

LEARNING, ADAPTING, EMBEDDING ■ ■ ■

Experiences and lessons from the Triple-S Initiative in Uganda



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ACRONYMS

CBMS	Community Based Management System
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DIM	District Implementation Manual
DLG	District Local Government
DWO	District Water Office
DWSCC	District Water and Sanitation Coordination Committee
FLOW	Field Level Observation.....
HEWASA	Health through Water and Sanitation
HPM	Hand Pump Mechanic
HPMA	Hand Pump Mechanics Association
JESE	Joint Effort to Save the Environment
LCCA	Life Cycle Costs Approach
LEAPPS	Learning for Policy and Practice in Sanitation
M4W	Mobile Phones for Water
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MSP	Multi Stakeholder Platforms
MWE	Ministry of Water and Environment
NETWAS (U)	Network for Water and Sanitation (Uganda)
O&M	Operation and Maintenance
PILS	Performance Improvement through Learning for Sanitation
PPDA	Public Procurement and Disposal Authority
RWD	Rural Water Department
RWS	Rural Water Supply
SCWSCC	Sub County Water and Sanitation Coordination Committee
SDA	Service Delivery Approach
SDI	Service Delivery Indicators
SDM	Service Delivery Model
SWSSB	Sub County Water Supply and Sanitation Board
TAF	Technological Assessment Framework
Triple-S	Sustainable (rural water) Services at Scale
TSU	Technical Support Unit
ULGA	Uganda Local Governments Association
UWASNET	Uganda Water and Sanitation NGO Network
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
WEMNET	Water and Environment Media Network
WSC	Water Source Committee
WSSB	Water Supply and Sanitation Board
WUC	Water User Committee

FOREWORD

The Rural Water Sub Sector in Uganda continues to face challenges in terms of sustainability of service delivery. Currently, only 64% of the rural population has access to safe water, which is still short of the national target of 77% coverage by 2015.

There are concerns about the failure rate of water supply systems. Investment in new systems continues but functionality rates have fluctuated between 80% and 84% for nearly five years now. From 2010 to 2013, through the District Conditional Grant, the Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) invested in over 10,000 new rural water facilities, reaching nearly 2.5 million people. Considering that up to 16% of rural water sources are non-functional, the population considered as served faces a real possibility of losing access to safe water.

To ensure that both the MDG and government targets are met, it is important to identify and understand the key challenges in the rural water supply sub sector. There is need to analyse what has been achieved, how and with what challenges. It is against such a background that the Triple-S Initiative entered the Uganda Rural Water sub sector in 2009.

The government of Uganda acknowledges the invaluable input of other stakeholders like NGOs, Private sector and development partners. In that regard, the Ministry of Water and Environment welcomes partners like IRC who join hands with us to address the key challenges that confront the sector.

Particularly on the Triple-S Initiative, the Ministry of Water and Environment provided intellectual and technical leadership, especially on issues relating to decentralisation and sustainable rural water service delivery. And to maintain linkages between Triple-S and other government ministries and departments, MWE also chaired the Project Steering Committee.

Over the past five years, the rural water sub sector has embraced new ideas and innovations focused on improving functionality of rural water supply systems and sustainability of services. Triple-S has



particularly been keen on reawakening the need to look beyond systems and infrastructure and focus on delivering water services.

Learning and research have been the bedrock of the Triple-S Initiative in Uganda. Working within the broad framework of existing sector policy guidelines, Triple-S investigated, researched and tested new ways of working within the rural water sub sector. I have no doubt that the lessons have been embedded and the innovations and approaches introduced by Triple-S will be scaled up and continue generating the intended results throughout the sector.

Identifying and understanding the key bottlenecks in the sector should be a never-ending effort. All sector players should aim for continuous improvement in service delivery until we achieve or even supersede national targets. We need to achieve universal access to water services that last.

Eng. Aaron Kabirizi

Director, Directorate of Water Development
Ministry of Water and Environment



A bricklayer in Kicwamba Sub County says that access to water has boosted his business.

1 TRIPLE-S UGANDA OVERVIEW

2009-2014

Introduction

Sustainable Rural Water Services at Scale (Triple-S) is a learning and research initiative of IRC. Triple-S aims to improve sustainability of rural water services by applying innovative planning and best practices and encouraging the shift away from one-off, stand-alone projects delivering new infrastructure to water services that last. Triple-S also seeks to identify and understand the key bottlenecks in rural water service delivery through a process of learning and research involving the full range of stakeholders in the rural water sub sector - Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) to district water personnel, private operators, users, local politicians and opinion leaders.

The results of learning provide concrete evidence to underpin modified approaches, new information and guidelines about how to implement and support rural water supply services. Ultimately the new approaches and models will be scaled up and adopted, thereby contributing to improved functionality and sustainability of systems across the whole country.

In Uganda the Triple-S initiative started in 2009, with a comprehensive scoping study, assessing the rural water sub sector. The Initiative was piloted in two districts – Kabarole district in Rwenzori Region, western Uganda and Lira district in Lango region, Northern Uganda.

Why Triple-S?

At the time Triple-S Initiative was conceived, rural water services in Uganda were facing growing challenges in terms of sustainability of supply. There were growing concerns about the increasing failure rate of rural

water systems. While there was continuous investment in new systems and facilities, functionality rates had stagnated between 80% and 83% for five years. This meant that progress towards meeting the sector targets for coverage and access would start to fall behind. The government of Uganda target is 77% of the rural population to have access to safe water by 2015.

To meet both government and MDG targets, it was important to identify and understand the key challenges confronting the sector. There was need to analyse what had been achieved, how and with what successes and what challenges. New thinking was needed, especially in the wake of declining sector investment. It is against this backdrop that Triple-S, entered the rural water sub sector in Uganda. Throughout the implementation period (2010-2014), outcomes and activities were centred around three pillars including:

1. Promoting the Service Delivery Approach (SDA): There must be a shift from projects to services. This means envisaging a service instead of projects in which policy, institutional, planning, financing and governance of the sector all support water services at scale for rural populations.
2. Promoting Learning and Adaptive capacity: This means a sector with the capacity to learn, innovate and adapt to changing circumstances and demands necessary for the continuance of service delivery approaches for rural populations.
3. Promoting a Harmonised and Coordinated rural water sub sector: This means greater harmonisation of donor

efforts at both operational and national levels, as well as better coordination and alignment of these efforts behind government-led strategies for service delivery to rural populations.

Within the broad framework of the three pillars, there were three milestones to be reached:

- (i) creating opportunities and initiating processes for learning about SDA,
- (ii) Defining and creating opportunities for testing and improving Service Delivery Models at national decentralised level
- (iii) Uptake of Service Delivery Models.

The overall Triple-S vision is of Reliable and functional water supply provided at scale in rural areas of Uganda

Following a mid-term assessment in 2012, Triple-S Uganda adopted seven research areas – also called experiments. The view was to provide a different but clearer direction for the Initiative, addressing very specific challenges of rural water service delivery in Uganda. The experiments would ensure the move from diagnosis to treatment and would also test practical solutions to addressing the identified problems. The focus was to generate evidence and establish strong and reliable feedback mechanisms to ensure learning and follow-up; effective engagement with key stakeholders; and strengthen strategic and management approaches for internal Triple-S project use. These include:

A. Under the pillar on service delivery approach

- 1. Performance analysis of service delivery models (SDMs): Described and analysed the performance of the Water User Committee (WUC) as service delivery model for point sources based on the Community Based Maintenance System (CBMS). It was found that a significant proportion of service providers were not performing their functions as expected.



Chairman of Kaguma Tap stand Water User Committee scrutinises a jerrycan belonging to one of the users. Kicwamba Sub County, Kabarole District

- 2. Developing Service Delivery Indicators (SDIs) to enhance monitoring of rural water service delivery in Uganda. The SDIs build on the existing policies, guidelines and strategies and link to the current 11 golden indicators. These SDIs describe how water supply services are delivered and supported across the different levels of service delivery namely: Service delivered; Users' level; Service provider level (WSC); Service authority level (sub-county and district)
- 3. Strengthening district based Hand Pump Mechanics Associations (HPMAs). Hand pump mechanics – responsible for maintaining rural water service – have formed associations to help members access spare parts and respond quickly to breakdowns. This experiment supported HPMAs in developing and implementing a viable operational model for maintenance of rural water sources; supported the district water office and technical support units in developing a support strategy for HPMAs; developed guiding frameworks for Local governments for engaging HPMAs.



The Triple-S Uganda team. Back (L-R) Benon, Peter Eberu, Martin Watsisi, Joseph Abisa, Peter Magara, Robert Otim. Front (L-R) Jane Nabunnya, Lydia Mirembe, Winnie Musoke.

4. Testing the M4W initiative. This aimed to improve effectiveness in monitoring and improving functionality and responding to break downs of water supply systems. The system enables water users to send instant text messages about breakdowns and can potentially reduce downtime, if all stakeholders respond as expected. Having been tested successfully, the M4W system needs to be improved and scaled up so that water users can hold service providers accountable for operations and maintenance.
 5. Developing, testing and scaling up the Sub County Water Supply and Sanitation Boards (SWSSB). The experiment aimed to strengthen institutional capacity at sub county level to coordinate, monitor and maintain rural water services. It envisions a governance structure that serves both point source and piped schemes with professional management of fees collection, financing, and operations and maintenance in a rural setting.
- B. Under the pillar on learning and adaptive capacity**
6. Improving sector learning and adaptive capacity by applying a learning alliance approach. The experiment aimed to assess the understanding, appreciation and application of the Learning Alliance approach in the WASH sector and whether the approach improves capacity of the sector stakeholders to be innovative and adapt policy and practice. The experiment also assessed the capacity, resources, and processes required to enable decentralised and national level forums adopt and sustain the Learning Alliance approach. The experiment proposes a Learning Model to improve learning at different levels by providing a formal structure for aligning learning agendas at, synthesising issues, harvesting evidence emerging from the Multi Stakeholder Platforms, and tailoring communication outputs/ messages to relevant institutions.
- C. Under the pillar on Harmonisation and Alignment:**
7. Review and update the District Implementation Manual (DIM). The experiment aimed to review and update the DIM taking into account new developments in the sector; to improve its packaging so as to enhance its utilisation by the stakeholders; to produce a user-friendly version of the DIM for use by sub-county and district WASH practitioners and service users; develop information materials in various languages for use by stakeholders; and design a dissemination strategy

for the DIM and a process for creating ownership among stakeholders for use of the DIM. The overall goal was to enable the WASH sector to professionalise its practices, improve harmonisation and coordination and ultimately enhance decentralised service delivery.

Communication was a central part of the experiments at both national and district levels. Communication strategies and approaches were mainly: Public awareness; One-on-one/interpersonal interactions with the Triple-S “champions”; meetings; Building partnerships with likeminded organisations; and piggybacking on existing sector structures and channels

Since inception in 2009, Triple-S in Uganda has implemented a wide range of activities that have generated various outputs, all contributing to the attainment of the three key milestones.

1. **Creating opportunities and initiating processes for learning about the Service Delivery Approach (SDA)**

- Developed a framework for assessing performance of rural water Service Delivery Models.
- Organised joint regional learning meetings in Rwenzori Region and in Northern Uganda with concrete action plans and recommendations for scaling up good practices
- Used and engaged various media outlets to share information and experiences on the SDA and to involve service authorities, providers and users to share experiences
- Supported MWE to roll out and operationalise HPMAAs.
- In partnership with MWE, SNV, Water Aid and Makerere University, developed and implemented the M4W system for monitoring functionality and triggering response to break down of rural water supplies.



- Organised training in Service Delivery Approach for key MWE staff and the two DWOs from the pilot districts
 - Internally, Triple-S Staff learning and reflection retreats were organised. These enabled the staff and consortium members to meet and discuss what is working, what is not working, what needs to be changed, and what strategies should be used to ensure delivery of the project
2. **Defining and creating opportunities for testing and improving Service Delivery Models at national and decentralised level**
- Initiated processes for testing the Sub County Water and Sanitation Board model in Kabarole and Lira districts
 - Conducted an information scan for the Life Cycle Cost Approach (LCCA) in Uganda
 - Identified and tested innovations within the Community Based Management System (CBMS) and the Water Supply and Sanitation Boards (WSSB) service delivery models in TSUs 2 and 6

3. Promoting Uptake of Service Delivery Models

- Supported the review and updating of the District Implementation Manual (DIM) and development of simplified versions and illustrative materials of the revised DIM
- Supported the strengthening of District Water and Sanitation Coordination Committees (DWSCCs) in coordinating and reinforcing roles of rural water service delivery stakeholders
- Enhanced awareness of stakeholders on their roles and responsibilities and how to monitor and assess performance of rural water service delivery. With NETWAS, Triple-S also provided capacity building support on improved WASH governance

Supporting and working with the Ministry of Water and Environment

The Ministry of Water and Environment is the main client of the Triple-S initiative in Uganda. Triple-S has supported and worked with the Ministry to address the challenges of rural water service delivery. Triple-S was the Secretariat of the Ministry's Functionality Thematic Group and particularly strengthened collaboration and partnership with TSU2 and TSU6 the WSDF-N. All this was implemented within the context of the existing MoU between IRC and the Ministry.

