

Improving Water Supply to Rural Communities in Bundibugyo District by Strengthening Water Management Structures

Author: Wilbrod Turimaso

Country: Uganda

Sector: WASH RWER

CONTEXT

Sustainable water supply to the rural poor remains a major challenge for the Ugandan government. Although the government and its partners pipe billions of Ugandan shillings into the sector every year, the statistics show little improvement. Thirty-six percent of Ugandans do not have access to safe water due to nonfunctioning systems.

Bundibugyo District uses a variety of water supply technologies, including gravity water schemes, protected springs, rainwater harvesting, boreholes and shallow wells. Due to the large network of freshwater streams originating from the mountains, piped water accounts for 59% of the district's water supply network. Yet Bundibugyo still suffers from poor water supply.

MWE reports that only four out of the 18 schemes within the district are fully functional, with 13 partially functional and one completely out of use. These nonfunctioning systems lead to dry tapstands, leaving 31% of residents without access to safe water. Within the district, the water supply varies. Some subcounties like Karugutu and Busaru have coverage and functionality rates well above 90%. Others are much poorer. In Kanara only 33% of water sources are functioning.

The 2010 Water Supply Atlas, published by the Uganda Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE), attributes many of Bundibugyo's water supply problems to technical breakdowns. It claims that only 7% of nonfunctioning systems are due to poorly-run water user committees. What it fails to consider, however, is that *all* breakdowns are a result of poor management. If management is good, repairs are carried out in a timely manner, leading to sustainable service delivery.

CLIENTS & PARTNERS

Bundibugyo District requested SNV's support in strengthening the capacity of management structures for the gravity flow scheme (GFS) in Ndugutu (as well as two other subcounties). The district believes that once the management structures for these water systems are in place and able to perform their duties, water service delivery will become more sustainable. SNV in turn engaged Rwenzori African Development Foundation (RADF), a civil society organisation, as a local capacity builder (LCB) to strengthen the capacity of the Ndugutu GFS water board. Ndugutu GFS has a total of 45 tapstands serving the populations of Ndugutu and Bubandi subcounties with the last tapstand located in Nyakuka Town Council.

SNV and RADF intervened with the following objectives for the process:

1. To get district and subcounty authorities to work together to address water management issues.
2. To support the water board to learn and adopt best approaches to community management.
3. To liaise with the regional network of rural piped water suppliers, Mid-Western Umbrella Water and Sanitation (MWUWS), and the regional technical support unit to provide policy direction and guidance to subcounty authorities on operation and maintenance.

RADF started by helping the clients to draft clear strategies and work plans through inception meetings with the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), the District Water Officer (DWO) and subcounty officeholders. These meetings also spelled out the roles and responsibilities of each party. The LCB helped the offices develop a water point mapping and assessment tool, which they then used to carry out a situation analysis.

The assessment of the Ndugutu GFS revealed a number of technical and management challenges that needed immediate action. These challenges stemmed from existing capacity gaps identified among water boards (who oversee the entire GFS) and local tapstand committees (who are charged with maintaining a single tap).

First, a central water board was formed in 2003 but had never been reviewed and was inactive. Therefore, no one was overseeing routine maintenance of water pipes, inkates and tanks. Second, tapstand committees were nonexistent, leaving no one to collect user fees that could be used to repair breakdowns and perform routine operation and maintenance.

Over time, of course, this neglect led to multiple technical challenges. Only a few tapstands were able to receive water; none of the air release and wash-out valves worked; there were multiple leakages in the piping at the main reservoir tank; the pipeline was severed in several areas by road construction equipment and went unfixed; none of the taps were fenced as required by the operation and maintenance policy; illegal connections went unnoticed, reducing water pressure; and most tapstands lacked heads.

Based on these findings, the LCB developed a capacity building plan. The plan involved bringing on board all the stakeholders from the district level to the water user level through feedback sessions. Through the subcounty, which is the local water authority, the LCB and district water mobilisation officer reviewed the central water board, providing general sensitisation and specific training to its members.

