



Performance Improvement through Learning on Sanitation - PILS

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How the PILS project improved coordination and WASH performance in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts, Northern Uganda

The PILS approach has helped the Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts to appreciate the importance of coordinating stakeholders' efforts in sanitation and hygiene. The increased participation of local and international NGOs in the multi-stakeholder platforms at district and sub-county level has improved harmonisation and coordination of interventions in the district of Gulu. Resource allocations for sanitation and hygiene by Development Partners have increased and this has benefited Village Health Teams (VHTs) and enabled them to reach more households.

This paper discusses the benefits of sharing and learning while implementing water and sanitation and hygiene (WASH) projects. This case shows how stakeholders participating in the PILS project in Gulu district between 2009 and 2012 have been working together to put in place a system to improve WASH service delivery through better learning and coordination in the district and sub-counties.

Box 1 The PILS approach

The Performance Improvement through Learning in Sanitation (PILS) project was a two year and half sanitation and hygiene project with a unique approach. The project consisted of 80% software activities which focused on supporting the coordination of stakeholders, and on learning and sharing new knowledge around technologies and changing attitudes and behaviour. Hardware inputs were only made for the demonstration of low-cost technologies, like the Arbor loo and Fossa Alterna ecosan toilets.

The PILS project

The Performance Improvement through Learning in Sanitation (PILS) project was designed to respond to sanitation challenges of insufficient knowledge, attitudes and practices on sanitation by the community. The purpose of the project was to promote learning and appreciation of hygiene and sanitation, change attitudes and improve practices through adaptation of appropriate technologies. The main strategy of the project was to reach the stakeholders through the creation and utilisation of multi-stakeholder platforms. Multi-stakeholder platforms were organised at the district and sub-country level, as well as between districts. The PILS project started in October 2009 and was implemented by a consortium of IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, NETWAS Uganda and Caritas-Gulu in the Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts of Northern Uganda.

Beneficiaries

The beneficiaries of the PILS project were mainly the returning communities who had been living in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps for the last 25 years.



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Context: 25 years of war

The Gulu District in Northern Uganda went through a lot of turmoil following the twenty years of insurgency as a result of the war between the government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army. During the twenty years of war (1985 to 2005), the populations of the region were displaced and forced to live in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. Many Humanitarian Organisations, like UNICEF, World Food Program, Norwegian Refugee Council, CARE International, Save the Children, War Child Holland and Canada, etc. came to the region to give humanitarian support. They were then involved in implementing a number of projects and formed clusters that brought together various organisations carrying out different activities. The clustering of these Humanitarian Organisations was done according to the activities they were undertaking in the region, e.g. Health cluster, Education cluster, Water and Sanitation cluster, Agriculture and Livelihoods cluster etc. These clusters were then used to enhance coordination of the different agencies implementing their projects in the area. When the region started to experience peace from 2006, many of the humanitarian agencies left. A few agencies, NGOs and Faith Based Organisations continued to carry out activities in the region. They came together again and formed clusters, which were renamed Coordination Committees.

Under the WASH intervention, the District Water Sanitation Coordination Committee (DWSCC) was formed. This committee brings together all stakeholders implementing Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) activities in the district. It comprises key government departments such as the District Water Officer, District Health Inspector, District Education Officer, District Engineer, and Secretaries / Hon. Councillors for Health, Education and Works. This committee is formed at the district level as well as at the sub-county level, where it is known as the sub-county Water and Sanitation Committee (SCWSCC).

How do we define PILS coordination?

In PILS we have defined coordination as: *'The act of making different people or things work together for a goal or effect to fulfill desired goals in an organisation.'*

Coordination therefore involved the different Civil Society and Local Government staff sharing their work plans, their reports and jointly coming together for supervision and follow up of agreed activities. This helped to overcome the challenges of coordination that were hampering effective implementation in the districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader.

The target groups and project activities

In order to ensure that there was effective coordination, the people playing active roles in improving coordination are displayed in box 2.

Box 2 Main actors and activities in the PILS project

The key people who play a coordination role in the PILS project were:

At the District level:

- The CAO / ACO
- DWO, DHI, DEO, Health Inspectors, Secretaries for Education, Health and Works, NGOs

At the sub-county level:

- Health Assistants, CDOs, LC3, and sub-county Chiefs, Hon. Secretaries and NGOs

The main/key activities implemented in the PILS project included:

- Strengthening the DWSCC
- Conducting District and sub-county learning platform/sessions
- Conducting action-research, with for example the piloting of new technologies (Ecosan Toilets) in villages and the introduction / strengthening of school health clubs
- Capacity building
- Documentation



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Coordination issues identified in Gulu District at the beginning of PILS

