

Coordination: coverage catalyst in Swaziland

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THE KINGDOM OF Swaziland, extending across the dissected plateau edge of southern Africa (Figure 1), is a small landlocked country bordered by Mozambique to the east and wholly surrounded by South Africa everywhere else. Over a total land area of 17,364 sq km, it has a 1986 census population of 681,059, projected to reach 984,000 by the year 2000.

Considering that 77 per cent of Swazis live in scattered dwellings in rural settlements (Government of Swaziland, 1991a; 1991b), a hybrid of significant efforts - government departments, NGOs, and external support agencies (ESAs) - responding to a well publicized country-wide water supply crisis are naturally focused upon the rural subsector. This trend also relates directly to the generally low infrastructural development level of the rural areas.

Since the inception of DECADE activities, the sector has witnessed a number of donor-funded projects in partnership with key government agencies, as well as input from NGOs. External support from multilateral and bilateral donors has played a major role in service delivery, institutional strengthening, and capacity building.

In the first couple of years post-DECADE, the main activities of spring protection and small water system construction were predominantly being undertaken by only two NGOs. However, in the wake of the 1991/92 severe drought from which the entire lowveld and parts of the middleveld never recovered, affirmative responses to a variety of drought emergency appeals have ensured that the sector is, once again, replete with NGO activities.

Whatever resources are available to the sector must be optimized within a cost-effective, coverage expanding framework which eliminates project duplication and agency competitiveness. The importance of collaboration amongst sector organizations, coordination of activities, and sharing of information could not be stronger than now: Revenue constraints and unusual expenditure increases are bringing about serious budgetary problems even as the country faces an increasingly competitive regional and global environment.

This paper presents the mechanisms put in place in Swaziland for sector coordination, following a brief review of the major sector institutions and an outline of the thematic issues and strategies of the sector.

Core sector institutions

Two Government of Swaziland (GoS) ministries - Natural Resources, Environment and Energy (MNREE) and Health and Social Welfare (MoH) - share the responsibilities for planning and implementing rural water supply and sanitation programmes. Three departments of MNREE are connected with water supply and sanitation, dealing with: exploration and exploitation; protection of water resources; the provision of drinking water to communities and the monitoring of water quantity and quality.

At present, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is the only bilateral institution active in the sector. Starting from April 1996, the entry of the Japanese government to the sector is spread over two years in the first instance. The support covers extensive facility construction and supply of vehicles and laboratory, geophysical, and drilling equipment. Funding to the tune of US\$6.3 million has already been confirmed for the first project year.

The multilateral organizations include the EU Microprojects Programme and members of the United Nations family - UNDP, UNICEF and WHO - which continue to play a role that dates back to DECADE years.

Since the mid-70s, external support to the sector has reached about US\$30 million. The contributions came predominantly from the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) of the UK, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Emergency Operations Fund of the United Nations (UNEOTF), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), European Development Fund of the European Union (EU/EDF), and the Netherlands government trust fund through the UNDP.

