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# SIXTH WATER INFORMATION SUMMIT: BREAKING THE BARRIERS LET WATER INFORMATION FLOW!

WATERWEB CONSORTIUM AND IRC INTERNATIONAL WATER AND SANITATION CENTRE  
SEPTEMBER 9-12 DELFT, THE NETHERLANDS

2003

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## BUILDING NGOS/CBOS' CAPACITY THROUGH INFORMATION

Caroline Batanda Nafula <sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** Uganda Water and Sanitation NGO Network (UWASNET) is an umbrella organization of over 120 NGOs and CBOs in the water and sanitation sector in Uganda. UWASNET has information as one of the ways of building capacity of member organizations. Today in Uganda, the water and sanitation sector is undergoing several reforms in the different sub-sectors of urban, rural, general institutions, water for production and water resources management. As a result of these reforms, there is increased pressure on all stakeholders to deliver more quantity and quality. In addition, there is an increase in phenomenal information and, thus, NGOs and CBOs, as sector players, need to be kept updated. This paper focuses on the ways UWASNET is attempting to bridge the information gap between NGOs, CBOs, and other stakeholders at local, regional and international levels. Given the diverse membership of UWASNET, it highlights how appropriate information is disseminated to its various members. It further discusses the value of information collection and dissemination and how these are used to build the capacity of members. It concludes that through sharing and learning from others NGOs, they can start to think outside the box and thus exploit the enormous potential of increasing the knowledge base of their organizations.

The paper presents practical experiences and lessons in information processing by UWASNET as the focal organization for water and sanitation sector NGOs and CBOs in Uganda. The paper is divided into three sections; the first section presents an overview of UWASNET highlighting its vision, mission, objectives and key activities. The second section highlights the values that UWASNET attaches to information. These include: enriching NGOs work with the provision of information; enhancing awareness of stakeholders regarding NGOs contribution to the water and sanitation sector; fostering collaboration; contributing to the creation of an enabling environment; and eliminating some of the barriers to information. The third section illustrates the various ways that NGO capacity is built through information. These include updates on government policies, issues and guidelines, linking NGOs to international issues, promoting dialogue on sector thematic issues, linkages to other resource centres, research and documentation. The fourth and final section presents future plans in information and knowledge management.

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<sup>1</sup> Communication/Liaison Officer, Uganda Water and Sanitation NGO Network (UWASNET), P.O. Box 33396, Kampala, Uganda, East Africa. Tel: 256-41-222922 or 256-77-617710; E-mail: [ngocoord@infocom.co.ug](mailto:ngocoord@infocom.co.ug) or [cbatanda@uwasnet.org](mailto:cbatanda@uwasnet.org); Web site:

## **OVERVIEW ON UWASNET**

The Uganda Water and Sanitation NGO Network (UWASNET) was established in February 2000 in response to the need to improve and strengthen the contribution of NGOs and CBOs in achieving the water and sanitation sector goals. UWASNET is an umbrella organisation for all NGOs and CBOs working in the water and sanitation sector in Uganda. It is sector specific, confined only to the water and sanitation sector and it includes both International and Indigenous NGOs. UWASNET aims at working towards achieving universal access to safe water and improved sanitation in Uganda through ensuring effective coordination, fostering stronger collaboration and developing strategic partnerships.

### *Vision*

To contribute to poverty alleviation by increasing access to safe water and improved sanitation through effective coordination of NGOs and CBOs in the water and Sanitation sector in Uganda.

### *Mission*

To strengthen the coordination, collaboration and networking of NGOs and CBOs with all other stakeholders in the water and sanitation sector.

### *Objectives*

- To strengthen collaboration between NGOs, and CBOs with central and local governments
- To promote partnerships between NGOs, CBOs and other stakeholders in the water and sanitation sector in Uganda
- To strengthen collaboration and networking among NGOs at the local, national regional and global levels
- To contribute to the development and implementation of sector policies, strategies, standards and guidelines.

### *Key Activities:*

- Maintain database of NGOs and CBOs
- Provide sector relevant information to NGOs and CBOs
- Facilitate dialogue on sector thematic issues
- Strengthen NGO role and image through advocacy and lobbying
- Provide advisory and support services

- Strengthen Capacity of NGOs and CBOs
- Represent NGOs and CBOs at various levels

### *Organisation Structure*

UWASNET is structured into a General Assembly (currently with over 130 NGOs/CBOs), an Executive Committee of 11 members (3 international, 8 local NGOs), a Secretariat with 7 staff and Working Groups.

