

National WASH Learning Forum 2009

Post-Forum Press Release

Press Release from SAWA – Sanitation & Water Knowledge and Learning Alliance

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Did NGOs, government and private sector in water and sanitation learn?

National Learning Forum 2009- Kampala, 12-13 Oct 2009

Last week, government, civil society organizations and UN came together to share and learn how to do better in water, sanitation and hygiene in rural communities and at primary schools. The event addressed the basic, continuing problems and promising solutions on poor access to reliable water services and adequate sanitation facilities in rural Uganda. The event was the first water, sanitation and hygiene learning forum at national level. Having a good water supply and sanitation facilities is such a basic need that we almost forget to talk about. Still in Uganda, only two out of every three



For the first time in Uganda, some 50 staff from government, NGOs and other agencies examined what they do in water and sanitation sector so successful. The claimed success was subjected to deeper analysis to determine the fundamental reasons of success. Do we know what changes the attitude of politicians, technocrats and rural people? What makes people pay for water or construct a latrine? Or trust the Water Committee so that they can pay the monthly fees without being afraid that the money may disappear? This is the first step of looking at how in-depth knowledge from civil society organizations, government and other stakeholders can improve our water, sanitation and hygiene situation in a lasting (sustainable) way.

The learning forum had four themes: local water resource management, rural water supply, household

rural persons have access to a protected water source or an improved latrine. But take Kaabong district, there only one out of five people has access to a good water supply; while in Rukungiri almost all (98%) have good water supply. And In Kotido and Kaboong, there are no latrines at all (2% of households have), while all Rukungiri. (again) people (99%) use a latrine.

Whose responsibility?

Many times when you ask professionals in the water and sanitation sector who is responsible for sanitation and hygiene they will answer that it is everybody's responsibility although not everybody ever takes responsibility. In reality sanitation and hygiene is my and your responsibility because anyone of us not taking the responsibility affects us all. The other day while I was in the taxi coming from work in the evening, a smartly dressed gentleman sat next to me but to my amazement he had one of the worst body smell I have experienced recently. His bad smell did not only affect me but the entire taxi. Therefore we all need to make an effort to improve water quality and improve sanitation and personal hygiene. Otherwise sanitation related diseases like cholera and hepatitis-E will continue to claim many lives of Ugandans.

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sanitation and water, sanitation and hygiene at primary schools.



On Integrated Water Resource

Management: we agreed that integrated water resource management is relevant for all people. We all realize the effects of climate change. We concluded that realistic and understandable policies and strategies have to come from the national level. At local level water users and water polluters need to be assisted to improve the sharing and quality of water. It is important to be responsible in the way we live near water sources for instance

when at the lake shore you need to use a toilet and collect rainwater. The district coordinating committees should take up their role. And good lessons learned from need to be shared also at local level.

On the functioning of rural water systems: We found that major factors for success were the level of organization and the professionalism of the water management committees and the hand pump mechanics. The formation of associations of treasurers and repairers pointed towards a new trend of teaming up makes you stronger! And we concluded that reliable (monitoring) information on how well or poorly the systems function, triggers the responsible persons to do a better job. Again learning –to-do-better needs also to take place at district level.

On the uptake of rural sanitation and hygiene:

the forum concluded that community-based approaches work very well. Community health clubs clearly create a critical mass of people who take sanitation, hygiene and health seriously and jointly tackle household and community problems in a lasting (sustainable) way. The effects are clear: safer environmental conditions, less diseases! The Forum found that the combination of social marketing (raise awareness, motivate people to change) linked with product marketing (e.g. construct latrines, selling latrine slabs) appears to leading to success. Ecological sanitation is a very promising approach that apparently does not cost that much as always assumed; so it becomes affordable for the rural poor!



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On water, sanitation and hygiene at primary schools: the Forum concluded that both in promotion and on technologies there are good practices. Many child-friendly teaching materials and games on sanitation and hygiene exist: to be shared! Urinals for boys and girls, well designed and providing adequate privacy, are promising solutions to stop the long queues during breaks and are cheaper than latrines. The Forum found that Uganda can do much better in school sanitation!

MORE? The participants of this first national learning forum thought that it would be good to organize these twice a year, get more national government staff in and make sure that sharing of results leads to scaling up of good practices. But often more analysis also by research institutions needs to be done to validate the 'good' practice. It was also recognized that this learning forum was an innovative event that will be copied in our neighbouring countries.

SAWA, the Sanitation and Water Alliance, is a consortium of four organizations Network for water and sanitation (NETWAS), Uganda Rainwater Harvesting Association (URWA), Uganda water and sanitation NGO Network (UWASNET) and WaterAid-Uganda. The First Water, Sanitation and Hygiene National Learning Forum was organised together with the Ministry of Water and Environment.

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