



## CAPACITY BUILDING FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS: Reflections from Watershed Uganda work package

Watershed is a strategic partnership of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, IRC, Simavi, Wetlands International and Akvo.

The long-term objective of Watershed is improved governance for WASH and IWRM so that all citizens, including the most marginalised, can benefit from sustainable services.

The immediate goal is to enhance citizens' ability to obtain information so that civil society organisations (CSOs) can advocate for change based on reliable, accurate data.

The programme is active in Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Kenya, Mali and Uganda. Other partnerships are being developed in The Netherlands and at the international level.

Civil Society Organisations (CSO) play a critical role in the realisation of citizen's rights to Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services. CSOs are the voice of citizens at local, national and international level. With funding from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Watershed Programme, a partnership of IRC, Simavi, Wetlands International and Akvo, undertook to build the capacity of CSOs in Uganda to empower them to identify and address the critical governance issues in WASH and water security. This briefing paper summarises the capacity building initiatives and experiences from the Watershed Uganda work package throughout the first year of implementation. The purpose is to share some lessons and pointers for improvement in CSO capacity building for lobbying and advocacy.

### Background

The Watershed Programme recognises that civil society organisations have limited capacity to effectively undertake their roles and mandates. Thus, the programme is investing resources in strengthening the capacity of CSOs and empowering them to engage and participate in dialogue and dissent about WASH and water security issues.

In the context analysis for the Watershed Programme in Uganda, it was observed that most civil society organisations operating at local, district and national level were involved in advocacy and lobbying at policy and practical programme level. However, many had limited knowledge and capacity on a range of related issues including:

- Formal and informal policy processes within Uganda
- District level governance planning and resource allocation processes
- Capacity to analyse issues – including stakeholder, power and influence mapping
- Selection of target audiences, delivery platforms and design of approaches and information products.



It was therefore recommended that the Watershed Programme in Uganda undertake an assessment of civil society partners in relation to Lobby & Advocacy (L&A) capacity shortfalls, then tailor capacity development and mentoring plans.

To this end, Watershed partners in Uganda have over the past one year taken steps to identify CSOs involved in WASH and water security activities, and facilitate self-assessments of their L&A capacities, with a view to enhance and empower them through capacity building interventions. While this is an ongoing process, it is already generating some important lessons on processes and approaches which can be applied to similar programmes within and outside Uganda.

Rationale

CSOs play a critical role in the realisation of universal access to WASH – as expressed in Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG6). CSOs are the voice of citizens at local, national and international level. They play a wide range of roles like:

- At the local level, CSOs mobilise communities to claim their water and sanitation rights and to participate in decision making.
- At the national level, CSOs can advocate for changes in WASH policies, practices and discourse to represent voices and perspectives of citizens. They can also avail critical evidence and mobilise stakeholders for engagement. They can also hold governments and local authorities accountable to apply policies and regulations.
- At the international level, CSOs and their coalitions can advocate for WASH investments towards universal coverage (SDG 6), for a better integration of integrated water resource management (IWRM) principles in the SDG 6 and engage/lobby national governments to uphold the human right to water and sanitation.

It is therefore prudent to invest in CSO capacity to enable them to effectively undertake those roles. CSOs should have

the requisite organisational structures and skills to be able to advocate key issues and rights of citizens in their areas of operation – at national and decentralised level.

The process

*Identify CSOs whose capacity need enhancement:* Within the context of the Watershed Programme, local CSO implementing partners had been selected and confirmed mainly because of their outstanding contribution to the WASH and IWRM sectors. These were Joint Effort to Save the Environment (JESE), Health Through Water and Sanitation (HEWASA) and Uganda Water and Sanitation NGO Network (UWASNET). At community level, Community Based Organisations (CBOs) were selected with the help of the Community Development Officer (CDO) – a government official at community level who mobilises and supports communities to pursue development goals based on government programmes.

*Capacity self-assessment:* Through a guided self-assessment process, the organisations were able to identify their capacity strengths and gaps. This enabled them to determine and prioritise the necessary capacity building actions. Assessing organisations on a wide range of aspects<sup>1</sup> ensures that they have the governance and management structures; the HR and financial resources, as well as the necessary sectoral experience to undertake evidence-based advocacy in WASH/IWRM.

*Development of a capacity building plan:* Based on the key gaps identified, the Watershed partners and CBOs prioritised the areas for capacity building and developed action plans accordingly. Most of the capacity gaps had to do with knowledge and skills.

<sup>1</sup> The twelve Watershed Capacity elements include: Internal organisation; systematic lobby and advocacy; understanding of stakeholder context; legitimacy through representation of constituency; inclusion of marginalised groups; understanding of sustainability of WASH services; integration of WASH/IWRM; transparency on own activities and results; collaboration with other CSOs; collaboration with other non-government actors; use of reliable evidence or lobby and advocacy; level of holding service provider to account.



LEFT: Joint Effort to Save the Environment (JESE) staff members take part in the training on lobbying and advocacy for Watershed partners in Uganda.

Key capacity gaps identified

- Absence of lobbying and advocacy strategies and action plans.
- Limited documentation, storage and dissemination of information for reflection and learning.
- Limited use of reliable evidence. Specifically, the ways of acquiring and using evidence and data at district and national level.
- Level of use of reliable data: need to collaborate with academic and research institutions for evidence-based advocacy.
- Low capacity in policy and decision influencing at national level.
- Unbalanced knowledge and experience between WASH and IWRM. Partners were more inclined to one or the other.
- Limited understanding of the policy making and power relations at the national level hence need to understand how the government system works even at decentralised level.

