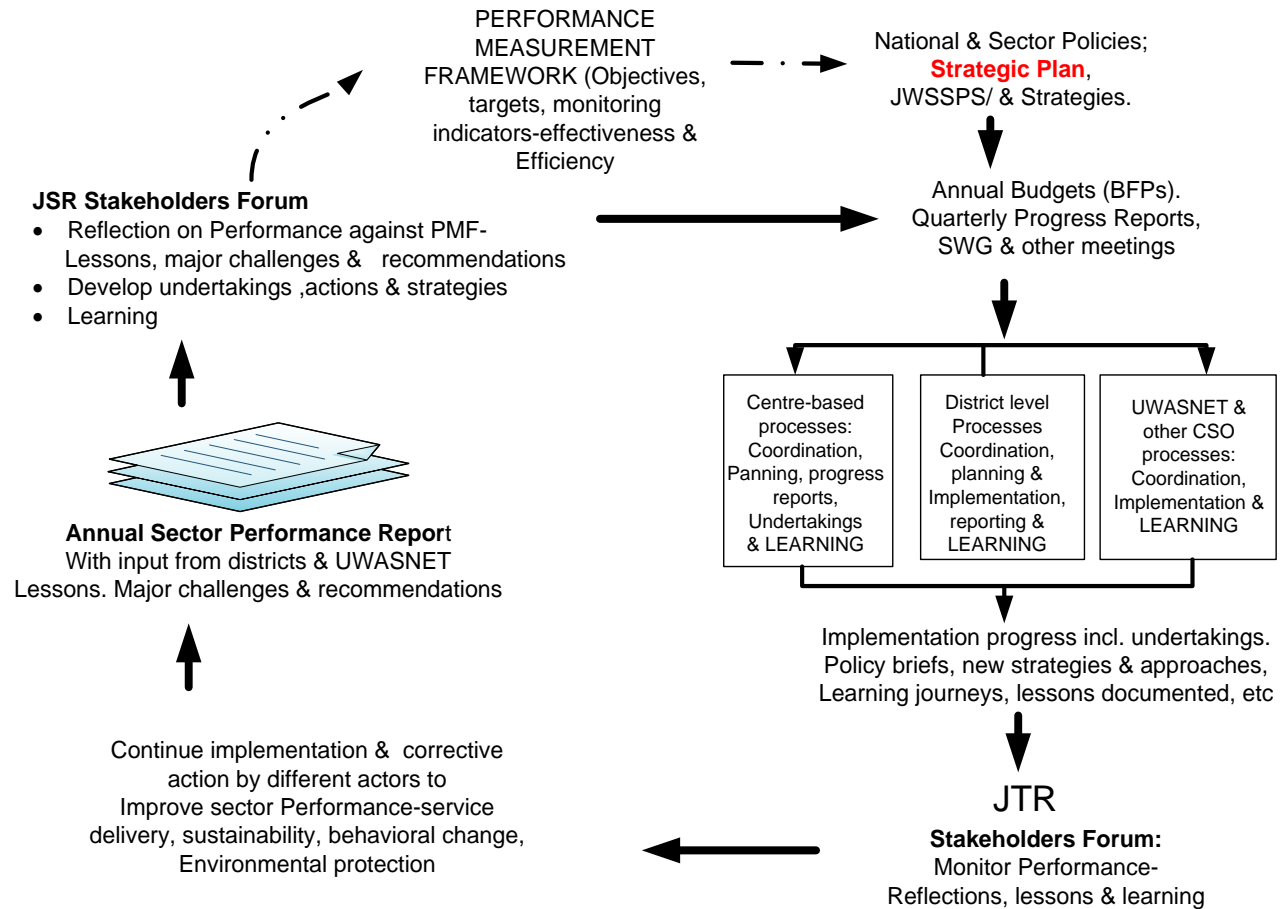


Figure 2: Existing Sector coordination processes

Figure 2, shows an ideal JSR and JTR process that involves the key stakeholders in the whole sector planning, monitoring, performance and accountability. It provides for reflection and lessons learnt. LR aspects are expected to lead to new strategies and approaches for improved sector performance.

c) Sector Working Groups

The **Water and Environment Sector Working Group (WESWG)** is platform at national level. The WESWG provides overall coordination, and technical and policy guidance for sector development, and approves work plans and budgets for water and environment. It comprises of representatives of the Sector Development Partners, the Ministries of Finance, Health, Education, Local Government, NGOs (represented by UWASNET). The Water and Environment Sector Working Group has two sub-groups, namely the Water & Sanitation Sub-sector Working Group (WSSWG), and the Environment and Natural Resources Sub-sector Working Group

(ENRWG). All new support programmes are vetted by the Water and Environment Sector Working Group before they are approved for funding and implementation. This ensures alignment with sector policies, plans and strategies. The Sector Working Group is chaired by the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Water & Environment with Lead Development partners (ENR & WSS) as co-chairs..

