



## Community management & maintenance of urban supply



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THE DIRECTORATE OF Water Development (DWD) was traditionally the Government Agency responsible for O & M of Urban Water Supply Systems in Uganda. In 1969, the National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC) was created after an ADB funded Urban and Sewerage study carried out in 1968. The NWSC mandate was (and still is) to operate and maintain urban water systems on a commercial basis i.e. on full O & M cost recovery. At present, NWSC has assumed full responsibility of 9 large urban water systems while DWD is responsible for 25 Conventional Water Supply Systems. The Government is still subsidising the O & M of the systems that are under the DWD.

By the year 2000, NWSC will have assumed responsibility of 3 more urban systems while new water systems will have been provided in 40 small and medium sized urban centres under the countrywide on-going Rural Towns Water and Sanitation Project (RTWSP) funded by GOU, IDA, KFW, BADEA, Austrian Gov., DANIDA and ADB. The O & M approach of the new systems is still a subject of further study under the Small Towns Water and Sanitation Project (IDA) of the RTWSP. The subject will be discussed briefly in this paper.

### The changing roles of DWD

Since 1990, Government has initiated and implemented Macro-economic policies with the aim of creating efficiency in the economy and effective social service delivery. Some of the key policies that have influenced delivery of services in the water and sanitation sector include among others, Decentralization, Restructuring and Retrenchment, Liberalization and Privation. In addition to the above, Government has carried out deliberate campaigns to democratise its business encouraged self-help and community participation in its programmes.

The DWD has been restructured and its roles re-defined along the Decentralization Policy of the Government. Thus DWD at the centre has been relieved of some of its duties and delegated those duties to the lower levels of Government i.e. the Districts. Operation and Maintenance of Urban Water and Sewerage Systems is one of the duties that has been passed to the Districts.

Some of the functions that have been retained by the Central Government (DWD) include among others;

- (i) Water Resources Management to ensure economic use of water.
- (ii) Planning and supervision of capital development works including mobilization of resources for those works or improvements.
- (iii) Provision of back-up support, advising, regulating, monitoring and facilitating lower levels of Government to implement programmes, operate and maintain their systems.

### New approach to O & M of urban water systems

The traditional approach is to develop and passover systems to NWSC who would operate on a self-financing basis. The system therefore would have to be economically viable which is dependent on the population size and its Social-economic status. This process is slow due to the level of our national development. Most towns in Uganda are relatively small with revenues far less than what would otherwise be required to necessitate take over by NWSC.

The Decentralization Programme requires that O & M of Urban Water Systems be transferred to the Districts. The Programme does not prevent NWSC to take over urban systems provided they are economically viable. However, the capacity of the local authorities to take over O & M of urban systems is still lacking. It is for this reason that the DWD has introduced a short term management approach based on partnership between Government authorities on one hand and Beneficiary Communities on the other which is essentially a community participatory approach.

### Joint Management Committees (JMC)

Community participation in O & M of rural water systems has been successfully implemented in Uganda with remarkable success particularly with water point sources but has virtually been absent in urban water systems. This can be explained by the higher levels of technology but also lack of Government effort to introduce it.

Since 1991 Government has initiated Community participation in O & M of urban water systems as a short term intervention to address some of the shortcomings experienced as a result of centrally managed systems and also the initial inadequacies ushered in by decentralization.

Maintenance of Urban Water Systems is being delegated to Joint Management Committees (JMC's) that have been formed in the urban centres purposely to manage water supply systems. JMCs are composed of local leaders of the urban authority and the users. Local

leaders who have been of particularly importance are; The Town Clerk and District Water Officers while the users have been represented by the Resistance Council Chairman, who is the political head of the authority and other members as the beneficiaries decide. The recommended number of members on the committees is between 6-10- people.

The Government (Central) and the JMC have different roles to play.

### **Role of Government**

Government retains it's roles as indicated in Section 2 above. Detailed Specific duties regarding urban water systems include;

- (i) Payment of Salaries and Wages
- (ii) Provision of grants to meet some of the recurrent costs on maintenance e.g electricity, repairs etc.
- (iii) Assist in procurement of some special inputs like chemicals, pumps, pipes and fittings
- (iv) Carryout difficult repairs
- (v) Carryout major rehabilitations works
- (vi) Provide training to staff. Training is a centralized duty of Government in all Sectors.

### **Roles of the Committee**

The JMCs have taken full responsibility of O & M of urban water supply systems in towns where the committees have been formed. JMCs have been formed in 16 towns and they are functioning. Roles of the JMCs include but not necessarily limited to;

- (i) Revenue Collection
- (ii) Payment of incentives and allowances
- (iii) Supervision of Operation and Maintenance Staff
- (iv) Operates a Bank Account and maintains auditable books of accounts
- (v) Make quarterly reports to DWD
- (vi) Links Governments to the Users.

### **Achievements**

Since Community Participation was introduced in O & M of urban water systems, there has been a remarkable improvement in service delivery. Some of the achievements include;

- (i) Flexibility in setting tariffs has been achieved. Communities have by themselves had to increase the tariffs having noted that the Government rates were unrealistically too low. For example, while Government rates were US \$1.5 per household per month, the average new rate is approximately US \$ 10 per household per month. This has led to increased revenue, in some cases, by up to 200%.
- (ii) Increased revenue and authority to spend it, has led to timely payment of allowances and incentives. Water systems are properly maintained and there is quick response to repair faults and breakdowns. The

net effect has been efficiency and availability of water in the towns for most of the times.

- (iii) Administrative and financial burden by Urban Water Systems on DWD has greatly reduced communities are starting to be independent and therefore allowing time to DWD to concentrate on development activities.

### **Constraints**

Despite the above achievements, there still remains some constraints. However, some of the difficulties are merely "initial process" difficulties. It is likely that as the committees gain experience and confidence these "initial process" difficulties will be solved. However, the following problems have been experienced;

- (i) The amount of money collected as revenue is still low and cannot fully meet the operating cost of the urban systems.
- (ii) In some towns, the Committees have left work to Government employees at the water works, and therefore undermining the Spirit of Community Participation.
- (iii) Lack of book-keeping knowledge has led to poor accountability of the funds collected.
- (iv) Legislation on establishment of Committees is still lacking. Hence the JMCs are not legal entities. However Government is in the process of inacting a law that will give legal status to Water User Groups, Committees and Associations

### **Future prospects**

The initial achievements have indicated that the Committees will be playing a leading role in operation and maintenance of Urban Water Systems by end of this Century. DWD through the STWSP is developing a community participation strategy for implementation of water and sanitation programmes in urban centres. The strategy aims at making community participation an in-built component at all stages of the project cycle. DWD has drafted a policy document, Policies and guidelines, which details the organization framework for O & M of Urban Water Systems. The policy seeks to create water user groups/associations/committees with legal status which will own the water supply infrastructure. In this way, Community Participation will be fully developed and be sustained during O & M.

### **Conclusion**

Sustainability of Urban Water Systems are of primary concern to Government of Uganda. Projects are designed and implemented on grounds that they will be well operated and maintained so that benefits can be sustained for an economic period of time. Therefore factors that enhance sustainability are well addressed in project implementation. They include Appropriate Technology, Health education, Women and gender, Environment Protection, Capacity building, Privatization, back-up services and Community Participation.