

Key learnings from the Kitgum Municipal Council Town Sanitation Plan Development Process

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Background

Water For People, with funding from UNICEF Finland, is scaling up Sanitation as a Business (SAAB) in Kitgum District in Northern Uganda. The main goal of the project is to increase access to sanitation services through scaling pit emptying business in the district and enhancing the knowledge and skills of Kitgum Municipal Council (KMC) technical and political staff in planning for faecal sludge management (FSM). It's against this background that the development of a Town Sanitation Plan (TSP) for the municipality was initiated and developed.

Problem

Despite the many interventions to address the challenge of inadequate improved sanitation in Uganda, the sanitation coverage figures still seem to mask some critical challenges in the entire sanitation value chain (collection, transportation, treatment, and re-use). Moreover, despite a provision in the Public Health Act which stipulates that each town should have a Town Sanitation Board, the said boards are nonexistent in all the towns. Improvement in sanitation provision along the entire sanitation chain is thus necessary for sustainability of interventions.

Like the situation in many other towns in Uganda, Kitgum is experiencing tremendous population growth that makes the sanitation needs even more critical. While several improvements have been made over the years, the rapid rate of urbanization has not been in tandem with the sanitation requirements in the municipality. Notably still, the majority of toilets are unlined, filled with solid waste, and with minimum faecal sludge management services or even cesspool emptiers, in addition to the inadequate regulation on faecal sludge management.

It is also worth noting that effective implementation of sanitation initiatives and interventions requires full involvement of a variety of stakeholders within and outside the three divisions of the municipality, a concern which the TSP process effectively addresses. This has culminated into fragmented sanitation developments and low funding and mobilization towards sanitation despite observed disgust from poor sanitation outcomes.

Objective of the TSP

The goal of TSP is to have in place a strategic document that holistically captures all the interventions necessary to improve the sanitation situation in the municipality, covering sustainable sanitation interventions in households, schools, healthcare facilities, and public places.



The TSPs will further provide a strategic framework for delivery of sanitation related goals (both hardware and software) for the municipality, in the short, medium, and long term. In this respect, the participatory approach will greatly assist in the identification of local priorities. Solutions will be delivered by the local stakeholders.

Lastly, the TSP will present a structured approach (investment portfolio) to service provision interventions across the sanitation chain in the municipality in a manner that is incremental, comprehensive, and conceded and will thus assist the different stakeholders to plan for investments in a more cohesive manner.

Process of the TSP Development

In Kitgum, formation and orientation of the Sanitation Task Force (STF) was the first step in the development of the TSP. The Town Clerk was tasked with the responsibility of identifying a team from across the different disciplines and departments. It should be noted that the STF is an ad hoc replacement of the Town Sanitation Boards, which despite the provisions of the Public Health Act have never been constituted.

The team comprised of: the Mayor to represent the political wing, Town Clerk to represent the technical wing, Municipal Engineer, Health Inspector, Environment Officer, Physical Planner, Law Enforcement Officer, Production Officer, Community Development Officer, and Urban Education Officer. A representative from the Business Development Forum, the Strategic Planner, and Chair Persons of the three divisions of Pandwong, Pager, and Central respectively were later added to the STF, totaling 15 group members.

All STF members were provided with training and coaching on the five stages of Town Sanitation Planning. The training took the mode of presentations, group activities, peer-to-peer learning discussions, and coaching, among others. The training sessions were organized in accordance with the TSP approach stages of: preparation, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation and reporting. A team from Water & Sanitation Development Facility-North (WSDF-N) and the Resident State Attorney facilitated the training program. In addition, the STF members were taken through a training process to gain an understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

The second step was capacity building of the STF members on the stages of TSP. The following aspects were handled during the workshop:

1. The concept of sustainable sanitation refers to a holistic decision-making process which considers multiple aspects related to sanitation, including health, environment, finance, technology, and sociocultural aspects of the community. It is a system based approach which fundamentally differs from the conventional concepts of sanitation and instead primarily applies to protection of public health.

Most sanitation systems are designed with the protecting and promoting of human health by providing a clean environment and breaking the cycle of disease, but in practice they often fail in one way or another. There is perhaps no system that is 100% sustainable. The concept of sustainability is rather a direction than a stage to reach. Nevertheless, it is essential that sanitation systems are evaluated carefully regarding all the five aspects for each element of the sanitation value chain within the local context.

