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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF WATER RESOURCES, WATER SUPPLY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION

Training For Real: Strategic Training and Capacity Building for Uganda Water Sector

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This paper presents the case for the Training for Real (TFR) project that was implemented by WEDC in Uganda from January 2005 to March 2006, with funding from the UK Department for International Development. The project aimed at motivating HRD and training providers to be responsive to the demands of employers so that professional development of water and sanitation sector staff is relevant to the needs of employers. To achieve its objectives, the project organized forum meeting to facilitate dialogue between the Higher Institutions of learning and employers, carried out research studies to establish the current training and capacity building activities and courses conducted in the HEIs, piloted alternative learning interventions, conducted needs assessments in areas of interest to the stakeholders, and provided support in information and knowledge management. Arising from the outcome of the project, the stakeholders have recognized a need to develop a training and capacity building strategy and institutionalize the TFR principles in the water and sanitation sector in Uganda, with further support of WEDC.

Background

The TFR Project was an offshoot of the DFID-funded ‘Learning and Teaching Network’, an international research project carried out by WEDC in 2002/2003, which sought to enhance the development of professionals in the water and sanitation sector by improving dialogue between employers and training providers. Uganda was one of the six countries in which a scoping study for the ‘Learning and Teaching Network’ project was implemented. DFID Uganda Office became interested in the findings of the scoping study, and through the Uganda Water and Sanitation Sector Joint Partnership Fund (JPF), requested WEDC to develop a more detailed research proposal for Uganda along the theme of the ‘Learning and Teaching Network’ project, hence the conception of the ‘Training For Real’ Project.

The inception phase was completed at the end of 2003. During this phase, a steering committee, drawn from key individuals from the water sector was set up, and interviews were held to gather facts and perceptions about human resource development in the water and sanitation sector. Activities for the main phase of the project were undertaken between January 2005 and April 2006. The final report was submitted to the Client in May 2006.

Project goal, purpose and outputs

The overarching goal of the project was to reduce the gap between the skills and knowledge of engineering and other water and sanitation sector graduates, and the demands of sector employers. The purpose of the TFR project was;

“to motivate HRD and training providers to be responsive to the demands of employers so that professional development of water and sanitation sector staff is relevant.”

It was anticipated that the project would provide the beginnings of a sector-wide approach to human resource development and capacity building and this fitted well with the trend of relating sector activities more closely with outcomes. The outputs of the Phase 1 of TFR project were:

- Output 1: Key national level HRD staff in the sector orientated for participation of in the TFR project activities.
- Output 2: HRD capacity strengthened to develop a sector-wide HRD Strategy
- Output 3: HRD activity-to-impact mapping carried out
- Output 4: Capacity development tools, approaches and delivery methods piloted in agreed training areas
- Output 5: Information and knowledge management support provided to key training institutions
- Output 6: Project secretariat identified and agreed
- Output 7: Progress reports and the Final Report written and presented to the relevant body.

Methodology for implementation

The project employed various methods and approaches in order to achieve the project objectives. In the first instance, key HRD staff in various sector institutions were mobilised to form a sector-wide HRD thematic group. Members of this group attended an HRD refresher course, met regularly to

discuss HRD issues in the sector, and they were assisted to join national HRD forums. There were also links established between the sector HRD thematic group and their counterparts in the UK.

The second method was engagement of key Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Uganda that produce professionals for the water and sanitation sector, to participate in research studies and programmes, with a view of carrying out a gap analysis of what the needs of the sector are compared to what the HEIs offer in terms of training and continuous professional development. The HEIs that participated in these studies were Makerere University, Kyambogo University, Mbale School of Hygiene, Nsamizi School for Social Development and Uganda Management Institute. The research method adopted for the study was paired interviews in which key stakeholder(s) from the 'supply' institution worked with the TFR project team to interview a group of stakeholders from the 'demand' institution and vice versa.

Thirdly, a retrospective survey was carried out with stakeholders in purposely selected local government units to evaluate the impact of previous training and capacity building activities.

Fourthly, a number of TFR forum meetings were held that brought together the suppliers of manpower to the water and sanitation sector (Education and Training Institutions) and the demand side (employers), with the objective of improving dialogue between employers and training providers (Kayaga et al, 2006), which enabled the two sides to begin appreciating the needs and requirements of the others. Besides being the main reporting method on project progress throughout the year, the TFR forum meetings were an integral part of the project process. Communication was in various directions: the project team could report progress to the wider stakeholder group, whilst stakeholders could give feedback on the direction of the project. There was also peer communication, with stakeholders from different parts of the water/sanitation capacity building sub-sector reporting their activities and sharing best practice. It was anticipated that such dialogue would enable the training institutions to start the process of involving the employers in the design and development of learning curriculum at the universities and tertiary institutions.

