

**COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE
OF RURAL WATER FACILITIES IN POST-COFLICT GULU DISTRICT.
A CASE STUDY OF BOBI SUB-COUNTY**

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ABSTRACT

Operation and maintenance (O&M) of water facilities is a critical factor for sustainability of rural water supply in post conflict-areas in Uganda. This study was undertaken to examine the role of community involvement in O&M of water facilities in Northern Uganda. The study was undertaken in four communities in Bobi sub-county in Gulu District.

A cross-sectional design was used applying both qualitative and quantitative methods. A sample of 99 study participants was selected using simple random sampling. Spot-checks were conducted at 10 water points to gain insights about functionality and usability of the water facilities. Focus Group Discussions were conducted with water users. The study covered the period 2006-2013; a time saw the return of internally displaced persons to their former communities.

Study findings indicated poor O&M of water facilities due to challenges in the implementation of community-based management system (CBMS) in the post-conflict setting. CBMS requires existence of a functional water user committee (WUC), mobilization of O&M contribution, engaging and paying of hand-pump mechanics that communities can hardly afford due to the desperation caused by poverty as a result of conflict. The emergency relief approach used by the Government, development partners and Non-Governmental Organizations has developed complacency within the community. A poor O&M culture made governance of water facilities difficult. Poor governance of water facilities was exacerbated by the aftermath impact of conflict. Water users irregularly contribute O&M funds and do not participate in planning meeting for water delivery which has led to non-functionality, collapse and abandonment existing water facilities. The study found that the 25 years of conflict weakened community structures responsible for O&M of water facilities. Limitations of the other key players such as sub-county, district and the central government and development partners also exacerbated problems of O&M in area of study.

The study recommends conflict-responsive approach that emphasizes addressing gaps in the CBMS with focus on Information Education and Communication towards O&M, enhancing the capacity of WUCs to effectively engage with the water users, making conflict-sensitive bye-laws and collaboration with Non-State Actors on O&M issues.