WATER SERVICES that last

PERFORMANCE OF RURAL WATER SERVICE PROVIDERS

AND SERVICE AUTHORITIES IN EIGHT DISTRICTS IN UGANDA



BRIEFING NOTE, APRIL 2014

POINTS FOR ACTION

For national **governments**:

- Strengthen the sub-county level for the delivery of WASH services, with staff and budget dedicated to rural water.
- Review the District Water and Sanitation Conditional Grant allocation formula, increasing resources for post-construction support to service providers.
- Ensure all districts have the required staff.

For **Local Authorities**:

- Hold to account local stakeholders who do not attend District Water and Sanitation Coordination Committee meetings and/or do not follow guidelines for the provision of rural water services.
- Establish a strong coordination structure at sub-county level.

For **all implementers** :

- Promote and support WSC-managed savings and credit schemes to limit dormancy of WSCs, and provide an incentive for water users to pay fees.
- Pilot more professional rural water management models, and monitor their performance.
- All implementers to adopt harmonised approaches and discourses towards communities and involve politicians at critical steps of service delivery.

In Uganda, most communal water facilities in rural areas are managed by Water Source Committees (WSCs) for point sources (boreholes, shallow wells and protected springs) and Water Supply and Sanitation Boards (WSSBs) for piped schemes. They are the water service providers, i.e. entities that manage and deliver water services, taking care of the operation, maintenance and administration of the systems under their responsibility. According to policy, service providers are to receive support from the local service authority, which is the body that has a legal responsibility for guaranteeing a water service in the area, i.e. the districts and sub-counties.

The performance of service providers can have impact on the quality of the service delivered to the water users. For this reason, one of the national Golden Indicators ("Management") tracks the percentage of water points with actively functioning WSCs / WSSBs. The 2013 Sector Performance Report shows that this indicator reaches 71% (MWE, 2013), while the national 2010 Water Supply Atlas reports the functionality of WSCs at 47% (MWE, 2010).

The difference between these two reports may be partially explained by a lack of a clear and harmonised way of measuring the performance of service providers. Most importantly, these figures show that a significant proportion of service providers are not functioning well, hence not performing their duties as they should. In too many communities, water committees do not collect water fees, do not report to users, and often are not adequately supported in their work.

In order to obtain more details on the nature and extent of common issues associated with community management of rural water facilities, Triple-S Uganda conducted an in-depth analysis of the performance of the whole Service Delivery Model for point sources. A service delivery model is the way a water (or sanitation) service is provided. It includes: policy and legislation at national level; the service to be provided; the infrastructure used to deliver the service; the management system needed to operate and maintain the infrastructure; the revenue mechanism that will make the service financially sustainable; and the support to providers at local level. In this context, data on the performance of rural water service providers and service authorities was collected and analysed.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in eight selected districts located in the Technical Support Unit (TSU) 2 in Western Uganda and TSU 6 in Northern Uganda. These districts are Alebtong, Lira, Kitgum and Nwoya in TSU 2, and Kabarole, Kamwenge, Kasese and Kyenjojo in TSU 6. The performance of the Service Delivery Model for point sources was measured against a set of Service Delivery Indicators (SDIs) specially designed for this purpose. These SDIs describe how rural water services are delivered and supported across four levels:

- Service delivered: assessing the compliance of the water service with national norms as regards to water quality and quantity, and to accessibility and reliability of the facility.
- Users' level: measuring users' satisfaction with the service, as well as their participation in the management and maintenance of the facility.
- Service provider level: looking at WSCs'composition, governance and performance of duties.
- Service authority level: investigating how districts and sub-counties fulfil functions such as planning, coordination, oversight of water services, and post-construction support to service providers.

This briefing note focuses on the measured and perceived performance in terms of water service delivery of service providers and authorities in the study area. It is based on the analysis of data collected on103 randomly selected WSCs, the eight District Water Offices (DWOs), and 16 sub-counties (2 in each district). The study looked at the traditional Service Delivery Model, and at two innovations within the management system, at service provider level: the integration of community-led savings and credit schemes

BOX 1: MAIN FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

35% of the interviewed water source committees were found to have a low or very low performance, and 26% a fair performance. Aspects that positively influence the performance of WSCs are the existence of innovations in the management model (a functioning WSC-managed savings and credit scheme or the involvement of a hand-pump mechanics association), or better support from districts. Findings of this study reinforces that community-based management of rural water points as currently practiced has limitations. WSCs often manage services on a voluntary basis with hardly any motivation, and they often lack the support required for them to perform their tasks efficiently and effectively.

