



## Performance Improvement through Learning on Sanitation - PILS

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### Effective Coordination: a potential solution for improving Sanitation and Hygiene coverage in the Districts of Northern Uganda

#### Introduction

This briefing note is aimed at all water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) stakeholders working in the three Districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader, in Northern Uganda. It looks at the context and changing trend in the Acholi Sub-region, where the three districts are located, in terms of coordination among stakeholders involved in sanitation and hygiene promotion. This document introduces the Performance Improvement through Learning on Sanitation (PILS) project and its impacts on coordination. It further analyses the remaining gaps in coordination structures at both District and Sub county levels, with clear recommendations for improvement.

#### Context

The Acholi Sub region in Northern Uganda went through a lot of turmoil following the more than twenty years long (1985-2005) insurgency under the brutal Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). During this period, the people of the area were displaced and forced to live in Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) Camps. This situation created a flock of humanitarian organisations who implemented several projects. In order to improve coordination, these humanitarian organisations were grouped in clusters according to the activities they were carrying out in the region: Health cluster, Education cluster, Water and Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) cluster, Agriculture and Livelihoods cluster, etc. The coordination meetings of the WASH cluster were specifically funded by UNICEF until early 2009, when relative peace had been established and many IDPs had started returning home. To respond to the gap in coordination after UNICEF

stopped funding the WASH cluster, the Districts formed interim District Water and Sanitation Coordinating Committees (DWSCCs)<sup>1</sup>, headed by the District local governments. However, the DWSCCs in Northern Uganda remained weak for a number of reasons. First they had the mandate but no budget to facilitate the coordination. They were also intimidated by the International NGOs and UN agencies who were used to working independently without the local government support and had important budgets to implement projects in their Districts. Even the local NGOs received their funding from INGOs and accounted only to them. These imbalances in power did not help in creating a good relationship and coordination of work between NGOs, and local government as a result was weak. They often used different approaches and tools without sharing plans, reports or other important information. This led to duplication of work and soured relationships.

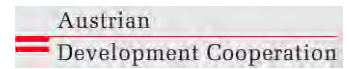
It was with this background that the Performance Improvement through Learning on Sanitation (PILS) project was introduced in October 2010 in the Acholi Sub region. The project whose goal was to support the Districts leaderships in the coordination and harmonisation of their approaches, tools and methodologies in the sector used a multistakeholder learning approach and action research. This meant that all the stakeholders in the water and sanitation sector in the Sub region met quarterly at district and sub-county level to share and learn from each other; while Inter-District Capacity Building meetings were conducted once a year. The project was funded by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and

<sup>1</sup> A DWSCC typically consists of district technocrats and NGOs representatives active in the district.



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implemented for two and half years by a consortium of 3 NGOs: IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, NETWAS Uganda and Caritas Gulu Archdiocese.

### Achievements under PILS

In this section, we examine how this project improved coordination and harmonization of tools, approaches and methodologies in the three Districts.

#### Increased coordination among stakeholders for planning and implementation of projects

The learning and sharing approach promoted by the PILS project during the District and Sub county platforms emphasised sharing, dialogue and planning. Both the international and local NGOs working in the Districts shared their progress and what tools they used. These agencies included; Red Cross, Oxfam, UNICEF, Concern Worldwide, Zoa, Caritas, the District and Sub county local governments in the three Districts. They shared information about the tools they use for data collection and management, approaches such as CLTS, case studies of their best practices and new interventions. During the last District meeting in Kitgum for example, the District health inspector shared how they have taken this coordination to the next level, as illustrated in the case below.

#### Improving coordination and harmonisation of Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) in Kitgum District.

After introduction and training to the CLTS approach of the District Health Inspector (DHI) and all Health assistants in the District in 2010, the District stopped any agency from triggering CLTS in any village, unless it came through the DHI's office. The Office would then verify if the staff had received training and how the District and specific Sub county officials would be

**involved. In some cases organisations with no personnel properly trained in the approach relied on the Office of the DHI to provide the personnel, while the organisations offered other required resources. This has ensured that CLTS is done in the right way by all stakeholders; although no villages have been declared ODF yet, the DHI is optimistic that good results will be attained this financial year.**

Efforts like those above have considerably reduced duplication of work and the mistrust that was high in 2010 when the projection inception meeting was conducted in all the three Districts.



