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**ENSURING AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT  
OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL**

**Good governance for sustainable WASH programming:  
lessons from two USAID-Funded projects in Uganda**

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*The USAID/Uganda Strengthening Decentralization for Sustainability (SDS) Program's WASH component and the Northern Uganda Development of Enhanced Local Governance, Infrastructure, and Livelihoods (NUDEIL) Program brought innovative approaches to supplying WASH services and infrastructure through existing District Local Government systems in Southwestern and Northern Uganda respectively. The SDS Program's WASH Component focused on increasing the flow of resources, both human and financial, into existing District programs. Increased numbers of trainers and informational resources for CLTS and hygiene education allowed Districts to increase their number of ODF communities. The NUDEIL program built infrastructure through the District Local Governments, all the way from planning to construction supervision. The program allowed war-affected Districts to build up their capacity for planning, procurement, engineering supervision, and training with technical guidance from the implementing partner to successfully complete a large number of water points, with trained hand pump mechanics and water user committees.*

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**Background of WASH in Uganda**

Uganda has a population of over 35 million and is one of Africa's fastest growing countries. As much as 56% of Ugandans are under 18 and the annual population growth rate is 3%. (UBoS 2014) Although barely 17% of Ugandans live in cities at present, Uganda's urban growth rate suggests a tripling of its urban population by 2025. (World Bank 2013)

Although Uganda has made improvements in access to safe water over the last few years, access to an improved water source, especially in rural areas, still remains low at only 64%. Additionally, access to improved sanitation is only 34% with the country unable to meet the Millennium Development Goal target of halving the number of people without access to improved sanitation. Water and sanitation facilities in Uganda's schools remain badly underfunded, inadequate and poorly maintained, leading to many detrimental impacts on the ability of children to lift themselves out of poverty. In Uganda, sanitation coverage at schools has actually decreased over recent years, as demonstrated by the decrease in pupil to latrine stance (cubicle) ratio from 57:1 in 2004/05 to 67:1 in 2011/12, largely due to an increased number of youth. In order to address these challenges and attain comprehensive and sustainable improvements in WASH, it is critical that a strong enabling environment is created through improvements in national and district governance, policies, planning and monitoring (MoWE 2012).

**SDS Program WASH Component**

The Strengthening Decentralization for Sustainability (SDS) Program WASH component, funded by the United States Agency for International Development, supported the improvement of access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene practices in selected schools and health centers. The WASH component activities covered the south western region of Uganda in the districts of Kabale, Kisoro and Kanungu, and concentrated on WASH in selected schools, health centers, and communities with a focus on improving the delivery of District Local Governments' WASH services.

Target districts were not being allocated enough resources to meet their goals in WASH, and the component was designed to help alleviate this. For 20 districts in Western Uganda, there were only two master Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) trainers, who also had full time jobs at districts. The SDS Program WASH component supported the creation of a one year pilot project, adding a new level of trainers, Trainer of Trainers (ToTs), who don't need to be at the level of master trainers, but can effectively train people and access the expertise of the master trainers when needed. The ToTs successfully conducted outreaches to a large number of villages, increasing the number of Ministry of Health--Certified Open Defecation Free (ODF) communities from 2 to 19 during program implementation; 50 more were in the process of being certified during the following year. These ToTs are still regularly used by the Districts for outreaches and are recommended to NGOs as a resource for CLTS work.

Both the central and district governments in Uganda often receive donor funds to drilling boreholes, construct rainwater harvesting systems, and build gravity flow schemes. Often, these funds do not allow for (or aren't sufficient to cover) the software work required to create Water User Committees (WUCs). In Uganda, WUCs are required by policy for all public water points; however, many Districts don't have the resources to train these committees. Through the SDS Program's WASH component, WUCs for water points that didn't have WUCs were trained and brought up to government standards, using the Government's training materials and policies. WUCs were also created for schools, which previously didn't have them, as it was thought that the school administration was capable of managing the resource; however, this often proved false. The addition of WUCs within schools allows for clear management roles and responsibility for school water points.

In Uganda, the most basic level of health care is provided by Village Health Teams (VHTs), who operate at the lowest level of local government (village). VHTs are responsible for disseminating information and educating people in their area on all health related matters, including WASH. At the outset of the WASH component, most VHTs were not spending much time on WASH, mostly focusing on Malaria, HIV, and MCH. The SDS Program found that VHTs receive sets of Information Education and Communication (IEC) materials on hand washing, latrine usage, safe water, and menstrual hygiene management, and government policy has District Health Officers responsible for training and disseminating information. The SDS Program found that many VHTs did not really understand WASH issues, District Health Officers were overwhelmed with managing larger health centers and hospitals, and most of the WASH training materials and handouts had never been translated into local languages. The SDS Program WASH component worked alongside District Health staff to train these VHTs to understand WASH issues, including CLTS, and translated all related documentation into local languages to facilitate VHTs to speak knowledgeably on WASH issues to their community members.