Most visited sub-counties (12 out of 16) and districts (7 out of 8) were also found as having a poor or fair overall performance. Weaknesses are at all stages of provision of the water service: before, during and after construction. Three areas are identified as critical gaps at service authority level:

1. There is an institutional gap at sub-county level for the provision of rural water services, with no decentralised office of the water department there
2. Lack of resources at both sub-county and district levels to ensure the effective fulfillment of the service authority function
3. The coordination between stakeholders at sub-county and district levels can be improved

BOX 2: SERVICE DELIVERY INDICATORS

SDIs for Service Provider Level

– WSC institutional capacity

Excellent when WSC is elected, gender-balanced, has been trained and is regularly re-trained, and takes decisions based on consensus

– WSC administrative tasks and accountability mechanisms

Excellent when WSC holds monthly executive meetings and quarterly meetings with users, keeps and shares up to date records, formulates local water user rules

– WSC involvement in O&M of water facilities

Excellent when WSC collects user fees and provides feedback to users on O&M fund, carries out preventive maintenance, calls a HPM to carry out minor repairs

SDIs for Service Authority Level - Sub-counties

– Community mobilisation by sub-county before construction

Excellent when the sub-county ensures that all 6 critical requirements set in national guidelines are met before construction

– Support by sub-county during construction

Excellent when the sub-county is involved in all four of the following construction support activities: community mobilisation during construction, training of caretakers, training of WSCs in O&M, commissioning of facilities

– Post-construction support and supervision by sub-county to WSCs

Excellent when the sub-county provides support to WSCs to mobilise communities on O&M, has mechanism for continuously following up the performance of WSCs, retrains WSCs that disintegrate, and has documentation on support provided to WSCs and communities

SDIs for Service Authority Level - Districts

– Resources of the DWO

Excellent when it has at least 5 staffs, who have the required equipment to do their job (transport, computer, GPS handset) as well as copies of key sector documents

– District planning, procurement and contract management

Excellent when DWO rates the fulfilment of procurement requirements and supervision of works as excellent

– Utilisation of District Water and Sanitation Conditional Grant (DWSCG)

Excellent when DWSCG is spent according to sector guidelines

– Post-construction support, supervision and monitoring to service providers by the district

Excellent when the DWO (1) has a plan for providing technical support to WSCs and provides support accordingly; (2) monitors the water service (functionality, water quality) twice a year; (3) regularly updates the water atlas and Management Information System (MIS)

– Post-construction support, supervision and monitoring to HPMs / local artisans by the district

Excellent when (1) the DWO has an inventory of trained HPMs updated annually; (2) HPMs report quarterly to the sub-county and DWO; (3) there is information on availability of spare parts; (4) there is a HPMA

– Coordination and harmonising of district local government departments, NGOs and community-based organisations involved in rural water service delivery

Excellent when (1) there are quarterly District Water and Sanitation Coordination Committee (DWSCC) meetings, during which all stakeholders are engaged; (2) action plans developed during DWSCC meetings are followed up and reported upon; (3) synergies and partnerships are formed between government and other stakeholders, resulting in more efficient use of resources; (4) DWSCC provides opportunities for reflection of experiences; (5) DWSCC reports issues to the works sub-committee; (6) field visits are conducted prior to DWSCC meetings.

for financing operation and maintenance in Kamwenge district (Y-Y strategy), and the involvement of a Handpump Mechanics Association in Kasese district.

SDIs were designed basing on the norms and guidelines contained in national policy documents. The indicators for measuring performance of service providers and authorities hence measure the extent to which these stakeholders comply with their roles and responsibilities as set in these norms and guidelines.

Each SDI is a composite indicator that captures a number of aspects under each area of performance. For each SDI, the service provider or service authority receives a score among 5 possible values: 0 (Very low), 0.25 (Low), 0.5 (Fair), 0.75 (Good) or 1 (Excellent). Criteria for the allocation of each value were agreed upon with national sector stakeholders. The value of 0.5 (Fair) was set as the benchmark, i.e. the level from which national norms and standards are just fulfilled. In other words, this is also the minimum acceptable score in terms of performance on each SDI. The value Excellent (1) represents the ideal case.

The SDIs applied for measuring the performance of service providers and authorities as well as the aspects they cover are summarised in Box 2 (for more details, see also Bey,et al., 2014).

During data collection, scores were allocated based on a self-assessment by the service provider or authority, using ordinal scoring. The allocation of scores through a self-assessment has the advantage that stakeholders have the opportunity to reflect on their own practices, but it also has the disadvantage that some of them may overestimate their actual performance.