Before coordination was strengthened to improve the implementation of WASH in the district, the following key issues were identified by the Local Government and Development Partners, with assistance of the PILS project staff:

- NGOs were using different approaches on their own, separate from government. Some of these approaches went beyond the government-stipulated policies. In addition, the government became suspicious of the acts of some of the agencies, since they did not share their work with the relevant authorities.
- Duplication of same projects in same areas. This put a lot of strain on the resources that were being used, yet those resources could have been used differently to achieve more results.
- Poor performance / not achieving results in the sector by NGO and Local Government. In some instances, the NGO or the Local Government Department that was implementing an activity did not have staff who were qualified enough to do the work.
- Work that was done would then have poor end results. This could have been avoided if there was good coordination among the stakeholders
- Poor resource allocations by Local Government and NGOs. This challenge also brought in misuse of resources to implement project activities. In the end, this could have been avoided if there was good coordination among the stakeholders.

Factors preventing key actors from addressing challenge of coordination

The two main challenges that were hampering coordination in the Gulu district were:

1. Poor attendance of multi-stakeholder learning platforms

These platforms aimed at enhancing peer learning among the stakeholders. In all the 3 districts, multi-stakeholder platforms were formed: the Inter-District Capacity Building (IDCB) platform, and the district and sub-county learning platforms. Nevertheless, it was a challenge to hold them at regular intervals. Attendance was a particular challenge at the district level. In general, however, the Inter District and sub-county sessions went well.

2. Poor attendance of DWSCC

The DWSCC was formed as the main force to ensure proper coordination of the WASH activities in the district. The challenge that it faced was the low turn out of the members for the monthly meetings. In this regard, there were no proper follow up of activities being implemented by the different stakeholders.

While the key agencies / NGOs that were implementing WASH intervention in the district were making every effort to do effective work, there was little being shared or learned from one another. Although the DWSCC held monthly coordination meetings, there was very poor attendance by members.



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One of the main reasons for the low turnout was that members claimed they were too busy with other activities. This indicated that they did not give priority to the meeting. Another reason given was that having monthly meetings was too tedious. Instead, they opted for quarterly meetings. This low turnout affected implementation of action points that were agreed upon during the DWSCC meetings.

Achievements of PILS; improvements in coordination

As a result of PILS activities, coordination improved the attendance and general performance of both the DWSCC and the SCWCC in the Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts; this resulted in:

- Improved attendance of the coordination meetings. The members agreed to hold quarterly meetings instead of monthly meetings, unless there is an emergency call.
- High turnout for national and international events with encouraging contributions from the stakeholders, e.g. the World Water Day and Sanitation Week.
- The district is now organising joint follow up and monitoring of WASH activities being implemented by the different stakeholders.
- Improved linkages and information sharing from the district to the sub-county.
- Activity plans and reports are willingly shared among stakeholders and with the district.
- There is now rapid sharing and response on emerging problems (disasters) e.g. hepatitis epidemic and the 'nodding disease' for which the causes are still unknown
- Increased mainstreaming of WASH activities with the other sectors e.g. HIV/AIDS, Environmental Health, Education, as well as political (where the locally elected councilors are involved).

Main strategies used by PILS for improving coordination

- In Gulu, when the Assistant Chief Administration Officer (ACO) saw the continuous low turnout for the monthly coordination meeting, he threatened to write warning letters to members for disciplinary action against them. In the end, all the members started to report for the meetings.
- Early circulation and reminder of monthly meeting schedules by the DWO by e-mails, phone calls and SMS.
- Early circulation and distribution of the DWSCC monthly meeting minutes to members, particularly by e-mail.



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Conclusion

The increased participation of local and international NGOs in the multi stakeholder platforms at district and sub-country level has improved harmonisation and coordination of interventions in the districts. Under the DWSCC setup in all districts, WASH partners' activities were shared and discussed. Increased coordination improved the complementarity of the efforts of Development Partners and reduced duplication of work. The PILS project has increased attention for sanitation and hygiene within WASH interventions.

Sub county chief of Bungatira Mr. Walter Laker leading a discussion during a sub-county learning platform session



Credits: Photo by Mr. Oyugi Matthew – PILS Project Officer Gulu

Way forward and recommendations

Bringing WASH stakeholders together and strengthening coordination among sector actors has given new inspiration to ensuring that activities that were being implemented will continue after PILS. In light of this, there is more transparency and willingness among the stakeholders in all three districts to share their work plans and project reporting. It is therefore recommended that this is strengthened by the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer who is the head of all the sectors in the district.

For more details

Documentation available at: **IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre:** <http://www.irc.nl/page/52256>

NETWAS Uganda: <http://www.netwasuganda.org/projects-4/>

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