

Many Innovations, but minimal scale

Reflections from NETWAS on Northern Region learning forum 2021.

The Northern Regional Learning Forum (NRLF) 2021 showcased many positive efforts aimed at achieving safe water and sanitation services in the region. NETWAS through the WASH SDG Sub-programme in partnership with regional partners organised a two-day event, which attracted over 35 participants from different organizations in Northern Uganda. The NRLF ended with a strong message from the steering committee chairperson: “We need to measure the extent of scale of these innovations and also follow up with those implementing them”.

This message spoke of the realities the Uganda WASH sector as a whole is facing especially in moving from pilots to scaled innovations.

The theme of this year’s NRLF was Accelerating WASH Service delivery through scaling up of innovations in the northern region. In this piece we have collected reflections of NETWAS about NDP3 focus, Technology transfer, water integrity and cost recovery planning in WASH.

NDP3 focus

With the shift from sectoral planning and coordination to programme based planning, CSOs are advised to align their work to the NDPIII and representations in the sub programmes 1. Agro industrialization pgme (MAAIF) - Water for Production; Human capacity Development (MOES) Water Supply and Sanitation Natural resources, environment, climate change, Land and Water Management programme (NRECCLWM) (MWE) DWRM,)

Technology transfer for improved sanitation

Agency for Sustainable Rural Transformation (AFSRT) shared on how locally trained masons can facilitate the distribution of sanitation products in the WASH supply chain. This ensures user focused designs making technologies reach people it’s meant to.

The presentation from AMREF health Africa highlighted how simple sanitation marketing techniques like Chicken for SanPlats could help increase latrine coverage in rural communities; because communities use basic commodities to exchange for latrine construction. As a take home it was recommended that stakeholders utilize existing income commodities to promote sanitation marketing thus increasing latrine coverage.

“Sustaining WASH technologies adoption needs marketers and financing for it to work” is what John Mutebe from WASEU shared on how they are bridging the sanitation gap through marketing corps and a WASH microfinance. The two need to work hand in hand to services to reach everyone

Water Integrity

NETWAS Uganda shared on the importance of conducting water integrity scans as a mechanism to facilitate dialogue governance and corruption in the WASH sector. Although water integrity scans offer nice way of addressing transparency, accountability and participation in the sector, the discussions alone are slow due to the sensitivity of the topic. People tend to fear to disclose much due to fear of witch hunt.

“Collecting citizen voices is one way of ensuring that community demands reach those that are responsible” is one way of addressing Water Integrity. Caritas Fort portal HEWASA is promoting the Watzella (radio feedback tool) to collect citizen voices in Agago on WASH challenges which will be shared with the service providers. This helps community voices to be heard in a nutshell without fear and could be helpful in budgeting and planning with the new Parish Model approach.

Cost Recovery Planning

Cost Recovery Planning as shared by JESE, is very effective in institutions with good record of paying for services, and where institutions managing the service have proper management skills. The tool is also good in facilitating full scale WASH planning in institutions like schools.

Conclusion

Despite the clear conclusion that the extent of scale for innovations is still low, the Northern Regional Learning Forum itself focused largely on accelerating the uptake of these innovations. Scaling up innovations is a combination of many aspects i.e. financing, political will and community behavior change. It's therefore paramount that if WASH innovations are to attain scale, there need for combined approach to have innovations move from pilots to scale.