For each level – service provider, sub-county or district – different indicators are allocated an individual score. An overall performance score can also be calculated at each level; it is obtained by summing the scores of the individual indicators. For service providers and sub-counties levels, that both comprise three individual SDIs, the maximum overall score that can theoretically be reached is therefore three, while the corresponding benchmark is 1.5 (3 times 0.5). For districts, whose performance is measured through six individual SDIs, the maximum overall score that can theoretically be reached is six, and the corresponding benchmark is three (6 times 0.5).

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Performance of service providers

Scores reached by WSCs on each SDI and overall

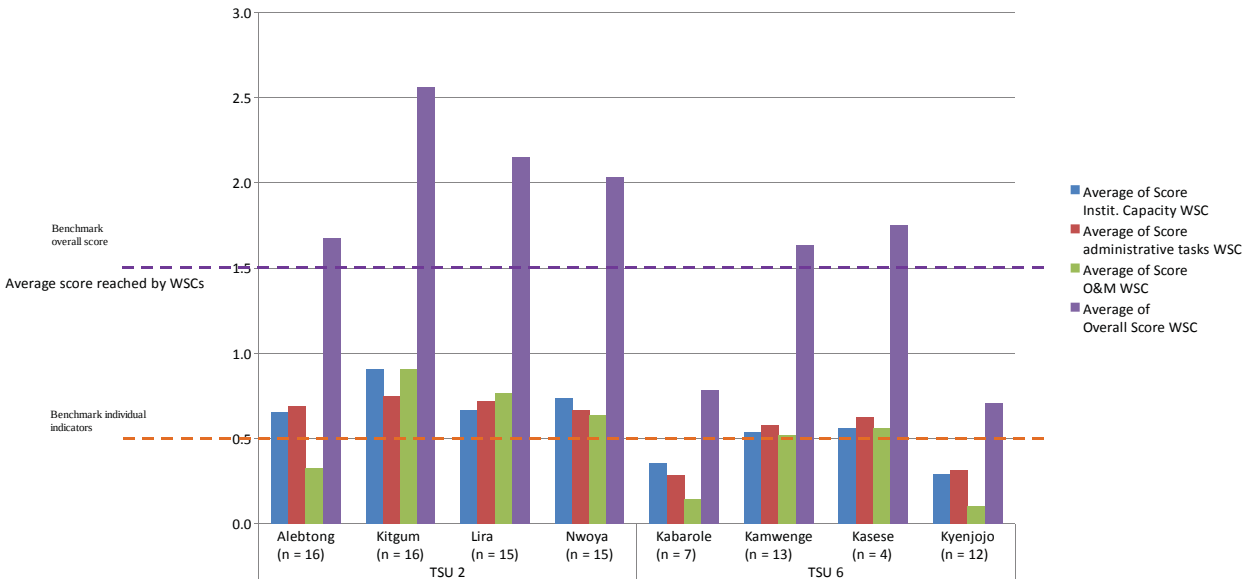
Figure 1 shows for each district the average score of all interviewed WSCs on each SDI, as well as overall.

BOX 3: DEFINITIONS

The Y-Y strategy is a community managed savings and credit initiative that is used to leverage financing for operation and maintenance (O&M) of water facilities. The initiative seeks to address the challenge WSCs face in mobilising communities to contribute towards O&M by linking payment for water to livelihood of households, through the provision of micro credit. Water users make monthly payments ranging typically between 200 and 2000 Uganda Shillings (USD 0.08 - 0.83). A proportion of the collected money is reserved for O&M while the rest is used as soft loans to members who wish to borrow.

A Handpump Mechanics Association (HPMA) is an association that brings together Handpump Mechanics (HPMs) operating in a given district to enable them to perform more effectively their roles in terms of repair and maintenance of water systems. The first HPMAs in Uganda were established by some DWOs in partnership with community-based organisations, with the idea that HPMAs would coordinate and supervise the work of HPMs, provide them with peer support, and facilitate their access to spare parts. Since the study, HPMAs were rolled-out nationwide.

Figure 1: Average score reached by WSCs for the 3 indicators at service provider level, and overall



In six out of the eight districts, the average overall score for the WSCs reach the benchmark. In one district (Kitgum) the average score is good, in five districts (Alebtong, Lira, Nwoya, Kamwenge and Kasese) fair, in one district (Kabarole) low, and in one district (Kyenjojo) very low.

WSCs in TSU2 displayed better levels of performance than committees in TSU6 on all individual indicators. In TSU2, with the exception of Alebtong for the indicator measuring WSC involvement in O&M, the average score for each individual indicator is always above the benchmark. In contrast, in TSU6, none of the average scores of the individual indicators reach the benchmark for Kabarole and Kyenjojo districts. Given the historical context in TSU2 – transition from two decades of civil conflict and relief support to recovery and development in 2006, with the re-introduction of community-based management – many WSCs there have been established more recently, which may partly explain their better performance.

