

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND: IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO WASH SERVICE DELIVERY IN UGANDA

ABOUT THE WATERSHED PROGRAMME

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 being implemented in Rwenzori Region, with the intention to escalate and apply lessons at national level.

This policy brief highlights issues and obstacles that impede access to Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services for nearly ten million people in Uganda. The unserved people face multiple vulnerabilities brought about by social, economic, environmental, technological, institutional and legal factors that account for their marginalisation and exclusion from WASH services.

Uganda has ratified and domesticated through the national Constitution and National Development Plans, several international and regional conventions and treaties that recognise and provide for access to water and sanitation as a human right. However, translation of policies and regulations has not been matched with financial commitments currently at 3% of the national budget; yet the sector requires about nine times more the current investment in order to meet the national targets. This threatens the achievement of universal access to the human right to drinking water and sanitation by 2030.

It is important for all sector actors to develop strategies to ensure universal access to safe, sustainable water and sanitation, leaving no one behind

THE UNSERVED, EXCLUDED GROUPS

Marginalisation and exclusion may be obvious or concealed. Different groups of people are marginalised from access to adequate WASH services including:

- **Women and girls**, by virtue of their gender roles are the main users of water and sanitation at household level. Girls endure long and risky distances and lose school time in search of water or due to lack of adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities at school. Women often lack financial resources and power to participate in WASH related decisions.
- **Communities in hard to reach areas** largely remain unserved due to geographical or topological factors such as high-water tables making it difficult to have sustainable sanitation facilities and limited water source options caused by cases of salinity and turbidity.
- **The Elderly and PWDs** face multiple vulnerabilities due to physical challenges as well as limited participation and representation at household and community level. Often, the WASH technology designs don't cater to the needs of the PWDs and the elderly. Society still expects them to walk long distances to the nearest source and use strenuous technologies like boreholes and squat toilets.
- **Children** in most communities bear the burden of fetching water, which affects their ability to attend school regularly. They are susceptible to WASH related diseases due to low immunity and lack resources to provide for their own WASH needs.
- **Ethnic Minorities** are excluded from services due to social, physical and historical differences leading to limited representation and ability to voice their WASH concerns.
- **The poor in rural and urban areas** lack finances to invest

in and maintain appropriate WASH facilities. They pay higher water tariffs because of too much dependence on intermediaries. They are susceptible to diseases because they mostly live in poor environments particularly in urban areas.

- **Marginalized populations** because of their livelihood style especially pastoralists, fishermen, forest dwellers and migrant casual labourers on large estates. They are transient in nature and do not seem to settle in a given locality making it difficult to serve them.
- **Refugees and transient communities** – Access to clean water and appropriate sanitation facilities are among the most urgent needs of people displaced by conflict. By providing appropriate water and sanitation infrastructure, and educating people on good hygiene practices, families are helped to live dignified lives.

BARRIERS TO ACCESSING WASH SERVICES

Several obstacles impede access to WASH services for various categories of people:

- **Planning challenges and population dynamics** – Uganda is experiencing exponential population growth (3% pa) and high urbanisation (6.6% pa) that is not matching the ability of the country to plan and provide appropriate basic services including water and sanitation.
- **Inappropriate and expensive technologies** – due to climatic variations and topographical limitations, some of the traditional water supply technologies such as boreholes and springs are no longer viable. Some areas have high iron content, saline water and collapsing soils that require expensive technologies and significant financial investment, amidst stagnating sector funding averaging at 3% of the national budget per annum.



Citizens participate in a community dialogue on sanitation. It is important for both women and men to participate in decision making processes concerning WASH services



Children draw water from an unsafe open pond, a recipe for water-borne diseases

- **Geographical / topographical barriers** - some places have poor quality water due to salinity and high iron content making it unsuitable for human consumption. Weak and collapsing soils especially in hilly and flat areas often cause erosion leading to flooding and water logging. In such areas, it is nearly impossible to construct lasting latrines and water sources are easily contaminated. As a result, communities resort to risky, distant, polluted and dirty water from streams and rivers, limiting the amount of water available for use per household per day.

- **Economic or Financial Barriers** – the sector has experienced consistent low funding levels (averaging at 3% pa), insufficient to meet demand in line with the strategic investment plan projections. Only 3% of the district water and sanitation conditional grants can be allocated to sanitation. Budget allocation to sanitation by MWE remains at 2bn per annum, meanwhile the line ministries of education and health has no or limited allocation to sanitation and hygiene in schools and health care facilities.