The WESWG has sub sector working groups responsible for coordinating particular thematic areas in the sector e.g., National Sanitation Working Group (NSWG), Functionality Working Group, Good Governance Working Group, Water and Sanitation Working Group and the self supply working group. These working groups are characterized by reporting and information sharing, with less learning. However, a few of the working groups have adopted the practice of organizing separate learning sessions/journeys to further analyze thematic issues in the group e.g., the NSWG has organized several learning sessions on CLTS and Sanitation Marketing in the recent past, the self supply working group is organizing learning sessions as well around the self supply approach and related interventions in the sector.

The WESWG and WSSWG meetings deal with policy and strategic aspects of the sector while district and regional coordination meetings deal with operational issues. The national level forums are, increasingly, linked to regional forms of the TSUs, WSDFs and WMZs. The linkage of these processes is not clear and its work in progress.

2.3.2 Regional level coordination platforms

a) Technical Support Units (TSU) Review Meetings

TSUs are an arm of government set up to offer technical support to the districts. The overall function of TSUs is to provide strategic support services to District Local Governments (LGs). This is intended to avoid discrepancies in district achievements and ensure adherence to sector guidelines and policies. The TSUs build capacity of Local Governments (LGs) by providing technical back up support and monitoring adherence to national policies and guidelines on the implementation of water and sanitation activities. There are 8 technical support units covering all regions of the country.

The TSU Review Meetings are a routine activity that TSUs hold every end of quarter to review performance. The fourth quarter meeting is held in June and serves as one of the preparatory meetings whose outcomes feed into the JSR. These meetings rotate within the different TSU regions. TSU meetings last for three days and participants include all the TSUs consultants, MWE officials from the headquarters, representatives of the DWOs under that TSU region and sometimes representatives of CSOs.

Unlike the JSR, the TSU meetings have more LR aspects, including field visits and discussion groups, all of which encourage experience sharing, question setting and reflecting on various action points. The major objective of TSU Review Meetings is to review the performance of the TSUs in support activities to the districts in the areas of planning and budgeting, monitoring of the implementation processes, quality assurance, compliance to policies and guidelines among others as mandated by the MWE. These meetings also constitute a forum for sharing experiences and best practices with the aim of providing adequate support services to district local

governments. Each meeting reviews the minutes of the previous meeting in order to verify progress on the implementation of the action points that were agreed upon.

b) Umbrella Organizations

In 2003, the regional umbrella organizations (UOs) concept was introduced in Uganda and piloted in South Western Uganda as an association of small water supply boards to address challenging O&M issues. To date, there are three such UOs, namely, the South Western (50 member associations), Eastern (77) and the Mid-Western (56). UO are financed through internal resources (subscription, membership fees and activity charges), and external resources (MWE, Development partner, NGO grants).

A study by Felix Twinomucunguzi and Ronald Nyakana (2011) revealed that UOs have facilitated adequate O&M support to water supply systems in the numerous RGCs in the country. UOs, provide O&M support to member schemes through technical backstopping (new connections, metering, leakage detection, water quality testing, catchment protection) and management support (financial planning, auditing, capacity building).

UOs bring together water service providers in small towns and RGCs. These service providers together constitute the general assembly that regularly meets to deliberate on a wide range of issues. Other than regularly reporting to their General Assembly, the UOs Secretariat, which is in charge of operations, reports to the MWE and Development Partners, as well as partner NGOs. UOs have the potential to promote LR, limited, aspects in their operations.

c) Water and Sanitation Facilities (WSDF).

The WSDFs are regional bodies under the MWE responsible for implementation support of water and sanitation programs in the urban centres and Rural Growth centres (RGC). They group a number of district local governments with centres in Mbale (WSDF-East), Lira (WSDF-North), Mbarara (WSDF-SW), Wakiso (WSDF-Central). They hold regional coordination meetings every quarter for each region but with participation of all WSDFs, MWE, and representatives of districts from the region. The agenda is predominantly on planning and implementation status of interventions, priority setting and decisions on funds. The review includes field visits and sharing of experiences and lessons for better sector improvements.

d) Inter-district coordination meetings (IDMs)

The Inter-District Meeting (IDM) is a miniature JSR facilitated by TSUs.. The participants in IDMs are from a wide spectrum of sector stakeholders including education, gender and labour, and health, civil society, politicians (LCV and RDC), representatives from the centre and CSOs.. IDM meets once a year, though sometimes the timing is irregular. For instance, TSU 6 districts held their IDM for 2008 in April while for 2009 it was held in July. The IDM assumes the geographical and administrative coverage of the TSU for that area⁴.