Links between performance of WSCs and service level

The performance of the WSC can have a positive influence on the level of the service. For instance, in TSU6, facilities whose committees have a higher overall performance are repaired faster as shown in Figure 2.

The two districts in TSU6 where water committees are performing better are the ones where innovations to the standard management system have been found: Kamwenge (Y-Y strategy) and Kasese (HPMA) districts. In addition to having a positive influence on the performance of the WSCs, these innovations also seem to guarantee in turn better water services; for instance broken down facilities are repaired faster as shown in Figure 3

Users' satisfaction with the service delivered is also higher in these two districts, especially where the Y-Y strategy is found. In Kamwenge District, 85% of users are very satisfied with the service delivered against 63% in Kasese, and only 47% in districts where no innovations were found.

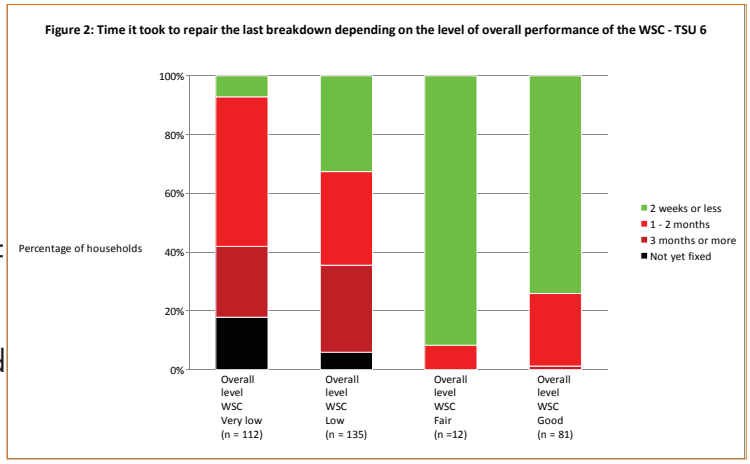
Performance of service authorities

Performance of sub-counties

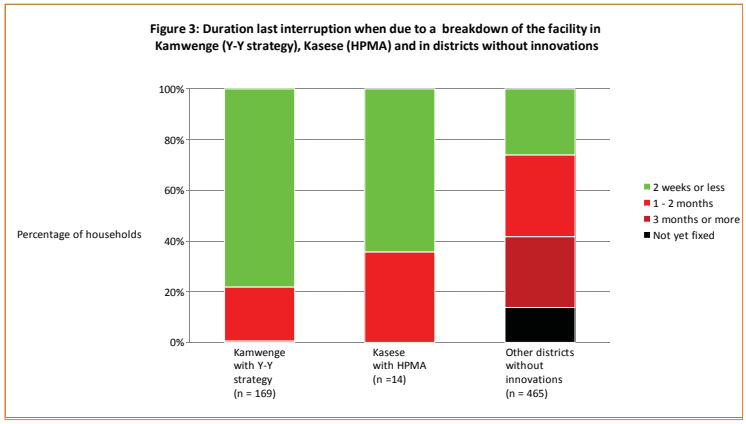
Figure 5 shows for each district the average score on each of the three composite indicators, as well as overall.

Regarding the overall performance of the sub-counties, it appears that the average scores exceed the benchmark in only half

of the districts. Lira and Alebtong (in TSU2) and Kasese (in TSU6) are particularly standing out as having better performing sub-counties, while three districts (Nwoya, Kabarole and Kamwenge) are more in the average, and sub-counties in Kitgum are particularly weak. The highest performance of the sub-counties in Lira was attributed to the fact that in this district sub-counties formed Sub-County Water and Sanitation Coordination Committees (SCWSCCs) that are functioning well.

