

DELIVERING BASIC SERVICES IN SOUTHERN SUDAN

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INTRODUCTION

January 2005 saw the signing of the Peace Agreement that established Southern Sudan, after a decade of civil war. At the end of 2005, a rudimentary state government structure was established; however, the functioning of the systems at all levels is severely hampered by the lack of equipment, human and financial resources.

The government of Southern Sudan (Juba level) is currently responsible for funding the running of the entire government system. The revenue generation of the system is low, especially in Eastern Equatoria, where the cash economy is small. Officially, income from cross-border trade is mainly channelled to Khartoum, where it is equally shared between the North and South. Informally, revenue is collected through law enforcement structures.

SNV has been operating since May 2005 in Eastern Equatoria, one of the 10 states in Southern Sudan, where various other development agencies are also working. In early 2006, SNV supported the emerging state government in drafting a plan of priority activities for the year, at a workshop funded by PACT through one of their partner CBOs. Later in the year, the CBO fell out with the authorities and the plan was not implemented. In September 2006, UNDP facilitated a three-day planning meeting in the capital, where most NGOs were represented. The resultant plan was neither realistic nor participatory, but it gave GOSS (Southern Sudan government, Juba level) a tool for resource mobilisation. The plan was gradually refined by a planning team, composed of state government ministries, and some effort was made to gather some real data on the ground.

In 2006 SNV decided to focus its activities on service delivery in 'water and sanitation' and 'education'. Upon interaction with both these ministries in Southern Sudan, it became evident that they faced similar problems, namely:

- planning and decision making is based on theory rather than on reliable data and with the participation of actual beneficiaries;
- there is a lack of clarity in the roles and responsibilities of key government and local government actors at the county level;
- while mechanisms had been established to coordinate activities between the government and civil society, these are not functioning;
- staff capacities in the state ministries are severely lacking, making delegation almost impossible.

The lack of reliable baseline data, coupled with the absence of a representative structure makes it difficult to plan with and for the communities and end beneficiaries. Local authorities are unable to coordinate the varied activities of development agencies, as the latter remain in charge of their own agenda, and baseline data.

METHOD

The aim of the intervention was to create a common understanding of, and actual decentralised capacity to effectively and efficiently deliver, basic services as required by the community.

SNV initially worked with the state ministries of education, water and local government, with the objectives of:

- strengthening decentralised coordination and planning capacity;
- improving the capacity of local authorities to source external funding for their plans;
- improving the capacity to target services based on community needs, specifically;
 - girl child enrolment,
 - borehole rehabilitation versus new boreholes,
 - community involvement in the management of education, water supply and sanitary facilities.

To this end, the following key activities were undertaken:

- 5 multi-stakeholder forums/fora organised at the state level;
- participatory discussions on the roles and responsibilities of the different levels and directorates in the ministries of education and water;
- a consultative workshop on the establishment of local government authorities and their roles;
- support for county planning and budgeting to increase the participation of communities and develop realistic, capacity-based, plans with attention to revenue generating capacity;
- through LCB, state level staff were trained in computer use;
- exercise to identify issues related to girl child education at the lower levels;
- support to the establishment of Girls Education Movement Clubs in primary schools, with financial support from UNICEF.

Capacity building was undertaken from a position of collaboration, equal partnership and trust. Different cadres within each ministry were engaged to evaluate their activities and decisions to determine if any of these could have been improved.

Although the specific state ministries and local government authorities were considered the main clients, all activities were undertaken in collaboration with other clients and stakeholders including: UNICEF, UNDP, CRS, PACT, the Catholic Diocese of Torit (CDOT), AAR, the Carter Centre, local NGOs and CBOs, and Caritas/the Bridge, a loose partner of SNV. Clients and stakeholders, thereby, gained a better understanding of SNV's approach and capacity to deliver relevant services, based on actual experience.

IMPACT

With time, the ministries at state level have been able to organise the actual multi-stakeholder planning forums/fora, with only facilitation and report editing support from SNV. The schools and decentralised structures of the Ministry of Education are able to address identified practical issues, without waiting for direction from the central level.

The SNV advisors have been dedicated and committed to the process, using local capacity-building expertise to fulfil the client demands, while ensuring quality improvement.

Through this approach, it is anticipated that the activities and interventions of the local authorities will respond to the actual needs of the community. It is also anticipated that those in charge of budget procedures are cognisant of these requirements and fund allocation will be equitable. Given their participation in the planning process, the community ownership of the process is stronger, and it is expected that this will ensure sustainability and long-term success.

LESSONS LEARNED

To consolidate the process, the following activities have been planned for the next stage:

- train county staff in data gathering and analysis, and staff use in computers;
- facilitate issue-based enquiries to validate the baselines in two counties;
- support the Ministry of Education to recruit and train appropriate staff to enable actual access to education as opposed to access to facilities;
- support WaSH policies elaboration at state level and support the establishment of structures and institutions that can implement and enforce these at county level;
- establish community management structures for education facilities, including training as appropriate;
- facilitate training and establishment of community management structures for WaSH facilities;
- support and facilitate the definition of the terms of reference for staff at the state and county level, taking into consideration the desired impact.

To achieve the desired results, SNV has adopted flexibility in its approach to engage its partners and client groups, and aims to create a dynamic that enables the client to replicate the successes elsewhere. To strengthen the processes it is engaged in, it is important for SNV staff to, at least, be well informed about the plans of the other actors, including multilateral donors and government. Through the activities thus far implemented, SNV has achieved a position of strength with the state, as compared to other support programmes. SNV is perceived as being a knowledgeable and committed partner.

It is important to create confidence in the client that SNV can deliver. In Southern Sudan the confidence was built through engagement of the stakeholders at a higher level, where there was likely to be a better understanding of the SNV intention, role, advantages, approach and process. Counties especially strengthened their confidence in SNV, when they saw the state ministries engaging with SNV in multi-stakeholder processes. The willingness of the UN agencies to work with SNV made them a credible partner in the eyes of the state government.

Gender still remains a secondary issue, if an issue at all in peoples' minds. While development agencies can 'force' the issue by incorporating women's involvement in the project designs, when most of the partners and clients believe that the involvement of women will hinder the process, it is difficult to push it too far.

Data upon which decision making is based is generated at the national level and does not always take into consideration the perceptions of the people at the grassroots level. There is a need to assist the decision makers to validate the data and ensure that the plans developed effectively address the needs of the communities they are intended to serve.

The sharing of experiences without appropriate documentation has a limited impact. However, the documentation of processes and experiences is not considered a high priority. Most stakeholders tend to focus on activities and achievement of tangible benefits, and do not dedicate the required time to documentation and learning.