- **Institutional Barriers** such as inadequate planning; inadequate participation of communities; lack of appropriate and reliable data; and political influence affecting decisions on resource allocation. There is also limited integration across sectors (such as education and health) affecting prioritisation and resource allocation for WASH and gaps in guidelines for district allocation.

- **Insecure and hard to reach groups or communities** – communities living in remote and insecure locations are sometimes left out of the service delivery chain mainly due to the difficulties associated with reaching them. For example, people in fishing communities, displaced populations and refugees in emergency settings are sometimes excluded from access to WASH services due to planning, technological and cost limitations.

- **Social Cultural Barriers** – tribal and social classifications particularly among the Batooro and Bakonjo and Batooro and Bakiga were expressed as reasons for exclusion from receiving services or gaining representation in decision-making spaces.

THE NEED TO REDUCE MARGINALISATION AND EXCLUSION FROM WASH SERVICES

The Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognises universal access to safe water sanitation and hygiene services (SDG6) as a means to achieving the rest of the goals. Investment in the water and environment sector is critical to achieving Uganda's short term and long-term goals. For example, 48% percent of the agricultural sector and 34 percent of the manufacturing sector depend on water resources. Research has also shown that every single investment in WASH realises four times more in return (Industrial Economics 2016). Thus, insufficient investment in water management will have much more dramatic effects on the specific water dependent activities in the agricultural, manufacturing and service sector.

Despite the numerous obstacles, the sector has significant investments and made policy reforms to support improvements in WASH service provisions. Nonetheless, progress remains a challenge leaving over 10 million Ugandans without being served. This requires deliberate and targeted investments at various levels in order to ensure universal access to WASH services by 2030. Uganda is signatory to the 2030 SDG Agenda and is therefore, to pay attention and address existing inequalities likely to impede realisation of universal access by 2030.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the current efforts, issues of marginalisation and exclusion from WASH services remain largely unaddressed. This calls for better articulation of the issues, increased awareness and deliberate efforts to design and finance appropriate interventions that address the unique needs of the different categories of people. Specific recommendations have been proposed:

Influencing legal and policy processes

- Strengthening policy and institutional processes to ensure that the standards and indicators for water, sanitation and hygiene align with the SDGs to improve monitoring of progress
- Strengthen regulation of services, accountability and feedback mechanisms to increase participation and response to the needs of the less served populations
- Undertake consistent and targeted advocacy to influence key decision makers in MWE, MOES, MOH and DPs to increase sector financing.

Strengthening planning, Implementation, monitoring and reporting processes

- Support mapping and generation of desegregated WASH data to improve investment decisions
- Disseminate existing policies, strategies and guidelines to increase understanding and response on the right to water and sanitation, targeting political and technical leaders, and communities.
- Adapt and scale up appropriate technologies and approaches to match context specific needs of the marginalised and excluded groups.
- Strengthening integration and coordination across sectors to increase harmonisation and influence appropriate planning and resourcing of relevant WASH interventions
- Strengthen support supervision; monitoring and inspection of WASH infrastructure to improve access for all at schools, health care facilities, household and community level by key actors

Prioritising Research, Documentation and Learning

- Investing in research and learning in collaboration with the private sector, NGOs to innovate and adapt new models and approaches that may be more effective and efficient in addressing unique needs of the different groups and context.
- Organise and facilitate learning forums and dialogues at different levels to share experiences and stimulate debate on



An elderly couple try out their home-made tippy tap. WASH services should be delivered to all

pertinent issues that compound marginalisation and exclusion with a view to inform practical actions for redress.

Strengthening partnerships and collaborations

- Strengthening partnerships and collaborations with different sector stakeholders (line ministries, private sector, CSOs, Government Agencies, to improve targeting and leverage technical and financial resources

Improved Sector Capacity

- Undertake continuous and well targeted sensitisation to improve appreciation and stimulate action from the right actors to address marginalisation and exclusion from WASH services
- Strengthen capacity of implementers to appreciate the issues, appropriate approaches and technologies and provide adequate financial and human resources to address marginalisation and exclusion
- Empowering women and men on their critical role for providing WASH and increase community WASH financing through supporting Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) or initiatives to address resource requirements at household and community level.