Participants during a Sub county platform in Lakwana (Gulu District)



Participants during the inter District capacity building session

#### Revitalisation of the sector coordination structures at Sub County levels (SCWSCC)

At the inception of PILS, none of the three Districts reported having a functional sub-county water and sanitation coordination committee (SCWSCC). This was mainly because sub counties had little resources and having a coordinating committee at that level was not a priority. During the multistakeholder platforms

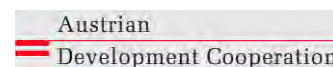


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conducted at the Sub county level, the importance of such committees was discussed and acknowledged. As a consequence, there has been a revival of 3 SCWSCCs in Kitgum and Pader Districts: in Akwang and Amida sub-counties (SCs), in Kitgum District, and Adilang in Pader. In Gulu, Bungatira SC council made a resolution to reactivate and fund the committee from 2012. The District Water Officer (DWO) of Kitgum wrote letters to all the Sub county authorities to revive the committees at SC level. These changes were all closely linked to the prioritization of sanitation and hygiene on the political and resource allocation agenda. Below is a case of a Sub county in Kitgum district that won the battle.

**Akwang Sub County in Kitgum District, like all the Sub counties in Acholi Sub region, had no funds allocated for the work of the health assistant or the SCWSCC. After attending the Inter District Capacity Building (IDCB) workshop organised under the PILS project, the Sub county chief made it a point to find resources for the work of the SCWSCC. She started by reallocating UGX 200,000 from the health centre fund in the financial year 2010/11, to fund the work of the health assistants in data update and sensitization activities. She also transferred another UGX 100,000 from the graduated tax compensation for funding SCWSCC meetings. This amount was used to conduct 2 quarterly meetings towards the end of 2011.**

### Enhanced networking and linkages between stakeholders

Before the PILS project, there was no functional linkage between Sub counties and Districts, while inter-districts linkages as well as the link with the national level were weak. During PILS, learning session participants had the opportunity to mix and interact with people from all levels in

the sector. Some sub county level staff even met school stakeholders for the first time during the sessions: for instance, in Pader District, the Patron of the School Health Club (SHC) in Adilang primary school noted that the Health Assistant had never been to his school before the PILS project, but that now he is a frequent visitor who supports them with their SHC and management of Ecological Sanitation (Ecosan) facilities. There has also been an increasing level of interaction between District and Sub county staff and among District stakeholders. Districts like Gulu and Kitgum have introduced googlegroups to which most sector players have subscribed. These new developments led to a more effective coordination and effectiveness in the promotion of sanitation and hygiene in households and schools.

### Trusting relationships built between politicians, technocrats and CSOs in the three Districts

In the early days of the project, there was in some instances mistrust among technocrats and politicians, and even CSOs, and conflicting attitudes and practices. A case in Pader District is described in the PILS inception report: some politicians had arranged to open a water source that had been closed by the technocrats as a measure to motivate the community to contribute to Operation and Maintenance (O&M) and build latrines. There were also a tense relationship between departments; for instance in Kitgum district the relationship between the health and water departments was described as "pulling ropes". Under the PILS project, technocrats, politicians and CSOs participated in the platforms at different levels; they held dialogues and learnt from each other with only one goal in mind: improving sanitation and hygiene. This created a mutually benefiting and trusting relationship.