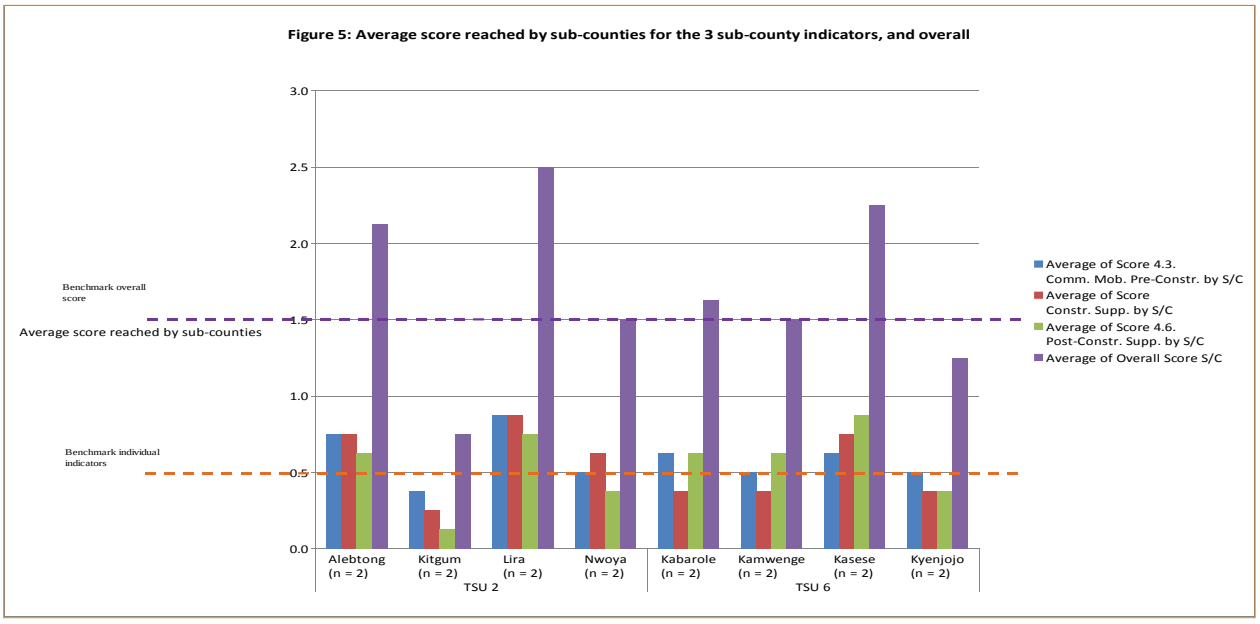


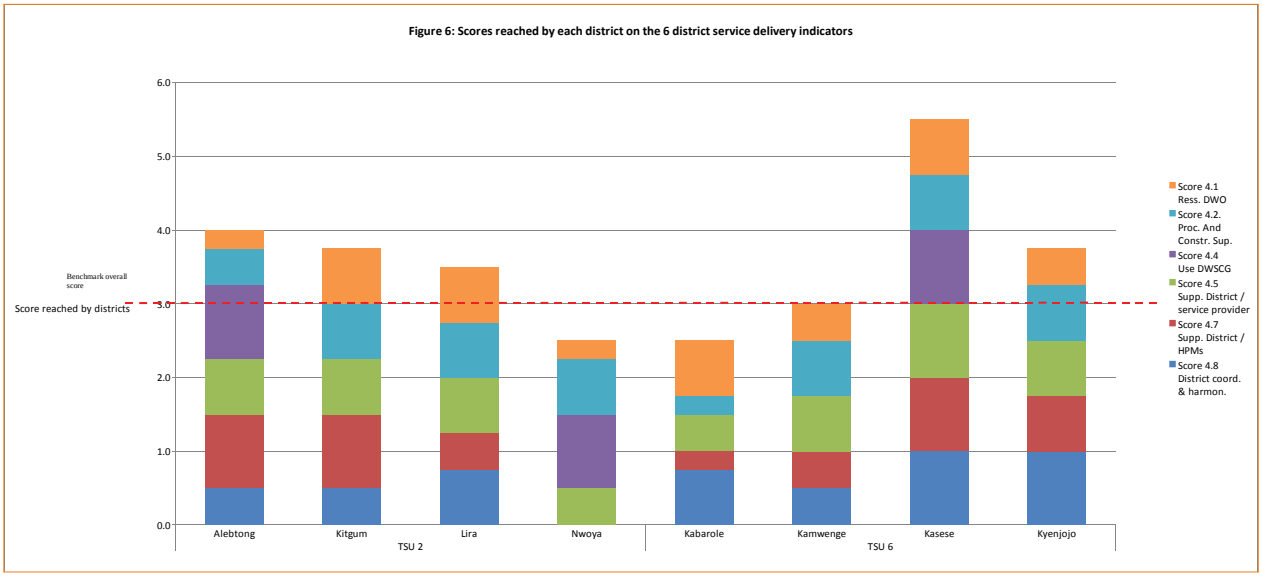
Sub-counties in TSU2 rated their performance in mobilising communities before construction as better (average score of 0.63) than in TSU6, (average score of 0.57). However, these scores are probably overestimated, as some critical requirements (e.g. settlement of land and ownership conflicts with formal agreements in place; preparation of a realistic and viable three year O&M plan) are often hard to meet.



When it comes to sub-county support during construction, the average score of all sub-counties in TSU2 is again 0.63, against 0.47 in TSU6. A drop in performance is therefore observed in TSU6, between the first and second SDI.

