

DELIVERING RESULTS WHILE LEARNING: THE CASE OF GUIDED DISTANCE LEARNING IN WATER SANITATION AND HYGIENE IN ETHIOPIA

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Country: Ethiopia

Sector: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

CHALLENGE

Ethiopia has one of the lowest levels of WaSH facilities and practices in Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2007, access to unsafe water supply was on average more than 50% (Fig. 1). Sanitation levels were lower and estimated by the Ministry of Health at less than 40% ((JTR) Annual Report, 2008). Under five-child mortality rate in Ethiopia is reported to be 117/1000 of which 20% of the death is caused by diarrhoea (KAP 2005). In response to the urgency, the government of Ethiopia (GoE) initiated implementation of the Universal Access Program (UAP) in 2006 to provide access to safe water for 98% of the rural population and for 100% of the urban population of the country by 2012. One of the reforms that GoE recommended to achieve the UAP targets was to give responsibility for WaSH achievement to districts (Woredas) and strengthen the capacity of the District staff. The sector staff was expected to be equipped with practical knowledge and tools that would enable them to assist local communities to make and implement action plans to improve and maintain their water and sanitation systems.

Fig 1. Unsafe drinking water



CLIENTS

In November 2007, the Federal Ministry of Water Resource (MoWR) approached and requested SNV Ethiopia to assist strengthen the capacity of the Technical Educational Vocational Training Centres (TVETCs) to improve the relevance, quality and capacity to train more graduates to work in the Woredas. This was in recognition of the fact that it is the TVETCs that train the WaSH staff that work in the Districts. SNV convinced the ministry to start capacity support from one TVETC and later expand depending on the success and lessons learned. Hawassa TVETC in the Southern Nations Nationalities Peoples Region (SNNPR) of Ethiopia was chosen to be the pilot.

SNV Ethiopia engaged the services of Meta Meta Communications from the Netherlands to assess the capacity of the Hawassa TVETC and recommend strategies for improving the relevance and quality of its WaSH training program and also the capacity to train more WaSH graduates. The findings of the assessment showed that the training program had far too much theory and did not fit the practice. The TVETCs lack practical training materials and methodologies and most of their trainers are recent university graduates without enough practical experience. As a result the trainees from the TVETC are not really equipped to enter the labour market.

These findings prompted the stakeholders to seek for ways in which the capacity of TVETC graduates could be strengthened without disrupting their service delivery. Guided Distance Learning (GDL) was identified as a potential solution for 'on the job' training.

The Guided Distance Learning (GDL) program

GDL is a guided practice based self learning at the place of work (paper based, CDROM, Internet) which allows trainees to learn with colleagues, share experience with trainers (by postal mail or email) and get feedback and support at the workplace by a visiting trainer or resource person.

The trainees review materials and test themselves through self assessments, apply and submit results and assignments to trainers, make arrangements for field visit by trainers and make final assignments which are reviewed and graded by the trainers. The net course content comprises of a period of two weeks for each module including field assignments but the course is implemented over a period of eight weeks to cover for self learning and practical exercises.

The GDL modules for training are developed in response to the practical issues faced by the WaSH staff in their work places. For instance, the first module that was rolled out by Hawassa TVETC was on water quality and water quality plans.

The GDL program is designed in line with the practical skill requirements of TVETC graduates set by governments. Trainees who complete the GDL-program successfully are qualified as field practitioners with competencies in the respective sector modules that they have trained on. On completion of the training they are awarded a certificate.

Piloting of the GDL program:

(a) The role of SNV and other stakeholders in the GDL Program.

A consortium of Addis Ababa University, Meta Meta communications, and SNV Ethiopia developed the guided distance learning (GDL) program. The primary aim of the program was to build the capacity of the TVETC WaSH graduates in their work places in a cost effective way and enable them to respond and address the practical issues they confront in the field. The program was designed to permit the professionals to study 'at the workplace' and link their learning with their own daily practical problems. In rolling out the program in Hawassa TVETC, Local Universities, the Regional Water Bureau and the Districts played key roles. The specific roles of the key stakeholders are as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Institutions and their roles in GDL pilot.

Institutions	Role/Responsibility
Meta Meta communications	Developed the module for distance learning and trained the trainers
Addis Ababa and Hawasa Universities	Gave feedback on the draft module and participated in training the trainers and contributed members of staff as trainers.
SNV Ethiopia	Provided feedback on the draft modules and training course, facilitated the TVET to set up the course, assisted to organize and kick start of the course and participated in the evaluation of the course.
Hawassa TVETC	Lobbied for financing, contributed members of staff as trainers, rolled out the GDL course and awarded certificates.
SNNPR regional Water Bureau	Regulated the program and aligned it to the government requirements, lobbied for financing, contributed staff members as trainers and promoted the program to the districts.
District Administration	Provided trainees and paid for part of the course fee
Trainers from the TVETC, Water Bureau and Hawassa University	Were trained in a training of trainer's course and implemented the GDL training.