IDMs enable districts to share implementation experiences and mechanisms of cooperation. Further, IDMs offer a platform for the Centre to disseminate information on sector policies, and

⁴ For instance, the mid western IDM covers districts in TSU 6, namely Kabarole, Kasese, Kyenjojo, Kibaale, Bundibugyo, Mubende, Mityana and Kamwenge.

receive feedback from local governments, including accountability. Below is an example of objectives of the IDM:

1. To share experiences & assess progress in the implementation of water & sanitation programmes
2. To have a common understanding of the current sector developments & strategies.
3. To share/disseminate new developments in the sector at national level.
4. To streamline ways for improved implementation of water and sanitation programmes
5. Review of Implementation of Previous IDM recommendations

The remarks of the chief guest at the opening ceremony of one IDM are illuminating. This IDM was held in Mityana district from 27th - 28th July 2009 at Enro Hotel. The Minister of State for Water who opened the IDM said that this meeting provided a good platform for getting feedback on government policies and strategies from the implementers in the local governments. She stressed that the IDM is a forum for exchanging ideas, clarifying on pertinent issues and learning from each other⁵.

The foregoing survey of the existing coordination platforms shows that the national level platforms were set up by the government, for effective coordination among stakeholders, facilitate planning, implementation reviews and accountability in the sector. Government has a responsibility over the whole country and organizes meetings that reflect this national coverage. As shown above, a number of platforms exist which are mainly information sharing/reporting and coordination but provide a potential for incorporating learning and reflection in their meetings, geared to improve sector performance.

⁵ See, Report of the Proceedings for the Inter District Meeting for Technical Support Unit 6, Held at Enro Hotel, Mityana, 27th-28th July 2009

Summary of the views of participants at a Kampala Roundtable Consultation on Learning (source: Nanbigne & Kyeyune, et.al., (2012))

- + There is some learning going on in the (WASH) sector; the issue is how to structure it*
- + There are financial implications for learning*
- + Policies can't be changed overnight to incorporate learning; it will take sometime*
- + Getting issues such as learning captured in the sector guidelines can help to institutionalize learning*
- + The ministry (MWE) and partners have to agree that learning is very important and so should be formalized*
- + If clearly spelt out in the guidelines, districts can get resources for learning*
- + If there is a clear guideline on how to institutionalize learning, it can be incorporated into the sector capacity building strategy which being developed*
- + The ministry is in interested in learning in the sector, so the task is to incorporate learning in the strategy*

3.0 LEARNING & REFLECTION IN COORDINATION PLATFORMS

3.1 Efficiency of existing coordination forums in promoting LR

3.1.1 Mode of facilitation of LR in coordination platforms

In terms of LR, the ideal mode of facilitation is that which prompts action. Existing facilitation styles include lecture methods where participants make their presentations to a listening audience. Other styles are more participatory and entail participants working in groups and sharing their results in a plenary session. In larger group meetings like the JSR, the participatory methods are not feasible and therefore are not used. In smaller groups like the TSU Review Meetings, a mix of lecture method and group work is used. In the case of IDMs, although they incorporate group work in their methodology, the dominant methods are the presentations (lecture method) made by representatives of various organizations and government departments. The method of facilitation coupled with limited time does not permit a thorough discussion of pertinent issues and ultimately undermines learning and reflection.

The presentations in the meetings cited above, focus on achievements, challenges and perceived way forward. In most cases like the JSR, such challenges and way forward would have been already discussed by a group not present in the meeting. Yet in actual LR, the participants set the questions (that is to say, they identify the problem) and together discuss the way out and develop action points. As such platforms like the IDM, TSU review meetings and the JSR which present already agreed upon recommendations, are rendered reporting and accountability platforms, with less LR.

Other than the mode of delivery of the learning agenda, the mode of facilitation encompasses the competency of the persons facilitating learning. Most of the LR processes in the existing platforms are self-led. This means that the host of the platform or the sponsor of the meeting doubles as the facilitator the learning and reflection. This applies to government-led platforms and to a smaller extent the CSO led learning events. Thus, whereas the TSU quarterly review meetings appear to be on a high scale of LR, one of their weaknesses stems from the lack of the outside (independent) voice to facilitate the meetings. According to one respondent, who gave his assessment of LR in the existing government-led coordination platforms in the sector, such LR is likened to *“a person who sets himself an exam, answers the questions himself, supervises the exam, and grades it! There is no independent view. There are no independent consultants that facilitate meetings, since these meetings are not convened as learning events. Learning just creeps in”*⁶.