Coordination and collaboration

Triple-S Uganda was structured around a Consortium comprising five member organisations. A Project Steering Committee facilitated the effective implementation of the initiative by providing strategic and policy guidance. The Committee comprised MWE/RWD, UWASNET, NETWAS, Unicef, WB/WSP, WaterAid Uganda, Kabarole District Local Government, Lira District Local Government. The Consortium members were:

1. The Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) to provide intellectual and

technical input on issues relating to decentralisation and sustainable service delivery of rural water services in Uganda. MWE also chaired the Project Steering Committee and developed and maintained linkages between Triple-S and other government Ministries and Departments.

2. SNV Uganda hosted Triple-S Uganda and therefore provided the required financial and administrative support. SNV also provided practical experiences in capacity building of local governments and NGOs, knowledge management and development, and facilitation of learning.
3. UWASNET worked with Triple-S in promoting information sharing, identifying critical opportunities for effective communication and advocacy and documenting best practices in WASH, particularly targeting and involving Civil Society Organisations.
4. NETWAS worked with Triple-S in facilitating district learning, multi-sector planning and learning, supporting facilitation processes, organising learning events and disseminating learning results.
5. IRC played the role of overall management and oversight as well as providing linkages to broader research and knowledge from similar initiatives in Ghana, Burkina Faso and at the global level.

Media: Triple-S works closely with the media at national and district level, especially to conduct public education and advocacy campaigns aimed at increasing stakeholders' awareness of their roles and responsibilities in RWS

Triple-S Uganda activities, successes, challenges and recommendation have been documented and shared widely. These can all be accessed at: www.waterservicesthatlast.org/uganda



Telela village, Ngetta sub county, Lira district.

2 MANY ACHIEVEMENTS, MORE WORK TO BE DONE

Jane Nabunnya Mulumba is the Country Director of IRC Uganda. She was also the Country Coordinator of the Triple-S Initiative in Uganda. In an interview with Lydia Mirembe, she shares her views on the Triple-S Initiative and how it contributed to the rural water sub sector in Uganda.

QUESTION: You have been leading Triple-S Uganda team throughout its implementation phase, what have been the key highlights for you as an individual and for the project?

ANSWER: Starting up Triple-S is a highlight on its own. Triple-S has been a big, complex project with so many interlinked things, which were all software. One needed a team that would grasp all of that and put it in a perspective that would enable us to attain systemic change. Starting off the project in 2009 was a big issue for me. At the induction in December 2009, everyone was talking a language I couldn't understand. It sounded so academic. I didn't know what exactly I was expected to do in Uganda. But I guess that was an eye opener for me to contextualise the project. We had to look at the sector and see where the project would fit. We were looking for that entry point that would add value.

Right from the beginning promoting aspects of sustainability gave the project an edge. The sector had been talking about sustainability, functionality, harmonisation and other aspects of rural water services. But getting a project like Triple-S that would get into generating evidence to show that there were gaps was value addition to the sector. Triple-S showed the need to address those gaps asking questions like: how do you push for sustainability? Even if coverage is at 65% and functionality at 83%, what are the aspects of sustainability you need



to look at? So the language of sustainability picked some mileage. You can't talk about sustainability without looking at the quality and reliability of service; or the distance from the service to the user. Those were things that we were able as a project to bring on board.

I have also enjoyed the approach of identifying and testing innovations in spite of the liabilities and risks involved. We have managed to penetrate areas that under normal circumstances one would be afraid to confront. For example the work we are doing with sub county boards. For a long time there was a cry about the gap between the district and the sub county. Triple-S suggested an alternative and government welcomed it. That is a highlight too.

In a special way, working with government has been a highlight. Being able to interact with officials especially in the Rural Water Department provided us with the lesson that to work effectively with another partner you need to know how that partner's interests and how they operate. A partner like the MWE is big so you need to know what they are interested in and how they want you to work towards creating a change within the sector. I have learnt protocol, procedure, processes at national and district level. The local governments have been great hosts, great advisors and great consumers of our products. For me the project set the pace for serious engagement and involvement of different players right from government to development partners and civil society.

What did it take for you and the team to identify the areas that would be addressed by Triple-S in order to add value to the sector?

First we took time to understand the sector and the different players therein. We appreciated that it was a mature sector, with systems, with people and with plans. They were already implementing a sector-wide approach. The sector was already organised with working groups so it was easy for us to utilize those structures than to waste resources trying to set up new structures. The sector already appreciated the role of civil society through UWASNET – of which IRC was a member. Generally the environment was conducive with conditions that favored Triple-S.

A lot had been achieved in the sector but there was still work to do. We were able to look at those gaps and mark our own

area focusing on sustainability. We also found the sector grappling with issues of evidence. Government doesn't do a lot of research. And so our strategies including action research, action learning, monitoring, promoting harmonisation and coordination was an opportunity for the sector to generate evidence.

But I also believe that our own personalities as members of the Triple-S team, was a huge contributory factor to our entry into the sector and comfortably staying there. We attached a lot of importance and respect to the people that we were going to work with across the different levels. That opened many avenues and channels for us. We invested in building relationships. Beyond just talking about what we were going to do but understanding who we were going to work with.

Looking at the sector since Triple-S joined, what have been the key changes and how did Triple-S contribute to them?

The greatest Improvement I see is that the sector is learning. Looking at the JSR meeting in 2010 and the last one I participated in 2013, there is a change in the way discussions are organised and facilitated. In 2010, you had people just coming in and making presentations. In 2013 I saw presenters attempting to assess progress, asking questions like what have we done well? What should we do differently? What changes do we need to address and benefit more from the undertakings? People are doing presentation and reflection. I can confidently say that our contribution towards that is manifested.

I have seen progress towards looking critically at life cost of systems and services. When we introduced the Life Cycle Cost Approach (LCCA) we didn't know it would pick up. But currently the ministry is seeking support to do an assessment of unit cost for rural water supply. They see this as enabling them to build a case for budget increase and for proper allocation of the conditional grant. It is an offshoot but a good one from the Triple-S initiative.

Another change in the sector is the recognition of the role of local governments in service delivery. Uganda Local Governments Association (ULGA) has been arguing for a long time that for WASH services to be sustainable local governments have to be on board; and not just wait for the conditional grant to spend. They need to be involved in monitoring. We have seen great improvement in Lira and Kabarole where the DWO goes out does monitoring, fully involving CSO actors. The findings are then discussed in the DWSCC meeting. The different actors then chart ways of addressing the gaps and improving the situation.

What do you think motivated the sector to give due consideration to the ideas and approaches introduced by Triple-S?

Firstly, they were involved in identifying the innovations. They were involved in assessing and analyzing the gaps. Take the DIM review for example. The MWE were involved right from the beginning in the assessment of utilisation. They were involved in pushing ahead the recommendations to review and update the DIM. There was acknowledgement of the need for improvement. The other motivator was the fact that Triple-S did not come in and denigrate the work that had been done previously. Rather we sought to build on what others before us had done while identifying the gaps that needed to be addressed. Thirdly, Triple-S worked within the existing structures rather than try to form our own. We did not come with a magic bullet. We appreciated the situation and ensured that we worked with all actors. I believe a combination of these approaches motivated the sector actors to look at Triple-S differently and to see the value addition we were bringing in.

What are the outstanding challenges that remain for the sector; where should sector actors focus their efforts say for the next five years?

There are still many gaps in sector monitoring and it needs improvement. We need to generate proper accurate data that eventually ensures good planning and good budgeting. The sector should continue

learning, reflecting, changing and trying out. You cannot stop piloting. You cannot avoid testing. It is from such testing that we can generate good programmes for the people.

The sector should also look at professionalising CBMS. The fact is that CBMS is not going away any time soon. So sector should be wondering, how do you make CBMS work? That would involve engaging more with the private sector. There is need to create linkages between public and private sectors.

The sector also needs to embrace technologies especially ICTs to boost monitoring for example as we have done with M4W. In this era of technology, break downs should be reported immediately. Assessments should be done immediately and worked on. You can only do that if you have the technologies and you are using them.

The sector also needs to revisit the WASH governance issues right from household level to national level. Actors need to look at accountability and transparency, participation of water users in decision making processes. Perhaps the good governance working group should be re-energised.

If you had to do Triple-S again, what would you do differently?

Mainly from the administration point of view, I would have the actual mother, IRC to manage this project. Secondly I would bring the private sector on board, especially as member of the consortium. I would also include an advocacy-oriented organisation to push for change. I would bring the academia on board to engage them in action research. This would elevate the research findings in a different arena. All of these would bring in new perspectives to the initiative.



Elwany Village, Agali Sub County,
Lira district.

3 SECTOR LEVEL CHANGE, A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

Peter Magara was the National Learning Facilitator of Triple-S Uganda. He looks back at his four year experience of searching, validating and learning to understand the landscape of the rural water sub sector in Uganda.

It has been four years of solution searching, developing, testing and adapting prototypes to guarantee continuous access to water for the rural population in Uganda. Coming from a background where project interventions have neatly defined target groups, normally referred to as underserved, it was difficult to shift my mindset to interventions that target change at the level of an entire sector. The multiplicity of actors involved in different initiatives, at different levels in the sector, and driven by different ambitions made it even more complicated. However, the desire to reach every one with water and sanitation services was the point of convergence.

Thus, to attain change at sector level, the Triple-S strategy was to recognise already existing structures and to partner with key sector actors. This guided the selection of the Triple-S consortium partners in Uganda. Network for Water and Sanitation (NETWAS), was brought on board due to its experience in facilitating learning alliances and Knowledge management while the Uganda Water and Sanitation Network (UWASNET), was brought on board to leverage its vibrant network of 160 WASH NGOs for communication and advocacy. A Liaison Officer was seconded by the Ministry of Water and Environment to facilitate communication on Triple-S outputs/proposals with the relevant units within MWE. SNV with wide sector experience at local government level was also the national host of the Triple-S initiative.



Particularly for sector learning, Triple-S worked in partnership with NETWAS, Water Aid, UWASNET, and Uganda Rain Water Association, to support the establishment of the National Learning Forum. The first National Learning Forum event was organised in September 2010, focusing on functionality and sustainability of water and sanitation services. It provided us great lessons on sector level learning.



Peter Magara talks to members of the Lira District Hand Pump Mechanics Association

Being a national level event, the organising team expected to have good representation of MWE but this was not realised. This was frustrating because the team had spent a lot of time putting together good content on case studies on innovative operation and maintenance practices with potential for scaling up. There was a bit of panic because we had expected that the MWE would own and embed the lessons from the forum. The event triggered deeper reflection on the role of MWE in the learning process. We later learnt that the goal for learning forums at national level should be to inform policy and shape directives. Case studies meant to inspire actors to scale up initiatives were best suited for the regional and district level.

With this in mind, we organised a second learning forum in 2011 which focused on self supply. The National Steering Committee on self supply took leadership in organising the forum and was able to attract all the key actors on self supply in the sector. IRC/Triple-S and partners kept 'behind the scenes'. The outputs from the learning forum were directly fed into the National Self Supply Strategy. The forum was a key milestone that enabled Triple-S and Partners clearly define the specific objectives for learning at national, regional and district level.

At the regional level, Triple-S with a coalition of NGOs and Technical Support Units 2 and 6 established Regional Learning Forums. The forums have become annual events where District Local Governments, NGOs, Technical Support Units, targeted private sector institutions meet to share and learn about innovative approaches, question and provide solutions to failing approaches/strategies, and build consensus on how to scale up promising approaches. The forums have been useful in profiling and communicating on innovations beyond their districts/regions, and in triggering scale up of approaches.

One case stands out as an example of successful sector-level change – the adoption of Hand Pump Mechanics Associations (HPMA) as an approach to improve functionality of rural water supply systems. Following the intensive documentation and sharing on experiences of the HPMA in western and northern Uganda the Commissioner Rural Water Department, MWE picked interest and asked Triple-S and SNV to write a concept note to guide the scale up of HPMA in all the districts in the country.

In 2012, an Undertaking was developed by MWE on Establishment of HPMA in all districts in Uganda to improve operation and maintenance of rural water facilities. The undertaking was hosted by the Functionality Thematic Group IRC/Triple-S had been asked to coordinate. IRC and SNV continued to provide evidence from the joint action research on operationalising HPMA through the Functionality Thematic Group. The action research provided yet another opportunity to inform the development of national guidelines for Local Governments for engaging HPMA. Today, HPMA are recognised as important actors in the sector at district level.

Emerging Evidence of Sector Change

- Over the years, Triple-S continued to aim for sector change in terms of policy and practice. Our involvement in the HPMA process changed the way that the sector looked at the Triple-S Initiative. Requests for review and development of specific sub sector strategies started to flow in such as; review and update of the District Implementation Manual, Development of Service Delivery Indicators, Learning and Coordination Model, and rollout of Sub County Water Supply and Sanitation Boards.
- The Sector is making efforts to improve the MIS for monitoring water and sanitation services. MWE has developed a proposal to review the M4W system developed by Triple-S and partners, and FLOW promoted by AKVO and Water for People. The Ministry wants to identify lessons on how to build an integrated system.

The SDIs proposed by Triple-S have also been endorsed by the sector to complement the existing golden indicators. Water for People and IRC/Triple-S are leading a coalition of NGOs that are harmonising their own indicators with the SDIs.

- The sector has opened space for trying out initiatives meant to bring in professionalism in community based management of rural water services. HPMA have been rolled out to provide water user committees with prompt technical support in operation and maintenance of systems. Service Charters are being experimented to clearly communicate to water users and committees' actual repair costs and this has had a positive impact on the willingness of water users to pay especially in Lira district.
- MWE and the District Local Governments have adopted the concept of Sub County Water Supply and Sanitation board as an area based management approach. Boards are established to manage pipe water schemes and supervise the operations of a selected private water operator. The same approach has been adapted for the rural water sub sector though the HPMA will replace the private operator.

