

FROM ASHES TO INSPIRING LOCAL SOLUTIONS: KAMA'S STORY.

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Sector: Education

CHALLENGE

"Kama has risen from the ashes" were the words of the chairperson Parents Teachers Association of Kama Primary in early 2008 at celebrations to mark outstanding 2007 Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) results. For much of its eighty seven year history Kama primary school in Mbale district had indeed been in the ashes. The school had perennially recorded poor results at Primary Leaving Examinations; the sense of community belief had been eroded and apathy has taken over the lives of the pupils, teachers and the community at large. The challenge facing Mbale district, like any other district in the country was how to improve the quality of education under the above environment. Taking an "in situ" capacity development approach to tackle capacity gaps in school governance, management and learning environment the challenge for SNV was to design and implement capacity development approaches that would demonstrate in selected pilot schools that notwithstanding the stresses on the education sector, the education authorities and their communities had it within their power to improve access to, progression and quality of basic education. At the district level, SNV also supported processes that were aimed at improving stakeholder collaboration, coordination and learning.

CLIENT

Mbale district local government has a total of 104 government aided schools; with a total enrolment of 81, 324 pupils (41,475 girls and 39,849 boys) (Mbale District Development Plan-(DDP) 2010-2012). The primary entry point of SNV interventions is the District Local government who are mandated with the provision of services at the local level. The Mbale DDP seeks to complement government efforts of improving incomes and livelihoods of the people as well as promoting free and compulsory education and access to WaSH for its citizens. Kama primary school is one of the 104 schools in Mbale district. Located in Bufumbo Sub County, about six kilometres from Mbale town, Kama is an a typical rural school in Uganda. As of June 2010, the school had a total pupil population of 687. The school has been a learning site and recipient of SNV capacity development services (CDS) since 2007 when it was selected on the basis of appalling 2006 Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) results when the school was the second last in ranking in the district.

SNV intervention in Mbale commenced in April 2007 with the identification of two pilot schools to try out a community focused intervention-that placed responsibility for change in the hands of the school community. This case represents Kama's story; an inspiring story of change that has seen Kama rise from the ashes. It builds on the case written in June 2008 entitled "School Quality Improvement Program (SEQUIP) in Mbale District- rising from the ashes"

METHOD / SNV INTERVENTION

SNV secured the services of a local capacity building organisation that undertook a school performance review (SPR) to assess capacity needs to ascertain school level impediments to a conducive learning environment and providing subsequent support. The SPR looked at three broad areas¹ namely governance, management and learning environment. A validation exercise (school level SPR meeting) was done and priorities that the school would tackle were identified and documented in a school development plan.

The SPR process was followed by an elaborate training of school leaders (head teachers, school management committee (SMC) members and members of the Parents teachers association (PTA) on enhancing community participation in education. Subsequently, a one year school development plan (SDP) was developed based on the challenges and priorities identified during the SPR. The SDP was developed through a participatory process involving the head teachers, teachers, school management and Parents. The SDP was developed to tackle

¹ These indicators were derived from the Uganda Government's Directorate of Education standards indicators of a good school.

OUTCOMES

pupils' and teachers' performance, school infrastructure development, stakeholder involvement in school programs/activities, improving retention of learners within the school system and maintaining good sanitation and environment.

SNV further provided ongoing support towards the implementation of the SDPs. Specifically, this involve: creating awareness on stakeholder roles and responsibilities, providing hands on support to SMCs PTAs and teachers in monitoring the implementation of the SDP, managing pupil assessment and school management systems, maintaining records of pupil performance during the school year, providing guidance to teachers in giving feed back to pupils, conducting class days and involving pupils in monitoring of actual lesson delivery by teachers, among others. The community around the school was trained in using simple tools of monitoring school performance.

Through an exchange visit to a rural community in Rakai district in Central Uganda, teachers, pupils, members of the SMC and a selected number of members of Kama community were exposed to better methods of hygiene and sanitation at school and community level.

As a result of the visit, a low cost rainwater harvesting tank was constructed at Kama primary school and simple sanitation and hygiene practices began to take root such as erecting a simple screen wall (see photo below) to provide privacy to the pupils' latrines, using tippy taps etc.



Figure 1: an improvised screen wall on a girls' latrine at Kama

Another significant change at Kama was the realisation by the school management and parents that they were active stakeholders in the management of the school and that they had a big role to turn around the affairs of the school. It did not take long for the community to discover their voice and demand for a classroom block to house pupils of lower primary. By the end of 2007, a three classroom block, complete with a five stance latrine facility, had been constructed by the district local government. The school had imposed subtle pressure on the district administration to replace a crumbling mud and wattle structure with a permanent block.

The school's ability to act and self organise is further evidenced by the establishment of a daily teacher attendance tracking system, managed by the teachers themselves. As such, teacher absenteeism has gone down by over 40%. In addition to reduced teacher absenteeism, there is a noticeable change in teachers' commitment evidenced by total teaching time and learning assessment. This is further complemented by pupil monitoring of actual lesson delivery. On its part, the school has put a mechanism of tracking pupil absenteeism with particular focus on the girl child in close collaboration with the parents and local leaders. This is aimed at reaching an amicable understanding with the parents to return the girls to school. In 2009, one girl who had been forced out of school due to pregnancy was successfully returned to school to sit her final PLE exams even when the official stand is that such girls set a bad example and should not be allowed back to school.