## **BASIS FOR INFORMATION AS ONE OF UWASNET KEY ACTIVITIES**

UWASNET provides information to its members and other stakeholders with the following intentions.

### *Enrich NGOs/CBOs Work with the Provision of Information*

Global, regional and national changes in the social, political, technological and economic domains, manifested in changes in funding flows and stakeholder demands are piling the pressure on NGOs and CBOs to deliver more in terms of quantity and quality. For most NGOs globalisation, decentralisation, sector reforms and Sector Wide Approach to Planning (SWAP) has made their operating environment more complicated and uncertain. UWASNET appreciates that given such changes NGOs and CBOs need access to a shared water and sanitation information and knowledge base that can help them to find the best way forward and prevent them from making the same mistakes that others have made before. Thus, the need for valuable and up-to-date information can only be emphasised.

### *Enhance Awareness of Stakeholders Regarding NGOs/CBOs' Contribution to the Water and Sanitation Sector*

Lack of adequate information on NGO activities has made it difficult to reflect NGO contribution in the overall sector picture. This not only makes ascertaining their impacts a difficult task, but also makes replication of successes a big challenge. For instance, it is not clear whether the water resources protected by some NGOs are reflected as sector outputs, which often results in duplication of efforts, ineffective utilization of meager resources and difficulties in ensuring quality and value for money. In addition, inadequate information base and fragmentation of activities makes it difficult to indicate the level and nature of support expected by NGOs, ascertain the criteria used to determine areas of support, the geographical area in which to operate, how to channel the support and indicative budgeting. It is on this basis that UWASNET was established to collect information on NGO activities and supply it to government and other stakeholders. One of the fora used to disseminate information is the Water Sector Working Group comprising of key stakeholders and line ministries.

### *Foster Collaboration Among Members Government and Development Partners by Exchanging Information*

Previously, sector NGOs/ CBOs operated in isolation and only shared information on their activities with their respective donors. UWASNET was established to act as a catalyst for change and a focal point for exchanging information, knowledge and ideas. Through bridging this information and knowledge gap between NGOs and other stakeholders it is hoped that the capacity for NGOs and CBOs to provide clean water and sanitation will be increased.

### *Contribute to the Creation of an Enabling Environment to Enhance NGOs/CBOs' Operation*

Although both national and sector planning frameworks are in place, they are still unclear and unavailable to most NGOs and CBOs. There is need for a deliberate effort to sensitise NGOs and enable them to contribute to national debates. This is done through UWASNET Working Groups where information and ideas generated are channelled to various sub groups in the Water Sector Working Group and other sector meetings.

### *Eliminate Some of the Barriers to Information*

Some of the barriers to information and knowledge exchange include weak linkage between those who generate information and those who use it, lack of established mechanism for information exchange, limited access to well packaged information, limited documentation skills and restricted information. UWASNET, by virtue of its unique position in the sector, is able to establish linkages between central government, development partners and other key stakeholders. Through these linkages, it is possible to access and disseminate information from various sources.

## **BUILDING NGOS/CBOS' CAPACITY THROUGH WATER AND SANITATION INFORMATION (HOW ARE WE DOING IT?)**

UWASNET provides various types of information including: a quarterly newsletter, compiled sectoral information at national/regional level, workshop proceedings, computerised database, information on member's activities and potential donors, updates on relevant issues, research work, resource centre services with internet facilities, books, videos, bulletins and newspapers.

### *Keeping NGOs/CBOs Updated on Government Policies, Issues and Guidelines*

As an umbrella organisation, UWASNET plays an important role in disseminating and increasing understanding of information on sector plans, policies and funding. For example, between August and October 2000, five regional workshops were held to enlighten NGOs on sector funding in relation to the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPCI) and the Poverty Action Fund (PAF).

In addition various sector policies and documents have been accessed from government and disseminated to members. This dissemination has been complemented by the invitation of government sector professionals to various meetings to enlighten NGOs on given sector

documents such as the operational plan for rural water and sanitation, the urban reform process and the community workers handbook.

