

MAXIMIZING THE BENEFITS FROM WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION

Developing a Capacity Building Framework for NGOs in the WatSan Sector

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NGOs have an important contribution to make to the provision of water and sanitation services. Like any organisation they need resources to deliver these services and human resources are vital. Providing quality, targeted and efficient capacity building across the diverse and scattered requires co-ordination and planning. This paper describes the development of a framework for capacity building of watsan NGOs and their umbrella organisation, providing a strategy to improve the ability of NGOs to help meet the challenging targets for coverage of water supply and sanitation services. A participative process was used to engage with NGOs from all regions of Uganda, in order to inform and develop a possible national funding mechanism that included both international and grass roots organisations. This case study provides an example of the participative development of a training strategy.

Introduction

The Water and Sanitation sector in Uganda has undergone a period of institutional change, with:

1. Central government moving away from implementation and focussing on policy, resource mobilisation, co-ordination, monitoring and quality assurance;
2. Local Government focussing on planning and financing activities through grants; and
3. Enhanced private sector and NGO participation in the provision of water and sanitation services.

Organizations need to be assisted in fulfilling their changing roles. Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are suited to providing services to poor communities, but do not necessarily have the range of skills and resources required to enable them to do this role on a large scale.

Towards the end of the nineties the NGOs active in the water sector in Uganda realised that government needed a focal point when dealing with NGOs in the water sector and that at the same time NGOs needed a body to lobby on their behalf. Thus disparate initiatives to develop the watsan NGO sector were brought together under the auspices of the Uganda Water and Sanitation NGO Network (UWASNET), which aimed to improve access to watsan through strengthening the contribution of NGOs and CBOs, supporting them with information and advice, organizational strengthening, and improvement of technical and management skills for better service delivery.

Although there were initiatives by several organizations to strengthen capacity of local NGOs and CBOs, they were scattered, uncoordinated and not integrated into an overall sector plan. This study had an inception phase, consultation and then discussion and development of the framework. The inception phase set out the methodology and then piloted the consultation techniques with the sub-consultants.

Consultation process

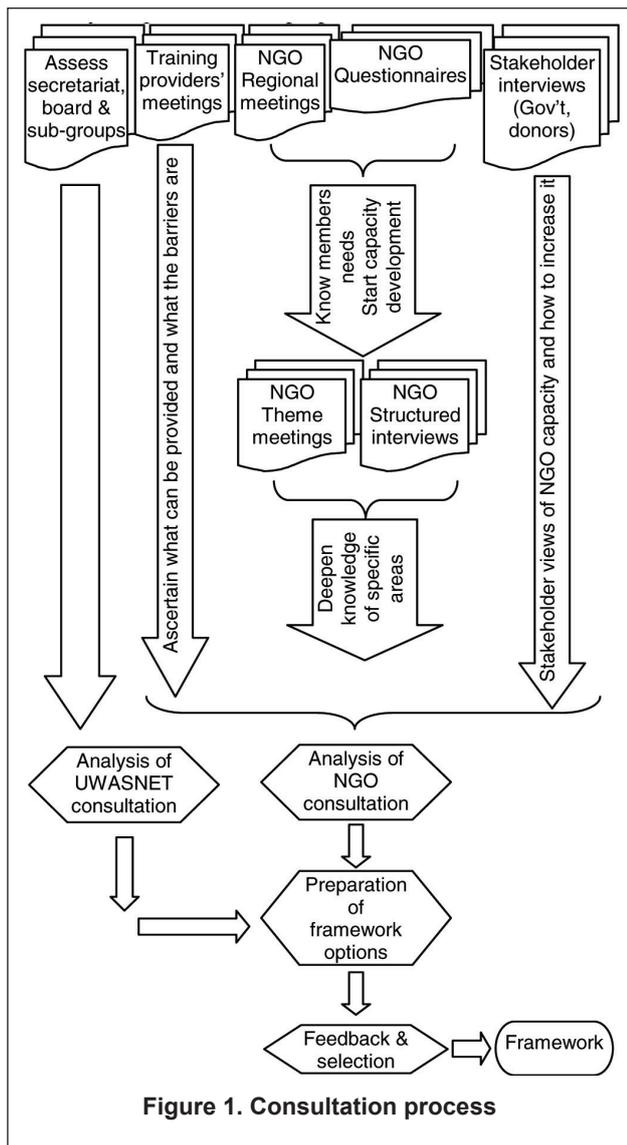
The consultation stage aimed to gather the viewpoints of a variety of stakeholders in the NGO and water sectors in Uganda. A range of consultation methods was selected to ensure that the consultation was wide, whilst providing the depth required, balancing open debate with a capacity building focus. It was designed to enhance client ownership and participation, to ensure quality information and decisions about the framework.