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### Harmonisation of approaches, tools and structure

The three Districts had various tools they were using for data collection on the status of sanitation and hygiene at household level, and this despite the existence of the Household Assessment Book (HAB). Some district local government and organisations had their own resource persons for data collection, while others used the Village Health Teams (VHTs), who had to collect data using different tools. Approaches such as CLTS were understood differently and triggered in various ways; for example in Gulu the Sub county officials just trained community members in Bungatira and claimed they had triggered CLTS. All these variations led to reduced efficiency in the interventions. PILS, through promotion of coordination, sharing, and learning, permitted the following changes:

- **Approaches:** In Kitgum, the District has been able to share approaches such as CLTS with NGOs, with support from UNICEF and OXFAM who facilitated training and support of the District in 2010; the approach is now being rolled out by many CSOs in Kitgum. In Pader District, approaches such as CLTS and the use of School Health Clubs are being used by NGOs like ZOA, ASB and Caritas. These have improved efficiency of the stakeholders.
- **Tools:** data collection tools like the Household Assessment Book were discussed during the District platforms to improve data collection. All three Districts are now using it and there is a negotiation between government and NGOs to make it the only tool used for data collection at community level. NGOs like Caritas and Concern Worldwide in Pader have agreed to

make more copies of the book for the Districts. In Pader, following a discussion during the last District platform, Zoa agreed to work with the District to translate it into Luo. Other social accountability tools like community score cards and gantt charts were also shared and adopted at the District and Sub county levels for improved planning monitoring and social accountability. Some sub counties like Adilang (in Pader) developed an accountability tool for quarterly display of WASH information on notice boards. Schools in Gulu, like Opit primary school (P/S), and in Pader District, with Kanyimpa P/S, are using another kind of accountability tools, the child perception mood cards. During the learning platforms, community health education posters were shared and ways of making information sharing more effective were also discussed. Posters, guides and manuals on Ecosan have for example been developed/updated and copied for distribution to all stakeholders under the PILS Project.

- **Structures:** Although only a few NGOs were using different structures for community facilitation and mobilisation, there has still been a marked improvement due to the discussions on unification of tools and approaches. The burden on VHTs and LC1 chairpersons have lessened as a consequence. Agencies like UNICEF are continuing to facilitate quarterly meeting for VHTs in Kitgum, while Concern Worldwide has trained VHTs in Pader District on their roles. This has improved networking and coordination as well as efficiency for grassroots mobilisation.





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### Remaining gaps in coordination

Despite the above progress made under the PILS project, the District and sub-county water and sanitation coordination committees are often still weak. Some of the challenges facing these committees include:

#### Poor attendance during the DWSCC

Most invited people do not come for the meetings. If they do, some attend for few minutes and leave. Below are some reasons for this poor attendance:

- Poor Planning and organisation of the DWSCC meetings**  
 The organisation of the meeting is often not well done. The Project Officer for Caritas Kitgum, Ms Beatrice Achan, shared her own experience: *“during the last district coordination meeting, I reported twice to the meeting venue the same morning and found no participants. The DWO himself was not at the venue, and because I had a lot of work in the office, I just went back. Although the meeting was later held in the afternoon, I did not attend it.”* In Pader and Gulu Districts, it was reported that the District officials were not committed to the meetings. For this reason, most partners are becoming relaxed.
- Lack of finances of DWSCC meetings**  
 According to the Assistant District Water Officer (ADWO) Kitgum, the organisation of these meetings faces financial constraints, with sometimes hurdles in planning and delays in approval of funds for them. Last year, no refreshments could be provided during the meeting

and participants were given their transport refund after 2 weeks. District Water Office staff also think that, not being able to give participants the same transport refund as many NGOs causes disparity and apathy. For example, the ADWO said *“we only give them UGX 13,000 when they come for our meeting, but the NGOs give up UGX 50,000 as transport refund.”* This, he thinks, reduces the desire of the NGOs to participate in the meetings.

- Frequency of the meetings**  
 The monthly meetings have become too frequent and tedious for most stakeholders especially in Gulu District; *the Health inspector, Mr Owiny Dickens, noted that “most members have other priorities so when the meetings are scheduled monthly, it becomes repetitive.”* This has caused many members to miss.

#### Limited participation of the stakeholders during the DWSCC meetings

The DWO shared in an interview that during DWSCC meetings most NGOs do not submit written reports or plans, and do not contribute much to the discussions either. Although the District states in the invitation letters that participants should bring progress reports, some of the NGOs think that what they should bring is still vague. We asked staff of Caritas Kitgum why sometimes they do not bring reports to the meeting; one project officer replied that they have a lot of work on different projects and do not have time to prepare separate reports for the District. The quarterly progress reports in most NGOs are internal documents of the organization; this makes it hard to bring the reports the way they are. Nonetheless, it



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seemed more a question of priority and accountability; since the NGOs do not face any real consequence if they don't account to the District, reporting to the local government is often not prioritised.