Looking back at my Triple-S journey which started in 2010, it has been a process of searching, validating, and learning to understand the landscape of the rural water sector in Uganda. I realise that indeed sector-level change is possible, but no single organisation can go it alone. It is a collaborative effort. It is willingness to act and learn together all the way.

Lira district WASH actors participate in a reflection meeting organised by Triple-S





Tapstand along the Mugusu Gravity Flow Scheme, Kabarole district

4 TRIPLE-S EXEMPLIFIED ROBUST ACTION RESEARCH

Although he joined two years into the implementation of Triple-S Uganda, the Research Officer Joseph Abisa tells of an enriching experience characterised by learning and capacity development.

I joined the Triple-S Uganda in June 2012, two years into the implementation of the Initiative. I had a lot of expectations especially because this was an international project. Having been recruited as a Research Officer, I had expected to find very complicated research frameworks and very huge data bases. However, after settling in, I realised that I was in an environment that was not very different from where I had been before.

My two years at Triple-S have been dotted with many highlight moments. First I got to understand the rural water sub sector a lot better than I did before. Another highlight for me was the focus on scientific writing in which each experiment lead was encouraged to write and publish articles in order to increase the “visibility” of the Triple-S Initiative. During my time at Triple-S Uganda, I have written various papers, briefing notes, activity reports, concept notes, research reports, fact sheets and policy briefs. And I also had an opportunity to write my own Triple-S story! This has sharpened my writing skills.

I have also participated in various studies at Triple-S conducted with the aim of improving the delivery of water services to people in the rural areas of the country. The survey on Service Delivery Models; the development of Service Delivery Indicators; the implementation of the M4W initiative; the district budget tracking study in Lira and Kabarole all made me realise that Triple-S



was keen on taking the first initiative in knowledge creation and management in the rural water sub sector.

In terms of sector-wide impact, Triple-S has supported various activities which have contributed to improved functionality of the rural water sources, especially in the two focus districts of Lira and Kabarole. Triple-S has contributed to the improved performance



Jo Smet and Joseph Abisa participate in an IRC/Triple-S planning meeting

of institutions responsible for rural water service delivery in many ways - for instance building the capacity of the HPMA's to perform their roles; training of the Hand Pump Mechanics District Water Officers, Health Assistants and the Community Development Officers; sensitisation of the communities on the relevance of contributing funds for operations and maintenance; and engagements with the Water Source Committees.

The Triple-S Uganda project has also done a lot of documentation and sharing. This has been reflected in the annual Sector Performance Reports. Part of the Triple-S documentation has also been used to influence the adoption of certain practices for instance the Hand Pump Mechanics Association model which initially existed but with limited visibility until the Triple-S project amplified it. It was later adopted by the Ministry and scaled up across all the districts in the country. What an achievement!

One may wonder how Triple-S motivated other actors to adopt our ideas and innovations. Most of the innovations introduced by Triple-S are usually done through a robust action research process. This encourages the community buy in into these innovations and increases the chances of sustainability of these innovations especially in the rural areas. Most sector actors therefore often give attention to

Triple-S ideas because they are well thought out and systematically researched before they are proposed for adoption and scale up.

During my time at Triple-S Uganda, I have learned that the strength of Triple-S as a project lies in pioneering and testing the development and use of new innovations of which little was known in the rural water sub sector. I have also learned that successful implementation of any WASH interventions largely depends on closer collaboration with the Local Governments such as the District Water Office and TSUs.

Going forward, the sector should allocate more resources to the improvement of functionality figures of the rural water sources. On the other hand, sustaining the ongoing innovations within the sector is still a challenge that needs to be given sufficient attention. For instance whereas there are guidelines for establishing HPMA's, these have largely not been implemented. There is need to follow up so that all the HPMA's in the country become functional.

If there is a chance for Triple-S to enter yet another phase, I would suggest we put more emphasis on action research; more community involvement in activities of Triple S; accountability for the resources through budget tracking surveys; and more documentation of Triple-S activities for sharing within the sector.

5 WE RAISED THE PROFILE OF THE LEARNING APPROACH

Martin Watsisi was the District Learning Facilitator based in Kabarole District. He was part of the team that organised the first ever Rwenzori Regional Learning Forum, which is now an annual event on the region's WASH calendar. His is a story of learning all the way.

From the onset, the Triple-S initiative embarked on the rigorous challenge of practicing and promoting learning in the Uganda WASH sector at the national, regional and district levels. We targeted the events at all levels to provide learning opportunities and to foster the learning agenda.

Even as we went through the process of selecting pilot districts the main focus was on the learning that they would provide. There were over 15 conditions set against which the pilot districts would be selected. Some of the conditions were: population size and its economic status; water coverage of 55%-70%; functionality rate of 70%-80%; willingness and capacity of district leadership to learn and undertake innovative approaches to improve water service delivery and to co-finance related activities; mix of water supply technologies; existence of water implementing agencies including government, NGOs and development partners.

Two districts were selected on the basis that they provided a good learning opportunity – Kabarole district with a mix of water supply technologies and high coverage; alongside Lira with a lower coverage and limited technologies.

Not that precedents were nonexistent. Learning initiatives like Learning for Policy and Practices in Sanitation (LEAPPS) and



Performance Improvement through Learning for Sanitation (PILS) had already made an entry point, albeit to a limited scale. LEAPPs had just wound up in the Rwenzori Region, while PILS was in its last days in the North. To learn from experience, the district learning facilitators attended a PILS Multi Stakeholder Platform in Gulu. At a



Martin Wasisi, Kabarole District Learning Facilitator, addresses participants in a sub-county advocacy meeting

higher level IRC organised the international symposium on sustainability in April 2010. Such forums provided us guidance and impetus for learning.

Having already seen the need and the potential of the learning approach, in Kabarole it was suggested right from the Triple-S inception meeting that learning should not be limited to the district level, but to the regional level, covering the entire Rwenzori region. But it was not going to be easy to convince “implementers” to learn about what they were doing.

Often WASH actors associated the word learning to schooling. They wondered how this would benefit their practice. To them, learning was a form of systematic training process they were to undergo.

The period that followed was characterized by unrelenting efforts to increase the interest of sector players in learning. A systematic process for developing common understanding of Learning in the WASH sector was undertaken including presentations, buy in meetings and clear indication of benefits to the sector and individual practitioners and their organisations. Key of these appealing benefits was jointly analyse challenges and find solutions as well as benefiting from each others experiences. Sharing experiences became a catchword in the Rwenzori region to denote learning.

To introduce learning in the Triple-S pilot districts, a learning journey to Amuria district was organised. Participants including selected members of the District Water and Sanitation coordination committee (DWSCC) meetings were taken specifically to learn about district level coordination of WASH stakeholders. This saw the beginning of properly planned DWSCC meetings in Lira and Kabarole districts. The learning approach was also introduced to Kamwenge District during one of the DWSCC meetings, and the practice of integrating learning in all DWSCC meetings continues to date. That same year, Triple-S worked with SNV and regional level actors to organise the first Rwenzori Regional Learning Forum in October 2010. This has since become an annual event on the WASH calendar of the Region.

Indeed, learning has now become a common phenomenon in the sector. Regional Learning Forums are now a key part of the sector. The Northern Uganda Regional Learning Forum, also spearheaded by Triple-S is now featuring for the third time. UWASNET has also organised Regional Learning Forums in Eastern Uganda and Central Uganda. There were even learning visits organised to garner lessons about specific interventions. These included the learning journey where the northern Uganda team visited Kabarole to learn about HPMA; and another where a team from Rwenzori region visited northern

Uganda to learn about village loans and savings schemes on water and sanitation.

It is worth noting that Triple-S no longer has to be directly involved in organising the learning events. The second and third editions of Rwenzori Regional Learning Forum were led and organised by local partners like JESE and HEWASA while the 4th edition was organised by TSU6. In the north TSU 2 and UWASNET are taking lead. Learning is indeed gaining a foothold in the sector.

Apart from promoting the learning approach among key actors, Triple-S also made efforts to try out and promote new innovations and good practices. Take the HPMA for example. After a presentation in a National Learning Forum and the first Rwenzori Regional Learning Forum organised by Triple-S and partners, Triple-S worked with SNV to develop a concept note based on which the Ministry adopted and endorsed the HPMA as a strategy to improve functionality of rural water systems.

Triple-S also sought to accelerate sector learning by involving the media. The idea was to take advantage of their expertise in identifying and profiling community issues and their wide reach. The first media dialogues organised in Kabarole, Lira and Kampala resulted into increased media interest in WASH issues. In Kabarole and Lira the media were invited to be part of the DWSCC and the Regional Learning Forum. A national network for WASH media practitioners has since been formed, although still in its infant stages.

But even when new ideas did not result into anticipated results, we learnt from the process. Such was the case when we introduced the Sensemaker tool which was meant to analyse trends in the sector. While it didn't produce the anticipated results, the whole process of collecting stories taught us how to engage with communities on future projects like data collection for Service Delivery Indicators (SDIs)

Documentation has been the bedrock of learning in the Triple-S Uganda workstream. For example the short documentaries we always produced became a useful tool for

sharing information and propelled learning. We never attended any event without a writeup; a presentation; a briefing note; a newspaper article; a shot film....

This success can largely be attributed to the ability of Triple-S learning facilitators to articulate the benefits of sector learning; the existing learning initiatives; and the willingness to try out new ideas.

Generally the picture of learning in Triple-S has been of looking both inside and outside. Internally learning has involved the entire consortium and has always been at the centre of planning, review and adaptation of strategies. On the outside, we focused on influencing others to create harmony and better coordination to gain collective impact. It has been a journey of discovery and working with other stakeholders to influence change in the sector.



A water users' meeting at Okello Amuku well, Akolodong village, Lira district



Telela Village, Ngetta Sub county, Lira district

6 A CHANGE AGENT BEHIND THE SCENES

Robert Otim was the District learning facilitator based in Lira district. Through his involvement, Triple-S contributed to transition of Lira District's WASH sector from the post-conflict humanitarian situation to the development phase. Through that process he learnt what it really meant to facilitate learning.

From the job advertisement to the actual start of the project, it was apparent that the Triple-S project depicted complexity, which I had heard about and longed to delve into. Getting my appointment as a District Learning Facilitator was exciting, although I was perturbed by the fact that it was not known what district I would be posted to.

Having come from the orthodox way of project implementation where staff were commonly referred to as officers, coordinators or managers, the title of District Learning Facilitator did not appeal to me. But what mattered most was the prospect of diving into the complex environment and starting on the journey of discovering that complexity. Also, having worked with District Local Governments for several years I was getting tired of the conventional approaches and titles. So I quickly gained interest and inspired myself to identify with Triple-S.

Following progressive internalisation of the Triple-S theory of change, I got to understand that in my position I was primarily a change agent. My role was to catalyse a movement to cause a paradigm shift from doing WASH business as usual; from one-off projects to sustainable services; from mere coordination to deeper reflection and learning; from unconscious practice to empirical evidence-based experiments and testing of innovation; from anecdotal documentation and information sharing to multiplier sector learning.



As a facilitator, I had to work from behind the scenes and through existing and mandated structures. To be a successful learning facilitator, I had to win the confidence of all actors involved in the process – local leaders, local government technocrats, civil society actors and group of like-minded facilitators.

Thus I went into Lira district ready to trigger the paradigm shift that Triple-S professed by simply facilitating the process; by creating and promoting space for people to critically test and question processes, strategies, methods, concepts, ideas on planning and service delivery.

At that time, Northern Uganda was just emerging from the protracted insurgency which pitted the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) against the Government of Uganda. The extended humanitarian situation had resulted into people largely relying on handouts for their daily lives. WASH service delivery was based on prevailing needs in the Internally Displaced People's Camps (IDP Camps).

With the return of peace and subsequent disintegration of the IDP Camps, new realities emerged around WASH service provision and particularly Operation and Maintenance (O&M). As people left the camps to return to their homes, they needed water supply facilities. Meanwhile they were leaving numerous functional and non-functional facilities in the IDP camps. Over 90% of the sources in Lira were located in IDP Camps.

The return of peace also meant that key actors had to transition from the humanitarian to the development phase. Local governments at district and sub county levels, community based organisations, civil society organisations all had to follow suit. UNICEF which had been the coordinator of the WASH actors also exited Lira in 2009. Coordination meetings were not held for nearly a year.

When Triple-S opened base in Lira in August 2010, our job was cut out. Right from the inception meeting when Triple-S was launched in the district, throughout our four years in operation, Triple-S has played a leading role in the WASH sector in Lira district. Our most outstanding interventions in Lira include

- Rejuvenation of the Lira District Water And Sanitation Coordination Committee (DWSCC) meetings
- Starting up the Northern Regional Learning Forum
- Organising joint Learning and reflection journeys
- Initiation of Sub County Water and Sanitation Coordination Committees (SCWSCCs)
- Initiation and testing of the Lira District Hand Pump Mechanics Association HPMA
- Introducing and testing the Sub County Water Supply and Sanitation Boards in six sub counties

I feel privileged to have been part of the process of change in the Lira District WASH sector.



Robert Otim interacts with water users in Ngetta sub county, Lira district

7 ALL IS WELL WHEN THERE IS VALUE FOR MONEY

Winnie Musoke was the Triple-S Uganda Office Manager. While she was busy with the finances and accounts, Winnie was always keenly aware of what was happening with programme activities. She shares her experience.