The consultation process centred on a series of four two-day regional workshops plus thematic workshops with UWASNET members and other stakeholders. A group of facilitators drawn from UWASNET members carried out the consultation, under the guidance of an international and national consultant, in order to make the development of the framework a capacity building activity in itself. This was however treated as an “external” event, to provide a degree of independence from internal UWASNET issues

The consultants developed a workshop guide, schedule and checklists for the facilitators, which were pre-tested and refined. The consultants monitored and evaluated the process, assisting the sub-consultants to prepare reports and hold de-briefing sessions on the exercise.

Because not all UWASNET members could participate (the numbers would have been too large for the participatory methods used) the Core Team selected range of International and local NGOs, secular and faith-based organizations, those from different parts of the Region, those working in sanitation as well as water supply and those working in urban as well as rural areas. Questionnaires were developed for UWASNET members not participating in the workshops.

A planned second series of more focussed workshops (see Figure 1) was replaced by a national workshop, to provide feedback on the consultation stage and to gauge a variety of opinions on the proposed framework.



Other stakeholders (Technical Support Units, Local Governments, private sector operators, capacity building suppliers, community representatives and line ministries) were consulted to corroborate the views put forward by UWASNET members regarding the capacity and roles of NGOs and allow an informed analysis of those views. This enabled other stakeholder groups to understand and participate in the process of developing the Framework, and thus accept the project’s conclusions and proposals. Consultants undertook meetings and semi-structured interviews with key informants.

The UWASNET secretariat were consulted formally, through a semi-structured meeting at their offices, but also were observed in carrying out their duties, for example, the preparation of workshops and sector specific working groups, support for the Executive Committee and engagement with other organizations, such as government and donors. The Executive Committee was also consulted formally concerning their current roles. As weaknesses were identified, the

discussion also covered steps the Executive Committee have taken to improve the situation.

Results of the consultation

The results of the consultation stage demonstrated that:

- There is a wide variety of NGOs, in terms of size, role, location, organization and resources;
- The need to develop capacity was evident;
- Concrete issues such as water quality training were raised more readily than abstract issues, such as organisational strategy; demand for some areas of capacity building had to be informed and even created;
- Some basic issues, such as NGOs mission and organization needed to be addressed before embarking on further development;
- Transparency and accountability needed to be addressed before NGOs can move forward;
- Capacity development did not just include human resources, but also some physical facilities;
- The sector is changing and NGOs needed to adapt to the changing environment;
- Funding needed to be addressed: NGOs need to know how to apply for funds and the funders needed to set clear requirements that enable NGOs to deliver the services they can offer the sector;
- Communication and documentation were important areas to develop;
- There was a variety of working practices: this sometimes creates confusion and dissent, but may be a strength as diversity can promote innovation;
- NGOs needed to demonstrate and promote their services to the public and private sectors;
- Relating to Local Government was important; and
- Capacity development did not just require “training”.

The consultation also showed work needed to be carried out in the wider enabling environment, including:

- The role of NGOs needed to be clearly set out by government at all levels;
- NGOs needed to engage more in the development of local and national policy;
- Staffing levels and retention were a problem. This was likely to continue with the state of flux in the sector;
- Practical actions, such as access to conditional grants and contracting needed to be addressed; and
- Capacity building in other sectors needed to be carried in parallel to the NGOs (or with NGOs).

UWASNET itself was performing well for a young organization, with the main issue being the lack of an Executive Director, which was being addressed. The secretariat did not require additional support beyond normal professional development. The Executive Committee had recognised that turnover in its membership was a problem and had put in place a programme of regular reviews. As a network, UWASNET did need to have more of a regional presence and engage the grass-roots memberships in a concrete manner.

Unresolved issues

Some issues were not adequately resolved during this stage. A final “blueprint” describing exactly what activities are required was not drawn up. More detail was required to identify specific activities. As such, this consultation was less a needs assessment of capacity building requirements (*what* to deliver) and more focussed on *how* to deliver improved resources. The preferred management system of the proposed framework was not clear. Strong opinions to separate the management from general UWASNET activities (to maintain UWASNET’s representative and independent role) were balanced by an assumption that the “centre” of UWASNET was going to assume the role. Keeping the management within the WATSAN NGO sector was voiced as well, but the majority of UWASNET’s membership did not engage with the issue, indicating the general lack of management expertise.