2. A baseline assessment was conducted to collect data on the current sanitation situation of the municipality by a consultant on behalf of Water For People. The data collection included among other aspects: demography, water and sanitation coverage, an inventory of the various sanitation technologies in use, socio-economic conditions of the inhabitants, effectiveness of the prevailing service delivery, status of the availability of services covering the entire sanitation chain (e.g. availability of pit emptying and transportation equipment and services), wastewater and/or fecal sludge treatment plants, the level of hygiene awareness, and hygiene-related behavior, including handwashing with soap after visiting the toilet.

A baseline report was generated which provided an analysis of the water and sanitation challenges in the municipality and identified the main constraints associated with sanitation. The preliminary report was presented in a stakeholder engagement forum for validation of the outcome and selling the idea of sanitation improvement to the greater community. In addition, a shit-flow diagram was developed.

3. An integrated participatory approach to sanitation planning was applied, bearing in mind sanitation is a crosscutting sector that influences and is influenced by other sectors that relate directly to the affairs of the municipality. These interconnections are seldom explored and understood. Citizens, one of the main stakeholders in sanitation, are rarely involved in the decision-making process when it comes to implementation of sanitation interventions which leads to lack of ownership and eventually failure of the intervention. Also, other stakeholders, like private service providers (especially from the informal sector), local artisans (such as masons and builders), and banks that provide loans for toilets are not involved during the planning of intervention thus making it harder to access services that can be sustained.

It's crucial to consider a holistic and inclusive approach that examines the interrelation of sanitation with other sectors, an approach that involves a wide array of stakeholders while interventions are being planned.

4. The responsibilities for the promotion and provision of domestic, school, public, and institutional latrines are split between three ministerial departments (health, water, and education). This therefore calls for an inter-departmental collaboration at the municipal council level, with each department working not to meet individual priorities, but to aim at developing a common strategy and plan for improving sanitation at the municipal level to achieve holistic and tangible results. The focus should be sanitation for all and not one or the other.

Members for the departments formed under the sanitation task force work together and come up with solutions to improve the sanitation situation. Additionally, clear allocation of functions within the members of the team is crucial for successful outcomes. Overlapping functions and responsibilities lead to confusion and conflicts and thus to the slowdown of the process.

Pooling knowledge, experiences, and resources of stakeholders significantly improved planning of sanitation interventions, in addition to coordination of needs, interests,

strategies, and actions to achieve success. Thus, encouraging stakeholders to talk to each other is the first step to making sustained sanitation provision a reality. Being involved while planning for sanitation interventions ensures wider ownership to improve sustainability of solutions using the multi-stakeholder based approach.

5. The strategic planning process is a series of steps that the municipal council conducts to incrementally achieve the objectives identified via a participatory approach and with due consideration of the principles of sustainability across the sanitation chain. The planning process is divided into five phases, namely initiation, assessment, development of the plan, implementation, and monitoring and assessment. The five phases are further divided into intermediate steps, each defining a certain task.
6. Designing and implementation of the TSP is where action plans are transformed into projects. Once the action plans have been completed, specific objectives should be agreed upon which provide a framework for planning future actions. Aims of projects “to achieve one or a defined number of specific objectives and ultimately the overall sanitation vision” are then formulated. The municipality had many projects with specific objectives and corresponding actions to be taken for each objective.

The project design was an outcome of both project planning and project proposal, and both steps were important for forming a solid project design. A project tree tool was used to identify the hierarchy of the goal, objectives, activities, and results to be achieved.

7. Understanding the sanitation by-laws of the municipality, the Public Health Act, and the Water Act, all in relation to actions and activities being formulated into the TSP. The success and short comings of the project will be determined by the laws in place and how easily they can be enforced by various arms and systems put in place.
8. A project proposal included a detailed description of a series of activities aimed at solving a certain problem, in addition to containing a detailed justification of the project, activities, implementation timeline, methodology, and human, material, and financial resources required. A full project proposal should encompass the title page, project title, an abstract, context, project justification, the target group, project implementation, budget, monitoring and evaluation, reporting, management, and personnel.
9. The municipal council selects one or more of the prioritized interventions from the TSP, and depending on the available resources, implements the intervention(s). Depending on the selected options, these interventions could be either technical ones, such as building a public toilet facility or a communal toilet, or a non-technical intervention, such as conducting an awareness raising campaign, or both.

When opportunities with additional financial resources are available, the relevant council departments, together with stakeholders, implement the other prioritized interventions incrementally improving the sanitation situation in the municipality. While implementation advances, progress is regularly monitored by the task force or by Water For People. The data management system is regularly up dated by an assigned entity.

10. Based on the outcomes of the monitoring, the implementation of activities is evaluated to check for progress, challenges, and constraints. The results of the evaluation are shared with stakeholders in the sanitation forum for further consultation, and if objectives are not achieved as expected, the actions in the TSP are reviewed and corrected. Long and short term goals for the TSP are closely aligned to the activities in the Town Development Plan and scheduled for a five-year period.

