

The Gulu Integrated Catchment Management Partnership, Uganda

A case study on natural resources stewardship





Risks affecting Gulu and its surroundings

Gulu in Northern Uganda is one of the country's fastest-growing cities. As the city continues to grow, so does the amount of solid waste and the degree of environmental degradation. Particularly water resources are increasingly polluted by plastic and organic waste and the water-holding capacity of wetlands is diminishing. Gulu City lies within the Albert Nile and Aswa Catchments of the Upper Nile Water Management Zone, which are characterised by high vulnerability to dry spells. Moreover, changing climate conditions in recent years have led to the drying-up of the Oytino valley dam and the associated streams, which serve as the main water source for the city. The accelerating rate of wetland degradation poses an additional threat to their capacity as provisioning, regulating, and supporting ecosystem services to the city's businesses and population. Yet, Gulu City's young waste and natural resource management system cannot deal with the increasing pressures.



Waste containers in Gulu City are often overflowing and waste ends up in the environment.



A degraded water stream in Oytino micro-catchment, outside Gulu City.

Joining forces for Gulu's sustainable development

Solid waste pollution in Gulu results in public health risks, affects food and water security and leads to a loss of biodiversity. In addition, the degradation within the Oytino micro-catchment reduces the city's water supply and leads to risks for businesses and communities, causing unemployment and disruptions in economic activities such as agriculture, the very basis for the city's further development.

In the past, various stakeholders in Gulu recognised these risks and were ready to act. However, individual actions were often limited in their effectiveness due to the scale and complexity of the city's environmental challenges. Recognising the need for cross-sectoral efforts, the Ministry of Water and Environment, Gulu City Council (GCC), National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC), the recycling company

Takataka Plastics, and the NGO Community Empowerment Education Development (CEED) Uganda in 2021 decided to form a multi-stakeholder partnership.



The "Gulu Integrated Catchment Management Partnership" is supported by the Natural Resources Stewardship Programme (NatuReS), which is commissioned by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), co-financed by the European Union (EU) and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), and implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). It aims at collectively promoting Gulu City's economic growth through sustainable solid waste and water resources management.

Laying a foundation for joint action

After agreeing to jointly tackle common risks, partners assessed the situation in and around Gulu in-depth. They found out that the main cause for the widespread solid waste pollution is a lack of cooperation between waste generators, collectors, and the city authorities, leading to waste not being collected and ending up in the environment instead. Partners also identified illegal sand mining and a lack of proper water source protection as the main causes for the accelerating degradation of the Oyitino micro-catchment. Partners jointly validated these assessments and drew on them to develop a Partnership Action Plan (PAP). The PAP is a document that summarises the partnership's main activities. It specifies exactly what actions must be taken, how, by whom, when, and at what cost. This enhances mutual understanding of the partnership plans among partners and allows for tracking progress toward achieving the partnership's goals. Also, in the PAP partners agreed on a governance structure for the partnership to share responsibilities and build trust between sectors that were previously not used to working together.



Peter Okwoko, the co-founder of Takataka Plastics, during the official launch of the Partnership.



"The partners in the Partnership came together to care for Gulu City's water source as well as its associated solid waste management challenges, taking collective responsibility for common resources and challenges."

Richard Musota,
Team Leader Upper Nile Water
Management Zone, Ministry of Water
and Environment

Gulu Integrated Catchment Management Partnership

2021–Present



Objective

Promote Gulu City's economic growth through sustainable solid waste and natural resources management



Partners

Public Sector:

- Ministry of Water and Environment - Upper Nile Water Management Zone
- Gulu City Council (GCC)
- National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC)

Private Sector:

- Takataka Plastics

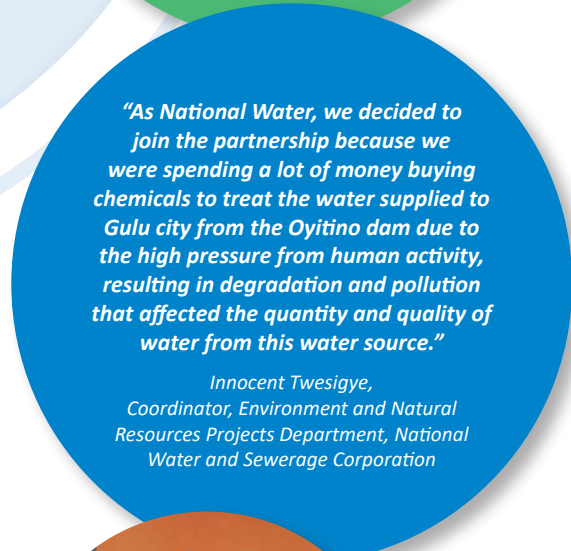
Civil Society:

- Community Empowerment Education Development (CEED) Uganda



Partner contributions

- EUR 4.180 in-kind contributions to partnership activities
- Staff time, technical expertise, and provision of meeting locations



"As National Water, we decided to join the partnership because we were spending a lot of money buying chemicals to treat the water supplied to Gulu city from the Oyitino dam due to the high pressure from human activity, resulting in degradation and pollution that affected the quantity and quality of water from this water source."

Innocent Twesigye,
Coordinator, Environment and Natural
Resources Projects Department, National
Water and Sewerage Corporation





Commit



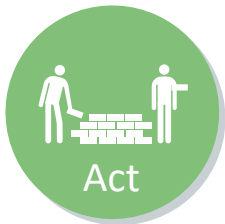
Partners of the Gulu Integrated Catchment Management Partnership.

Committing to a common goal

In March 2022, partners approved the guiding thread of their collective efforts, the Partnership Action Plan. Being a collectively developed agreement, it also serves as the basis for trust, transparency, and accountability between partners. NatuReS' guiding principle is enabling dialogue among public, private, and civil society actors for collective action. Only if sectors work together at eye level, they can develop long-lasting solutions.