When she joined the Triple-S Initiative in 2009, Winnie Musoke thought it was going to be daunting. Initially everything looked complex and complicated. There was a lot of reading required to understand the project. The content of the documents provided was very complicated. "I thought this was going to be a difficult project to implement," she says. But by the end of the first year of implementation, everything was clearer and the project was rolling well.

Being a lady of figures, one may think Winnie was not keeping tabs on the programme activities. But her observations tell of a person who was following keenly and seeing the impact that Triple-S was having on the Uganda rural water sub sector. "Triple-S supported the sector to improve and update key policies and guidelines. We also helped to influence water user perceptions on ownership of service. And by supporting the HPMA's, we contributed to the improvement of water services and livelihoods," Winnie explains.

Speaking from a Finance Manager's point of view, all was well when activities were implemented, office events were successful and project audits were completed without raising unanswerable queries. Thus, Winnie was always looking to see if every approach used and every activity undertaken was money well spent. For her, working within existing structures without reinventing the wheel; and working with existing professionals who already had the skills as opposed to hiring



and training new experts were winning formulae which demonstrated that Triple-S was not going to waste resources.

Now that the initiative is coming to an end, one wonders what the overall Triple-S Office Manager takes home as key lessons. "The key lesson is that an organisation gets a lot of mileage by working in partnership with other players in the sector," Winnie says.



Apii Pee village,
Lira District, Lira Sub
County

8 LEARNING NEVER ENDS!

Lydia Mirembe was the Triple-S Communication and Advocacy Officer. She tells of memorable learning events and the need to take the lessons forward in order to attain water services that last.

When I joined Triple-S in 2010, it was like wandering into unknown territory. I did not care much for Rural Water Service Delivery, considering that it was commonplace for people to go without water. In my own area of residence, we have dry taps for extended periods and we have to go water-hunting high and low.

But in preparation for Triple-S, I was exposed to statistics that took me aback. In a country where 80% of the population lives in rural areas, only 64% of that population had access to safe water. I wondered how 36% of Uganda's rural population survived. Moreover, even the 64% coverage was not fully reliable given that over 15% of the sources were non functional. And to think that progress in that area had stagnated for over three years! Several factors were blamed for the situation key among them: Poor choice of technology; Negative community attitude and behaviour toward operation and maintenance; Exogenous factors like seasonal changes; Focus on constructing new water supply systems rather than on post construction support.

So here was Triple-S, jumping into the fray – not offering new rural water facilities, but preaching sustainability of the existing ones. How was Triple-S going to do this? Some people asked: why do you attend to facilities that you have not constructed? Others told us bluntly: people want water, they are interested in facilities. How many boreholes



are you going to construct? What is Triple-S bringing on the table?

As insiders we had our own struggles understanding Triple-S. We called ourselves the anti-project project. There was a whole host of new concepts and ideas: the principle's framework; the theory of change; the service delivery approach; service delivery models; service life-cycle; life cycle costs...How were we going to communicate all these ideas to people in the sector?



But this is what made the prospect exciting. Communication was going to play a critical role. We had to adopt strategies that would ensure the Triple-S message sunk in. But first, we the insiders had a lot of learning to do – as a team and as individuals.

Internal meetings and interactions made learning easier. The 2010 inception meeting in Accra will be forever etched in memory. We argued. We joked. We challenged each other.....and at the end of it all, we were beginning to find our bearings. We understood where Triple-S had come from and where we intended to go.

But there was more learning to do – about Triple-S and about the WASH sector. Regular learning retreats were always something to look forward to especially because every time we convened, we seemed to have a different understanding of what it is we were doing. Learning never seemed to end!

By the end of the inception period in May 2010, Triple-S was ready to take off, but questions about value-addition persisted. Sometimes it

felt like we were going back and forth, not knowing exactly what we were on about.

Meanwhile for me the learning continued. Every field trip, every meeting, was a learning experience. The learning trip to Logiri Sub County in Arua district taught me about sub-county level coordination of WASH stakeholders. The learning visit to Kamwenge district taught me much about sanitation technologies. The national learning event about self supply helped in shaping our understanding of learning events.

There was more learning in sector events. IRC being adaptive and responsive, we always looked out for strategic opportunities and found ways of harnessing them to enhance our message of water services that last. We were always looking at these as opportunities to learn and to teach others about the Triple-S approach. We participated in prime sector meetings, Inter-District meetings, sub county advocacy meetings and civil society meetings organised by UWASNET.

Through our documentation I learnt a lot more about the realities of rural water service delivery. The field trips to document good practices, innovations always brought me face to face with the realities of rural water service delivery. It was always good to hear stories of lives that had changed. Take for example the women in Lira district whose livelihoods changed as a result of the small loans they took from the water user fees collections at their source.

It was also disheartening to see areas where in spite of the interventions, nothing seemed to change. This was especially the case when Triple-S worked with NETWAS to train Water User Committees on good governance and accountability, only for most WUCs to fail to apply the lessons.

By end of 2011, Triple-S was deeply ensconced in the sector. We had managed to carve out a niche as the “sustainability and learning” people. Once on a documentation exercise in Kabarole, I introduced myself and told people that I was from Triple-S. They chorused in Rutooro, “bano ab’amaizi” (the water people!) “Sustainability” became a buzzword in the DWSCCs and in national forums.

Around this time, we undertook the Mid-Term Assessment (MTA). The findings were as revealing as they were reassuring.

The feedback from the MTA process revealed Triple-S weak areas and also highlighted the strong areas. The feedback formed the basis for a re-planning process.

The process led us to identify key research areas, which we chose to call experiments. I came to appreciate that the use of the word “experiments” was in a way allowing us to acknowledge that along the way we may make mistakes, but most importantly we learn from our experiences. Failure is part of the learning process. It reminded me of 2010/11 when we experimented with Sensemaker and in the end we agreed that the method hadn’t quite served our purposes and we had to let it go.

Since 2013, the Uganda workstream has rolled out activities under the seven research areas/experiments. There is a lot of learning for the team and the sector. Take for example: With the SDIs and the SDM study report, the sector is for the first time getting monitoring data on water user satisfaction. The revised District Implementation Manual (DIM) is providing opportunities and lessons for improved coordination of sector actors at district level.

As the initiative winds up the most important question is: how do we take the lessons forward in order to attain water services that last.



A learning moment for Triple-S team members from Netherlands, Ghana and Uganda



Apii Pee village,
Lira District, Lira
Sub County

9 TRIPLE-S HAD COURAGE TO CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO

Jeanette De Regt is the Country Director of SNV Uganda. In an interview with Lydia Mirembe, she hailed Triple-S for having the courage to challenge the status quo.

“Functionality is the one word that comes to mind when I think about Triple-S,” Jeanette de Regt says as she shows me a picture from the Triple-S Maria cartoon series. For the SNV Uganda Country Director the Triple-S Initiative exemplifies courage to challenge the status quo.

Her cartoon of choice depicts a young girl who is going from place to place looking for water. In one instance, she is shown to be lost among a sea of signposts each displaying names of organisations that have provided water systems. But none of the systems is functioning. The apparent problem is that the providers didn't show the users how to maintain the facilities. The young Maria is left with no option but to go the river for water.

“This is the essence of functionality. You need the courage to challenge all these people who think they do great work. This is the reality,” she emphasizes as she repeatedly points at the cartoon.

Indeed that was the reality in the Ugandan rural water sector for a long time. There was a focus on investing in new water systems but not enough focus on the sustainability of those systems. People's hopes were always dashed – they are given a water supply system, it functions for a while and breaks down, leaving the users high and dry. The entry of Triple-S attracted renewed attention to the factors and conditions that affect the functionality and sustainability of those systems. The key appeal was: Focus



on the water service not the water system. Shift from one-off projects to water services that last. For Jeanette this has been one of Triple-S' most outstanding achievements.

Jeanette is optimistic that even if the initiative is coming to an end, the ideas and the strategies will live on. "The Consortium members are still here. In SNV water for all is a key part of our WASH strategy. UWASNET and NETWAS are very strong institutions. The government is also taking up the innovations and integrating them into policy. So there is no doubt that the Triple-S ideas will continue influencing the sector," she says.

Such optimism is anchored in the consortium arrangement of Triple-S, which ensured that scaling up of ideas and strategies was embedded in the project. As one of the key consortium members, SNV always ensured that Triple-S and IRC were effectively profiled and that other people knew everything

about the project. "I remember sitting here with Rene and discussing the joint WASH programme. So whenever I went out to the Dutch Embassy and to other embassies I always represented SNV and IRC," she reminisces.

She says it was good for IRC to identify likeminded organisations to implement the Triple-S Initiative in Uganda. With SNV it was indeed a special relationship. "SNV and IRC were both Netherlands-based. We both had a substantial core subsidy from the Dutch Ministry. We even had the same board Chairperson and we had the same corporate color – blue. It was very easy to connect and to work towards joint results," Jeanette further recalls.

"I still think that SNV and IRC will continue to collaborate. We are already working on some proposals together. We are good like minded partners."



Some of the cartoons used by Triple-S to convey the message of water services that last

10 DID TRIPLE-S BITE OFF TOO MUCH?

Engineer Paul Nyeko Ogiramoi was the Triple-S Liaison Officer in the Ministry of Water and Environment. He provided technical guidance and always ensured that Triple-S ideas and activities spoke to the sector. He shared his impressions with Deirdre Casella. Excerpts from the interview follow.

QUESTION: Please tell me about the time when the foundations were laid for Triple-S? What were your initial thoughts?

ANSWER: I first heard about Triple-S from my commissioner. He explained that an NGO had come to work on sustainability. My Commissioner asked me whether I wanted to be the Liaison Officer, I accepted. The catch word was sustainability and we thought this could be part of the O&M work we were doing. Indeed at first it was difficult to understand Sustainable Services at Scale. My first involvement was at the Annual Review and Planning (ARaP) meeting in Ghana where I asked a lot of questions. But it was a gradual process to know exactly what they would do.

If we reflect specifically on the idea of a learning approach, fostering collective action to achieve changes in policy, practice and dialogue on the topic of sustainable services, how was that received by you, by the Ministry of Water and Environment?

We looked at it as “biting off too much”. We did not think initially that this would result in change of policy quickly. It takes 10 years to have complete change in policy. But within five years you could see minor changes. So the approach of involving almost everyone to work on this change in policy did not look like a good idea for us. Because you need to target the weaker points if you want to hit something down, you do not hit everywhere.



Were there other areas of weakness that you thought – this is not going to work.

When Triple-S came, they were not flexible enough. The project was defined from a broad perspective and lacked the flexibility to adapt to emerging issues in the sector. The team came with Learning Approach, the Service Delivery Approach and it took us some time to know what they were talking about. At the beginning there was a lot of focus on learning. The concept was new as they were describing it. We could not get it immediately. But when we shifted to the O&M part where they said they wanted to improve Community-Based Management System, then we thought yes, now you are talking! The Service Delivery Indicators

came, the SWSSB came and HPMA came and the M4W all came – these came a little bit late. If this had been there at the beginning and the project was flexible at the beginning we could have done much better.

What was your role and the role of your Department in the Ministry in the Initiative?

I took an advisory role in the beginning to advise on how best to fit into the sector and what the Ministry was doing. However, later on, I did quite a number of technical inputs into all the documents being produced and to advise on the different policies that the Ministry had. The role of the ministry was to guide the Triple-S direction.

What did the Ministry buy into?

The Ministry bought into the concept of service delivery actually. In the beginning, Triple-S framed the message wrongly emphasising “the service, not the infrastructure.” But in the Ministry view, the service starts from the infrastructure, in fact from the planning and then infrastructure and then the service starts coming. So it is not only about the service, but also the infrastructure. These are the kind of buy in issues which I was trying to point out saying: “you know, if you talk like this your concept will be bought, but if you say it is not infrastructure, nobody is going to listen to you.”

What practically has changed now that Triple-S uses the right language to present the concept?

The mindset of those stakeholders engaged by Triple-S has changed regarding how we understand a service. Triple-S has provided input especially towards understanding functionality. We now look at functionality from a new perspective. Also the policies on financing O&M are changing because of Triple-S. This can be seen in the in the O&M Frameworks and in the HPMA Framework that we have developed. The District local governments were demanding a review of the percentage allocation for financing O&M which was very small. Triple-S added a voice and we have now reviewed the formula for the allocation of District Conditional Grants. That is already a policy change.

High-level changes can take up to 10 years. We are nearing the six-year mark and the end of Triple-S. Has the Triple-S consortium approach made a difference in terms of how fast these changes could take place?

Yes, the consortium approach was good. But it should have focussed on one or a few things only. Triple-S was covering so many things. But, yes the consortium approach accelerated the changes. If we use the same approach I think we would realise change more quickly. But we need to focus on only a few things. So many things in one basket means you will go slow in terms of change. Using existing platforms, involving the stakeholders was the right way to speed up policy change.

If you had to sum up in a one pitch, or brief statement, what was the added value of Triple-S?

The added value is more on the improvement that we are realising now as far as community based management systems are concerned; the monitoring of water supply services and coordination among the stakeholders. Those are the three areas where Triple-S added value.

What will be important going forward to move towards, talking about services that last?

When we talk about services, it is not only the software. A bit of hardware needs to come in, for instance, the quality of materials to ensure water services can last. The infrastructure, its quality, how it is built all need attention. Software and hardware should be balanced without one being left out.