L&A Capacity building Interventions by Watershed partners

In the context of the Watershed consortium, partners come on board with unique experiences and expertise which they apply in a complementary manner to the benefit of all members. The same principle applied to the capacity building initiatives. Thus, the different initiatives shared below were delivered/implemented by the best-suited strategic or implementing partner in the consortium. The initiatives also took different approaches including workshops, dialogues, field visits, practical/applied training. Some of these are explained below:

- *Dialogue on integration of WASH and IWRM at national and district level.* This was to identify the issues and opportunities for WASH/IWRM integration by CSOs and Government actors; identify the causes and underlying factors impeding integration and identify the strategies or ways of stimulating actions. Participants were able to develop practical Institutional Action Plans aimed at enabling WASH/IWRM integration. The Albert Water Management Zone for example presented and got input to complete the Semliki Catchment Management Plan. The Ntoroko District Chairman also pledged to prioritise WASH and IWRM in his district.
- *Training in gender mainstreaming in Lobbying and Advocacy* at national and decentralised level: Participants received training about the fundamentals of lobbying and advocacy, especially as they relate to gender in WASH and IWRM. The CSOs were enabled to develop and execute advocacy plans.
- *Training in data collection* and visualisation using Akvo FLOW, and introduction to Akvo Lumen. This was to enhance partners’ ability to collect and use data as evidence for lobbying and advocacy. So far, two partners (IRC and HEWASA) have collected updated data on WASH status in Kabarole and Ntoroko Districts. The data is being used to inform WASH planning in the respective districts and it has been welcomed by the district officials.
- *Outcomes harvesting workshop* was organised with the purpose to monitor the Watershed programme outcomes in a participatory manner. Partners have successfully harvested two rounds of outcomes, capturing the key developments arising from the Watershed programme activities.



TOP: Health through Water and Sanitation’s (HEWASA) Stephen Birungi makes a point during a lobbying and advocacy training workshop for Watershed partners in Uganda.

- *Documentation and reporting capacity building:* This was in the form of a “writeshop” for Watershed partners. The purpose was to enable partners to record and share the key developments in their respective programmes, while at the same time enhancing their skills to produce a wide range of communication outputs. All outputs have since been disseminated widely online.
- *Field visits to learn from WASH/IWRM good practices:* CSO members of the IWRM Working Group participated in a learning field visit to Lira and Otuke Districts where they visited sites of WASH/IWRM integration.
- *Training of CBOs in WASH business skills:* CBOs that were identified at community level were offered training in WASH basics including the safe water chain and the sanitation ladder. They were also trained in the business aspects of WASH like making soap for sale, and production of reusable menstrual pads. These sanitation business activities contribute to better management of sanitation and hygiene, and by extension to IWRM. In that respect, they were also trained in business skills. The CBOs in turn offered the same training to their clients.
- *Communication skills for CBOS:* The identified CBOs were also trained in communication skills to enable them to articulate WASH and IWRM issues. They have since started participating in District Water and Sanitation Coordination Committees where they are given slots to raise issues of WASH and IWRM at community level.
- In some cases, the capacity gaps were “self-bridged” by the individual CSOs with guidance from a strategic Watershed partner. For example, some organisations had staff members with skills that could bridge the gaps.
- *Cross learning and peer capacity enhancement* where a CSO with the necessary capacity was identified to support a peer CSO which had gaps.





**LEFT:** A participant explains a point during the water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) / integrated water resource management (IWRM) dialogue in Uganda, July 2017

## Challenges

- *Capacity gaps are too wide:* Some CSOs and CBOs had too many capacity gaps calling for more and longer interventions on the part of Watershed partners.
- *Resource constraints:* While the CSOs and CBOs are given training, they lack adequate human and financial resources to implement the action plans.
- *Inadequate capacity monitoring:* For the CSOs and CBOs that do not undertake regular activity and capacity monitoring, they could not readily outline their strengths and weaknesses during the capacity assessment process.

## Reflection and learning

- *Continuity:* Capacity enhancement is a gradual process that involves constant engagement. Through continuous interaction with the selected CSOs, CBOs will make efforts to actualise the integration of WASH and IWRM in their programmes.
- *Early government involvement:* Involvement of the officials from the district local government and Ministry of Water and Environment during the capacity mapping and assessment created buy-in into the Watershed programme and further making it easy to identify potential allies to lobby for successful WASH and IWRM integration.
- *Horizontality:* Involving CSOs' staff at all levels of institutional hierarchy widened the information base and helped identify more capacity gaps.
- *Needs-based capacity building:* Setting the objectives of the training based on the needs / gaps identified by the CSO members meant that issues of concern were addressed at first

hand. For instance, members wanted to know the different ways of doing advocacy at different levels and this informed the selection of presenters who came to share their advocacy experiences at grassroots, regional and national level.

- *Open sharing and inspiration:* CSOs that had experience in IWRM were open to sharing and this gave the other members the confidence that they can work in IWRM and Climate Change.

## Recommendations

- There is need for innovate forms of capacity building aside from the traditional workshop setting. This may include: development of toolkits on specific themes and topics; tailored mentoring/ support on development plans; selection of capable local partners (in terms of advocacy and lobbying) to be given specific roles and responsibilities in terms of mentoring others. This will make for easy appreciation and a trickle-down process.
- Continued involvement of all stakeholders in the capacity building process including government and private sector for them to appreciate the need for WASH-IWRM integration.
- Continuous CSO collaboration to generate synergy and joint learning.
- There is need to identify an issue which can be used as a case study for the working group where lobby and advocacy can be seen practically from beginning to end. The data research approach would be useful in this regard, as it would generate evidence together with stakeholders.
- Constant and active follow-up monitoring to ensure that the CSOs and CBOs sustainably apply the acquired skills and knowledge.