For the SDI on post-construction support and supervision, the average score of sub-counties in TSU6 is higher (0.51), while in TSU2 the average is 0.47. This last indicator is the weakest one for sub-counties in TSU2.





Correlations were looked for between the performance of the sub-counties and

- the level of the service delivered
- users' satisfaction with the service, and their participation in management and maintenance
- the performance of the service providers.

The aim was to establish whether, for instance, in areas where the sub-county is performing its duties better, the level of the water service and the performance of the WSCs increase. However, no correlation was found. This could be due to a threshold effect, i.e. that a sub-county would need to be above a really good performance level to have any effect on the level of service. It may also be that the capacity of the WSCs is often so low that they cannot absorb the support in an optimal way.

Lastly, the self-assessment of the sub counties had some weaknesses, with sub-county staff often overrating their actual performance, which may have an impact of the effectiveness of the cross-tabulations.

Performance of districts

Figure 6 shows the scores reached by the eight districts on each of the indicators. The overall score, is represented by the height of the whole column.

Six districts have an overall score that reaches or exceeds the benchmark, but most of these only have a score just above it. With a good overall performance, Kasese (in TSU6) stands out as performing particularly better than other districts, whiletwo districts have average scores significantly below the benchmark.

The overall performance of districts in TSU6 varies quite a lot. Kasese's overall performance (5.5) is more than twice as much as the one of Kabarole district (2.5). In TSU2, all districts except Nwoya have similar levels of overall performance. Nwoya being a new district, with fewer resources, its overall performance is the lowest.

It can be noted that districts in TSU2 have been performing better than TSU6 districts on procurement and construction supervision, and use of the DWSCG, while districts in TSU6 have been performing better than TSU2 districts on resourcing of their water offices, post-construction support to WSCs, as well as coordination and harmonisation.

Below is an overview of findings on each indicator:

- Resources of the DWO

In TSU2, two districts have a good level of performance (0.75), while the other two have a low level (0.25); in TSU6, all four districts perform well or fairly.

- District planning, procurement and contract management

Generally, districts rated their performance as good. Only Alebtong district considered it as fair, and Kabarole district as low.

- Utilisation of DWSCG

Most districts did not follow the guidelines for allocation of the DWSCG. Most districts that did not follow the allocation formula used a higher percentage for management costs, as 4% is seen as quite low. They also stated that in their view investments in O&M should be more than 8%.

- Post-construction support, supervision and monitoring to service providers by the district

Six out of eight districts assessed their performance as good or excellent, while two considered it as fair. The frequency for updating the MIS varied significantly, some districts doing it quarterly and other annually, while the percentage of water points where water quality testing was performed ranged from 4% to 90% depending on the district.

- Post-construction support, supervision and monitoring to HPMs / local artisans by the district

Districts had very varying opinions on this indicator: three rated their performance as excellent, one as good, two as fair, one as low and one as very low.

- Coordination and harmonisation

Generally, districts of TSU6 considered that they are doing better than TSU2 districts: two districts rated their performance as excellent, one as good and one as fair. In contrast only one TSU2 district rated its performance as good, two as fair and one as very low. These results may be explained by the fact that districts of TSU2 have a shorter history of having functional DWSCCs, only since the end of the 20-year armed conflict between LRA rebels and the government of Uganda.

Correlations were looked for between the performance of the districts and performance at other levels. One strong correlation that appeared is between the performance of the district and the reliability of water facilities, as shown in Figure 6.

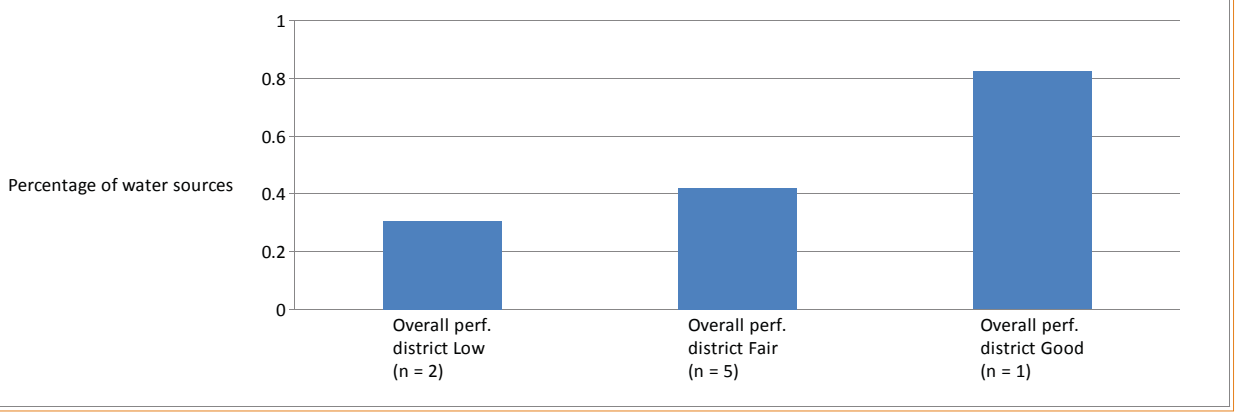
Cross tabulations also showed that when a district performs poorly, WSCs also perform poorly, both on each individual indicators and overall.When the district performs fairly or well, chances are higher that the WSC performs better, although this is not a guarantee. This trend is found more strongly in TSU 6, see Figure 7.

DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Service providers' performance

In six out of the eight study districts, the average overall score for the WSCs reach the benchmark. The majority of WSCs hence have an acceptable performance, although not excelling. The performance of the WSCs was found significantly lower in TSU6 than in TSU2, where many committees have been established more recently. The two districts in TSU6 where committees have an acceptable performance are the ones where innovations to the standard

Figure 7: Percentage of reliable water sources, depending on the overall level of performance of the district



management system have been found: the Y-Y strategy, which is a WSC-managed savings and credit scheme, and the involvement of a handpump mechanics association. The performance of WSCs is better when districts are better performing. When looking at the individual performance indicators of the WSCs, committees usually perform better on indicators of institutional capacity and administrative tasks. The involvement of WSCs in O&M often is the indicator with the lowest score. The collection of water fees by water committees is a very problematic issue; as WSC members are volunteers, they may have other priorities rather than chase water users for payment.

These findings suggest that community-based management of point water sources as currently practiced is showing its limitations. WSCs often manage services on a voluntary basis with hardly any motivation. They often lack the support required for them to perform their tasks efficiently. Could more professionalisation, help to ensure the model functions better? More professional management options are available:

- Setting up sub-county based water user associations
- Privatising management of point water sources, e.g. having HPMs as private operators
- Establishing sub-county based water supply and sanitation boards for overseeing all water facilitiesin a given area, be they point sources or piped schemes. This model is currently piloted under the Triple-S initiative in Kabarole and Lira districts.

Whenever more professional structures cannot be yet be set up, a first step could be to tackle the tendency of WSCs to become dormant because they have only few tasks to undertake. The establishment and running of savings and credit schemes such as the Y-Y strategy seems to motivate committees to undertake their tasks, and perform more effectively.

Service authorities' performance

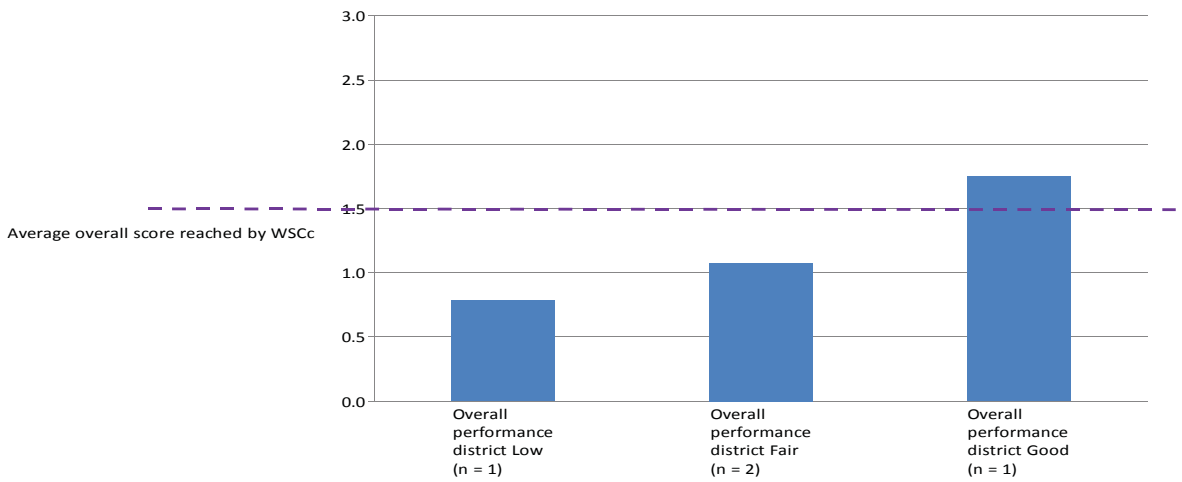
Most sub-counties have an overall performance that is below the benchmark or just reaching it. Weaknesses are at all stages of provision of the water service: before, during and after construction. Local sector stakeholders with whom the finding of the study were analysed highlighted that post-construction support, be it by sub-counties, districts or NGOs, is still very poor, as there usually is no plan for these activities.

