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LOCAL ACTION WITH INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION TO IMPROVE AND
SUSTAIN WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE SERVICES

**From camps to communities: a review of 10 years of WASH
programming by Concern Worldwide in Northern Uganda**

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There is a tendency for WASH interventions in emergency settings to be spontaneous and they frequently conclude before the emergency is over. Similarly, organisations may respond to emergencies not as part of their longer term country strategies, but rather as rapid responses to request for emergency calls. Whereas such emergency programming is characteristic of refugee-type humanitarian programmes that might culminate in voluntary repatriation, in emergency situations, like the case of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) programme in Northern Uganda, there is need to adopt a Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) approach that entails planning for post - emergency recovery and development programmes as well. This paper details Concern Worldwide's Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) intervention in Northern Uganda spanning a 10 year period, bridging emergency and development phases.

Introduction and context

Concern Worldwide's (Concern) first intervention in Uganda was in the early 1980s when a famine relief operation was carried out in Karamoja. In 1990, Concern Worldwide returned to Uganda in response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and has maintained a continued presence within the country. Currently Concern focus has expanded to include maternal and child health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and vocational skills for youth programmes in the poorest districts of Northern Uganda (two districts), Karamoja sub-region (four districts), and West Nile region (seven districts). In line with the Country Strategic Plan, Concern is committed to working in the poorest regions to build the resilience of the extreme poor through effective and sustainable programming.

This briefing paper focuses on Concern's work in the water and sanitation sector in Northern Uganda; a region that bore the brunt of a two decade long civil war orchestrated by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA); led by the self-styled leader, Joseph Kony. This war caused mass displacement of the local population (up to 95% of the population) into Internally Displaced Person's (IDP) camps with resultant negative economic, political and social consequences including poor access to safe water supply, deplorable hygiene and sanitation situations and high prevalence rates of HIV/AIDS.

Concern's emergency WASH intervention in Northern Uganda commenced in 2005 in the district of Pader, with associated projects implemented annually up to 2009. The purpose of these projects was to improve water, sanitation and hygiene conditions among the IDP populations of Pader District whilst ensuring that HIV/AIDS issues are mainstreamed into the process. The main results of these interventions were: improved ability of District Disaster Management Committees (DDMCs) to co-ordinate humanitarian responses, particularly in the WASH sector and in mainstreaming HIV/AIDS issues into planning and co-ordination; improved availability of, and access to, potable water; improved access to safe sanitation facilities; and improved knowledge, attitudes and practice with respect to sanitation.

Following the initiation of peace talks between the Uganda Government and Lord's Resistance Army in 2007, relative peace and normality returned to region from 2009 onwards. In this period IDPs begun returning to their villages of origin, and many International National Governmental Organizations (INGOs) started scaling down their emergency WASH operations. In response Concern adapted its approach from

one of emergency to post conflict recovery programming. From 2010 to date, Concern has been implementing recovery WASH programmes in return villages in Pader district from 2010 to 2013, and later expanded the programme to cover Agago district from 2014. This programme focuses on improving WASH service delivery at community, institutional, lower local government, and district levels.

Trends in programme design

Concern's intervention in Northern Uganda, and in Pader and Agago districts in particular, was premised on a Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) concept, and the trends in programme design can therefore be categorized under three interlinked thematic areas namely; emergency, rehabilitation and development.

Relief (emergency)

Under the emergency period (2005 to 2006), Concern was mainly involved in implementing WASH programmes in IDP camps in Pader district. Concern's interventions mainly focused on; increasing water coverage in the IDP camps to meet the minimum SPHERE standards for per capita safe water consumption; sanitation and hygiene improvement through the support of household latrine construction and promotion of handwashing with soap and HIV/AIDs awareness creation through mainstreaming HIV/AIDs in all programme activities.

The devastating effect of the conflict meant that access to water and sanitation facilities was low – over 70% of IDP camps in which Concern worked (a total population exceeding 100,000) failed to meet minimum SPHERE standards of 15 litres per capita per day (lpcd) (Concern Worldwide, 2006). Concern's intervention targeted increasing access to safe water supply in IDP camps through construction of point water sources (deep wells, shallow wells, and protected springs – see Photograph 1 for an example), plus associated software, including formation and training of water source committees. Meanwhile sanitation improvement in the IDP camps was achieved through procurement and distribution of latrine digging kits and concrete slabs, provision of technical support during construction of household latrines, construction of institutional latrine in schools and sensitization of communities on the correct use of latrines.