The consultation was just part of a process and not a product that had been completed. The framework would need to adapt to members’ needs and continuous dialogue will be necessary. Besides the general needs of the NGO WATSAN sector; specific concerns of individuals and single NGOs were important, especially in specialist areas such as borehole drilling. These needs were not highlighted at this stage, but would be evaluated when the process continued with more concrete planning of activities. By the end of the consultation stage, there were still some issues that either had not been resolved or needed further development and decisions needed to be made.

The Framework

The framework is based on underlying principles of flexibility, evidence base and ownership, centred on a series of annual regional evaluations (with eight regions but meetings held more locally e.g. at district level) (see Figure 2). Capacity development needs are identified and prioritised from this exercise and bids are made to a central fund to carry out a variety of activities to increase NGOs’ capability. The draft framework was presented to a national workshop of NGOs and other stakeholders, explaining the factors that influenced the development of the framework and discussing issues where decisions were required.

Before implementing the framework, work was needed to set the scene, so district level meetings were to be held:

- Explaining the framework to NGOs and other stakeholders (e.g. local government),
- Gathering basic information about the NGOs, in terms of mission and plans, so they knew where they wanted to go, and could identify resources required,

The UWASNET Executive Committee needed to agree the management structure (from options given in the framework), appoint a fund manager and trustees and for the fund manager to appoint regional coordinators. With the question of “who runs the framework”, some strong voices wanted an independent organization, whilst others wanted UWASNET or an NGO to run the process. A compromise was suggested to meet some of the concerns of the various

parties involved, but would require some internal adjustments within the operation of the network.

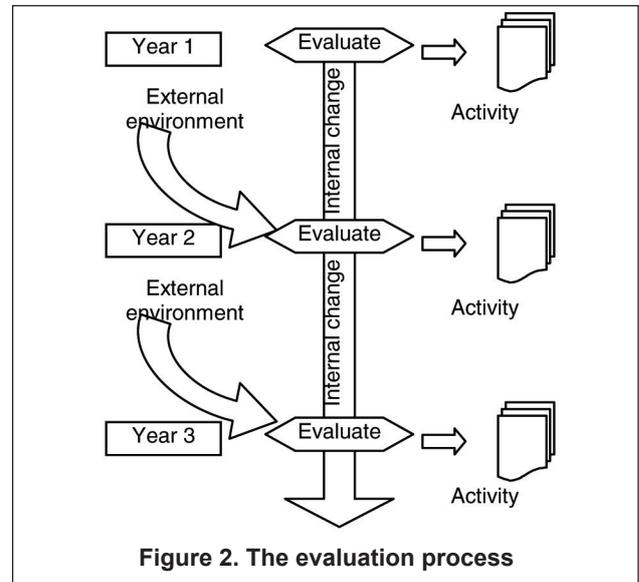


Figure 2. The evaluation process

Operating the framework

The framework needed evidence of capacity needs to be produced, collated annually to give a review of the state of the NGOs and ensure quality. This should be based on a checklist from individual NGOs stating their objectives and evidence to show what level they have reached. These are peer reviewed by NGOs regionally (with observers from local government) and then a regional list of priority capacity building activities is submitted to the fund manager UWASNET Executive Committee carry out a similar needs assessment for both the executive and the secretariat. The trustees consider the submissions and allocate funds to each region (or UWASNET centrally) and then the regional coordinators carry out the activities either directly or using third parties (see Figure 3).