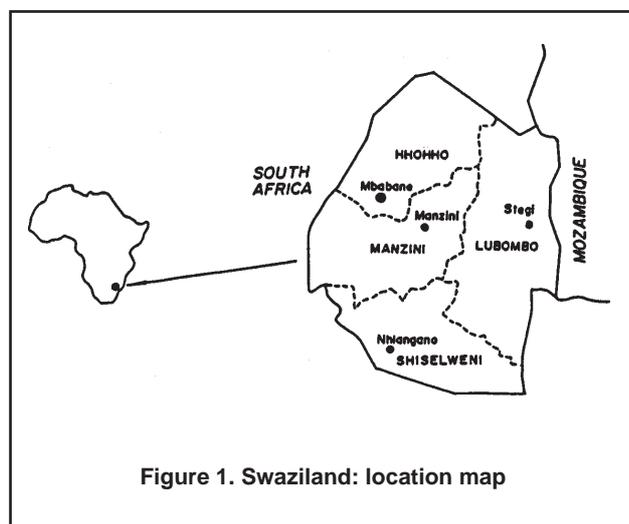


Figure 1. Swaziland: location map

Two NGOs - Emanti Esive and Council of Swaziland Churches - stand out as having outlived the DECADE and continuously implemented programmes on a national scale. At the moment, however, there are at least ten organizations in the league of sector NGOs. These new and not-too-new entrants are currently implementing UNICEF-funded drought relief water supply and sanitation projects, as part of the food-for-work activities of the WFP. Also, a number of the NGOs are being funded from government's recently gazetted water relief purse to intervene in identified communities.

Sector issues and strategies

The document 'Development of Rural Water Supply and Sanitation in Swaziland - National Policies and Strategies' reviewed and updated by the Rural Water Supply Branch (RWSB/MNREE) and Environmental Health Unit (EHU/MoH) in October 1994 outlines government's sector strategy. The forerunner also covering urban and peri-urban areas was prepared in 1986 under the aegis of a now defunct National Action Group (NAG), a ministerial-level outfit set up to plan and oversee DECADE-related sector development.

Sector strategies encompass the following:

- community participation in the planning of water supply and sanitation development;
- community contribution of a "reasonable proportion" of the costs of construction;
- community ownership of facilities and responsibility for all operation costs and "minor repairs", through properly constituted water and sanitation committees;
- coupling of hygiene education to water supply and sanitation to maximize and sustain health benefits;
- standardization of system components and equipment;
- adherence to established standards and guidelines for design and construction;
- priority of reaching the lowveld and dry portions of the middleveld where water supply shortages are most critical and water/excreta-related diseases are most prevalent.

A sector plan was prepared simultaneously with the sector policies and strategies, and are contained in the document 'Development of Rural Water Supply and Sanitation in Swaziland - A National Plan for Action 1994/95 - 1997/98'. The plan consists of 19 programme activities which aim at consolidating sector gains by improving institutional capacity to plan and implement projects, expanding water supplies to 115,860 unserved people, rehabilitating inoperable water schemes to serve a population of 102,000, and constructing latrines to serve about 187,000 people.

It is estimated that these interventions between 1994 and 1998 would raise coverage figures from 30 per cent to

45 per cent for sanitation, and from 40 per cent to 60 per cent for water supply. It is worthy of note, however, that the bulk of the programmes are yet unfunded.

Sector coordination framework

The last couple of years have witnessed an increased tempo of NGO activities in the sector. The most prominent support comes from external funds channelled through WFP. The activities stretch through water resources development and conservation, including: rain-water harvesting; erection of water tanks and tank stands; construction of cattle drinking ponds; borehole handpump installation; donga reclamation; catchment improvement and protection; and dam construction and rehabilitation. In some cases yet to be determined, NGOs have sought and received funds from other sources with the sole aim of establishing water supply and sanitation facilities across an unclear spread of rural communities.

It is unarguable that the efforts of all sectoral players are intended to ensure rapid coverage. And it is also true that NGOs can be useful contributors to the development of water supply and sanitation systems in rural areas. Indeed, Swaziland exhibits a few examples of good NGO performance in several aspects of water and sanitation programmes, including an effective use of local resources, fast mobilization, low project unit cost resulting from lean administrative structures and low overhead, and application of innovative development approaches.

Yet a good chunk of NGO work takes place in isolation from the mainstream of sector development, culminating in design and construction which fail to meet (or even conflict with) accepted standards. Also, due to limitations in planning skills, staffing level and administrative resources, some NGOs have found it difficult to see projects through. The most unfortunate result where community organization and motivation is not strong enough, is poor system operation and maintenance.

By virtue of an April 1979 Cabinet Paper, the RWSB was formally designated as the focal point of DECADE sector activities in the country. Subsequently, Cabinet in January 1995 mandated the RWSB to supervise and coordinate the activities of all sector organizations operating in the country. Thus, it was long recognized that government must take primary responsibility for sector management: identify institutions, pinpoint goals, evolve plans, establish priorities, and spearhead policy reforms.

