BMAU BRIEFING PAPER (13/14)

THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

JULY, 2014

Access to Safe water for all: Can Uganda achieve this?

Overview

Access to safe water and sanitation is critical for a healthy environment which translates into social economic values necessary for development. Access refers to the availability of at least 20 liters per person per day from a source within one kilometer of the user's dwelling (WHO/UNICEF 2000).

It is measured by the proportion of the population using an improved drinking water source and an improved sanitation facility. Globally, waterborne illnesses are the second leading cause of death for children under five, killing 1,400 children every day (www.ruralcharity.org).

The policy brief explores the safe water situation, sector interventions for accessing safe drinking water in Uganda; discusses challenges encountered and gives policy recommendations.

Key Findings

- In terms of Sector strategic investment plan/National Development Plan targets, the sector is grossly under-funded.
- The rural safe water coverage has been stagnating at 64% (average) over seven years.
- The underground water potential is declining thus failing some technological options.
- The sector has taken up a number of initiative to increase access but with little improvements.
- Lack of access to safe water mainly affects women and children.

Introduction

The Water and Environment sector objective for safe water supply is; "To provide safe water within easy reach and hygienic sanitation facilities based on management responsibility and ownership by users, to 77% of the population in rural area and 100% urban population by the year 2015 (Millennium Development Goal sector target).

The Uganda National Water Policy (1999) specifies the guiding principle in the delivery of water services as "some for all, rather than all for some". It is government's desire to increase access to safe water to 100% by the year 2015. Safe water in Uganda is provided through rehabilitation and construction of piped systems, boreholes, springs, shallow wells and rain water harvesting tanks.

Safe water

Access to safe drinking water is a basic human right and essential for achieving gender equality, sustainable development and poverty alleviation. However, 36 % of the world's population (2.5 billion people) lack improved sanitation facilities, and 768 million people still use unsafe drinking water sources (WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program 2013).

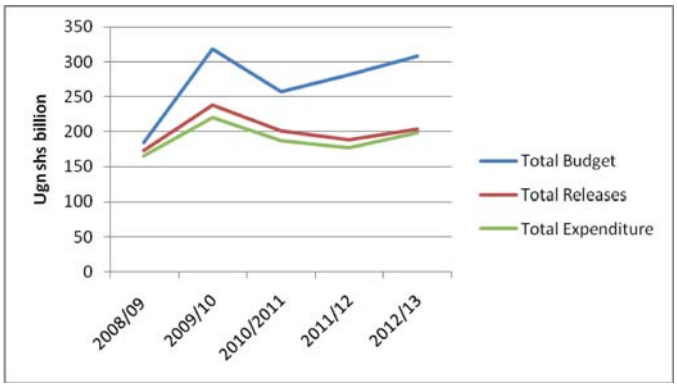
Access to safe water has been stagnant in rural areas as the pace of increment fluctuates with small margins. At this rate, the sector may not reach its targets given the fact that the population increase is one of the fastest in the world at 3.4%. Sector financing, functionality status and per capita investment cost have had a significant effect on the safe water coverage.

Investment trends and the impact on access to safe water coverage

a) Sector Financing/Investment

Although sector financing has been increasing over the years (Figure1) actual releases and expenditures have consistently declined. For example, the Government (on-budget) allocation for Water and Environment sector in the Financial Year (FY) 2012/13 was 2.8% of the total national budget (Ug shs 10.94 trillion). The Urban Vote Function took Ug shs 137.5 billion whereas the Rural Vote Function took Ug shs 24.3 billion. Out of the approved budget of Ug shs 308.3 billion (On budget), only Ug shs 203.7billion (66.1%) was released. Overall, the sector falls short of the Sector Investment Plan and National Development Plan access targets for the FY2012/13 by Ug shs 498.03 billion.

Figure 1: Trends in budget financing of the sector.



Source: ***Sector Performance Reports FY*** 2008/09-2012/13

b) Functionality status of the water sources

Functionality is the percentage of improved water sources that are functional at time of spot-check (rural/Water for Production) or the ratio of actual hours of water supply to the required hours (small towns).The functionality trend for the rural water supplies has stagnated at 83% while that of urban systems was at 69% by June 2013. Table 1 shows the various trends (access, functionality, per capita investment cost).