The key lesson the authors took from the success of these interventions was to **build on existing programs** being undertaken by the government **within existing government structures**. It is key to identify gaps in government resources, and then work alongside their staff to fill those gaps. District Local Government staff were involved in these interventions from planning through impact assessment and monitoring. The Result is that district staff now have full knowledge of the programs in a format they understand, and the programs were executed according to government policies. The authors believe this is the best path to sustainability and the takeover of all WASH work by government. One major downside of this approach can be seen where District staff are not dedicated to the work at hand. In that case, none of the work is likely to continue when the intervention is finished, and individuals trained will see their skills atrophy over time, requiring re-training the next time an intervention comes. The other downside is the difficulty of monitoring groups such as WUCs – it is expensive and challenging to survey in such a way that avoids the WUC itself saying “yes, we exist and we are still operating properly” even when this is not the case.

### **The NUDEIL Program**

The Northern Uganda Development of Enhanced Infrastructure and Livelihoods Program (NUDEIL), funded by the United States Agency for International Development, wanted to strengthen the procurement and finance management processes of the Districts while providing water points, schools, and rural access roads in previously war-affected Districts of Northern Uganda. The Government of Uganda has a process called the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets (PPDA) that must be followed for all Government of Uganda procurements. The creation of new Districts in Northern Uganda and the long period without regular procurements during the time of war left the Districts lacking the technical skills to properly

use the PPDA process to procure, manage, and pay for infrastructure projects. Often times, Districts were not even requesting funds available to them for infrastructure from the Central Government (e.g. Uganda Road Fund, Uganda Sanitation Fund.) All funds for the NUDEIL Program were transferred directly to the Districts, but all payments had to be approved by the implementing partner, allowing the Districts to plan, procure, supervise, and monitor the infrastructure projects with the assistance of USAID and the implementing partner.

One of the best qualities of the NUDEIL program was its utilization of the government's planning process, built up from the lowest level. The Government of Uganda implements a planning process each fiscal year to allocate resources to Districts across the country. This process starts at the lowest level, in village development committees. Their plans then inform the Parish Development Committee, which then informs the Sub-county Development Committee, which is then rolled into the District Development Plan. The Districts analyze the requests from the lower levels and compare it to their data – *Where is the nearest existing improved water source to this community? Where is the nearest existing access road to this community?* – and select the areas of highest need in their request for resources from the relevant Central Government Ministry. Using this system, redundant water points are avoided, and community engagement is guaranteed, as a community is required to already have a WUC set up, *prior* to requesting a water point. The major downside of this approach is that politics can affect which communities end up in the District Development Plan, which is very difficult to perceive to an outside organization. The Author's experience with boreholes drilled under this program did not show any clear signs of improper political influence however; many of the boreholes were in difficult places to reach where other organizations were not assisting with the provision of water.

After the planning stage, all software work on safe drinking water, good hygiene practice, and the development of strong financial and managerial systems within WUCs were completed by the District Water Office and District Health Office with training assistance from the implementing partner. Because District Water Office staff were involved in the training of all WUCs, anytime they made field visits (even to other boreholes) they could easily stop by and informally check on the status of both the WUC and the water point. In addition, individuals applied to become hand pump mechanics at the Sub-County level, with the goal of having a mechanic in each Parish. They were then trained by the implementing partner and the districts together, again providing the District Water Office staff with a clear picture of who is trained, what their skills are, and where they reside so that they know who to contact to resolve any issue with a borehole. This also benefits the hand pump mechanics, who now have a working relationship with District staff. While Sub-Counties are supposed to have spare parts for community boreholes, stock often runs short; District staff frequently travel to the region's large towns (Gulu, Kitgum, and Lira for the program Districts) and can purchase spares there to take back to Sub-Counties for delivery to hand pump mechanics.

The major benefits of a program designed like this is the impact it has on future WASH work implemented by government, as well as **giving communities faith and a stake in the planning process, and allows Districts to build their capacity for procurement and implementation with technical assistance.** When Districts can effectively use Government of Uganda funds to procure water points and other necessary infrastructure, work will continue after the exit of the program. It ensures that all work has been recorded by the overseeing government agency, from the ministry level to the WUCs. There are some downsides, however. The amount of time required for a program like this is substantially higher than a similar program that completes the same infrastructure work without procuring through Districts. Payments to construction and drilling contractors can be delayed due to inefficiencies in the process, and causing the Districts to break their own contracts.

## Conclusion

The authors understand that not every program requires the level of local government involvement that these two programs saw, but want to strongly highlight the benefits (and challenges) of working closely with Districts, especially in Uganda. Experience in Uganda and other countries notes many organizations operating under the radar, avoiding what is often seen to be obstinate politicians or lazy civil servants. While there is occasionally a bit of truth to that, the fact remains that these are the individuals who are typically responsible for the continuation of any WASH work after the exit of international NGOs and large donors. It is therefore important to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of local government technical staff, and involve them in your activities to leverage their strengths, their knowledge of the local landscape, and to

**build their capacity** as technocrats so that the world can reach the Sustainable Development Goals for Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene without outside funding ad-indefinitum.

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### **Note**

The views expressed reflect the authors' views, not necessarily those of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Cardno Emerging Markets USA, Ltd. is the Implementing Partner for the SDS Program. Cardno Emerging Markets USA, Ltd. served a financial and engineering evaluation consultant on the NUDEIL Program.

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