

1 THE SCHOOL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM IN MBALE DISTRICT

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INTRODUCTION

Mbale district local government has benefited from SNV support since January 2007. The support is aimed at enabling Mbale district local government (Mbale DLG) to improve the district's service delivery in primary education, water, sanitation and hygiene and in production, income and employment sectors.

CHALLENGE

Mbale district local government has a total enrolment of 72,797 pupils of which 35,650 are boys and 34,147 girls. Performance in the education sector has been greatly affected by many factors; including but not limited to: poor school management and administration, high ratio of pupil to instructional materials, low school attendance rates, high drop out rates and class repetition, poor hygiene and sanitation, low completion rates (58%) especially for the girls and disabled, low parental support/involvement in education often emanating from parental illiteracy, negative cultural practices including gender discrimination of girl children, early marriages, circumcision, high pupil to school facilities and infrastructure ratio; among others.

For example, classroom: pupil ratio of 1:216; against the desired 1:40; latrine stance: pupil ratio of 1:183; against the desired 1:30; house: teacher ratio of 1:50, and desk: pupil ratio of 1:13; among others.

SNV support to the DLG focuses on strengthening the capacity of key stakeholders to deal with these causal factors with a view to increase enrolment, retention and quality. It is anticipated that by the end of 2008 and as a result of SNV capacity development support to the key education stakeholders in Mbale, the following changes will be achieved:

Indicator	To	From
Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)	181.5%	181%
Net Enrolment Ratio (NER)	100	100
Teacher-Pupil Ratio (TPR)	47	49

The school education quality improvement programme (SEQUIP) is SNV's intervention intended to strengthen stakeholders' capacity towards the above results. The intervention was piloted in two (2) sub counties and two (2) schools per Sub County. It is envisaged that by the end of 2009, SEQUIP would have been expanded to cover 30 schools; directly impacting on 15,000 pupils.

Goal of assignment

SEQUIP is a community focused intervention whose overall goal is to provoke and sustain community (parents, political and religious leaders, schools and local government) interest in education. SEQUIP is desirous of having communities that value education and play an active role in its provision.

METHOD

From April 2007, SNV (through the services of Link Community Development - a local capacity builder) working with and through Mbale DLG began the implementation of SEQUIP in two sub counties and focusing on two schools (Kama and Bukhanakwa). The two schools were selected on the basis of their low achievement in the 2006 primary leaving examinations; which are the only means of assessment of achievement at that level in Uganda. The main activities to date have been:

- Support to the DLG to establish an education multi-stakeholder forum (MSP) aimed at mobilising stakeholder collaboration and coordination and joint action in addressing the impediments to education service delivery.
- Facilitation of the identification of school level impediments to a conducive learning environment

OUTCOME

- Support towards improving access to safe drinking water at schools through technical support on training teachers and school management committees on school sanitation and low-cost approaches for accessing safe water e.g. rain water harvesting. This was part of efforts to integrate WASH in schools in a bid to create a positive learning environment, especially for girls.
- Support to developing school development plans (SDP) through a participatory process that involved the head teachers, teachers, school management and Parents. The SDP were developed to tackle: pupils' and teachers' performance, school infrastructure development, stakeholder involvement in school programs/activities, improving retention of learners within the school system and maintaining good sanitation and environment
- Ongoing support towards the implementation of the SDPs. Specifically, this has involved: creating awareness on stakeholder roles and responsibilities, strengthening capacity for monitoring implementation of the SDP, managing pupil assessment and school management systems, conducting class days and involving pupils in monitoring of actual lesson delivery by teachers, among others.

SEQUIP is an on-going intervention that has so far brought some exhilarating moments in the case of Mbale. Perhaps the most noteworthy of these moments is where the two schools showed an over 150% improvement in PLE results in 2007; as measured by the number of candidates in division 1 and 2; Kama registered a 184.6% improvement while Bukhanakwa registered 152.5%. These two schools were the only schools in the previous bottom twelve schools of the district to register that magnitude of change, Most of the other schools recorded even poorer results in 2007 than in 2006.

At an event to commission the candidates and recognise their exceptional performance at Kama Primary School; the chairperson PTA remarked that "*Kama was rising from the ashes...since 1920 when the school was established, there was no time in history that the school had achieved such a great accomplishment.*" While the pupils received their certificates and small gifts, it was evident that both they and their parents were relishing this moment and perhaps looking forward to the next one.

Whereas it is difficult to establish data that would show a comparative picture for Bukhanakwa since their first P.7 candidates were presented for PLE in 1997, the available data could depict the situation as shown in table 1 below:

Table 1: Bukhanakwa Primary school PLE results 2002-2007

Year	Division				
	I	II	III	IV	X ¹
2002	0	3	5	3	1
2003	0	2	1	8	1
2004	0	3	8	9	1
2005	0	7	3	11	7
2006	0	0	2	11	0
2007	0	18	1	1	0

Source: Uganda National examinations Board (UNEb)

From the initial awareness creation meetings held at the school and sub county levels, the sub county education taskforces took a very keen interest in the running of the affairs of the schools. This interest sparked off a sense of accountability and reporting by the teachers and head teachers. At school level, one of the critical gaps that had been identified was non completion of the syllabus. This was tackled by investing extra hours to teach the candidate classes in order to complete the syllabus. The head teachers took particular charge of handling some lessons for the candidate classes to ease the teachers' workload.