Any other points you would want to have noted about Triple-S and the approach taken.

Yes, one observation has from the very beginning been about staffing. The number of staff was inadequate. Only one staff per district cannot lead to the expected changes. At the centre there were only three staff to start with. Also, a water professional should have been hired among the project staff.

11 ACCESS TO WATER STILL A CHALLENGE IN RURAL AREAS

Protocol bathing – that is a term coined by Doreen Wandera the Executive Director of UWASNET as she humorously talks about the reality that exists in many a rural household where access to safe water is a distant dream.

After a long day in the fields people in rural areas return home to find only 20 litres of water. Because they can't bear the thought of trekking the distance to fetch some more water, they try to use the 20 litres sparingly, mindful not to waste a single drop. Bath time comes with strict observance of family protocol. The mother pours a few litres of water in the basin. The father and head of household bathes first. He is followed by the wife and then the children in descending order. Apparently, everyone steps in the basin, washes his or her feet and selected parts of the body, and then steps out to give the next person a chance. In between turns, the water is left to settle. The top water is then decanted into another basin and the dirt is poured away.

Scenes of protocol bathing play out in many rural households in Uganda, on a daily basis. The effects especially on household sanitation are there for all to see. In a country where only 64% of the rural population has access to safe water, this is likely to continue long after the 2015 MDG timeframe has passed. Whereas the government set a target of 77% access by 2015, progress has been slow owing to numerous factors.

By telling the story of protocol bathing, Doreen wants to highlight the fact that access to safe water in rural areas is still a challenge. She challenges all actors to continue with ongoing efforts to increase access, but most of all to work towards improved functionality and sustainability of



water systems – which is what she finds most outstanding about the Triple-S Initiative in Uganda.

“Before the Triple-S Initiative we were all shy to talk about sustainability,” Doreen says. “Triple-S was unique because it came out to handle an important niche that had been neglected in the sector. We aimed to increase coverage by sinking new boreholes and other systems but we barely talked about sustainability,” she adds, as

she enumerates the many ideas, innovations and good practices that she observed about Triple-S.

Firstly, Doreen says, Triple-S raised awareness about the importance of functionality. The message was clear: It is not bad to have systems but they need maintenance. They need rehabilitation and repair. "We started talking about functionality freely. That is how we got the functionality working group in UWASNET. We even made it a theme on one of the WASH CSO Forums," Doreen recalls.

Doreen further says that Triple-S unpacked sustainability for the understanding of ordinary people in NGOs, communities and other stakeholders. "We discovered that it is not the role of government to ensure that water supply systems are functional and reliable. All stakeholders have a role to play including water users; technical personnel; political leaders; development partners; private sector actors."

Besides unpacking sustainability, Triple-S supported UWASNET's capacity building and knowledge sharing. This was especially in the areas of communication and coordination. Triple-S worked with UWASNET to produce the regional coordinator's manual which was meant to strengthen the coordination capacity of the network. Triple-S also facilitated UWASNET trainings and capacity building activities. "Triple-S staff were involved in all our forums, often taking leadership roles," she adds. Other activities that Triple-S did with UWASNET include producing the annual NGO sector performance report; writing and presenting papers; support to regional coordination; and direct funding of activities.

"We had a true partnership. There are some project where you are called partners but the partnership is one sided. We were always consulted and Triple-s was a good listener. Being a part of the consortium ensured UWASNET benefited in more ways than one," Doreen explains.



Children carry their water home after fetching from a nearby tapstand, Kicwamba sub county, Kabarole district

However she notes that Triple-S should have scaled up beyond just two districts.

The Triple-S concepts are good but need fast replication. But with only two pilot districts, replication might take longer. Even as Triple-S Initiative is phasing out, a lot of challenges remain in the sector thus the current actors and new entrants should know where to focus their energies. The UWASNET ED points out the following areas:

Centralise water so that everything rotates around it. All development should be centred around water. Advocacy experts should take this up. Integrate water into development. Water should be at the centre of agriculture; water should be at the centre of health; water should be at the centre of education.

Support data monitoring and update. There is need for a functional monitoring and evaluation system. This applies to the whole sector. We should think of harmonising approaches. We should all present our data on the same table. Need to harmonise sector information even with sister sectors e.g health, education,

NGOs are stuck in pilots. There are too many technologies being piloted but where are they documented? The Appropriate Technology Centre (ATC) ought to play a more prominent role and tell us what is working and what is not working. Which of those technologies should be scaled up?

What role can the private sector play? There is need to engage the private sector to do things differently. e.g Turning waste into wealth.

Rainwater harvesting should be emphasised. The rural water sub sector is very strong especially in provision of systems. Even the urban sub sector is strong and efficient. But all these are done by the government. The role of individual NGOs and other players in utilizing other appropriate options which may be even cheaper. As we wait for the pipes we should be doing something for ourselves. This will ensure increase in access and coverage.

Harvest water for sanitation. Water harvesting should be used to improve hygiene at household level. This should especially be promoted in areas which are hard to reach where piped schemes are a distant dream. Don't wait for government to give. Do something. Otherwise protocol bathing will be a forever phenomenon.



A young boy comes to a borehole to collect water for domestic use, Apii Pee village, Lira sub county.



Obanga Otwero borehole, Onyalo village, Lira Sub County

12 TRIPLE-S BUILT ON SECTOR STRUCTURES, INNOVATIONS

Cate Nimanya is Country Director Water For People and former Programme Manager, NETWAS Uganda. She was involved in the country scoping study which laid the foundation for the Triple-S Initiative in Uganda. She regards Triple-S as a game changer of sorts.

When Triple-S was introduced in 2009, the sector was already experiencing great successes. Compared to other countries, the Ugandan Water and Sanitation sector has always been described as mature. With numerous sector documents, strategies and policies; the 11 golden indicators for monitoring; significant improvement in coverage statistics; and several innovations that were just waiting to be scaled up, the sector was basking in success.

Enter Triple-S and WASH actors realised that there was much more work to do. People came to realise that the water and sanitation sector was not at its best. They realised that they could do better in more areas, especially on functionality and sustainability of rural water services.

To begin with, Triple-S made us realise that it was necessary to move away from the mere counting of systems and focus on the service that people ultimately enjoy. So while the golden indicators provided the numbers, they did not provide the detail on the level of service received. As such, Triple-S gave depth to the golden indicators by developing the Service Delivery Indicators (SDIs) which would address deeper concerns like user satisfaction and quality of service.

For organisations like NETWAS and SNV, Triple-S provided an opportunity to scale up innovations that had been stuck at pilot stage for a long time. SNV had been working with



some HPMA in Arua and Kasese. People knew that HPMA were necessary but they were not promoting them. HPMA were largely unknown and invisible. NETWAS had been trying out sector learning, and piloting water and sanitation boards. But all these were still at pilot stage. With the Triple-S initiative, we had access to some resources which enabled us to scale up. Triple-S provided us with the impetus and the energy we needed to scale up these things. Now the HPMA are in all districts; Water boards are rolling out in many sub counties; learning has become a buzzword in the sector.



The attainment of such achievements is mostly attributable to the Triple-S approach of working in partnerships. There was a time when NGOs would go it alone, focusing on what they knew best. But Triple-S looked at the bigger sector picture. You cannot go to scale alone because you do not have the resources. So Triple-S aligned itself to like-minded organisations and worked together to bring lasting change in the sector. For learning, the initiative aligned with NETWAS; for advocacy Triple-S aligned with UWASNET; for policy change and direction Triple-S aligned with the Ministry of Water and Environment.

The other aspect that enabled Triple-S to enjoy success was its focus on documentation, communication and media engagement. Triple-S inspired media profiling of the key concerns in the sector. It started off with the conference on sustainability, which raised people's awareness about the need to go beyond systems. The conference highlighted the issues that must be addressed in order to attain sustainable services at scale. This was followed by regular documentation and sharing on different platforms including the mass media. With time, key personalities in the sector stopped being shy about the key sector challenges. They started addressing the issues openly e.g. at press conferences. They started appreciating that indeed there was more work to do about rural water service delivery.

Even as the Triple-S initiative phases out, there is still more work to be done. IRC and other actors should therefore build on the successes of Triple-S. For example, the sector needs to look at ICTs more critically

because they offer a cheaper and effective way of monitoring service delivery. M4W and FLOW have been tested by Triple-S and Water for People respectively. Now the sector needs to move away from paper-based monitoring to ICT-based monitoring of services. How can they build on M4W or FLOW?

There is need to test the innovations beyond the two regions where Triple-S was piloted. At this point, the innovations like M4W, WSSBS have been tested and proven. They need to be spread to other parts of the country. In this regard, the partnership approach should be maintained. IRC should therefore identify partners with whom to work and build their capacities to carry on the gains. The TSUs and umbrella organisations; Private sector associations; ULGA are all avenues that IRC can work with to scale up innovations.

Capacity building is yet another area that IRC and other actors can look at critically. IRC has always been known for capacity building and facilitating knowledge sharing. From past experiences, projects that had a strong component of capacity building always left a lasting legacy. What the sector needs are longer-term capacity building programmes, not one-off workshops. Imagine if Triple-S stayed another five years, the sector would be very well capacitated at district and national level. Donors may not want to invest in capacity building but there is need to dialogue with them to see the value of long term capacity building programmes to secure the future of the sector. Looking back at Triple-S, I can say that the initiative was a true game changer.

13 LEARNING IS DELIBERATE NOT BY ACCIDENT

“You cannot keep sounding your drums from inside. The insiders are already converted. You should be drumming for the outsiders to hear.” That is the analogy Chemisto Satya uses to describe one of the key lessons he learnt from the Triple-S Initiative. Chemisto is the national WASH advisor in SNV Uganda and has worked closely with the Triple-S Initiative since its inception.

My story with Triple-S goes back to 2009 when discussions about the initiative had just started. Jo Smet and Harold Lockwood were in Uganda to see how the initiative would take shape. It was a unique and interesting opportunity. It came with a unique approach in terms of how they were going to work and with whom. Even when the advert finally came out for a Country Coordinator, all the consortium partners came together to take a decision – it was a multi-stakeholder platform in its own way. That was already a unique dimension to the project.

Triple-S has achieved so much. I want to go beyond the examples of tangible things we always want to see. Triple-S applied a unique approach of mainly engaging policy makers and implementers at all levels. The approach moves from business as usual and away from the theory. It involved active interaction and brainstorming with policy makers and implementers; seeing what works or what does not work; giving room for testing cases and adapting strategies.

Key lessons learnt

One of the things that we at SNV have learnt from Triple-S is the need to have a specialized person in communication. Previously we did not see the need for publicity or the need to tell our story. The Triple-S initiative brought



out the role of communication in every work that we do. You cannot keep beating your drums from inside when the outsiders cannot hear. The insiders are already converted. It is the outsiders that you should be drumming for.

Learning is not by accident, it is deliberate: Inside the Triple-S consortium, there was

deliberate learning through rigorous reflections at particular intervals of the year. I've learnt that you don't learn by accident. You set out to know: What have I done well? Where do I need to change? I remember in 2009 when we were just starting to think about Triple-S, the sector was grappling with the Joint Sector Review (JSR) meetings. Learning was not planned for. For example, the organisers were not taking the trouble to ask: What are we documenting? What are we sharing with people? Triple-S demonstrated that you can learn as you move but also be very systematic. Learning has to be built into everything you do. You even need personnel who are dedicated to facilitating learning.

Lessons applied: If you take the Revised District Implementation Manual (DIM) for instance. It is a typical example of concerted effort to apply lessons from all the experiments and the engagements in the field. It was a question of identifying what had worked in the old DIM and what had not worked. The revisions in the DIM were based on experiences gathered from implementation. It involved going out and engaging with the end users of the DIM including HPMs and WUCs; asking them questions about what needed to change.

Action research: I have learnt a lot from Triple-S action research. Learn as you move and adapt as you go. A good example of action research is the Mobile Phones for Water (M4W) initiative. We deliberately

went out there to learn with stakeholders. We captured their views and kept modifying the approach based on their needs. It was based on continuous feedback of the different stakeholders. Any initiative you undertake, you need to confirm that it is actually working. You make many assumptions in the beginning but the reality may differ. Learning is not confined to what you get and document from the field but continuously testing what you are doing. Action research is in the work we do every day.

Documentation: Triple-S made us realise that we must be on top of the documentation game. We realised that documents expire. We must remain current and be alert in order to document all developments in our work. You need to churn out useful and current documents all the time.

Media engagement: If you want to send out a message widely, you have to work with the media. You need to put deliberate effort and engage them effectively. We have learnt that the media don't have to be expensive. You have to dialogue and also tell them your message clearly.

Round pegs in round holes: If you realise that cutting down a big tree will take you eight hours, you should spend seven hours sharpening the axe then it will take only one hour to do the actual job. For every project you need skilled staff. The timely and systematic execution of Triple-S as well as staff retention throughout the project is a good indicator that the right people were



Staff from TSU2, SNV, NETWAS and Triple-S undertake training in process documentation, Kampala 2011



Participants from different partner organisations in a process documentation training, Kampala 2011

selected from the start. The caliber of staff on the Triple-s project loved their work, enjoyed their work and delivered the project.

Triple-S ripples throughout the sector:

Some projects come and pass without anyone noticing they ever existed. Triple-S was implemented in only two districts but the project was felt everywhere in the sector. Project usefulness is about content not geographical coverage. From the start, Triple-S was realistic about what the initiative could do and what it couldn't do. The stakeholders then would determine how to position themselves to work with Triple-S. This made it possible for sector actors to extrapolate, basing on the work in Lira and Kabarole. It is important to do whatever little you can but do it very well and thoroughly.