3.1.2 Duration and frequency of meetings

Lack of time frequently limits opportunities for learning through reflection. Almost all the coordination platforms that were reviewed meet for three days, with exception of the district and sub county platforms which meet for one day. This study reviewed the program for the IDM in Wakiso (for TSU 5 districts) held in December 2011. The program did not have a provision for group work and discussion time was allocated a maximum of 40 minutes after every presentation. A presentation by NETWAS on “sharing” was allocated only 20 minutes with no

⁶ Key Informant, MWE

discussion after. Instead, a 30 minutes session for discussion was allocated to all three presentations made by CSOs including that one made by NETWAS. A respondent of this study summarised the issue of duration of the coordination meetings and their ability to promoting learning as: “*These platforms meetings are so much in a hurry and too crowded to enable effective learning*”. Whereas three days are planned for most sector coordination meetings, this time is eaten up by lengthy opening remarks and closing speeches on the first and last days, leaving only one full day of strict business, with less or no interruption. In most cases, on the last day, business is conducted only half of the day to allow participants time to prepare to return to their stations/home. In actual sense therefore, time devoted to discussion of the critical issues is less than three working days.

According some of the respondents who have consistently participated in the JSR, this platform previously allowed time for exhibition of innovative technologies in the sector, but lately this item has been scrapped.. Yet it was an item which had an aspect of learning, in as much as it provoked and allowed discussion based on such new ideas and activities in the sector.

The platform meetings follow a regular schedule, with most of the platforms especially those at the national level meeting once in a year. The timing of the meetings is a strategically set to ensure that the outcome of one meeting feeds into the agenda of another. For instance, the fourth quarter meeting of the TSUs is held in June as a preparatory meeting whose outcomes feed into the JSR that sits later in October. On the other hand the JTR meets six months before the JTR, again to give time for participants to review and prepare for the JSR. The amount of time in between the meetings is important, to give ample time for consultation and implementation before feedback and review in another meeting. Beyond, the JTR, JSR and the TSU Review Meetings, this inter-linkage between coordination platforms is weak.

3.2 Effectiveness of existing coordination forums in promoting LR

National level platforms, the JTR in particular provide excellent opportunities for learning and reflection. Because of its mandate as a coordination platform, learning and reflection have not yet taken centre stage in its meetings. Learning and reflection have to be accepted and incorporated into the conceptualization of these meetings. If this happens, the content in terms of the agenda and its participative process will subsequently integrate aspects of learning and reflection. Below we take a specific look at some aspects of learning and reflection in these and other platforms at lower levels.

3.2.1 Learning agenda

A review of the agenda of one IDM revealed too many items to discuss (up to 10 presentations) in a short time, which makes it impossible to have exhaustive discussions. Learning agenda implies the process of drawing the learning and reflection agenda and assessing the consultative process (inclusiveness) of making the agenda to ensure that only appropriate issues are discussed in such forum. For instance, various respondents noted that the process of drawing the JSR and JTR agenda is not consultative. Thus, “*we come as observers and the agenda is already agreed upon*”, this calls for an inclusive and participative process of drawing up the meeting agenda if such coordination meetings have decided to incorporate LR.

3.2.2 Contribution of coordination platforms to the actual sector undertakings

Sector undertakings imply annual sector action points or objectives as agreed up on in the JSR on the basis of a review of the performance of the sector along previously set objectives. The sector objectives also reflect the sector needs and priority areas in a particular FY.

Discussion of sector undertakings takes place at the national level platforms. The contribution of LR platforms is reflected among others in the utilization of what is discussed and agreed upon in the coordination platforms. At a higher level, the contribution of coordination platforms to the sector is evidenced by the extent to which coordination platforms can be used to monitor and evaluate Uganda WASH sector practices. This latter aspect of M&E is discussed below under 3.2.3.

Although there seems less benefits that have so far accrued from learning and reflection on a general sector level, there are notable contributions at regional, district and Sub County and to an extent, some benefits are specific to particular organizations. IDMs act as conduits for feedback from the centre to the district staff on performance and developed strategies for remedial action. Further, these platforms are used to disseminate sector policies, guidelines and review of progress, identification of implementation challenges and developing strategies for addressing them.