The water board's training included sessions on:

- Roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders in the operation and maintenance of the GFS
- Collection and management of funds through the "YY" strategy, a local savings scheme
- Community mobilisation and communication skills
- Water, sanitation and hygiene, with emphasis on the safe water chain
- Formation and election of water boards
- Transparency and accountability
- Action planning

Key during the training was the promotion of YY (Yahura-Yehoza) which is local for savings and credit around the water sources as a long term measure to ensure availability of O&M funds. This micro credit scheme has been successfully used in other areas such as Kamwenge to improve user contribution and involvement beyond just getting water but to also address other issues of access to micro credit. This way O&M funds are always available whenever needed for repairs.

The training ended with the development of an action plan (with timelines) for sustainably undertaking operation and maintenance activities for Ndugutu GFS. The action points included mobilising to collect operation and maintenance fees; opening a bank account for the scheme; procuring tools, spares and bicycles so that the repairs can be carried out; and conducting a survey for any possible extensions to the scheme. These activities will be reinforced by periodic performance reviews of the water board, with coaching and mentoring to be provided for one year.

OUTCOMES

The joint effort by SNV, RADF and the district water office has so far led to several positive changes in the management of Ndugutu GFS and the local government's approach to sustainable water service delivery:

- A knowledgeable and functional central water board was formed in line with the Ministry of Water and Environment guidelines. The board, together with Ndugutu subcounty, is implementing the action points agreed upon during the training session. The water board holds monthly meetings and has begun collecting user fees. So far a total of UGX 200.000/= is in the O&M treasury.
- The community has responded positively to the efforts of the central water board. The water user committees are now in place and four communities have finished fencing their tapstands according to MWE guidelines. Before this activity, only 27

tapstands out of the 36 in Ndugutu subcounty were functional. This number has increased from 27 to 33 tapstands with most of these getting fitted with new tapheads

- The District has already engaged a contractor to address the exposed technical problems that were beyond the capacity of the users to finance. Rehabilitation works starts October 2011 and ground breaking for this work took place on 08th, October 2011.
- With most of the repairs undertaken and the District undertaking to rehabilitate the major ones, the water board has resolved to use the funds in the treasury as seed for the YY strategy for the long term O&M sustainability efforts starting with November.
- The subcounty has for the first time agreed to prioritise water issues and integrate them into its 2011/2012 budget.
- Women are participating in the management of Ndugutu GFS. This is evidenced by both meeting attendance and the composition of the new water board, on which two of the five members are women.

IMPACT

While it is too early to know the impact of the intervention, SNV expects that improving functionality while implementing the safe water chain will lead to a reduction in water-related diseases, especially among children.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs) are an excellent method to diagnosing problems and exploring solutions to dysfunctional rural water supply schemes. Involving all stakeholders at all phases enhances ownership of projects.
- It is not right to assume that government agencies are aware of their mandate. For example, the subcounty authorities did not know it was their duty to plan for and integrate WASH into their subcounty development plans and budgets.
- Water management committees and boards need to be reviewed regularly so that members who are no longer committed or available can be replaced.
- Although communities are aware of the need for water and that their livelihoods depend on it, they must be guided on how to sustainably maintain water services. Innovative ways which ensure that the users maintain a continued involvement in the O&M activities will be needed for sustainable management of these water facilities

With focused guidance and support, management of rural water schemes can greatly improve. Ndugutu GFS has already improved and promises to offer even better service in the future. However, just as a child needs to be nurtured and mentored to grow, this intervention will require close monitoring for some time to yield sustainable results. Consistent coaching and mentoring promotes a sense of leadership and commitment among water boards and user committees.

STANDARD
DATA

- Composition of team: Turimaso Wilbrord, Jacinta Nekesa
- LCB: RADF, Rwenzori African Development Foundation
- LCD PPDs: 12
- SNV Staff PPDs: 10



Sensitisation of water users in Ndugutu & the New Ndugutu GFS Water Board



Bundimbuga and Mitunda village tapstand fenced after the training



Gonne tapstand fenced after training and planning for repair of Butama Health Unit tapstand