The overall performance of the districts was also rated as fair, with most districts performing just around the benchmark, and only one excelling. Three areas are identified as critical gaps at service authority level.

Gaps at sub-county level

There is an institutional gap at sub-county level. Although sub-county staff should play

Figure 8: Average overall score reached by WSCs depending on the overall performance of the District, TSU6



a crucial role in the provision of rural water services, in particular during users mobilisation and for some post-construction support activities such as support to WSC through conflict resolution or re-training of committees, there is no decentralised office of the water department at sub-county level. Instead, staffs from other departments, i.e. Health Assistants and Community Development Officers, are tasked to do these activities, with the challenge that they are also involved in other work of their respective offices. Due to this gap, quite often water users or WSCs by-pass the sub-counties whenever they have a problem with their water facility, going straight to the DWO.

Findings of this study suggest the need for an efficient structure at sub-county level, with staffs largely dedicated to water activities. Should a new platform / water office be opened at sub-county level or will the establishment of sub-county based water supply and sanitation boards help addressing this gap? In all cases, sufficient resources for post construction activities will be required at sub-county level to top up still limited funds collected by WSCs. Strengthening of coordination at sub-county level will also be key for improving support to communities and service providers by all local sector stakeholders.

Allocation of resources

Lack of resources at both sub-county and district levels is often cited as a key limiting factor by local governments and can explain at least partly the limited influence that the performance of these service authorities has on services and performance of service providers.

For instance none of the districts were found with the prescribed number of staff, highlighting a staffing issue. In Kabarole district, in 2012, only UGX3,000,000 (about USD 1250) was allocated to post-construction support; this is for all sub-counties in the district and represents about USD0.005 per capita. This contrasts strongly with the estimates from a study by Triple-S and WASHCost (Smits,et al., 2011), which established that USD 2-3 per capita per year are required to provide direct support to service providers, including the costs of monitoring.

The responsibility for post-construction support lies with the districts; these usually have a budget for refresher trainings of WSCs. However, districts are not allowed to transfer any part of the DWSCG to sub-counties, even for post-construction support activities carried out by these sub-counties. In the end districts simply use the funds. Sub-counties have funds of their own but do not always set WASH as a priority, and may allocate most of their budget to other sectors. The lack of a dedicated budget to WASH at sub-county level was seen as an important issue by stakeholders with whom the study results were discussed.

The required additional resources should mostly come from central government. This also comes through enhanced support from the TSUs.

Coordination between stakeholders

Another area of improvement at service authority level is coordination between stakeholders. In some sub-counties, such as Layamo (Kitgum district), strong linkages exist between the Community Development Officer, the Health Assistant, local politicians, and the HPM, which seems to be having quite positive effect as 72% of the households pay a water fee there.

Local politicians are often accused of undermining the involvement and sense of ownership of communities, for example by promising free water points or discouraging people from paying for water. To counteract this, there is need for technocrats and politicians to work together, to ensure that a harmonised message is delivered. Negative political influence can be limited by advocating and explaining to politicians why it is so important that consumers pay water fees, and by involving them during critical steps of implementation, such as community mobilisation. Having one voice from the technical and political sides can limit users finding excuses for not paying.

The harmonisation of discourses and approaches actually concerns all stakeholders providing WASH services. This starts with all local government and NGO staff implementing the guidelines, e.g. for community mobilisation. This should be led by the Ministry of Water and Environment, and Chief Administrative Officers should hold to account development partners who do not follow the guidelines and rules.

Districts' performance on coordination and harmonisation is often affected by various issues, such as the non-participation of some stakeholders to DWSCC meetings, inadequate follow up of issues raised during DWSCC meetings, or limited funding for organising these meetings. Districts should fully embrace their service authority roles by holding accountable stakeholders who do not attend DWSCC meetings, as participation to coordination platforms is to be seen as part of the work of the various organisations and agencies.

Added-value of Service Delivery Indicators

The application of service delivery indicators in eight districts of Uganda has permitted to highlight some of the weaknesses commonly found among service providers, providing a deeper understanding of where problems lie than for instance the Golden Indicator on "Management". SDIs also go beyond the Golden Indicators by permitting to track the performance of service authorities, which are key in ensuring the quality of service delivery.

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About Triple-S

Triple-S (Sustainable Services 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 & Melinda Gates Foundation.

About this briefing note

This briefing note focuses on the measured and perceived performance of service providers and service authorities. It is based on the analysis of data collected from randomly selected Water Service Committees, eight District Water Officers and 16 sub counties. The study looked at the tradntinal Service Delivery Model and at two new innovations within the service management system at service provider level.

an initiative of IRC | triple-S