Triple-S legacy enconced: First of all the Triple-S approach ensured that lessons were embedded in the sector. The level of engagement with different stakeholders is already embedding the work of Triple-S. Triple-S has rubbed on to the consortium members and to everyone who had an opportunity to engage with the initiative. Additionally, the work of Triple-S has been documented. The fruits have been shared and adopted by others. For example working with the MWE to secure PPDA clearance on engagement of HPMA; the media network is here to stay. Other organisations in the sector are already engaging with them HPMA and WEMNET. These have outlived Triple-S already.

Indeed many people have gained knowledge from Triple-S and they will apply the lessons for a long time to come. Moreover, Triple-S made it clear that the project was staying for only five years so people were prepared for that and they have been asking: how do we continue with the good work?

Functionality, capacity building key issues for the future

The WASH sector is vibrant and fast changing. It is not static. The sector is responsive to prevailing needs. But these needs also reflect the lessons you learn along the way. Functionality will remain a key issue, given the many factors that surround it. The sector now realises that when you bring technology it needs maintenance. There will be need to introduce institutions and structures that address functionality.

The issue of capacity will remain key in the sector. The ministry is already working through TSUs to enable practical engagement with Local Governments. They are seen as representatives of the ministry. The TSUs fit neatly with the needs of the sector and its core functions. The local governments are here to stay so we need mechanisms that address their needs. TSUs will come in handy to support local governments. For the foreseeable future, sector actors should therefore focus their efforts on the matter of capacity building at local government level, through TSUs.



Happy to have enough water for her and her children. Kicwamba sub county, Kabarole district

14 TRIPLE-S FOUND A NICHE AND WAS RECOGNISED FOR IT

Solomon Kyeyune works with WaterAid but previously worked with NETWAS (U) as Knowledge Management Coordinator, focusing on WASH sector learning. He participated in the inception, and to a great extent, the implementation of the Triple-S Initiative in Uganda. He shared his impressions with Deirdre Casella. Below are excerpts from their conversation.

QUESTION: How did you come to know of Triple-S and how were you involved in the initiative?

ANSWER: Working at NETWAS at that time, I knew Triple-S at the time of inception. There were discussions around how Triple-S would be structured, and where it would be located. We were tasked to develop a baseline document on the rural water sector in Uganda – assessing various elements of decentralised service delivery. We wrote a Country Study Report on Uganda which assessed the sustainability challenges that Triple S initiative was to address.

When Triple-S started we had began focusing on sector learning. We wanted to look for a way to anchor what we were doing in sector learning. In the previous year, NETWAS had organised the first National Learning Forum and it was about the learning approach. In 2010 the Triple-S Initiative became part of the learning forum providing support in terms of expertise, funds and time. The Triple-S National Learning Facilitator particularly gave time to NETWAS to support learning. At that time, learning was done in consortium arrangement involving Triple-S, SNV, WaterAid, Uganda Rain Water Association, UWASNET and Ministry of Water and Environment.



Did you have questions at that time about the added value of Triple-S, a newcomer?

Triple-S came as a learning initiative. At that time we were struggling to market the concept of learning in the sector. We saw Triple-S as an opportunity to profile learning within the sector. Therefore Triple-S added value to what we were doing.



Solomon Kyeyune (centre) leads a discussion during the Rwenzori Regional Learning Forum, Kabarole 2012.

What was the intensity of NETWAS involvement in the consortium? What was the process to find what it would mean to work together in a new consortium?

The way the project was designed – there was a lot of time to bring consortium members together and craft out what the project meant. There was the principles framework and we worked on developing it with Triple-S and that would locate the different roles of various partners with ease. The process of defining what Triple-S would do in Uganda was facilitated by the consortium members.

Were the members part of shaping Triple-S therefore?

Yes, I attended several meetings to discuss how the different things would be working. We were only focusing on functionality and sustainability of rural water services. Over time we went from delivery of water, to services at scale and then shifted to water services that last. The idea was evolving as we were learning from the experience.

Can you provide a concrete example of something that followed these steps of

evolution from delivering water services at scale to water services that last and where that could be observed?

There was the example of the Hand Pump Mechanics Association (HPMA) in Kibale district. It was presented at a National Learning Forum and it was documented. Triple-S then started to work with other actors to profile the HPMA as a methodology that could enhance rural water service delivery. Eventually a steering committee was constituted to promote the HPMA in the sector. The Ministry assigned Triple-S to write a concept note about the HPMA. The concept note was presented to the sector through the Ministry and in one of the Annual Joint Sector Review meetings, the HPMA was adopted as an undertaking. Now it is an agreed methodology to engage Hand Pump Mechanics in the regular O&M of rural water services.

What has this profiling of learning brought with it for the sector – are there observed changes at sector level?

At sector level we were able to bring about a movement that dealt with everyone who

was trying to do something about learning. We saw UWASNET multiply that through its regional coordinators. Also, new projects started adopting learning for example the Dutch WASH Alliance engaged NETWAS to facilitate learning. Dutch WASH Alliance also provided UWASNET with funds to promote learning. Within the Government we started to have discussions about how learning could happen, and what form it would take.

There have also been changes in the way the Thematic Working Groups work. The Functionality group, chaired by Triple-S is moving towards a learning approach. The Self-supply Steering Committee is also adopting the same approach – so we see in the sector, a number of thematic working groups starting to take this up.

It is difficult to say that the sector is learning as a whole. But, it becomes easier if the learning is more on a Thematic Area and in a Thematic Group. I have seen this happening, in the National Sanitation working Group for example. In 2012 the World Bank – Water and Sanitation Programme (WSP) facilitated a learning mapping exercise and recently we had the sanitation conference “Unclogging Sanitation Blockages”. At the lower level district level coordination has improved. Particularly in Kabarole and Lira districts, coordination meetings have changed – there is more time for reflection, observing, addressing and having solutions to some of these challenges. These are all observable changes.

What would you say was unique about the Triple-S approach?

For the years I have been in the sector, we have been able to sink boreholes, able to put latrines and do all these things. But the challenge is that we are in a cycle of sinking more while others are failing. The value of Triple-S has been the realisation that we can be able to actually have services that last, and at scale. This has been an issue that requires a lot of attitudinal, sectoral and policy change as well as revision of strategic approach.

So in a nutshell, the contribution of Triple-S has been on dealing with the Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of the sector to actually adopt this new way of working.

This way of working, how likely is it to continue?

We need to have champions. If they are not there, we need to identify them. We need to address the power imbalances that limit changes in this sector. Often you will find the converted willing to do something about it, but the bureaucratic nature of the systems does not allow change to happen. When this conversation subsides, then the efforts of change will also subside. So this conversation has to continue. It will happen if we identify the right champion and anchor in the right places.

If you could look into the future where should we look, think or work to continue improving sector coordination and harmonisation?

The aspect of harmonising, in the way we deliver the services is still a challenge. For us to be able to move forward, we have to be able to tell what works, what does not work. We need a structured way to learn as a sector. Not that we should stop having the reviews, but facilitate them as a way to agree on lessons and have commitment to follow up on embedding and scaling up those lessons within the sector. But how do we facilitate the already existing processes to lead us to this direction?

Based on your experience, how do you think Triple-S fared in terms of finding its way into these processes and helping them to go to the next step?

I think it has fared well. It is not easy to gain space in a highly structured sector. But Triple-S has been able to find niche and be recognised for that niche. So, they have fared well.



Free for all. A tapstand in Kidubuli village,
Kicwamba Sub County, Kabarole district

15 TRIPLE-S REVIVED WASH SECTOR COORDINATION IN LIRA DISTRICT

When Triple-S opened shop in Lira, the district was just starting to recover from the protracted insurgency in northern Uganda. Lira District has since transitioned from the emergency to the development phase. Triple-S has been part of the transition, particularly in the rural water sub sector.

When Triple-S set up office in Lira district in 2010, the first undertaking was to revive coordination of WASH stakeholders. The district had last held a coordination meeting in 2009, before UNICEF closed its office in Lira. Hudson Omoko, the District Water Officer (DWO), recalls that at that time, Lira was emerging from a period of armed conflict, which had pitted the Government of Uganda against the Lord's Resistance Army. However, when peace returned to the region most actors started leaving the district. UNICEF eventually closed its Lira office in December 2009 and this left a void in coordination.

"With the dissolution of the WASH Cluster and the departure of many humanitarian agencies, we had to realign ourselves and focus on coordinating the actors that had remained in the district. Having been under the emergency phase for nearly two decades, the district did not have much coordination experience," says Omoko. "When Triple-S came into the district in 2010, we put our heads together and we convened the first meeting where we shared ideas with everyone. We discussed with partners on the need to transition from emergency to development and the need to follow standards," he recalls.

In the period that followed Triple-S provided a secretariat for the District Water and Sanitation Coordination Committee (DWSC), playing key roles like: mobilising partners;



compiling and disseminating minutes; following up of resolutions; formation and updating of the committee database, and organising learning events. When the DWSCC was firmly established, Triple-S handed over the Secretariat to the DWO, whose mandate it is to coordinate the committee. Since then, the district has been holding quarterly DWSCC meetings. This has mainly improved information sharing

among sector actors and enabled them to jointly address emerging issues.

The DWO further points out the improvement in operation and maintenance practices at source level. Omoko explains that Triple-S worked with partners to introduce and test innovations to enhance operations and maintenance. He cites the HPMA, sub county boards; the water user loan scheme; as well as continuous public sensitisation through the media. "Some of these innovations we never expected at the beginning. They came in along the way and have greatly enhanced O&M," he says.

"At the time of Triple-S inception we were mainly discussing coordination and harmonisation; training of extension staff and communities; documentation and advocacy. Indeed we improved documentation and increased our number of recorded case studies. Triple-S created visibility for our work at the district and national level, and also improved our advocacy with the political leaders and the community. We have seen some changes especially in terms of community perceptions," Omoko explains.

The DWO is confident that although the functionality percentage statistics have not improved dramatically, the actual numbers

are something to laud. "If you look at the figures, our functionality in Lira district has fluctuated between 76% - 79%. That may not look significant but indeed there has been improvement in access and in O&M."

To sustain the gains, Omoko says it is important for the District Local Government to get involved to support the HPMA, the boards and the communities to continue with the innovations. Communities should be continuously sensitised about their O&M roles; the HPMA should be supported especially to participate in monitoring of functionality; and the boards should be supported to improve their management skills.

"At the district level, we are encouraging partners to take up these innovations and replicate them. We need to discuss and plan for this in the DWSCC. We are also encouraging documentation and sharing of good practices. For example, where changes have been recorded, we refer to those communities that are doing well, we bring them to our meetings and events to share their experiences. It makes them realise that if you do certain things well, you will be recognised and others will learn from you."



WASH practitioners participate in a Lira district water and sanitation coordination committee meeting

16 “WE MUST ENSURE THAT TOMORROW’S WATER SERVICES ARE BETTER THAN TODAY’S”

When the Triple-S Initiative started rolling out in Kabarole District in 2010, the District Water Officer, Pius Mugabi, expected that in the end sector policies and implementation practices would be modified as a result of evidence picked from the six-year field based study and that knowledge bases would be widened. He shares his observations about sector changes influenced by Triple-S.

There has been a shift in focus from the water point to the water user; from what the sector can provide to what the citizen needs. There has been the realisation that it is not enough for a water source to be functional. Service providers and service authorities must continuously take that extra step forward to ensure that tomorrow’s water services are better than today’s. For example, it was my assumption that 20 litres per person per day is sufficient for rural households. Now I strongly believe that the sector should plan for 40 litres per person per day for domestic consumption.

The decision by the Ministry of Water and Environment to review the allocation formula of the District Conditional Grant, and increase the allocation for rehabilitation of water sources is a welcome development. Districts are presently operating under a lot of pressure from communities to repair non-functioning water sources. It is clear now that districts have not always been creative in carrying out the repair works. The formation of HPMA, sub-county WSSBs, and community level dialogue meetings will go a long way in ensuring a proportional increase in functional water sources.

There is also improved coordination of sector actors. In the past, NGOs were not coordinating with the district which caused them to waste resources and duplicate services. Now with better coordination we have eliminated



duplication of services; we have tapped into different skills. We know which sector actor to talk to for what purpose.

We have also improved our reporting on the status of water resources in the district. In the past we used paper based forms, manually printed out and filled at a water source. The forms would then be taken back to the office and data entered manually. This required many staff and would take a long time to complete. In the end we would submit late reports to the ministry. IRC/Triple-S introduced the M4W system which enables water users to report on the status of their water source. The system enables the HPMS to report on the

water source as they carry out rehabilitation. The DWO is now able to provide timely reports to the ministry and accountability to the district council. We are also able to engage partners from an informed point of view. In the past we used to present data from the archives which could not be accurately depended on.

Triple-S has contributed to the process of bringing together water artisans in the district. These are people who have been in the sector doing different things – plumbing, repair drilling. These people used to work independently. They did not have enough tools. They could not assist each other when faced with community challenges. Now with the association, they are recognised by everyone. We thank IRC for opening our eyes in this area. The Kabarole District Local Government shall continue to support the HPMA for the benefit of the community.

In order to sustain these gains, there should be dissemination of policy changes through the Technical Support Units as part of their routine work in districts. There should also be emphasis on organising critical meetings - such as extension workers' meetings, DWSCC meetings, and regional learning events through which more dissemination can be done. But above all, the good will of sector actors to carry the work forward even after Triple-S phases out.