Some respondents revealed that they had acquired new skills/knowledge which they claimed had lead to improvement in their performance. There is some form of dissemination of best operation practices in the sector. New innovations and strategies are disseminated to participants in these meetings. Some good approaches have been scaled up through the coordination platforms. Anecdotal evidence corroborated with interviews with key informants of this study, shows that most districts in Uganda are at different stages of forming hand pump mechanics associations (HPMAs). HPMAs started as a small case study in Kibaale where a hand pump mechanics association proved that hand pump mechanics could work and do much more than just repairing pumps. In a similar way, the savings and credit schemes (Yahura Yehoze or YY) strategy in Rwenzori region was popularized through the coordination platforms in the region. Again, anecdotal evidence shows that improved sanitation coverage through the use of the Community Led Total Sanitation in Kamuli and Tororo districts after NETWAS organized learning platforms that disseminated CLT knowledge and shared best practices in CLT.

During the national learning forums especially those organized by NGOs aspects like functionality of WASH facilities, school sanitation, good governance, etc are discussed and case studies are shared, which in turn inform policy formulation. At the organization level, the experience of Water Aid Uganda (WAU) is illuminating. WAU has strengthened its water point mapping experience through the M4W initiative in partnership with SNV/Triple S/IRC, Makerere University School of Computing and Informatics and the MWE. WAU has shared a lot with the Water Resources Management (WRM) department on water quality surveillance and is using the learning to improve on the methodology for water quality testing, pricing information, testing parameters and support to the partner CSOs and DLGs.

Nanbigne & Kyeyune *et.al.*, (2012) have observed that learning initiatives in Uganda have so far led to the following results; increase collaboration and trust between the sector stakeholders,

increased political support for the sector, increased budget allocation for software activities and improved communication styles. In addition, district learning and coordination improves local governance, it also leads to reformulation of policies and strategies at the national level in that practice in lower governments impacts policy at national levels (Nanbigne & Kyeyune *et.al.*, 2012).

3.2.3 Measuring and documenting LR outcomes

Coordination platforms at all levels play an M&E role in way or another. One of the commonly cited examples by this study's respondents that have participated in these meetings is the case of the JTR. Thus the JTR follows up on the progress of implementation of the agreed key actions from the JSR in respect to quality, value for money, delivery time and relevancy in terms of an intervention being in compliance with sector policies and standards. In a similar manner, the TSU Review meetings play an M&E role, but limited to performance of the districts.

This study's findings revealed a dearth in evidence of how LR improves WASH sector outcomes. Lack of a clear demonstration of the efficacy of LR in the WASH sector undermines acceptability and buy-in of the unbelievers in LR, who are interested in tracking indicators of LR. Existing evaluative practices focus largely on outputs of individual and particular learning events, for instance end of workshop assessments and in some cases follow up of action points agreed in seminars or platform meetings. In effect, there are no clear agreed indicators of LR outcomes in the WASH sector.

Coordination platform meetings always start with a review of what was agreed upon in the last meeting and a presentation of reports on progress (or the lack of) on such agreed action points. In essence, there is no midway discussion or review of the progress on the action points until the next convening of the meeting. One participant in this study and whose view was seconded by his colleagues during a group discussion, confirmed this when he observed that "*undertakings are not used a planning guide until when it's time for another JTR and JSR, that's when people start reaching out for their notes of the previous meetings (in a way to remember what was agreed upon)*"⁷.

The learning resource website⁸ stresses the importance of managing information and research based knowledge as one of the prerequisites for creating a 'learning sector' that is able to adapt to changing circumstances and demands. However, in the Uganda WASH sector, there is limited documentation of LR experiences and the lack of appropriate information products to provide evidence. Whereas the TSU review meetings and the IDMs produce reports of the proceedings of the meetings, this study did not find any evidence of similar documentation for the JTR and the JSR. There is a reported lack of systematic documentation of what works and how it works. For instance, existing data collection on learning is carried out in a haphazard way in most places, eventually learning doesn't happen, and there is no change of behaviour (Nanbigne & Kyeyune *et.al.*, 2012).

⁷ MWE Key Informant

⁸ <http://www.waterservicesthatlast.org/Resources/Building-blocks/Learning-adaptive-management>

Further, in all reports by TSUs and the IDMs that this study reviewed, as well as those authored by UWASNET, in instances where learning groups are mentioned, it is not clear how many people were in each group, the criteria of group formation are not explained and seldom are the group tasks clearly explained. The UWASNET Bulletin which covered the first northern Uganda learning forum held in March 2012 is a clear example of inadequate documentation which does not adequately address LR outcomes. Whereas the forum clearly involved LR, the aspects of LR are not clearly articulated in the newsletter.

Overall, there is no doubt that coordination platforms constitute an important element of the M&E of the WASH sector. However, this potential in coordination platforms needs to be properly exploited by systematizing, among others, documentation and indicator development to capture LR outcomes alongside other sector performance indicators.