Hygiene improvement activities mainly focused on training of hygiene promotion committees on best hygiene practices, display of billboards with safe water chain messages at water points; and procurement and distribution of Non-Food Items (NFIs) such as soap and jerrycans.

Furthermore, Concern's WASH intervention in the IDP camps was augmented by activities focusing on HIV/AIDS and malaria prevention and control. These include; conducting Knowledge, Attitudes, Behavior and Practice (KABP) surveys on HIV/AIDs, training hygiene committees on the three major modes of HIV/AIDS transmission and the main means of prevention, distribution of condoms to complement the training on HIV/AIDs. Owing to the close relationship between HIV/AIDs and malaria, activities aimed at malaria control were included in the project designs, including distribution of mosquito nets and blankets to the most vulnerable communities.

Rehabilitation

As a result of the peace gains under the process in 2007 the closure of IDP camps began and increasing numbers of people departed the camps for the return sites (typically small trading centres close to villages) with a view of returning home for good. This resulted in a shift of humanitarian interventions from the IDP camps into the return sites/home villages, where most of the WASH infrastructure was in a poor state or non-existent. One positive consequence was that the departure of people from IDP camps led to increased per capita availability of potable water. Consequently, the WASH needs in the camps (many of which are now permanent settlements and trading centres) became one of sustainability and operation and maintenance rather than one of access. In contrast the reverse scenario was true of the return sites.

Setting up sustainable community and local government administration led management systems in the return areas proved to be a major challenge. Data for the return sites and home villages were inadequate or non-existent, and many returnees felt unwilling to contribute (financially or in kind) to the operation of water systems due to having received such services for free in IDP camps – referred to as dependency syndrome. Given the significant needs, most agencies, including Concern modified their approach towards scaling up interventions in return areas while ensuring that the humanitarian conditions in the IDP camps did not deteriorate. This change in context was critical in informing Concern's WASH programming from 2010 to date.

Development

From 2010 to date, Concern’s WASH interventions in Northern Uganda have shifted from emergency to development WASH programmes that focused on implementing WASH activities in return sites. These interventions, funded by the Austrian Development Corporation (ADC) and charity: water, initially focused on return villages in Pader district from 2010 to 2013, but were in 2014, expanded to cover Agago district. The two WASH programmes are complementary to each other. Whilst the charity: water funded projects extended access to safe water through infrastructure interventions,, the ADC funded projects sought to build capacity and governance of the water source management structures.

The overarching objective of Concern’s interventions under the development phase is to establish accountable and sustainable mechanisms for effective service delivery for water, sanitation and hygiene in Pader and Agago districts. The strategy to achieve this is through improving access to safe water supply, improving levels of sanitation and hygiene, and supporting establishment of efficient community based management and information systems, together with appropriate support from local government. Activities to support the strategy include: improving structures for WASH service delivery at community, institutional, lower local government, and district levels, while at the same time contributing to strengthening coordination and learning at national level. Additionally, in line with Concern’s policies on cross cutting issues, environment, gender and HIV/AIDS issues are mainstreamed in all programme activities.

At community level, the core programme activities include strengthening community based management of rural water supply sources through the formation and training of new water user committees on their core roles and responsibilities. Other associated activities at community level include rejuvenation of existing but redundant water user committees (always in tandem with new or rehabilitated water points), improvement of household hygiene through promotion of Handwashing with Soap (HWWS) and the safe water chain; and household sanitation promotion using the Community Led-Total Sanitation (CLTS) approach. Additionally, the programme trains village leaders in WASH governance in order to equip them with leadership skills necessary for sustainable WASH service delivery. Although data on district-wide access is not entirely reliable, there is a clear positive trend in access to water in rural areas (Figure 1).

