



NGOs water health service-delivery

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UGANDA WAS ONE of the most promising developing countries south of the Sahara, particularly in relation to service delivery. The positive trend was reversed with succeeding regimes that were marked with over centralization - creating a dependence syndrome and leading to deterioration in service delivery - (World Bank, 1992). NGOs have been instrumental in filling up the gaps. With the advent of the National Resistance Movement regime, multi-lateral agencies, NGOs both external and indigenous flourished. The regime is devoted to reversing the situation particularly through decentralization and promotion of participatory development. The paper focuses on NGO approaches to health and water services delivery under decentralization with special focus on participation.

Methodology

The paper is based on a study conducted in Tororo, Bushenyi and Luwero districts in Uganda. Six NGOs focusing on either environmental health/Primary Health Care, water or both sectors were studied using qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. RedCross (water and health) and Kayoro (health) NGOs were studied in Tororo; Rukararwe CBHC (health) and West Ankole diocese (water) for Bushenyi; Voluntary Efforts for Development Concerns (VEDCO) (water) and African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF) (health) for Luwero district.

Decentralization and service delivery

Districts have the role coordinating NGO and government programmes to ensure optimal allocation and utilisation of resources. This is supposed to be instituted through NGO fora and the donor coordination units at the districts. NGOs tend to favour self initiated fora; consequently, such fora tend to function better. The health sector has improved significantly since decentralization; NGOs with a health component collaborate with District Medical Officers. For 2 of the NGOs, training of personnel and communities are done jointly, the DMO's office sometimes contributes technical expertise and there is exchange of information. Sectoral partnerships have been useful. NGOs that have strong connections with the district sectors are more aware of the effects of decentralization, are benefiting from partnerships and playing their role in the process. In the water sector, most of the ongoing programmes are managed by NGOs and communities.

At national and district levels, there is some evidence of lateral linkages among NGOs through umbrella organiza-

tions. UCBHCA (Uganda Community Based Health Care Association - for health and water sector) is among the most effective. It has district branches, some of which have been instrumental in facilitating the central health and water sectors. Kasese district is exemplary. NGOs in environmental health and water sectors have high levels of coalition. Umbrella organizations are vital in coordination, networking, capacity building, sharing of new practical knowledge, promotion of accountability culture, self criticism, participatory approaches and gender awareness. Additionally, UCBHCA supports related initiatives and facilitates linkage with government and other agencies. In Kasese district, Water Aid for instance works with Kasanga CBHC on WATSAN programmes. In the water sector at local level, VEDCO and PLAN International in Luwero district collaborate, PLAN International was requested to take over the environmental health component of the programme, since VEDCO had no capacity to continue.

Operation of NGOs at grassroots level

NGOs studied have endeavored to take participatory CBHC integrated approach with substantial capacity building; integrating gender issues at leadership levels more than LC system. Management committees have been established, taking existing local systems into account. Although coverage is usually small, some NGOs are able to remain long enough in an area to instill positive values/practices among users. In the case of AMREF, Ventilated Pit Latrines were promoted not only for health purposes but as a symbol of prestige - 'respectable citizens'. The coverage increased from 28 per cent to 100 per cent by the time of phasing out. For Red Cross, there is tremendous improvement of health standards, unity in solving communal problems, which has also led to initiation of other development activities. The management board of the programme collaborates with LCs, with RedCross as overseer. District sectoral personnel participate in training of community workers. Hence, the NGO has fostered positive community and technical/district relations, thereby increasing chances of sustainability. NGOs' relationships with LCs are universally good, particularly those that started as CBOs; these blend better with the community.

Community participation

All studied NGOs have integrated community participation, however, at varying magnitudes. Where the community was involved right from identification services, there is

more awareness of participation in the rest of the programme activities ($P = .00009$). Communities understand reasons for their participation: as aimed at efficiency, building a sense of ownership and capacity building for purposes of sustainability. Kayoro and RedCross, scored highly in capacity building and empowerment through active participation throughout the project.

Gender and participation

Services related to health and water are generally deemed to be women's domains. However, construction work especially among the Bantu people of Uganda is mainly carried out by men. For 4 out of 6 NGOs studied, especially RedCross - women are more active than men. This is particularly the case in the health than the water sector. However, remunerable activities tend to be dominated by men. For AMREF, women are most active in planning rather than just practical implementation. Most NGOs (5/6) allow for participation of women in making decisions concerning activities they participate in (73 per cent - 122 overall), especially Kayoro and RedCross where all respondents indicated that women make the decisions.

For all NGOs, committees have been formed in relation to the services. Women constitute 1/3 of committees on average. In most cases, women occupy posts are largely related to their perceived gender roles and abilities: Secretary - because it is an easy job, because women can keep secrets and are careful; Committee members - because they are active in attending, but also, because it is an idle position; Vice chairperson - because they are incapable of being chair persons; Kayoro and RedCross are exceptional, women are chairpersons since they are key users of the services; and treasurer - women are trustworthy. Occupation of the post of treasurer is strategic since it has possibilities for women's participation in control of resources.

Resource mobilisation

Resource mobilisation universally practised among the NGOs as a way of cost sharing for purposes of efficiency, propagation of a sense of ownership and therefore commu-

nity control of utilities leading to responsible and more accountable systems. Communities mainly contribute locally available materials, money, labour, co-operation and moral support. Water sources have been sustained even after NGO phasing out, through continued community participation. However, there are gaps where expensive replacements are required.