3.3 Cross learning among coordination platforms at different levels

Cross-learning among different level platforms exists but needs to be encouraged to ensure systematic follow up and reporting. The JTR stands out as an exception with a clear agenda to follow up on the progress of implementation of the agreed key actions from the JSR in respect to quality, value for money, delivery time and relevancy in terms of an intervention being in compliance with sector policies and standards. In lower level platforms, participants report on the outputs of the platform meetings they attended, which is largely an accountability requirement. For instance, IDMs act as conduits for feedback from the centre to the district staff on performance and developed strategies for remedial action.

Further, coordination platforms are used to disseminate sector policies, guidelines and review of progress, identification of implementation challenges and developing strategies for addressing them. Where a new approach (e.g., Yehoza Yehora [YY]) is being reported, cross-learning takes the form of dissemination of innovations in the sector and in such a case those who choose to take up such an idea come up with clear plans for implementation. Cross learning is therefore reflected in inter-platform reporting and reviewing of the outputs of each other's meetings, with varying degrees of emphasis placed on drawing up a plan to track the implementation of those outputs.

3.4 Limitation and threats to LR in the WASH Sector

Amidst the ambiguity of conceptualization, learning and reflection takes place but is sometimes not noticed, nurtured and therefore less supported. In general terms, learning and reflection is one of the components that make up the less supported software aspect of WASH sector programming in Uganda. The software aspect of WASH refers to non hardware components in WASH sector programming. The hardware includes civil works related to construction of water systems, the software concerns stakeholder mobilization to participate in activities to increase access to safe water in the country. The software activities range from supporting the formation and functioning of water user committees to facilitating the formation and running of WASH sector coordination structures at the sub county, district and national levels.

Learning requires resources; time and funds (Nanbigne & Kyeyune *et.al.*, 2012) and facilitators with technical skills to lead the learning process. There is less priority for software aspect—under which LR falls— which is a sector challenge, where the software vote is less than 10% of

the total sector budget. A roundtable stakeholder consultation on learning noted that sustaining and institutionalizing existing learning especially at the district level is a challenge. Learning initiatives at the district level are project driven where capacities and resources are provided through these projects to facilitate learning (Nanbigne & Kyeyune *et.al.*, 2012). Thus, the sustainability and institutionalizing of district learning remains questionable without project based support.

Learning and reflection starts with individual appreciation of how essential LR is to solving sector problems and improve efficiency and effectiveness. Among the challenges to LRP is that most actors in the sector have not yet appreciated LR as necessary to incorporate in their programming. In a study by Nanbigne & Kyeyune *et.al.*, (2012) it was revealed that during the implementation of PILS in West Nile, fewer senior level district officers participated in learning platforms at district level. LR champions are needed at all levels, crucially though at the national level, to influence budget and policy alignment in favor LR.

Other than funding, the sector needs critical capacity support. The sector especially at the district level is thinly staffed. The low staffing levels in the District Water Offices (DWOs) have greatly affected implementation of water programmes and subsequently sector performance especially with the newly created districts. 90% of staff in the newly created district water offices lack the required qualifications and experience to effectively and efficiently implement water activities. As of April 2011, only 48% of the district local governments had the right number of suitably qualified staff within the District Water Offices (Ssozi and Danert, 2012). In the others, the District Water Officer may be doubling up as the District Engineer, say for roads, or an assistant is also acting another role. This situation has led to inadequate implementation capacity in some of the local governments for delivery of rural water and sanitation services (Ssozi and Danert, 2012). In terms of learning and reflection, such capacity shortcomings undermine the sector's ability to translate what is learnt into meaningful action.

3.5 Opportunities for scaling up LR in the WASH sector

So far this report has demonstrated that opportunities exist in the Uganda WASH sector to scale up LR. Existing environment in the sector is supportive of learning and reflection and the learning has to be mainstreamed in all sub-sectors of the Ministry. As a prerequisite for successful integration of LR in the sector, it has been suggested that there is need to find a strong institutional leader (champion), (Nanbigne & Kyeyune *et.al.*, 2012).

So far one of the most conspicuous opportunities for scaling up LR in the WASH sector is the lead role and enthusiasm that CSOs have displayed in the uptake of LR. CSOs mainly NGOs and some CBOs have their fora that meet at district, regional and national level through which learning and reflection are promoted. CSOs participate in the lower and national level sector platforms. For instance, since 2007, SNV, NETWAS and IRC have been using different projects to promote learning and reflection at district and sub-county levels. The projects are LeaPPs (Learning for Policy and Practice on Sanitation and Hygiene) in the North, West and East of Uganda, PILS (Performance Improvement through Learning in Sanitation) in Northern Uganda, the West-Nile accountability project in WASH and Triple-S in Lira and Kabarole. All these initiatives are piloting learning connected to the DWSCCs and SCWSCCs. At the sub-national

level, NETWAS has conducted a study on “Possible Linkages of Learning between District, National and Sub-county Level”.