Fifthly, in recognition of the fact that merely discussing the desired strategy in abstract may not be enough to attract stakeholders to try out the ideas practically, the project aimed at piloting some innovative training methods. The pilot studies were designed based on areas of expertise which the sector stakeholders highlighted as being in critical need. Distance Learning modules were delivered to 20 stakeholders from various institutions in the water/sanitation sector in 'Report Writing' and 'Consultancy' skills. Another innovative training delivery method piloted was conducting a panel discussion on a topical issue of trans-boundary water negotiations under the Nile Basin Authority initiative. Selected stakeholders from the HEIs carried out capacity needs analysis in the following five topics:

- Negotiation skills in the water and sanitation sector
- Working with NGOs, communities and the private sector
- Information needs for decentralised water resource management
- Valley tanks and dams
- Wastewater treatment technical management issues

Finally, the project carried out a baseline survey of the information and knowledge management capacities of the key HEIs. Based on the findings of this audit, pilot projects were carried out with Makerere and Nsamizi Institute, in which support was offered to strengthen knowledge and information management, with a view of meeting the objectives of appropriate curriculum development.

Major findings of the study

The main finding of the action research was that there is a clear lack of planning and strategic direction for training and capacity-building in the sector, with predominance of "fire-fighting" and supply-led, short-term interventions. Initiatives for training and capacity building in the sector are fragmented not only across sector institutions, but also across different departments of most institutions.

Secondly, there are currently no formalized links between 'supply' and 'demand' institutions. Therefore, sector organisations hardly play any role in initiation, development and evaluation of courses offered by HEIs. There have been few cases where HEIs have developed tailor-made continuous professional development courses for the sector organisations. Academics in the HEIs identified the barriers to being responsive to the needs of the sector as mainly inadequate resources, a high student/lecturer ratio, and poor enabling environment. As a result, the stakeholders in the sector reported many training topics in which they are deficient in skills.

The main findings from the retrospective survey in five districts were that most training conducted was in form of short-duration workshops, although stakeholders placed more value on longer certificated courses. The respondents thought that some of the training topics covered deserved a longer period of time for it to achieve the required impact. Furthermore, the training/capacity building activities in the districts were not harmonised, and often led to repetitive training for some staff, at the expense of others. Furthermore, there was no corporate memory to store concepts gained from training.

Key lessons learnt

A number of key lessons were drawn from the implementation of the TFR project. Firstly, training and capacity building is a cross-cutting function in the sector, and there is a danger that it may not receive the required resources if it is not part of one of the key departments.

Secondly, although a lot resources are spent on training and capacity building (for example about 17% of the budget for Financial Year 2003/2004 was earmarked for capacity

building), it is currently difficult to evaluate the value of this investment. There is need, therefore, for developing performance indicators against which training and capacity building can be planned, designed, implemented and evaluated.

Thirdly, in order to have effective continuous professional development (CPD) in the sector, HEIs should be involved in policy-making for and delivery of training and capacity building in the sector. There is therefore need for formal collaboration between the sector and HEIs. Such a collaboration will only be sustainable if it is perceived to be mutually beneficial to both parties. There is need to intensify the dialogue between the sector policy-makers and HEIs and incorporate relevant HEIs into the decision-making mechanisms of the sector.

Fourthly, many professionals who graduate from universities do not possess the functional skills required of them when they are employed in the sector. There is need to work with the HEIs to incorporate these generic skills in their curricula, and provide CPD to the practicing professionals.

The way forward

The various activities undertaken as part of the TFR Project laid firm ground for development of a sector-wide HRD strategy. A strategy for human resource development will only be effective, cost-efficient and meaningful if the relevant higher education institutions (HEIs) are fully engaged in its formulation and implementation. To that effect, the collaboration between the relevant higher education institutions (supply) and sector organisations is to be strengthened. The following actions are specifically planned to strengthen collaborative partnerships:

- The Uganda water/sanitation sector is to co-opt representatives of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to sit on its Sector Working Group (WSWG), the highest policy-making body in the sector.
- The sector is to use part of its budget for training and capacity-building to form and facilitate a coordination body that will work out formalities for a framework to strengthening collaboration between HEIs and sector institutions, to encompass various activities, examples of which are more participation by HEIs in continuous professional; development for sector staff; joint ventures in applied research, more involvement of sector staff in development and assessment of university curricula, and subsequent accreditation of the courses for the sector staff.