Trend of Access to safe water, Functionality status and Per capita investment cost

Financial Year		2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Access	**Rural**	61	63	63	65	65	65	64
	Urban	51	56	61	66	67	66	69
Functionality	**Rural**	83	83	82	83	80	83	83
	Urban	51	56	61	66	67	66	69
Per Capita Investment	**Rural**	$35	$38	$44	$43	$41	$47	$44
	Urban	$93	$58	$93	$64	$46	$40	$38
Cost of new person served *in Ug shs	**Rural**	32,161	34,770	42,270	7,564	48,308	36,891	42,000

c) Per capita Investment cost

This is the average cost per beneficiary of new water and sanitation schemes (US$). The rural per capita investment has been increasing because of; increasing administrative costs for new districts, inflation and increased cost of inputs (materials) which impact on the costs and numbers of output. However, the investment costs for urban areas lessen once distance and population in the supply areas are big.

Sector interventions and benefits

The sector has under gone a number of interventions and innovations to improve people's access to safe water, these include:

Formation of Hand Pump Mechanic Associations (HPMAs); The Community Based Maintenance System (CBMS) is the recommended strategy for operation and maintenance of rural water supply systems. The sector initiated support structures at district and sub county levels for the formation and operationalization of the HPMAs to explore and improve operation and maintenance of existing rural water facilities.

The Appropriate Technology Center initiative: this is aimed at action research on water and sanitation technologies that would be appropriate and efficient for adaptation as a guide to improved implementation in the sector. Research has been done on rainwater harvesting, iron removal plant and rope pumps.

Setting up of de-concentrated units including; water management zones, technical support units, umbrella organizations and water and sanitation development facilities for water quality checks, facility development and maintenance; and technical capacity development in the areas of their jurisdictions.

Self-supply: The individual/communities invest their own resources to improve water facilities and entirely own the facility. They may seek for guidance from the technical personnel though there are no clear guidelines and skills by the implementers.

Water Quality monitoring: The water samples are taken at the point of water collection or waste discharge points to check for compliance with national standards. The district local governments conduct quality testing for new water sources and surveillance of old sources. Regular monitoring is done for urban water supplies. In most cases only E. coli and biological tests are conducted.

Ensuring equity: This is the mean sub-county deviation from the district average in persons per water point. It is intended to promote provision of equal opportunities for the water supply delivery service and minimize differences between groups of people. Politics negatively affect allocation of water sources much as equity value improved from 160 in 2011/12 to 153 by June 2013 in the sector.

Challenges encountered in providing access to safe water supply

- The community based initiative to operate and maintain their facilities has not improved the functionality status of finished water facilities.
- Low and unreliable funding where sector activities stall or plans are not able to meet the demands/targets.
- Decreasing potential of quality and quantity of ground water resources affects development and the long-term sustainability of the water supply infrastructure.
- The equity principle is compromised by political factors that are decisive on actual allocation of water facilities in

local governments despite the sector policy strategies, policy prescriptions and guidelines which aim at equity provisions.

- The steady increase in per capita investment costs especially in the rural areas.

Conclusion

The water and environment sector is largely underfunded with huge funding gaps especially in the rural subsector. The funding figures have been nominally increasing but don't translate into increased outputs. Thus access to safe water is at a decreasing rate. Almost 85% of Ugandan population is rural based; yet the most underfunded. At the population growth rate of 3.4% and constant indicative planning figures for the conditional grants over years safe water levels experience slight changes.

A lot of effort has been put into innovations/ interventions but the challenges remain; nonfunctional CBMS, low underground yields, non-equity considerations at local levels that affect the overall Sector Investment Plan (SIP)/National Development Plan (NDP) safe water access targets.

If the challenges are not squarely addressed access to safe water for all will remain a dream.

Recommended Policy Options

- The Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) should adopt different strategies/ models to mitigate the CBMS' challenges for example privatising management of completed water facilities to ensure sustained provision of services.
- The MWE should exploit different funding options to increase funding in the sector including increasing off budgets from NGOs and other donors in order to accelerate water coverage.
- The MWE should increase research; adopt and upscale appropriate technologies that offer cheaper and feasible options especially surface water development in areas of low ground water potential.
- Deliberate efforts should be directed to ensuring equitable supply of services to all people especially in hard to reach areas and vulnerable groups by MWE and District Local Government.
- The MWE should encourage procurement of larger drilling contracts involving a cluster of districts to exploit economies of scale and reduce on per capita investment costs in the district local governments.

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