(b) Implementation process

Implementation of the GDL course was achieved through 5 steps. In step 1, Meta Meta, Addis Ababa University and SNV developed the course content, training plan and training materials for the water quality and water safety plan module. In step 2 a training of trainers was undertaken in which a total of 6 trainers were trained in a 5 days course on how to implement the GDL. In step 3, a stakeholder's promotion meeting was held in Awassa town where all stakeholders reviewed the planned implementation of the GDL in 6 districts and explored how to institutionalize the program and also seek for sustainable financing for the program. Step 4 was the actual training which proceeded by first convening a 2 days kick-off meeting (Fig. 2) in which the trainees were introduced to the course and equipped with the required materials. The trainees were then dispatched to their duty districts to proceed with the training. Follow-up visits to the trainees by trainers from the TVETC and resource persons from the Water Bureau and Hawassa University to review and discuss their training results in the field was also done. Towards the end for the training, a Meta Meta trainer reviewed the trainee's final assignments and then a one day feedback session was held for stakeholders to review the progress and achievements of the program. In total there were 5 trainer/trainee meetings and 2 field visits by the trainers. A total of 6 trainers were involved and they trained 12 trainees from 6 districts.

Fig 2. Kick off meeting



OUTCOME

Main Results

The positive results achieved from the training overcame initial doubts about applicability of distance learning in strengthening practical knowledge and skills of WASH staff at the work place (Fig 3). The trainees were involved in practical hands on learning that resulted in final assignments that enabled the communities to come up with practical Sanitation Plans and Community Water Safety Plans for improving access to WaSH. The trainees expressed satisfaction and acknowledged that they acquired concrete knowledge and skills while continuing with their routine roles and responsibilities in the district. The district administration in the districts where the trainees worked were also very excited with the opportunity provided for the staff to learn while still providing routine services which also boosted their morale and commitment. The districts are willing to support more staff go through the same training and promised to allocate a budget for the training during the 2009/2010 budget year.

Fig 3. Pair of trainees in a practical session testing the water quality



The first lots of trainees of the GDL program have expressed an interest for participating in additional GDL additional modules. The priority modules that they have identified include: Preventive operation and maintenance of WaSH facilities, Community led Total Sanitation, Hygiene promotion and behavioural change and Pro-poor water supply financing. These modules fit very well in the SNV chosen areas for capacity support in most East and Southern Africa countries.

Rolling out the GDL program provided an opportunity for the Water Bureau, Hawassa University and the TVETC to work very closely together. The 3 institutions found the collaboration to be quite unique and effective in strengthening the capacity of the WaSH sector. They realized how they could compliment each other and have expressed an interest to continue with the collaboration. Staff from the three institutions have recommended that this kind

of partnership ought to be expanded in the whole country in order to foster capacity development in the WaSH sector.

The program turned out to be quite appropriate for women staff in districts who otherwise would have found it difficult to leave their families and seek training far away from their workplaces. The female trainees who participated in the program are very appreciative and more female staff have expressed an interest to participate and they believe that the program offers a unique opportunity for addressing a gender gap where female staff are disadvantaged in accessing further training (Fig 4).

Fig 4. Female trainees expressing appreciation to the



The community water sanitation plans developed by each trainee encouraged integrated thinking and resulted in concrete community actions on the ground. These included: (1) the community cleaning and putting in service 4 abandoned hand dug wells in Shashego district, (2) the community changing WaSH Committee members and re-initiation of interrupted water supply service delivery in a school in Mirak Badewacho district, (3) Water users purchasing spare parts and putting the water supply back in service in Boloso Sore District and (5) Community members who were drinking water from a traditional spring switching to a protected system after seeing the water quality test results in Kedida Gamela District (Fig 5).

Fig 5. Community lining up to formally abandoned well



The results and success of the GDL pilot were presented and shared in the recent WEDC conference held in May 18-22, 2009 in Addis Ababa Ethiopia. The WEDC International Conference provides a global platform for practitioners, decision-makers, academics and researchers from all over the world who lead water and sanitation innovation in low-income countries to share and discuss WaSH knowledge and experiences. This year's 34th WEDC conference brought together a total of 645 participants (272 international & 373 national delegates) who appreciated GDL as an innovative approach with a great potential for strengthening the capacity of the WaSH sector and therefore an approach that should be promoted and expanded.

LESSONS LEARNED

All key stakeholders have reflected on the process and results of the GDL pilot and find it to have been very successful and to have achieved its objectives. The trainers and trainees found GDL useful for themselves and for colleagues and were positively surprised about community interest. The districts have realized the potential of the program in upgrading the skills of their staff at a minimum cost while still delivering results. The TVETC, Bureau and the Local Universities found their partnership and collaboration to have been very rewarding and have vowed to continue with it. SNV on its part find the program to be a quick and effective way of upgrading the WaSH sector capacity. The Hawassa TVETC is very happy with the partnerships it has build and regards the GDL program as a refresher program it will try to sustain to continually upgrade the capacity of its graduates in the working places.

Based on this success, SNV has agreed to participate and support an expanded GDL program that has been developed and is planned to be rolled out starting January 2010. The program will expand GDL in SNNPR and later expand to 2 other regions. The aim is still on training more trainers and upgrading the knowledge and skills of more District staff and with a particular focus on the female staff. The program will still be rolled out by Hawassa TVETC in collaboration with the local Universities, the Water Bureau, Meta Meta Communications and SNV. The program success has been noticed by other stakeholders who have made a commitment to join and support the expansion of

the program. RIPPLE with funding from DFID and WaterAid are the new partners in the expanded GDL program.

Literature cited:

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