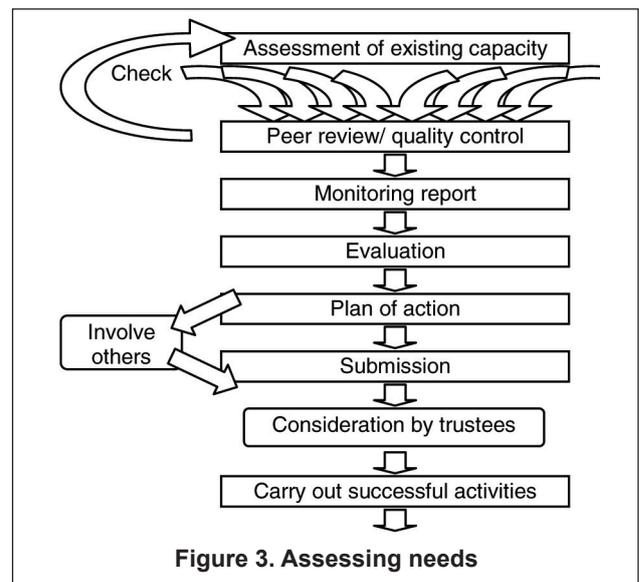
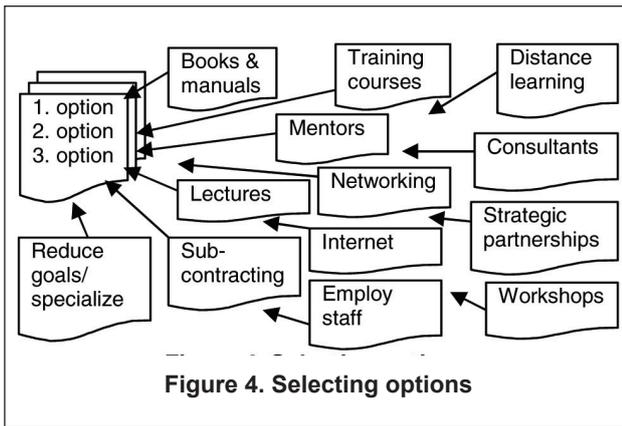


Figure 3. Assessing needs



Selecting activities.

It was important that the NGOs selected capacity building activities that addressed their organisation needs, not just taking what was offered. It was also emphasised that a range of activities are available (see Figure 4).

Setting priorities

Given the need for capacity development and the competition for funds, choices will have to be made to ensure that the funds available are spent effectively. Setting priorities will be necessary to make the best use of limited budgets. Criteria for choosing between possible activities were discussed at the national workshop at the end of the consultation stage and include (in no particular order):

- Sustainability of activity (less need to address an unusual problem that will not be encountered often or providing training in an unproven new technology).
- Impact directly or indirectly (not just number of people participating but also the results on the ground).
- Value for money.
- Comparative advantage (NGOs do not need to be experts in water quality if it is carried out by government, but they should be skilled in working with poor communities).
- Work based experience rather than pure theory.
- Resulting in qualifications or other evidence.
- Appropriateness of technology (considering local factors; gravity schemes are limited by topography)
- Fit with mission, vision and objectives of NGO(s) (activities should contribute to the organization and not just be undertaken because they are on offer).

Some issues may not have a high priority locally, for example only one organization may be directly interested in certain specialised areas, such as borehole drilling or preparing promotion materials, but others can then use their services indirectly). The Executive Committee should review the submissions to the fund and put in bids that are nationally, if not locally important, e.g.

- Locally specialised but significant nationally;
- Relate to the secretariat or Executive Committee;
- Cover nationally neglected areas (such as O&M); and

- Benefit UWASNET’s aims (such as advocacy or policy development).

This allows some activities to be carried out that some NGOs may not be aware of (such as NGO management) and where the demand comes from other stakeholders in the sector.

Implementing the framework

The consultants had set out a strategy, but this needed to be owned and operated by the NGOs themselves; some operational decisions had to be made by the Network before action could be taken and further detailed consultations carried out. Unfortunately the lack of an Executive Director and the redeployment of the Executive Committee Chair lost some of the momentum, although activities are now underway.

Learning points

- A diverse group of (small) independent organisations can benefit from coming together in activities such as capacity building.
- Concrete needs (e.g. water quality training) are more readily identified than abstract concepts (e.g. organisational direction)
- Developing a strategy allows individual organisations to contribute more effectively with sector goals.
- A cycle of evaluation allows progress to be monitored and adjustments made in a changing environment.
- Capacity building is not just about “training”.
- Ownership of the process is vital.

Note/s

1. This study was carried out by the WELL Resource Centre Network, funded by the DFID UK
2. Over 200 people were involved in the preparation of this framework, UWASNET members and stakeholders in the sector and associated sectors. The detailed consultation was carried out by a number of sub-consultants, led by Joe Gomme. Contributors included: Sarah Bukirwa, Fred Kabuye, Moses Kasolo, Dave Kyangayanga, Joyce Mpalanyi, Samuel Mukaaya, Annette Nalwoga, Sarah Ssonko, Grace Waako Katuramu, JBK Consultants (John Beijuka and Dennis Kakuba), the UWASNET Executive Committee, especially Amsalu Negussie, the UWASNET Secretariat (Caroline Batanda, Harriet Nabunnya and Juliet Kayendeke), and Simon Mugayo of DWD.

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