

The power of talking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene



The International Training Programme (ITP) Sustainable Urban Water And Sanitation (SUWAS) programme is different from other typical water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions. The programme, managed by Niras and WaterAid, and funded by SIDA, looks at how to build capacity among WASH stakeholders. In particular, it aims to improve their ways of working and promote organisational effectiveness in order to reach more people with WASH services. As opposed to construction and hardware, the programme relies more on experience and knowledge sharing, as a way to make change happen.

In 2017, six participants from Manyara region in northern Tanzania were enrolled in the programme. There were representatives from Government, the council and the town utility. They began a journey that would see them look closely into how they work individually and as an organisation, and look at what can be improved as a way to increase access to water and sanitation in their home communities.

Context

Babati is located about two hours south of Arusha, along the main road to Dodoma and by Lake Babati – one of the few lakes in

the region. The city has a population of about 100,000 and is the administrative center for a large, mainly farming region. This part of Tanzania is water scarce, and thus water is not abundant in the city. The supply is based on groundwater being pumped into the city, with some wells located rather far away, implying considerable costs and difficulties in getting the water to the city.

The WASH conditions in Babati are challenging. Much water is lost in leaking pipes, contributing to a high rate of non-revenue water (NRW). Sanitation is mainly based on pit latrines and septic tanks. A sewage treatment plant does not exist; the sewage collected is emptied outside the city.

Looking into the future, the city faces considerable challenges. Honolath Sebastian, Acting Technical Manager of BAWASA, the local water and sanitation utility, says:

“There are a lot of challenges with water, sanitation and hygiene in Babati. The water sources are often polluted. The water infrastructure that we have here is old, and needs rehabilitating. We need capital for this, and one of the big challenges we have around revenue for BAWASA is that Non-Revenue Water (NRW) is high.”

The case

When the team from Babati travelled to Sweden for training and study tours, they also went with an idea that you have to have a lot of money in order to improve services and, specifically, reduce NRW. However, during their visit to Sweden they changed their thinking. They saw that they have to use their resources better and work more efficiently and work with what they have. After a visit to the Royal Seaport in Stockholm, the delegation was inspired to learn about how stakeholders were involved in the planning and building of a new area in the city. As one of the participants stated:

“When we came from Sweden we saw that we needed to coordinate ourselves better and to communicate with all stakeholders so they are aware of our work and our standards. We also realized that reducing NRW will mean that we have more income and from this we can increase our service hours and extend the infrastructure”. In other words, it can become a win-win option, moving change upwards, rather than downwards.”

Today, in early 2019, and only two years after the group enrolled in the training, the changes in Babati are dramatic:

- Water supply coverage has increased from **66% to 76%**
- NRW has decreased from **40% to 30%** (expected May 2019)
- Service hours have increased from **12hrs to 18hrs**
- Billing value has increased from TZS **130,000,000 to TZS 146,000,000.**

This has happened without funding for infrastructure development projects. The power of talking WASH has led to these significant changes.

When the team returned home from Sweden, inspired by open and participatory planning processes, they decided to try a

new way of working together.

Eng. Iddy Msuya, Managing Director of BAWASA described what happened:

“We looked at how to improve stakeholder coordination as a way to reduce NRW. One of the major steps we took was starting to conduct stakeholder meetings. This helped us to understand who are our key stakeholders, and they have helped me to get the information that we need in order to implement the NRW strategy”.

The talking developed along several avenues. Local government agencies were engaged. The road department was approached and water losses due to bursting pipes during their work was reduced. The same piping standards and equipment used were introduced across the city; and a MoU was signed, outlining how to work together, which in turn helps to ensure that the infrastructure is protected and NRW reduced.

BAWASA started to share information via meetings and media, about their tasks and activities; the importance of reporting leaking pipes became a key message; and great emphasis was given on general water awareness.

BAWASA's customers was also a key target group. Much work was given to make them more aware and knowledgeable about the water distribution system, but also to give them improved services. This included a pre-billing system, telling them about the amount to be paid at the end of the month; to have staff actively engaged in addressing customer queries and concerns, including a quick response mechanism to leaking pipes and valves; the creation of WhatsApp groups for improved communication; and to establish a call center. The call center has a free line open for customers to call and let BAWASA know about a leakage or damaged infrastructure.

This ITP SUWAS programme has helped to demonstrate that just by talking and exchanging knowledge, and developing stronger communication mechanisms, organisations can deliver improved WASH services. Simple changes can have big effects.

What are the linkages? By promoting public awareness and engagement, sharing information and coordinate with all stakeholders, and supporting openness and transparency, a positive spin is generated, which in turn makes the system more focused, efficient and productive.

With this, the utility receives positive feedback, which in turn motivates the staff to deliver more and better services. In the end, limited resources – like staff, time, funds, and investments – are more efficiently used at a very low cost.

Looking into the future, Eng. Iddy Msuya, has a vision:

“One piece of advice I would give to other utilities is that you don’t need a lot of money to reduce NRW. You need to work together with the citizens so you can educate them and get



Eng. Iddy Msuya, Managing Director of BAWASA with his ITP SUWAS certificate.