### *Linking NGOs/CBOs to International Issues*

Through UWASNET, member organisations have learnt about global and international events and have been able to participate in the water and sanitation sector in Uganda. NGOs, such as ACORD, KDF, Uganda Society for Hidden Talents and Water Aid, were supported to participate in the Water Africa conference and exhibition in September 2001. This enabled them to demonstrate their new and innovative technologies alongside government and private sector (local and international) representatives.

Other international events include the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for all (WASH) Campaign. UWASNET in collaboration with the WSSCC and the Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment, launched a national WASH campaign. UWASNET members played a crucial role in mobilising communities for the event and in dissemination of the WASH advocacy materials. Information encouraging members to participate in the *Water Action Contest* of the *World Water Forum (Kyoto, 2003)* was disseminated. Some member's actions were selected and they were invited to travel to Japan. Voluntary Action for Development (VAD) won the first prize and the award for best water action.

UWASNET has attracted a growing number of researchers (international and local) seeking information on NGOs and CBOs' in the sector. For example *Ugandan Society for Hidden Talents (HITS)* was contacted by WEDC to participate in the *study on access to water and sanitation by disabled persons*.

In addition UWASNET through the secretariat or through the general membership participates and shares NGO experiences in international, regional and local workshops and conferences. The feedback from the workshop is provided to the rest of the membership either through the newsletter or through other meetings that are held to share lessons learnt.

### *Promoting Dialogue on Sector Thematic Issues*

Working Groups have proved popular in stimulating discussions on sector thematic issues. To date there are five active Working Groups these include, hygiene and sanitation, policy and advocacy, water and sanitation technologies, women and children and urban poor. Experience has shown that NGOs are involved in the Working Groups because they get something of this process and in the course of this they build their collective awareness. At UWASNET we believe that confidence is key and when NGOs see or learn that others are doing a given activity they believe they can do it too. In order to establish or maintain the ability to introduce wider narratives into the debate different resource persons are constantly invited to facilitate at the Working Groups.

### *Linkages to Other Resource Centres*

To ensure that the membership is able to access a diverse range of information, linkages have been established with other resource centres such as the Uganda Participatory Development Network (UPDNet/Community Development Resource Centre (CDRN), the British Council and the Directorate of Water Development library. In addition, information is provided on key institutions that shape fresh water policy globally, regionally and nationally such as the Fresh water Action Network (FAN), NETWAS, Global Water Partnership, WSSCC, Water Resources Management Department (Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment), the Gender and Water Alliance.

### *Research and Documentation*

Carrying out or obtaining the research and information necessary to achieve policy influence is another of aspect of building capacity. This is because all researches initiated are proposed and owned by the membership. It has been appreciated that to provide constructive proposals to Government there is need to provide well-researched information.

The Policy and Advocacy Working Group commissioned a study on budgetary allocations on water and sanitation emergencies in the districts in November 2002. The major finding was that water and sanitation emergencies are not usually budgeted for thus when a crisis occurs there is *ad hoc* reallocation of funds. Yet in all of the study areas, there has been insurgency for a long time. The report has been submitted to the high level policy Sector Working Group with a major recommendation of improved planning for water and sanitation emergencies.

Members are encouraged to share documentation and evaluation reports of their project work in order for others to learn from their experience and spreading best practices and in order to promote free flow of information. By enabling NGOs to share and exchange such knowledge, a very powerful process is triggered, whereby NGO exchange transforms development. NGO exchanges enable the organisation to articulate and develop their knowledge and understanding of their situation and how it can be addressed. Exchanges scale up and speed up known development processes by effectively transmitting relevant information and understanding of contemporary sector issues. Capacity and confidence is built up in NGOs/CBOs and their development options are extended.

### **WAY FORWARD**

- Plan to create a web page
- Publish positive experiences of NGOs/CBOs
- Establish and strengthen linkages and learn from other resource centres at both local and international level
- Provide opportunity for NGOs and CBOs to comment on water and development issues

- react to topical news and make statements both locally and internationally
- Publish a directory of sector NGOs and CBOs

## **REFERENCES**

UWASNET progress and annual reports, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002

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Report on Regional Consultative Workshops for NGOs and local Governments (August-October 2000)

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