Stakeholder Engagement Forum

A stakeholder forum was organized to seek and incorporate the views of the different stakeholders once the first draft of the TSP was ready. This was attended by the STF, representatives of the households (town agents from parish and village committees), development agencies, religious leaders, business community representatives, and private service providers.

Using a participatory approach, feedback and contributions on the most pressing issues related to sanitation in the municipality were noted, action points agreed upon, and subjected expert view fed into the final process of developing the TSP.

Summary

The sanitation planning process was based on the following steps:

1. Water For People, through the municipal council, initiated the planning process by formally endorsing a resolution and a sanitation task force comprising of various departments involved in sanitation.
2. A baseline survey was conducted that involved sanitation (including fecal sludge management), water supply, and solid waste management situation in the town with a Shit Flow Diagram (SFD) being established for the municipality.
3. A stakeholder forum representing a wide interest group was held, and the results of the baseline survey were presented to identify priority issues with regards to sanitation within the municipality.
4. The task force in consultation with stakeholders reviewed the required technical or non-technical solutions with selection of appropriate options based on the principles of sustainable sanitation with due consideration to the entire sanitation chain.
5. The selected options were listed in the TSP per the short and long term goals. The TSP will then be embedded in Town Development Plan per its planning and budget cycle.
6. The municipal council will select one or more of the prioritized interventions from the TSP, and depending on the available resources, implement the intervention(s).
7. The outcomes of the implementation will be monitored and evaluated to check for progress, challenges, and constraints. The results of the evaluation will be shared with stakeholders in the sanitation forum for further consultation and corrective actions.

Challenges

1. Low motivation and commitment of the technical staff that was constituted into the STF at the time of formation and capacity building stages of the processes. This was at a time the former Town Clerk of the municipality was still in office.

2. Commitment from the office of the Town Clerk in the entire TSP development and implementation process is crucial for the success of this process. The amount of gains made in this process during the previous Town Clerk and the strides that have been made with the new Town Clerk in office are vividly noticeable. More has been achieved with the current Town Clerk than what was achieved with the previous Town Clerk.
3. During the process of putting together the TSP into its final document, it was evident that there was a lack of readily available data, especially secondary data, on the demographics of the municipality. Data from the consultant who had been contracted by Water For People to establish a Shit Flow Diagram (SFD) was supplemented by data compiled by Village Health Teams, and Kagga and Partners.
4. The economic status of the outskirts of the Pandwong and Pager divisions of the municipality, in comparison to the central division that form the municipality, are lagging. Most of the activities are concentrated in the central division which serves as the Central Business District.
5. Capacity gaps among the members of the STF were evident when it came to implementing and putting together the final document after the capacity building of the task force. It called for more hand holding.

Lessons

1. Beneficiaries are willing to put resources for sanitation improvement like media coverage. This was evident during the Stakeholder Engagement Forum when on behalf of the media fraternity, the chairperson offered to create awareness and sensitizations on issues pertaining to sanitation in the district as a contribution from media houses.
2. There is a lot of private sector potential in service provision in KMC in solid waste and fecal sludge. With the new Town Clerk in office, he has put emphasis on having private sector players take the lead role in the provision of FSM, in addition to solid waste management and garbage in the municipality.
3. Regulation is core in service delivery. This was evident when the bigger facility was commissioned and the only cesspool operator in the district, Lee Wright, was reluctant to dump at the facility. The task force enforced this through the enforcement officer and eventually sorted it out.
4. Private sector players in the WASH sector i.e. WASH Consult managing the DEFAST and gulper operators through SAAB approach is making great impact. The feedback during the stakeholder engagement forum was commendable and appreciated from the public of all the three divisions of the municipality.
5. More opportunities for private sector involvement to supplement what has been done by the local government and National Water and Sewerage Corporation with a call from the new Town Clerk for more private sector involvement in sanitation.
6. Although KMC has sanitation by-laws in place, these by-laws have never been forwarded to the State Attorney for approval and signed into law or gazetted, hence the need to have them ratified. This process is ongoing, and the resident State Attorney based in Gulu is completing this process hopefully by the end of this year.
7. The sanitation task force passed fees for WASH players in the district, from dumping fees by gulgulpers, to fee structures for cesspool emptiers, and annual operational licenses in one of their seatings.
8. We have the first Town Sanitation Plan for Kitgum Municipal Council which is being reviewed and will then be passed in council. This is the first of its kind for the municipality, especially for sanitation, and it will be used as a tool for lobbying and an investment portfolio.