The Water and Sanitation Sector HRD Thematic Group set up under the TFR project is to take a centre stage in the development of the sector-wide HRD. WEDC shall facilitate a process of strategy development for the water and sanitation capacity building sub sector, aiming to produce guidelines for value-for-money, and effective training.

Research is to be carried out on good practices in holding workshops, and on the development of indicators for training and capacity-building. The process of strategy development shall use the findings of past and on-going sector initiatives

such as the Technical Support Unit (TSU) study and the Training Needs Analysis study.

In the next one year of institutionalization, the TFR project team shall engage parts of the sector that have not participated fully in the TFR project activities, such as the district local governments and the private sector. The innovative training methods piloted in the project shall be institutionalized and scaled up in the sector.

The following outputs and activities are planned for the institutionalized phase;

Output 1:

Water/Sanitation Sector HRD Coordination Body established, functioning and mainstreamed in WSWG structures.

- Further consultations with stakeholders on establishment of the Coordinating Body
- Establish and strengthen secretariat for the Coordinating Body
- Identify, recommend and establish coordination rules, mechanisms and structures.

Output 2:

A sector-wide training/capacity building strategy developed and fully functional.

- Synthesize current institutional, policy and strategic issues from the TFR project and initiatives (e.g. Training Needs Analysis, Evaluation of the Technical Support Units) and from other institutions e.g. Ministry of Education, Local Government and Public Service
- Consult with stakeholders through questionnaires, interviews, meetings on strategy formulation
- Develop draft strategy and hold validation workshop

Output 3:

Best practice Guidelines for holding workshops and training/capacity building indicators developed.

- Carry out a Literature Search
- Develop a study instrument
- Consult stakeholders and validate findings

Output 4:

Scale up piloted capacity development approaches.

- Establish collaborative links with local 'Supply' institutions on delivery of DL Modules
- Scale up DL Modules on Report Writing Skills, Presentation Skills, Analytic Skills and any other areas of best practice.
- Commission detailed TNA and Curricula development for the pilot studies
- Carry out pilot delivery

Output 5:

Information Management (IM) and Knowledge Management (KM) Support to sector institutions.

- Provide IM & KM support to two Tertiary Education Institutions

- Provide IM & KM support to two non-education institutions (e.g. TSUs) providing training services to Local Govt organisations
- Provide IM and KM support to UWASNET and two pilot Local Govt organizations
- Develop options of strengthening the DWD Resource Centre and link it to the training/CB coordinating secretariat.

Output 6:

Wide dissemination of TFR Project Findings

- Smooth transfer of TFR website to the secretariat
- Carry out various activities using various pathways such as briefing notes, learning notes, popular articles, synthesis notes; conference papers, journal papers
- Organize a Dissemination Workshop at the 32nd WEDC Conference in Colombo.

Output 7:

Progress and final reports of institutionalization phase presented to relevant body.

- Hold quarterly steering group meetings
- Present papers at JTR and JSR
- Final report written and presented

Conclusion

The TFR project that was implemented between 2003 and 2006 by WEDC largely achieved its stated objectives of bringing together the institutions that provide professionals to the water and sanitation sector in Uganda, and the employers of the professionals with a view to ‘motivate HRD and training providers to be responsive to the demands of employers, so that professional development of water and sanitation sector staff is relevant.’ This objective was achieved through forum meetings that brought stakeholders together to discuss pertinent issues related to the subject matter, jointly conducted research studies to establish the mechanisms and impact of current training and capacity building activities and courses in the HEIs, field work studies to get in-depth knowledge of the actual requirements of the employers, pilot capacity building activities and innovative methods of training/capacity building to try out alternative methods of learning delivery in deficient areas, and institutional support in information and knowledge management.

People are the most important resource in the sector, and limited human resources in terms of numbers, attitude, focus, skills, knowledge or experience can lead to poor productivity and failure to achieve the MDGs. The objective of Training for Real (TFR) Project was to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the development of the human resources, which would in turn lead to the sustainable development of water resources, water supply and environmental sanitation. The TFR Project activities acted as building blocks for development of a sector-wide training and capacity building strategy in Uganda’s water/sanitation sector. The project recommendations have been taken seriously by the

Uganda water and sanitation sector policy makers, who have sanctioned an extension of the project to enable institutionalization and development of sector training/capacity building strategy.

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