### Lack of transparency and accountability between agencies and governments

There is still lack of transparency from CSOs as reported by the ADWO Pader, Ms Amony Ruth, who said; ***“the NGOs do not follow the reporting format we give them and they leave out information especially on the finances.”*** But further discussions with her also revealed that, although there has been some attitude changes, some District officials still have some degree of suspicion about NGOs' work.

### Inability of the Sub Counties to prioritise funds for the revitalisation of the SCWSCC

Under the PILS project, six sub counties were selected for the organisation of learning platforms and action research. Although all six SCs were given the same attention, only two have been able to fully revive and maintain a vibrant coordination committee. We sought to understand why the others have not made much progress; in an interview, the Health assistant for Kitgum Matidi Mr Robert Kumakech said that ***“there are plans and budgets for the committee meetings but funds are not given for it.”*** This therefore means that the commitment of the Sub County heads to the functionality of this committee is critical.

### General recommendations for further improving sector coordination at district and sub-county level

Whereas the PILS project contributed to the improvement of coordination in the three Districts, it is important for them to continue working on their own District coordination

structures to sustain beyond PILS the gains made. During the last learning sessions, districts officials emphasized the need to continue to sustain this coordination and networking for better services. Based on this, we do recommend that the districts further work on the improvement of the functionality of the DWSCCs and SCWSCCs.

The district leaders could consider the following ideas gathered from the discussion of participants in the last learning platforms and during individual interviews with line departments' staff in all the three Districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader

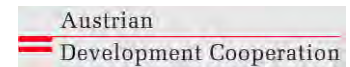
- **Leadership:** The DWOs need to take lead for re-energising coordination meetings through early invitations/mobilisation, sending of reminders, developing a WASH calendar for the District and developing a CSOs reporting guide to encourage the District stakeholders and NGOs to take this seriously and participate.
- **Building a professional relationship:** proper coordination in the District depends a lot on the informal relationships. It is therefore important that the DWO, District Health Inspector (DHI) and Assistant District Chief Administrative Officer (ACAO) in charge of the sector make support visits to sector NGOs, share information and build an informal relationship with NGOs.
- **Allocate responsibilities to NGOs:** it would be useful to ask some NGOs to host the DWSCC and SCWSCC meetings in their own offices, while asking others to be secretaries or to prepare a case to share with the committee. Some NGOs could take the committee members to their projects to visit. All these are



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- expected to increase stakeholders' interest in coordination.
- Request capacity building NGO to include the strengthening and support of DWSCCs and SCWSCCs in their new projects: Organisations that focus on capacity building like for example OXFAM, SNV, CONCERN, NETWAS or CARITAS, could engage more in fundraising to support the functionality of the District Coordination as well as the Sub county structures. Discussions could be with them so that they include this in their next proposals.
  - Explore ways to support the Sub county structures to become more functional: District staff writing letters to sub-counties is not enough; they should also hold discussions with SC stakeholders and explore with them the reasons of the challenges they are facing. Resource allocation has been a major constraint, so SC staff needs support on how they can find the necessary resources within their budgets. Clarifying the roles the committee is supposed to perform and how they can benefit from a functional structure would also be a good area of support. SCs can learn from well functioning SCWSCCs like the one of Akwang in Kitgum.
  - Identify ways to make the committee informative, a learning event, rewarding and beneficial for all: Organisers of coordinating committees could use visual/video presentation (e.g. on a documented case from elsewhere) on a critical issue in the District like Operation and Maintenance or CLTs, then asking members to comment and share their experiences in the meeting.
  - Promote and use adequate communication tools: It is suggested that each District start for example a googlegroup and invite stakeholders to be part of this, like Gulu District is doing. Initiators of the googlegroup should make sure that it is functional and encourage members to use it to share cases, reports, events and what is happening in the District. This is a great way to stay in touch and learn about new members / NGOs in the sector.

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