Together CSOs in the sector under their umbrella organization of UWASNET have spearheaded the uptake of LR in the sector. The most prominent role has been played by SNV, IRC/Trippl S, NETWAS and Water Aid Uganda. CSOs are active in a variety of ways ranging from participating in LR platforms, hosting and sponsoring LR events to production of the LR materials and generally facilitating the LR processes. For instance, in 2010, four CSOs came together and formed the Rwenzori WASH alliance (RWA) which covers seven districts. The alliance has so far organised two regional learning forums in partnership with district local governments, IRC/Trippl-s and other actors. In northern Uganda, CSOs held the first Northern Uganda Learning Forum which among others highlighted the possibility of effective LR even at lower levels of governance like the Sub County. Another example of CSO activity is provided by NETWAS which has implemented learning programmes in 7 districts namely, Kyenjojo and Kamwenge in western Uganda, Koboko and Arua in the west Nile sub region and Pader, Gulu and Kitgum in Acholi sub region. The organization helps in setting up learning agendas, case documentation and actual facilitation of learning and reflection events.

The Performance Improvement through Learning in Sanitation (PILS) is one more example of the CSO LR projects that demonstrate interest and enthusiasm to promote LR in the sector. Launched in October 2009, PILS was a two year project funded by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) jointly managed and implemented by IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC), NETWAS Uganda and Caritas Gulu in close collaboration with district and sub-county government and local NGOs. This initiative referred to as ADA PILS, aimed at improving local level management and the provision of sanitation services in three districts of Gulu, Pader and Kitgum all in northern Uganda. ADA PILS covers 2 sub-counties in each of the districts with the overall goal of improving sanitation and hygiene behaviour in rural households and schools. ADA PILS’ approach is based on facilitated district and sub-county level multi-stakeholder learning through action research.

It is therefore clear that opportunities for scaling up LR in the Uganda WASH sector abound, both within the government structure and most significantly among the CSOs. These opportunities show strong nodes of LR at different levels of governance and across the country that the sector can draw from to integrate LR in its coordination platforms.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusions

It is now clear that there is LR in the Uganda WASH sector. Coordination platforms exist from national to sub-national levels i.e., regional, district and sub-county. Existing coordination platforms are largely for accountability and coordination and do not mainly focus on learning and reflection, because these platforms were primarily established for coordination purposes.

However, the sector continues to encounter operational challenges, constraining budgetary resources which calls for innovations in order to meet the sector targets. This can best be achieved by institutionalizing LR in the existing coordination platforms and providing resources.

Coordination platforms offer opportunities for promoting learning and reflection in the sector. The stakeholders in the WASH sector appreciate and consider platforms as a forum to disseminate new sector policies and guidelines. Like any other aspect of the sector, LR needs champions at various levels, to enable its uptake. Presence of strong and enthusiastic champions will among others influence allocation of funding to promotion of LR in the sector.

4.2 Recommendations

General recommendations

- 1) There is need to have a harmonised definition and understanding of LR in the sector which should be matched with the relevant awareness creation to ensure buy-in by all the stakeholders. Thereafter, efforts and strategies can be put in place to make it part of the key platforms such as the JTR and JSR and others
- 2) MWE along with CSOs that have active LR programs should jointly develop indicators of LR outcomes, to enable tracking and documentation of LR outcomes, including evidence of LR in coordination platforms.
- 3) Cross learning among coordination platforms can be promoted by encouraging review of action points recommended by different platforms, during such coordination meetings. This review needs to be coupled with documentation and sharing of such documents.
- 4) Considering the significant strides that CSOs have made in adopting LR in their platforms, their expertise and experience is an excellent opportunity for MWE and generally the sector to draw on and scale up LR. CSOs can play a role in:
 - a. Facilitating LR sessions
 - b. Helping coordination platforms with documentation and follow up of action points
 - c. Dissemination of new approaches in the sector
 - d. Setting up of LR alliances where they do not exist
- 5) There is a need to identify individuals and interest them to be champions to advocate for scaling up of LR in coordination platforms and indeed for LR to be entrenched in sector programming. Champions can include the Ministers, Permanent Secretary, Director of DWD, heads of Directorates and Departments, LCV Chairpersons and CAOs. Individuals can also be identified among the Development Partners. One way of interesting such persons is putting them at the centre of LR activities, inviting them to LR events,

including making them chief guests asking them to endorse key documents produced by the LR platforms.