Notwithstanding the stated mandate, the planning, implementation, and support functions within the sector still remain scattered among a number of agencies, each with its own priorities. External support institutions are not different: agendas and interests even amongst UN System sisters could vary widely.

The mechanisms to facilitate coordination in Swaziland are made to operate first amongst government agencies. This allows a common government front in dealings with other sector partners. Daily coordination at the central level is fostered by the outposting of an EHU/MoH

officer to the RWSB. However, more formal links are needed here if meaningful policy and planning coordination are to be forged.

Intra-government coordination has worked a lot better at the field level, between regional Health Inspectors/Health Assistants from the MoH and the Community Development Officers (CDOs) from the RWSB. Officers prepare and copy weekly schedules to their field counterparts, make invitations to community meetings in writing, share resources when visiting the same areas, and submit a written report on such activities. In most cases, the result is a more informal, more routine, and more effective teamwork.

A lot more challenging is ensuring coordination with other agencies and organizations providing complementary services in the sector. The mechanisms put in place are additions to routine biannual coordination meetings involving key officers from sector organizations.

Firstly, the RWSB is committed to bringing in all sectoral players as full partners in the sector development process and having tasks assigned in accordance with national development goals: a scenario devoid of project duplications. A major step has been taken, therefore, to make NGOs parties to the formulation of, and thus follow, sector policy guidelines, especially those for design and construction, community organization and participation, and linkage of water supply, sanitation and hygiene. Ahead of a sector consultative workshop in June 1996, individual agency programme documents and plans have been exchanged, in view of evolving common strategies and a collective national action plan.

In particular, the GoS agencies have presented the following documents for review by NGOs and the donor community:

- sector plan of action (1995-98);
- sector policies and strategies;
- guidelines for drinking water quality;
- procedures for approval of rural water systems;
- notes on latrine construction.

Secondly, the GoS realizes the importance of a more formal and regular participatory forum that would link its departments with other sector partners, as well as the need to ensure exchange of information amongst its own agencies, NGOs, and ESAs. Thus, every year, a sector review workshop will be convened to consider the activities of the previous year and look into programme plans for the succeeding year.

Thirdly, a single national sector plan will render donor support to all sector agencies (including NGOs) more consistent with national goals. As already accomplished

last year in a Memorandum of Understanding amongst UNICEF, the Coordinating Assembly of NGOs (CANGO), and GoS in the case of a drought emergency project, donor support to NGOs is to be routinely implemented under tripartite agreements to which government should be a signatory.

Implied in the foregoing coordination mechanisms is a more effective sector coverage, due to an enhanced programme efficiency that would emerge from appropriately shared resources. From better design and construction standards to greater community participation and linkage of interventions (water, sanitation and hygiene), the sector is sure to benefit.

Conclusions

Several players in the rural water and sanitation sector - NGOs, government departments, ESAs, and the private sector - have made significant contributions to the expansion of water supply and sanitation services to the unserved and underserved rural populations in Swaziland.

In many cases, however, those interventions occurring in isolation from the mainstream of sectoral development lack technical expertise, and leave community facilities which often conflict with accepted standards of design and construction. Frequently, government funds have had to be used to address problems relating to lack of initial planning with communities, and non-recognition of the linkage of hygiene education to water supply and sanitation and, in particular, the vital need for long-term sustainability of system operation and maintenance.

Considering that the sector is currently replete with NGO activities resulting from affirmative responses to drought relief appeals, government is taking primary responsibility for sector management. In systematic consultation with all sector organizations, government is establishing goals and priorities, and spearheading policy reforms. In particular, a demand-driven approach to service delivery is increasingly emphasized.

The mechanisms put in place include bringing in NGOs as full participants in the sector planning process so that every NGO project is backed by a Memorandum of Understanding with government, alongside the project implementation guidelines.

References

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