Accountability and transparency

Accountability is most critical now that NGOs as intermediary organisations are sometimes subcontracted by the districts, donors on behalf of the districts to deliver services to the grassroots. RedCross and Kayoro are exceptions with accountability at community level and transparency at district level - both for locally and externally raised resources; all respondents (100 per cent) ascertained so. Rukararwe also had over 90 per cent of respondents indicating that there is financial accountability. For the rest, accountability to the community exists with regard to program activities. Members of the community accounted to are mainly the broad community especially for Kayoro, RedCross and VEDCO. Other key ones are program leaders, followed by relevant committees/LCs. NGOs are key catalysts in facilitating establishment of institutions for resource management. Whereas at district levels only 25 per cent of the villages have village water committees, existence of committees is universal wherever NGOs (studied) operate, which is an indicator of potential for sustainable utility management.

There is ready sharing of information with community members on technical project issues; Red cross (and Kayoro) however go further to share information on finances and other resources; budgeting for programmes is done with the community. Community members in Red cross catchment area are more inquisitive about information concerning resource management, sources of funding and spare parts for water sources. Exposure therefore, leads to demand for more accountable systems; increased community interest and participation in critical programme aspects results in capacity building, increased awareness and better

Table 1. Level of community participation by existence of accountability ($p=.00000$)

Level the community comes	NGO Accountable to the Community			
	Yes	No Know	Don't Totals	Row
• Implementation	19.25%	17 (55%)	19 (53%)	55 (38.5%)
• Planning	2 (3%)	5 (16%)	3 (8%)	10 (7.0%)
• All levels	54 (71%)	7 (23%)	4 (11%)	65 (45.5%)
• Don't know	1 (1%)	2 (6%)	10 (28%)	13 (9.1%)
Column Total	76 (53.1%)	31 (21.7%)	36 (25.2%)	143 (100%)

resource management which usually spreads to other sectors. For RedCross for instance, community members note that the program has raised awareness especially concerning accountability; the community is using the same basic principles (applied to water and health sectors) in economic sector.

Increased levels of community participation in this case also entails increased accountability. There is substantial accountability where the community participates at all levels (right from initiation) and least accountability where the community only comes in at implementation. With regard to participation in selection of services in relation to existence of accountability to the community, the study revealed that where the wider community largely selected the services, there is most accountability (90 per cent). There is least accountability where the NGOs exclusively did the selection (24 per cent) ($p=.0000$). In this case too, most respondents in this category did not know anything about existence of accountability (38 per cent). Emphasis on community leaders participation at the expense of broader community is not a positive indicator for community participation since in this case too, a substantial number among the rest of the community do not know about accountability. This again confirms that NGOs that allow more community participation (selection of services) are also more accountable to the community.

Sustainability

NGOs' role as actors in development under decentralisation should be evident not only through effective partnership with the district sectoral departments, but also effective participation and capacity building of the communities towards sustainable delivery of services. The majority of respondents indicate they have the willingness and ability to pay for services where required. In most cases, communities strongly believe that they have been empowered to sustain the services. In addition to establishment of committees, health education and resource mobilisation, RedCross, VEDCO and AMREF have facilitated communities establish income generating projects both at individual and collective levels, taking an integrated approach. This facilitates increment in incomes of users and ability to sustain programmes. For all cases, training and sensitisation have been the main avenue of empowerment with emphasis on committees formed in relation to the services; capacity building exists for committees, health provider groups, opinion leaders and the community in general. Pump mechanics and water source caretakers have been trained in the water sector and are performing commendably.

Some of the NGOs that had not taken participatory approaches from the start and proper analysis of contexts have made commendable adjustments ever since; learning from their past mistakes and from NGOs in similar sectors. VEDCO for instance is very successful in its new area of operation. The water sector at local level has been linked to Directorate of Water Development (DWD) for purposes of

sustainability. It is clear that most NGOs with intensive participatory approaches and collaboration with the relevant district sectors performed best overall.

One of the key challenges many NGOs is their relationship with district sectoral personnel especially the water sector and politicians. Despite decentralisation of planning and resources, not much change had been registered in the government water sector; NGOs in the water sector especially in Luwero were the most opposed to collaboration with government sector. Many NGOs' reluctance with regard to collaboration or accountability is attributed to suspicion regarding unethical practices by district personnel. Consequently, accountability, especially of financial resources for many is usually upwards to donors and national bosses and not downwards to the respective communities, leading to strained relations. The need for technical expertise and resources for water and health delivery, especially after phasing out makes collaboration with LCs and district sectors imperative. Sometimes NGOs (water) receive donations, utilise inputs vary from those regularly used by DWD. This leads to problems in case of replacement. DWD encourages consultation, collaboration for promotion uniformity, quality control and sustainability.

Conclusion

NGOs provide services to grassroots using participatory community based oriented approaches that should be emulated by district line sectors. They also reveal high levels of flexibility, adjustment in adverse contexts. There is substantial gender integration and involvement of minorities even at committee levels. Participation at all levels, exposure, leads to increased awareness, leading to demand for more accountable systems, which contributes to chances of sustainability. NGOs with close partnership with relevant sectors at the district have better performance and definitely have higher chances of sustainability (of services) in case of phasing out than NGOs that operate independently. Those that are transparent at this level also tend to do the same at local level. Relations with districts are expected to improve with increasing levels of decentralisation.

NGOs therefore, need to take their place in the decentralisation process; to strengthen their links with relevant sectors at district level for purposes of sustaining service delivery. Alternative plans, for instance accessing resources designated for community development at LCIII and districts is crucial for sustaining service delivery. Accountability by NGOs and relevant committees should be both upwards to their bosses and downwards to lower committees and the community.

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