Assignment results

To date, the SEQUIP intervention is impacting directly on 1,076 pupils, 15 teachers and 30 members of the SMC and PTA executives. Indirectly, SEQUIP is reaching approximately 38,987 (19,644 female and 19,343 male) people in the

¹ Division X denotes candidates who registered for PLE but did not sit the exam due to one reason or the other. It could be used to infer the drop out rate at that level

IMPACT

two sub counties of Bufumbo and Busano through the sub county multi stakeholder processes. Furthermore, the DLG is taking lessons from SEQUIP and has to date trained all head teachers in the 104 primary schools of the district in school management towards quality results, and has established a district-wide system of school development planning, monitoring and management.

The most tangible result is the improvement in the level of achievement at PLE as indicated in the section above. However, there are other results that attest to the fact that SEQUIP is on track. There is a marked increase in enrolment at both schools although the figures for Bukhanakwa are less impressive. The overall percentage increase in enrolment is 42% and 10.6% for Kama and Bukhanakwa respectively. In the case of Kama percentage increase in enrolment for girls is 31%; while for boys it is 27%. The table below shows a comparison over a two year period according to available statistics.

Table 2: Enrolment figures for Kama & Bukhanakwa Primary schools 2007 & 2008

Year	School					
	Kama P/S			Bukhanakwa P/S		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
2007	207	222	429	183	240	423
2008	287	322	609	219	243	468

Source: Mbale DLG education office

It needs to be noted that these are schools that traditionally perennially recorded high pupil turnover. With the improved performance at PLE, there is a noticeable improvement in community participation in school affairs. The parents desire to see more of the achievement attained in the 2007 PLE examinations. This is evidenced by attendance of school meetings and School management committee and PTA involvement in running the school.

In both schools, parents have been mobilised to contribute a modest fee of three thousand shillings (3000 UGX); an equivalent of about two US dollars per child per term towards providing mid day meals. This programme is more successful at these pilot schools than at any of their neighbouring schools. For example during a visit in April, it was observed that while over 100 pupils were on the school feeding programme at Kama PS, a neighbouring school had less than 10 pupils paid up for the programme.

In another instance, the parents of upper primary (P.5- P.7) have consented to contribute an additional one thousand five hundred shillings (1500 UGX) for meeting the costs of administering monthly tests for upper primary.

In Bukhanakwa Primary school, the SMC and PTA are working jointly to collect building materials to construct a rain water harvesting tank at the school. Parents have pledged to make a monetary contribution and labour towards the construction. SNV will provide the necessary technical assistance required to finish the construction. This is a school where eighteen months ago, this level of community involvement in school affairs was virtually non-existent.

In addition while the community is waking up to their sense of duty; realising that they partly hold the key to their children's future; the teachers at both schools have on the other hand developed a renewed sense of duty and accountability. Teacher absenteeism that plagued both schools hitherto is steadily becoming a thing of the past. The schools have established a daily teacher attendance tracking system; managed by the teachers themselves.

As such, teacher absenteeism has gone down by over 40%. In addition to reduced teacher absenteeism, there is a noticeable change in teachers' commitment; evidenced by total teaching time and learning assessment. This is further complemented by pupil monitoring of actual lesson delivery. On its part, the school has put a mechanism of tracking pupil absenteeism with particular focus on the girl child in, close collaboration with the parents and local leaders. This is aimed at reaching an amicable understanding with the parents to return the girls to school.

LESSONS LEARNED

SNV support has increased a sense of self belief within the schools to demand for infrastructure development from the DLG. Kama primary school for example, had been ear-marked to benefit from the schools facilities grant (SFG) by getting a 3 classroom block; a major component of Universal Primary Education (UPE). However, this plan had been shelved for a number of years until the school management exerted subtle pressure on the local government. Currently the building has been roofed and plastered and will serve over 200 pupils who have been studying under trees and an incomplete church structure. The community has found its voice and community advocacy is beginning to take shape.

This case reflects a gradual and remarkable shift in the community's perception on the value of education. This is an outstanding achievement considering that such behavioural change is not an overnight thing. It is imperative that this new behaviour is maintained for it to cause the desired 'ripple effect' in the entire community.

The case for community ownership of their problems and identification of solutions to these problems cannot be over emphasised- that with a little push, the community can unleash their often untapped potential and act.

This programme has also vindicated the in-situ method of capacity development support that SNV has used in the implementation of SEQUIP. SNV has 'walked with the client' in the client's execution of its duty rather than engage in hackneyed training with the hope of subsequent successful transfer of training.

Perhaps one of the critical lessons also is that SEQUIP is working as long as people are guided at a reasonable pace to allow for considerable absorption. Recommendations for learning and follow up

The learning from the first phase of SEQUIP shall be used to shape the district up scaling of the intervention across the entire district. Already, the district has picked a few good practices for replication. One such practice is the adoption of the concept of the idea of school development plans.

Through the multi-stakeholder process, the lessons from SEQUIP and the best practices will be shared and publicised for purposes of developing stakeholder interest in the approach.