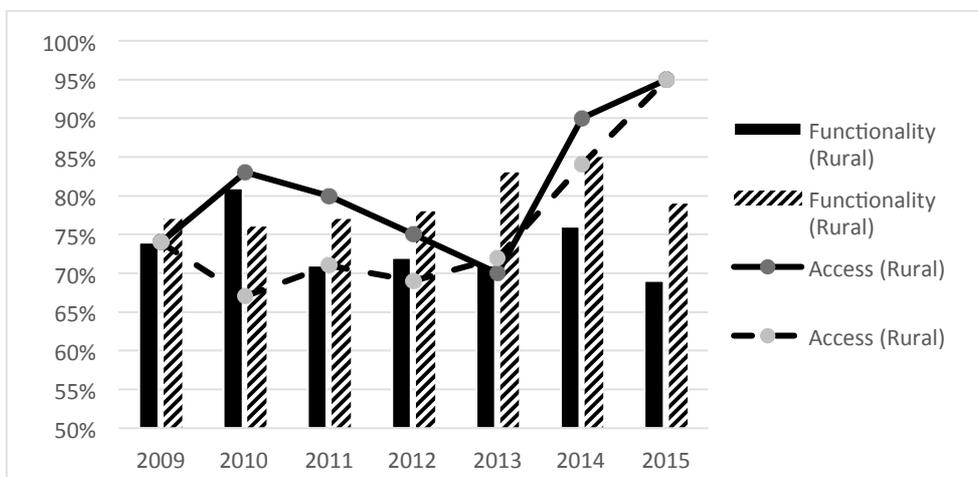


Figure 1. Trends in access to and functionality of rural water points in Pader and Agago

Source: Ministry of Water and Environment, Uganda Water Supply Atlas (www.wateruganda.com)

However this is countered by regressing functionality trends attributed to two main factors namely; the local government focus on mainly construction of new water sources as opposed to rehabilitation of defective ones and; low functionality rates attributed susceptibility of the commonly used India Mark II hand pump technology to corrosion. Under its current programme, Concern under its current programme is focusing on addressing the negative trend in water source functionality through introduction of the Life Cycle Cost Approach (LCCA) to enhance local government resource mobilisation for Operation and Maintenance (O&M) and piloting corrosion resistant hand pump technologies to counter the corrosion problem.

At institutional level, the main focus is on school WASH, involving construction of new water and sanitation facilities and rehabilitation of existing ones. In order to enhance the sustainability of these facilities, Concern is also implementing associated software activities, including formation and training of School Water and Sanitation Committees and School Health Clubs using the PHAST approach, which targets behaviour change in order to promote hygiene and sanitation improvement. This is augmented by use of innovative techniques in the form of school WASH competitions, promoting peer monitoring innovation whilst rewarding schools that are making noticeable progress in adopting best WASH practices. This work has improved hygiene and sanitation in schools, whilst also having a noticeable ‘trickle down’ effect in communities (Twijukye 2014).

At Local Government level, the main activity of the programme is capacity building of sub county WASH structures. This is aimed at empowering them to take on their mandatory roles of delivering WASH services – a role that was neglected during the two decade long insurgency. These roles include but are not limited to; effective planning, implementation and coordination of WASH activities within the respective sub counties, alongside monitoring service provision. The capacity of sub-county committees is being improved in the area of data management and the life cycle cost approach (LCCA) – this complements the current decentralisation of much WASH funding from districts to sub counties.

The District Water Offices (DWO) are mandated by law to spearhead implementation of water and sanitation activities at district level. Therefore in order to improve service delivery, it is imperative that the capacity of the District Water Offices are enhanced to a level where they are able to efficiently carry out their roles. Accordingly, the Concern intervention is implementing capacity building activities which include among others; training on LCCA based budgeting, ArcGIS based data management, results based reporting; strengthening operation and maintenance through supporting District Local Councils to enact Operation and Maintenance related ordinances and improving district level WASH sector coordination through support to the District Water and Sanitation Coordination Committee (DWSCC). Throughout the engagement with the DWOs, Concern has consciously adopted a collaborative approach to needs assessment, and activity design and implementation. Whilst not without challenges (Roche 2012), this approach has enabled the DWOs to take ownership of the journey towards effective service delivery, and has been recognized as effective in external evaluations of the programme (Ó’Súilleabháin, 2013). It has been essential to ensure that learning processes are fully engrained into programmes (Roche 2012) to ensure that all partners can reflect on difficulties and iterate programme design as appropriate.