- 6) Define clear learning indicators for the sector. This will be strengthened with an appropriate monitoring and evaluation framework for the application of learning in the WASH sector.
- 7) Strengthening the sub-national coordination (DWSCCs/TSUs/WMZs/WSDFs) and the feedback mechanism into the national level processes
- 8) Instituting learning after sector review processes to deliberate, review and agree how to take forward the learning, follow and feedback.
- 9) Explore innovative ways of undertaking learning to maximize on participation with limited resources. Innovative learning platforms/ways e.g. e-learning through use of blogs, webinars, knowledge nodes could be created and popularized to attract many people.

Specific recommendations for JSR and JTR

- 10) For the JSR: discuss and pass mechanisms for incorporating learning in the sector and ensure the learning aspect of the JSR is incorporated in the TOR and Agenda.
 - a. Modalities for involving and encouraging learners in the platforms
 - b. an inclusive and participative process of drawing up the JSR agenda and program
 - c. should focus on strategic instead of operational issues
- 11) Ensure maximum participation of the different groups and minimize parallel sessions to ensure that the learning feeds into the final agreed actions/undertakings.
- 12) For the JTR: consider how to organize the available 3 days and facilitate the meetings to ensure dedicated reflection on specific themes e.g. undertakings & proposals for improving action based on evidence.

Specific recommendations for other coordination platforms

- 13) MWE should consider one annual meeting of TSUs to review their performance of their geographical areas (for efficiency). The meeting should:
 - a. Be held before the JSR and JTR such that the outcomes of the TSU meetings feed into the JSR/JTR. The meetings to have clear LR items, in addition to performance review.
 - b. Include participation of CSOs with proven experience in LR, and who should facilitate LR in such meetings. This is a temporary measure up to the time when TSUs have the LR expertise, should CSOs relinquish their LR facilitating role
 - c. Meet for 4 days and apply a mix of LR approaches including group detailed discussions and fieldwork/learning journeys. Circulate outcomes broadly and monitor implementation of recommendations.

14) IDMs should:

- a. be held annually as well is the current practice, but adhering to a regular timetable (for effectiveness)
- b. Again, for effectiveness, more time should be devoted to these meetings
- c. their agenda needs to be focused on fewer issues that reflect the sector and regional priorities, but also those which can realistically be covered within the time available to the meeting

- d. IDM sub committees can be formed to start work earlier in their districts (coordinated by TSUs since these cover more than one district) and come to the IDM with a set of questions and action points for further discussion.
- 15) District coordination meetings be increased to two days instead of the current one day. This will ensure learning becomes part and parcel of the meeting. Another option can also be to hold one of the coordination committees in a year with the focus on supporting learning. Such meetings then can devote their attention to clear documentation and follow up of action points; participative processes of coming up with action points and evolve a mechanism of gathering evidence of LR outcomes and experience sharing.

16) UWASNET should:

- a) Strengthen its learning arm and overall coordination of the CSO learning platforms through her members who have an added advantage in terms of experience, capacity and commitment such as NETWAS, the lead agency on learning that would work with the secretariat to ensure the rest of the members are well coordinated and engaged. This will take organisational commitment in terms of leadership will, time and financial resources.
- b) Through its members, to plan for LR and organize, at least, one meeting a year dedicated to LR as basis to action and improvement of service delivery.
- c) Support documentation of LR processes and outcomes
- d) Advocate for LR in the agenda of JSR/JTR

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Appendix 1: List of Persons met

No.	Name	Position	Organization
1	Kate Nimanya	Program manager	NETWAS
2	Aciro Brenda	Senior Program Officer	NETWAS
3	Daniel Mwesigye	Program Officer	NETWAS
4	Doreen Wandera	Executive Director	UWASNET
5	Eng. Paul Nyeko Ogiramoi	Senior Eng, Rural Water Supply	MWE/DWD
6	Eng. Gaetano Okello	PE(Planning and Development)	MWE/DWD
7	Daudi Mukama	Sanitation Specialist	MWE/DWD
8	Alice Ankur	Country Representative	Water Aid in Uganda
9	Spera Atuhairwe	Head of Programme	Water Aid in Uganda
10	Rebecca Alowo		Water Aid in Uganda
11	Angella Bwiza	Team Leader, TSU5	MWE/DWD
12	Khasifa Nantaba	TSU5	MWE/DWD
13	Peter Magara		Triple S
14	Rene Lieshout		IRC