From the initial awareness creation meetings held at the school and sub county levels, the sub county education taskforces took a very keen interest in the running of the affairs of the school. This interest sparked off a sense of accountability and reporting by the teachers and head teachers. At school level,

one of the critical gaps that had been identified was non completion of the syllabus. This was tackled by identifying effective ways of teaching so that syllabi are effectively covered within the prescribed time.

Much of the capacity development services to Kama has focused on enabling the school management committee and teacher to effectively execute their mandate. There are visible signs of improvement in this regard. The SMC meetings are more regular and well documented with clear follow up actions. It should be noted though that the ability to effectively follow through on these actions is still wanting. There is appreciation among the community members that leadership is transitional and dynamic, as evidenced by the smooth election of new SMC members at the beginning of 2009 for a two year term.

Increased vigilance of the SMC in monitoring school activities is noticeable as a result of skills and knowledge imparted on alternative support supervision models. The SMC members are confident to monitor school performance in aspects of discipline, security and safety, punctuality, health, hygiene, environment and sanitation, pupil and staff welfare among others. As the Chairperson SMC noted:

"As management we are now able to make key valid judgments about the performance of our school on non-technical matters". Chairperson SMC Kama

Within a year of SNV interventions, the SMC proposed measures to tackle the perennial problem of school feeding. Parents were able to contribute a modest fee of 3000 Uganda shillings (an equivalent of about two US dollars) per child per term towards daily lunches. In order to complement this effort, the school administration has re introduced the idea of school gardening. A one-acre cassava garden, intercropped with beans, was opened up towards the end of 2009. This has made it possible for the school to feed all the teachers and pupils in upper primary. See photo below:



Figure 2: Part of the cassava garden at Kama

At the district level, efforts have been made to share good practices exhibited by Kama. The head teachers' monthly peer group meetings have provided an avenue for inter-school learning and support. Also arising out of this intervention, the district local government (DLG) has made it a point to focus on teaching and learning as a way of improving the quality of education. From 2009 to-date, a district wide (covering all 142 government and private primary schools) intervention that targets Primary six and seven teachers was launched. This initiative was borne out of the increased realisation that the starting point was to create an understanding among the teachers that the quality of education is directly related to the quality of instruction in the classroom. Every school term, the head teachers are brought together in an interactive session to discuss ways of becoming effective at what they do. The focus, according to the district education officer (DEO), is to make a *"conscious shift from teacher centeredness to child centeredness"*.

One of the other significant results is the appreciation of the SNV capacity development approach that places change in the hands of community members as opposed to handouts and tokens. As part of the broader strategy to replicate, the DLG is "interesting" other actors to adopt the approach. *"We want to do away with mere tokenism and build lasting results among the people"* says the DEO. As

IMPACT

a result, accordingly, development actors have slowly bought into the approach with organisations like World Vision taking on the approach in one sub County.

While there were attempts to introduce wider learning platforms at sub county level, there has been little success in this direction as only four out of the fourteen sub county level education task forces are functional.

With these changes registered at Kama, there has been stable increase in enrolment at the school. From 2007 when SNV interventions began, enrolment increased by 42% with percentage increase in enrolment for girls at 31% and boys 27% within the first year of interventions.

In Uganda a school is judged successful by its performance at PLE. Within the first year of SNV intervention, Kama primary school registered 184.6% improvement in PLE performance as measured by passes in division I and II. It was a historic achievement since the school had not registered such a performance since 1920 when it was established. According to the Chairperson PTA, "Kama was raising from the ashes". This trend has continued with emphasis being laid not so much on Div I & II passes, but also on reducing failures (Div U) and absentee candidates (Div X). Further analysis of performance reveals percentage increase in Div 1-3 pass rates; while also showing percentage decline failure rates (Div 4, U and X) The former represents candidates who are able to move on from primary to post primary levels (secondary and vocational) under the government system. It is worth noting that prior to SNV intervention, the highest ever Div 1-3 pass rate was 32% with a failure rate of 97% compared to the 2009 pass and failure rates of 76% and 24% respectively.

LESSONS LEARNED

This case reflects a gradual and remarkable shift in the community's perception on the value of education. This is an outstanding achievement considering that such behavioral change does not come overnight. It is imperative that this new behavior is maintained for it to cause the desired 'ripple effect' in the entire community.

The case for community ownership of their problems and identification of solutions to these problems cannot be over emphasized. With a little push, the community can unleash their often untapped potential and act.

Whereas there is appreciation of the in-situ method of capacity development support that SNV has used in the implementation of this initiative, it would appear that this appreciation is not matched with corresponding replication efforts. Although a few attempts have been made, it is imperative to focus on supporting the DLG to identify ways of further replication. It is imperative for both SNV and the client to develop a well conceived approach to collective learning during future interventions. This would ensure that even when anticipated results are identified and evidence of actual accomplishments collected, it would perhaps easily ensure that the lessons of experience will be learned and subsequently implemented.

While this success has been registered at Kama, it has been as a result of intensive support through the LCB. Future interventions of a similar nature must be cognisant of the vast amount of resources needed to achieve these results. SNV and Mbale DLG need to answer key critical questions for example, why the uptake of the approach by the DLG is low. This way, it would be able to determine whether there are institutional impediments to the change in behavior and practice that is required at DLG level.

For SNV, it would be critical to reflect on whether we have worked in a manner that sufficiently and progressively transfers leadership of the programme to the DLG.

STANDARD DATA

MOU date:	April 2008- April 2010
Composition of team:	2 advisors, 1 Local Capacity Builder
Involved partnerships	None
Financial resources invested:	418 PPDs up to Dec 08; approx; 16,000 euros
Scores output and outcome measurement	3, end 2009