Going forward, local government cannot work alone. We still need partners to support us and ensure that these innovations continue. We need to carry out research. We need to develop new products. But we do not have the budget and the staff. That is why we request IRC to continue working with the government of Uganda so that we don't regress. We need to keep working with the Triple-S experiments to make sure they succeed. We need to work with partners to ensure that there is an increase in the budget allocated to the servicing of existing facilities.



*A happy water user,
Hakibaale sub county,
Kabarole District*

17 FINANCING, ACCESS AND LEARNING - THERE LIES THE FUTURE OF WATER SERVICES

Jo Smet was the IRC Uganda Country Adviser at the time the Triple-S Initiative was introduced. He looks back at the start and says the timing was just right.

// There were many developments in the sector at that time. Sustainability was coming to the fore. Sustainability was complex so we wanted to unpack it – to show its complexity and importance. We unpacked it into building blocks for water services that last. When we started, the Ugandan rural water sub sector was mature. There were systems in place. There was the SWAP. There were efforts to coordinate all stakeholders through national level forums. But yes, just like a mature person, a mature sector also learns. Things keep changing and you have to keep adjusting. It makes you more mature. More efficient.

When we came in, the sector in Uganda was ideal. It was open to change. It was not cast in stone as in other countries where regulations are strict. There was openness for the sector to ask: what are we doing? What can we do better? That was the trigger for IRC to bring Triple-S to Uganda. The factors were all favourable. There was creative resistance – the ability to ask questions.

To have a successful Action Research like Triple-S, we needed good players who were also willing to learn. This includes government, NGOs and others. We found them in Uganda and we were able to form the Triple-S Consortium – the gang of five. We decided to work with government because that was a natural way to embed change in the sector at national level. With SNV, we had been working together on sanitation since 2006. Again, at that time both IRC and SNV had core funding from DGIS. IRC



Uganda was small and there was no plan to grow any bigger. But we also didn't want to put the IRC label too prominently on the project. So SNV was selected to host Triple-S. We needed an organisation that represented the NGO sector, and UWASNET was the most natural choice. We also needed to consolidate learning around water services, hence our choice of NETWAS which was already facilitating sector learning. Apart from the consortium partners, we also had good communication with the Development Partners which was also important. What we

missed was the Uganda Local Government Association (ULGA) and the private sector too. I appreciate and thank the sector for that collaboration. Both the national and local governments were excellent partners.

Through the Triple-S Initiative, the sector got something positive. Maybe expectations were higher, but changes do not happen easily. There are reasons why people take a while to change. We wanted to do action research where we were confronted by daily realities. There was no silver bullet. We defined stumbling blocks to water services that last. We addressed some challenges, but not all – and there will be more to come. Rural water service is a complex area with many issues, but you have to pull out the ones that are most urgent and are hindering progress.

We addressed the issue of governance and management of rural water services. CBMS is a good principle but professionalization is missing. So we tried out the SWSSBs which are between management and governance. The boards worked out fine, looking after a wider range of aspects of RWS. The issue of systems functionality continues. Now there is the HPMA, an organised group to respond to the demands of the water source managers. Triple-S, SNV and others worked to strengthen HPMAS. We also paid attention to the monitoring of services - how do you monitor the performance of water service? We tried out M4W which is a point of convergence between HPM and water points making repair quicker and enhancing functionality. We tested the SDIs, which also address governance and service levels.

It is up to the sector to consider the potential

of these developments to scale them up and adopt them. That may also take a number of years. I am sure that the sector would like to see more work done before scaling up, but we already have key results that are scalable.

Looking to the future, sustainability remains top among the challenges to be addressed. Financing is dwindling and we have to find new sources to keep up. Whatever is put in place should last forever. Sometimes actors make wrong technology choices.

There is need to refer to WASH-Tech TAF. This will help to identify the most promising technology for particular contexts. This is a starting point for sustainability. Next we should be aiming for universal coverage – everyone forever. We need creative strategies and innovations even among the users themselves. Learning is also a key element to be addressed by the sector. IRC is known to start new concepts and help the sector to learn through action research. So there lies the future: financing, universal access and learning.

There is need to focus more on the local government level. And to change perceptions and behaviours, there is need to focus on the sub-county and village level. There are many perceptions and behavioral issues about ownership and payment for services. There are also social dynamics regarding trust and accountability. A lot of action takes place at that level. We need to get closer to the people. We are still so far away from them.

There will always be work to do because there is need for continuous improvement.”



A water user fills his jerrycans at a borehole in Ngetta sub county, Lira District

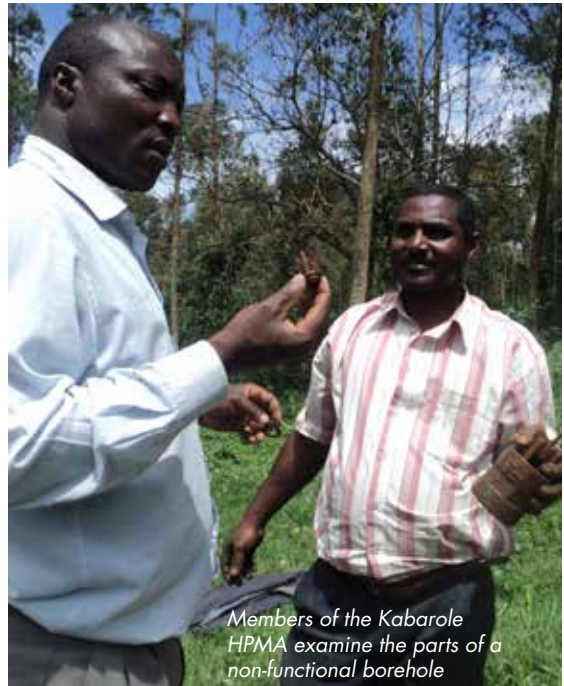
18 HPMAS SET TO CONTINUE IMPROVING FUNCTIONALITY

In 2011, the Ministry of Water and Environment endorsed an undertaking to roll out HPMAs in all districts, as a means of enhancing functionality of rural water facilities. Triple-S supported the Lira and Kabarole district HPMAs to start up and grow into viable, self-sustaining entities. How have the two associations fared thus far?

There was a time when Hand Pump Mechanics (HPMs) in Uganda operated as individuals, each pursuing his own business interests. Their services were on high demand: community members wanted sources repaired; private sector WASH actors wanted to recruit them; NGOs wanted to hire them to work in specific areas of NGO's interest.

But there was no coordinated mechanism for HPMs engagement. Thus regulation and management of HPMs was a challenge. Community members reported that HPM charges were exorbitant and inconsistent. HPMs operated with neither a clear support structure nor a defined accountability mechanism. This had a negative impact on the zeal of HPMs to perform their roles and led to high dropout rate. The MWE observed that limited access to spare parts within districts increased the cost of repairs and reduced willingness of communities to pay for repairs. Ultimately there was delayed response to breakdown of water services. Much as their role was pivotal, HPMs were not contributing meaningfully to the functionality and sustainability of rural water facilities.

The idea to form a Hand Pump Mechanics Association (HPMA) was first conceived in Kibale district in the 1990s. In the intervening years, the idea spread to other districts like Arua and Kasese. The successes of those



Members of the Kabarole HPMA examine the parts of a non-functional borehole

associations were documented and shared widely throughout the sector. By 2010, there was enough evidence that if they are better organised, coordinated and unified, HPMs are capable of contributing significantly to the improvement of functionality of water sources. Thus the Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) endorsed the district HPMAs as an approach to improve functionality, of which the rate had stagnated at 80%-83% for over five years.



A Hand Pump Mechanic repairs a borehole in Kabarole district

To accelerate the roll out process, the Joint Water and Environment Sector review, JSR (2011), established an undertaking (8) on the formation of HPMAs. The Undertaking sought to establish HPMAs in at least 80% of the districts in Uganda by June 2012 and operationalise them in at least 30% of the districts by June 2013. The responsibility of HPMs is to support Water User Committees in responding to break down of water services and hence contribute towards improved functionality of rural water sources.

MWE in partnership with District Local Governments (DLGs) and NGOs has supported HPMs in all the 111 rural districts in Uganda to form Hand Pump Mechanic Associations (HPMAs) to enable them to network, improve their skills and also link up with private sector water operators and the DLG Structures.

On its part, the Triple-S initiative supported the roll out and operationalisation of HPMAs in Lira and Kabarole districts. Triple-S particularly sought to provide guidance on how HPMAs should operate to ensure that they are viable self-sustaining entities capable of maintaining rural water facilities and also generating income for

their members. Since most of the HPMAs have limited skills in business planning, they required external support to enable them develop viable business models that can sustain their operations. Lira and Kabarole HPMAs have since grown into outstanding actors in their districts and are looking up to an even greater future.

WE ARE PROVIDING THE DWO WITH DATA ON FUNCTIONALITY - KABAROLE HPMA CHAIRMAN

Previously, we worked as individuals. We did not know each other. We did not know the status of rural water facilities in each other's sub counties. We did not share technical information with each other. Since we started the association, our work has improved. We have introduced members of the association to the communities, now they know who to contact when they have a problem with their source. Previously, they did not have our contact and it always took them a long time to find a mechanic whenever they needed one. Now they can easily access our services because we have an official address. The DWO was our supervisor but he received scattered information. As the HPMA executive, we receive information from all sub counties, compile it and give a comprehensive report to the DWO and to other stakeholders.

We have a good working relationship with the district local government. We have been getting some assignments and facilitation from the DWO to go and collect data about functionality of water sources. Just this month the DWO assigned us to conduct assessment of seven sources in different sub counties which the district intends to rehabilitate.

We have also been working well with CSOs and other actors. For example, after knowing about the association, HEWASA started giving the association contracts to extend Gravity Flow Schemes (GFS). The first extension contract they awarded us was worth UGX60 million (USD24,000). HEWASA also contracted us to extended 1.3KM of a piped scheme in Kiguma Sub County. We worked on the extension of 3.8KM from Kakagusa

to Saaka in Kichwamba Sub County, which has five tap stands. We rehabilitated a GFS in Buhesi Sub County where we replaced the broken pipes. We had already worked on a pump system in Mpanga. Along all those extensions, we form and train Water User Committees around the tap stands. This ensures sustainability of the facilities.

Perhaps most importantly, our association has been groomed by Triple-S. They have given us technical advice. They have organised capacity building workshops for us. They have been organising for us meetings, enabling us to interact with each other. Triple-S has also brought in HPMA's from other districts to learn from us and to share with us their own experiences. In 2011, Triple-S introduced the M4W Initiative. They engaged members of the association to implement that initiative by collecting data on functionality and sensitizing communities. This initiative has marketed us as an association. Through our participation in M4W we have come to be known as a group that can provide a service to the community. Both the local government and the community members now know us as a reliable partner in ensuring functionality. Triple-S built our capacity to be able to write our business proposals. We are now in the process of developing and MOU with the DWO on allocation of funds from the government grant to the association. We have a work plan which we intend to implement systematically. Triple-S has given us that knowledge.

Again M4W has strengthened our working relationship with the community. Community members send information about their broken sources and in just a matter of hours or days, the HPM is there to assess the source. The only challenge remains with raising the funds necessary to repair the broken source. When the HPM tells the community what they need to repair the source, they can even take a month without raising the amount. But for us we work voluntarily. Sometimes we even improvise in order to see that the community can afford to pay. E.g we may do temporary/soft repair, pending the collection of adequate funds. The problem is not because they are

unable to raise the funds but just because they lack sensitisation. Also the local leaders often tell them that the source has been given freely and that government will come and repair. Otherwise even a single person in the community can provide that money alone.

As people who have been in this trade for a long time, we are happy that government and other key actors have started laying emphasis on functionality of water facilities. Now that the government is even linking directly with the HPMA's and artisans, we are optimistic that functionality status will continuously improve and people will have access to water all the time.

WE HAVE CLOSED THE COMMUNICATION GAP BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS - LIRA HPMA CHAIRMAN

The Lira District HPMA which has 25 active members started in 2011 and registered as a Community Based Organisation (CBO). Later in 2012, the association also registered a company through which it would conduct profitable business.

Moses Okello, the chairperson of Lira District HPMA recalls that before the association started, HPMA's worked independently and they did not know each other. There were many complaints about the inconsistent



Lira HPMA chairman, Moses Okello

charges for source repair in addition to lack of spare parts which often resulted into vandalism. The HPMS who had tools used them to vandalise sources. The situation contributed to the low functionality rate in the district. Since the association was formed it has contributed to the improvement in functionality status.

With the HPMA, we have closed the communication gap that existed between stakeholders. Previously, the source would break down and there was no hand pump mechanic readily available. Communities would wait a long time before their source could be repaired. Currently, every sub county has been assigned a hand pump mechanic and the communities can contact us easily. Each HPM is known right from the community through to the sub county and the district. HPMs are also part of the District Water and Sanitation Coordination Committee (DWSCC).

Triple-S has been particularly supportive towards the association. Apart from helping with the formation of the association, Triple-S has been building our capacity, especially in how to do business. They developed a business model and trained us. They have also been giving our association projects to work on. We collected baseline information for the M4W Initiative and fitted the identifiers. We also collected data on the SDIs and conducted an assessment of functionality of sources.

Other partners have also recognised us from our profile and have engaged us especially in data collection. On this note we have worked with the District Local Government, Plan International and Welt Hunger.