Also at district level, Concern is actively supporting the activities of the Pader Hand Pump Mechanic's Association (HPMA). The HPMA are tasked with improving the functionality of water sources, by providing repair services to communities, and undertaking monitoring on behalf of the DWO. Concern is supporting the Pader HPMA to achieve this objective, by increasing the viability of providing hand pump repairs as a business activity. This comprises a number of activities including; capacity building in basic business skills to manage Operation and Maintenance as a business, technical training in maintenance and repair of India Mark III Modified hand pumps; a hand pump technology that Concern piloted in Pader and Agago districts to mitigate against corrosion of galvanized iron pipes. In order to enhance access to hand pump spare parts, the programme has supported establishment of a hand pump spare parts shop in Pader Town Council, and entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Pader HPMA to manage the shop. The impact of this engagement is two-fold: it improves access to spare parts, while at the same time providing business opportunities to the HPMA through spare parts sales supplementing income from hand pump repairs. The engagement with the HPMA has been intensive, and has been built on the back of mutual cooperation, whilst Concern ensure that the HPMA takes ownership of all activities to help ensure sustainability (Photograph 2).

At national level Concern Worldwide is an active member of the Uganda Water and Sanitation NGO Network (UWASNET). The latter is an umbrella group that brings together NGOs that are active in the water sector in Uganda. Concern has used UWASNET organised fora such as the Annual WASH CSO to share its current WASH work in Pader and Agago districts with other WASH actors. This work has had concrete outcomes – for example a growing national consensus on the need for corrosion resistant hand pump designs, highlighted in research commissioned by Concern (Donkers and Byarugaba, 2015). Additionally, Concern Worldwide has used UWASNET as a platform to contribute towards recent policy reforms in the Ugandan WASH sector.

Concern Worldwide also contributes annually to the Water and Environment Sector Performance Reports via the WASH NGO reporting to UWASNET. The Ministry of Water and Environment then uses this information to compile its annual report, strengthening national coordination measures.

Lessons learnt

Concern's long presence in Northern Uganda has enhanced its visibility among the local community, which has consequently provided a conducive environment towards implementation of its programme activities. As for any human activity, the quality of the relationship between the partners is a crucial element: the continued presence of a national WASH Programme Manager helped to forge a strong relationship with the local government as well as with community representatives.

Programme implementation in partnership with Local Government partners enables optimisation of financial resources through supplementary budget support to annual local government budgets.

The funding of the project activities through the national system rather than its direct implementation by Concern was a major step towards sustainability. It allowed for Concern Worldwide to move out of direct delivery of WASH services to focus more on capacity building.

Programmes whose design is premised on a Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) approach, have an added value of being informed by a comprehensive contextual analysis which ensures better targeting

Design of programmes for communities emerging from conflict should focus on longer programmes in preference to short term ones. A roadmap needs to be defined to continue to work towards the sustainability goal across the different project grants.

Achievement of sustainability of project activities designed for communities emerging from long term conflict requires considerable time (>10 years), and need to be built up gradually. It is unrealistic to expect sustainability of outcomes in fragile contexts through only one or two funded projects.

Shifting the focus of local government from extending access to improving functionality takes time, and a shift in attitudes will not lead to an immediate improvement in functionality (Figure 1)



Photograph 1. A water point in a former IDP Camp in Pader



Photograph 2. HPMA members leading a workshop to define their role

Conclusions

Concern's WASH interventions over the last ten years within the same geographical region have enabled a deep understanding of the local context. This has resulted in the design of tailor made programmes aimed at addressing the existing WASH challenges. This strategy has resulted into some tangible progress (Figure 1).

Concern's implementation modality which focuses on local government partnership in the delivery of projects has improved the impact of its WASH projects (Ó'Súilleabháin, 2013). This has led to the organisation being recognised as the leading WASH agency in Pader and Agago districts. This has consequently improved Concern's profile in UWASNET and the national WASH sector fora.

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