The association is taking steps to ensure its sustainability and self-reliance. To begin with each member contributes Ugx 2000 per month in addition to an annual membership fee. The association has also started looking for business opportunities beyond mere repair of water sources. We have so far written proposals to all sub-county authorities in the districts requesting to be given tenders to manage sanitation facilities in public places. Oromo and Agweng sub counties have already agreed to give a tender to the association to manage sanitation in markets. That includes managing the toilet facilities and collection of garbage. The association is also considering starting a spare parts outlet in the district.

We are optimistic about the association's future, but there are challenges to contend with. The biggest challenge is with the communities. They still need to be sensitized about the need to pay for operation and maintenance. They also need to be continuously sensitized to share information about the status of their sources using the M4W system. The other challenge is with the cost and availability of spare parts. We don't have a spare parts store of our own, so we buy them expensively from the open market. Communities are willing to pay for the HPMs labor but not for the spare parts.



Lira Hand Pump Mechanics participate in a refresher training session

19 VIGILANCE, TRANSPARENCY KEY TO SUSTAINABLE SERVICES

It has been generally concluded that the performance of Water User Committees has been compromised by their voluntary nature. The Okello Odwar borehole in Lira sub county has a different story altogether.

There is a borehole that has never broken down since it was drilled in 2010. It is the Okello Odwar borehole, out in the lush and quiet Ocecy Oyer Village in Lira Sub County, Lira district. This borehole is not just a figure in the statistics of functionality of rural water facilities, which now stands at 77% in Lira district. It is an example of effective community management of rural water services. It is testimony that if supported and strengthened, Water User Committees (WUCs) can play a crucial role of maintaining the functionality of sources.

The caretaker, 65-year-old Joyce Okello knows better than to neglect a source of clean water. She explains that before they got this borehole in 2010, they used to fetch water from an unprotected spring. She is part of a Water User Committee of which members are sometimes passive. But that doesn't affect her zeal. With support from the Health Assistant and non-government actors like Triple-S, the WUC at Okello Odwar borehole has always been willing to try out innovations and interventions aimed at improving its operation and maintenance.

In May 2012, IRC/Triple-S Uganda in conjunction with NETWAS Uganda rolled out a capacity building plan aimed at improving good governance and accountability in rural water services. The training covered a wide range of issues around good governance including: roles and responsibilities of WUCs; effective operation and maintenance; maintaining the safe water chain; transparency and accountability; equity and inclusion;



Joyce Okello, caretaker of Okello Odwar borehole

communication channels. Additionally, the participants were trained in the application of innovative tools for Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) governance. Okello Odwar borehole was one of the first 10 sources in Lira Sub County to benefit from the training and they continue to apply the lessons to date.

To further strengthen and professionalise CBMS, IRC/Triple-S in conjunction with Lira district local government, introduced the Sub county Water Supply and Sanitation Board (SWSSB) in 2013. The approach was piloted in four sub counties in the district including: Agali, Barr, Lira, and Ogur. Lira sub county SWSSB has performed outstandingly – thanks to WUCs like the one at Okello Odwar borehole.

Okello says she applies all the lessons she learnt from the WUC training in 2012. She keeps an updated register of all users. She also tries to enforcing the bylaws like prohibiting users from fetching water in dirty jerry-cans and sending young children to the borehole. To communicate with users, she puts notices on a big tree just near the borehole. Through the notices, meetings are called and users are urged to pay their monthly O&M fees. She further reports that they also ventured into Bol Icap, although that did not last long.

The introduction of the SWSSB has further strengthened the WUC and encouraged the users to continue paying their monthly user fees regularly. Each house is expected to pay UGX1000 (USD0.4). Users were especially encouraged by the prospect of improved accountability and the fact that the sub county authority was behind the SWSSB initiative. Apparently, they trust a more authoritative structure like the board as opposed to their locally constituted WUCs. This is one of the sources that have been consistent in remitting a percentage of user fees to the SWSSB.

William Opio one of the water users testifies that with the board in place, it takes a shorter time to repair a faulty source. He recalls that when their borehole had a problem in January 2014, they reported to the Health Assistant who is also the board secretary. A hand pump mechanic was sent to assess the situation. It was found that the source required minor repair. It was repaired using some of the funds kept by the WUC treasurer. Still, Opio says, even if it had required major repair, the board would have provided the funds.

A combination of all the approaches and willingness of the Okello Odwar WUC to try them out has thus ensured that the borehole is maintained in a working condition for four



Lira Sub County Health Assistant scrutinises the records of Okello Odwar borehole

years now. Added to that is the vigilance of the caretaker; the willingness of users to contribute their monthly fees; regular monitoring and support from the sub county authorities, extension staff and partners like Triple-S and Divine Waters. At community level, Okello says that her biggest advantage is that she is an elder in the community who commands respect and attention.

Challenges:

- Parents always send young children to fetch water. These children lack the maturity to handle the source responsibly. She talks to the parents but they say they cannot help it.
- It is difficult to sustain the interest of all members of the WUC. The treasurer and the caretaker are the most active members of the WUC. As a result, one may end up involving family members to help. For example, Okello who is losing her sight because of advanced age has to with her son most of the time, yet he is not a member of the WUC.

20 WORKING WITH THE MEDIA TO ADDRESS ISSUES IN RURAL WATER SERVICES

In order to keep rural water issues high on the public agenda, Triple-S made deliberate efforts to engage the media. This has resulted into increased coverage of rural water, sanitation and hygiene issues in mainstream media including newspapers, radio and TV.

From the onset in 2010, we were aware of the need to work with media for effective communication and advocacy. But we were also aware that while the media practitioners were already covering rural water issues, the coverage was transient and far in between. Also, there was a focus on “hard news” rather than in-depth coverage. Coverage was mostly on commissioning of new sources and the fanfare that surrounds it. Issues of operation and maintenance were not prominently covered.

We wanted to increase the media’s knowledge and understanding of rural water issues which would consequently lead to better coverage in mainstream media – newspapers, radio and TV. These were our strategies

- Conduct media dialogues at district and national level
- Involve media in key WASH events at district and national level
- Involve media in our field activities
- Lobby media owners to allocate space/airtime for coverage of WASH as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
- Encourage WASH actors to open up and start working with the media
- Ultimately trigger the process of forming a recognised WASH media association/network



Commissioner, Rural Water Department, Eng Eyatu addresses journalists during a national media dialogue organised by Triple-S



A journalist records a field activity in Lira District

Visible outcomes

- Greater media interest in Rural Water Services issues: For example, we often get calls from journalists requesting for information on particular aspects of water and sanitation
- Increased coverage of water issues, especially on district level radios, but also in national media especially newspapers
- Willingness of radio station proprietors to allocate space for WASH issues, particularly district level radio stations like QFM, Radio WA in Lira district; Life FM and Better FM in Kabarole district.
- WASH actors are more “media friendly”. Often times, the Triple-S communication and advocacy officer has been co-opted on event organising committees to particularly organise media participation and coverage.
- Formation of the WASH media network (WEMNET) is progressing well. But so far there is active interaction through the google group created by Triple-S

Challenges:

- Media are generally business enterprises
 - For example, to earn complimentary

airtime on a radio station, the organisation has to first show willingness to pay for some airtime. You pay for one hour, you get another hour free. You pay for one newspaper page, you get another page free. Being an advertiser also guarantees, to some extent, editorial coverage.

- Mobility of media practitioners – journalists keep moving from one media house to another, sometimes even to different jobs altogether. This requires one to keep making new media contacts.
- Most of the journalists are freelancers who follow “juicy leads” so their attention is very easily drawn away from WASH issues.

Way forward: Uganda has a vibrant and dynamic media industry. It provides great opportunities for public education and advocacy for WASH. That means we need to be strategic in order to capitalize on those opportunities. It is possible to build partnerships with the media to profile and promote crucial issues in WASH. The budding WASH Media Network would be a good start for a partnership.

21 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The lessons and experiences shared in the foregoing chapters indicate that even as the Triple-S Initiative phases out, there is still more work to be done to improve rural water service delivery. IRC and other actors should therefore build on the successes of Triple-S to maintain the momentum that has been gained over the years of implementation. The outstanding issues in rural water service delivery include: functionality and sustainability of facilities; community level attitudes and behaviours; user attitude toward operation and maintenance; institutional strengthening and capacity building; professionalisation of CBMS. Additionally sector financing is dwindling and actors have to find new sources to keep up.

The key recommendations emerging from the experiences of Triple-S staff and partners include the following:

Functionality will remain a key issue, given the many factors that surround it. The sector now realises that when you bring technology it requires maintenance. Therefore more resources should be allocated towards the improvement of functionality. There is need to introduce institutions and structures that address functionality. Already, the SWSSBs, the HPAs, M4W have been tested and they have exhibited the potential to improve functionality and ultimately contribute to water services that last.

Capacity building: What the sector needs are long-term capacity building programmes, not one-off workshops. There is need to dialogue with Development Partners for them to see the value of long term capacity building programmes to secure the future of the sector. The Ministry of Water and Environment is already working through TSUs to enable practical engagement with Local



An abandoned borehole in Kabarole district

Governments. Sector actors should therefore focus their efforts on capacity building at local government level, through TSUs.

Monitoring: There are still many gaps in sector monitoring. There is need to generate proper accurate data that eventually ensures good planning and good budgeting. There is need for a functional monitoring and evaluation system with harmonised approaches. All actors should be encouraged to present their data on the same table. There is need to harmonise sector information even with sister sectors like health and education. Most importantly, there is need to monitor the quality and level of service that water users receive. The introduction of Service Delivery Indicators (SDIs)

Embrace ICTs to enhance sector monitoring. With ICTs, facility break downs should be reported immediately. Assessments should be done immediately and worked on. ICTs offer a cheaper and effective way of monitoring service delivery. M4W has been tested by Triple-S. How can the sector capitalise on M4W's potential?

Learning: The sector should continue learning, reflecting adapting and trying out. The sector cannot stop piloting and testing. It is from such testing that the sector generates good programmes for improved service delivery. Actors should be able to jointly reflect on what works, and what does not work. There is need for a structured way to learn and to facilitate already existing processes. Triple-S has proposed a learning model that has the potential to enhance and strengthen WASH Sector learning.

Governance issues: The sector needs to revisit WASH governance issues right from household level to national level. Actors need to look at accountability and transparency, participation of water users in decision making processes. It is also necessary to conduct budget tracking surveys to follow up on accountability. The good governance working group should be strengthened for this purpose.

Infrastructure and technology choices: Talk about water services should not be only about software issues. To ensure water services that last, hardware needs to be addressed, for instance, the quality of materials or spare parts used. Software and hardware should be balanced. Whatever is put in place should last forever. Sometimes actors make

wrong technology choices. There is need to refer to WASH-Tech Technology Assessment Framework (TAF). This will help to identify the most promising technology for particular contexts. The Appropriate Technology Centre (ATC) ought to play a more prominent role, informing sector actors which of the piloted technologies should be scaled up.

Focus more on the local government, particularly the Sub County and village levels. To change perceptions and behaviours, there is need to focus on the sub-county and village level. There are many perceptions and behavioral issues about ownership and payment for services. There are also social dynamics regarding trust and accountability. There is need for sector actors to get closer to the community level because a lot of action takes place there. The sector should also look at professionalising CBMS. The fact is that CBMS is not going away any time soon. So sector should be wondering, how do you make CBMS work?

Partner with the media: Uganda has a vibrant and dynamic media industry. It provides great opportunities for public education and advocacy for WASH. There is need to strategically capitalise on those opportunities. It is possible to build partnerships with the media to profile and promote crucial issues in WASH. The budding WASH Media Network (WEMNET) would be a good start for a partnership.

Build partnerships: Sustaining the ongoing innovations within the sector is still a challenge. There is need to test the innovations beyond the two regions where Triple-S was piloted. In this regard, the partnership approach should be maintained. IRC should identify partners with whom to work and build their capacities to carry on the innovations. The TSUs and Umbrella Organisations; private sector actors; Uganda Local Government Association (ULGA) are all avenues that IRC can work with to scale up innovations. It would also be recommended to include an advocacy-oriented organisation to push for change; and bring the academia on board to engage them in action research in order to elevate the findings in a different arena. It is important to find out what roles other actors can play and how they can do things differently.



About this book:

This collection of stories reflects the experiences of some of the individuals who were involved in the inception and implementation of the Triple-S Initiative in Uganda. The stories give personal accounts of the understanding and appreciation of the Triple-S Initiative; key achievements at personal and institutional level; proposals of how the achievements can be scaled up and sustained throughout the rural water sub sector; and outstanding challenges in the rural water sub sector in Uganda. Collectively, the stories highlight the fact that learning was at the centre of the Triple-S Initiative. The stories reinforce the message that a learning and adaptive sector is one that engages in continuous learning and reflection and is thus able to adapt to changing circumstances and demands – which is vital for provision of water services that last.

For more information and references visit: www.waterservicesthatlast.org/uganda

About Triple-S

Triple-S (Sustainable Service at Scale) is an initiative to promote Water services that last, by encouraging a shift in approach to rural water supply – from one that focuses on implementing infrastructure projects to one that aims at delivering a reliable and lasting service. The initiative is managed by IRC – International Water and Sanitation Centre in the Netherlands in collaboration with agencies in different countries and with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The Triple-S Initiative in Uganda was structured around a consortium including the Ministry of Water and Environment; SNV Uganda; UWASNET; NETWAS and IRC. It was piloted in Lira and Kabarole districts.