"We feel our voice is being heard. By developing the PAP, activities have been implemented together in a coordinated manner and grey areas that could have existed have been cleared."

Bernard Loum, Programme Director, CEED Uganda



Act

Joining action across sectors

Based on the in-depth risk assessments, partners developed joint solutions which they decided to cluster under two components:

- 1. Solid waste management**
- 2. Water source protection**

COMPONENT 1: SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

Promoting circular economy, plastic recycling, and job creation

The partnership envisions a circular economy as one of the main pillars for Gulu to become a city in which the economy can thrive, residents are offered good living conditions, and ecosystems are protected. This includes resources being kept in the productive cycle as long as possible, for example through upcycling waste into new products.

Through joint efforts, several companies in Gulu, such as Smart Homes Smart Garbage and Green Homes Transformation, are now able to transform recycled plastic into new products, like chairs and tiles. Bricks for walls to better protect water sources around the city from pollution are now also being made from upcycled plastic. This has not only added value to waste and further incentivised recycling but also created more jobs and income for communities.

To enable this shift towards a circular economy, CEED has for example supported small and medium-sized enterprises and start-ups with the necessary skills in business development to expand their businesses.

The partnership also provided networking opportunities for companies to better connect and learn from joint challenges.



Collected plastic bottles being delivered to Takataka Plastics LTD for recycling.

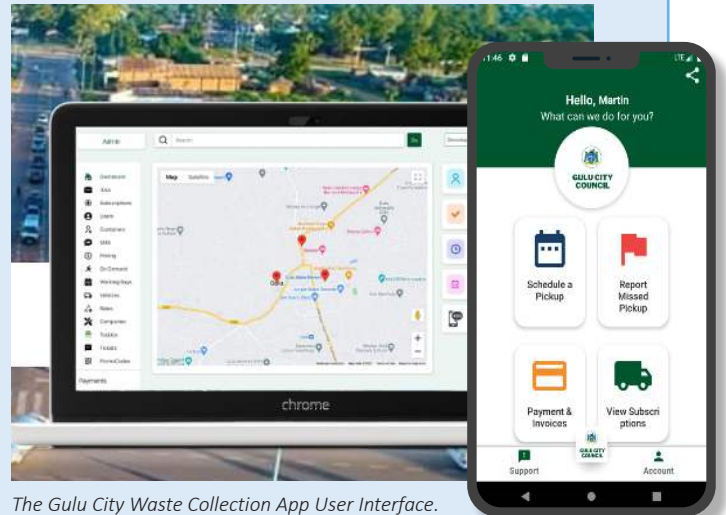
"As a private sector partner, the partnership has provided us exposure to other stakeholders, increasing our market reach. It has also enabled us to get closer to the Gulu City Council Authority. The major role of Takataka in the Partnership is to coordinate the private sector in plastic waste recycling, and through this, we have supported other informal waste companies to formalise through registration with Uganda Registration Service Bureau."

Peter Okwoko, Chief Operations Officer, and Co-founder of Takataka Plastics Ltd.



Digitalising waste management

To address the challenge of insufficient data availability and improve collaboration along the waste value chain, the partnership supported the development of a waste collection app for Gulu City. Through the app, waste generators like households and companies can for example order bookings with private waste collectors to pick up their waste, or get information about dates when specific types of waste are collected. The app also provides the City Council with accurate real-time data on the amounts and locations of waste collected around town and thus spurs a more timely, innovative, and efficient solid waste management system. While developing the app, partners also discussed the introduction of a waste fee, based on a zoning system, to improve the effectiveness of the city's waste management system.



The Gulu City Waste Collection App User Interface.



Residents of Gulu City during a community clean-up organised by the Partnership.

Engaging communities in waste management

A lack of public awareness about the importance of proper waste management was one of the identified aspects contributing to pollution in Gulu. Therefore, partners have sensitised local communities through radio talk shows around the importance of collecting and sorting waste at the household level rather than littering. Also, they initiated monthly community clean-up exercises led by the Gulu City Council to rid the city of waste in public places and instil positive behaviour towards waste management as a collective responsibility among communities.

Improving waste collectors' working conditions

To increase the coordinated and efficient collection of solid waste from the streets of Gulu, partners also aim at improving the working conditions of waste collectors. Waste collectors were therefore supported with training and mentorship programmes on Occupational Health and Safety (OHS). This encouraged them to put into practice measures like the right use of Personal Protective Equipment. Similarly, waste companies were trained on their OHS responsibilities and the means to adopt best practices on Environment, Health and Safety (EHS) systems in their companies to improve their employees' working conditions. Partners aim at ensuring that all waste collectors acquire solid waste collection and transportation licenses from the National Environmental Management Agency and work under formalised and safe conditions. They want to increase the understanding that if employees are better able to focus on their tasks without worrying about their personal safety, there will be an increase in productivity and company profits and finally, a cleaner city.



Gulu City waste handlers during an OHS training.

Supporting youth-led green start-ups

Partners are convinced that ideas for turning Gulu into a more liveable, prosperous, and green city exist. In fact, various youth-led start-ups in town are active in the field of a green economy. By supporting them with training and mentorship programmes, CEED as part of the partnership has enabled them to materialise their ideas and expand their businesses.

Youth-led start-ups, supported by the partnership, display products from recycled plastics at an Innovation Exhibition in Gulu City. Among them for example bricks from upcycled plastic waste that can be used to build walls for the protection of water sources.



COMPONENT 2: WATER SOURCE PROTECTION



The promotion of sustainable livelihood options such as apiculture contributes to incentivising the restoration of the micro-catchment.



Launch of the Community Environment Conservation Fund.

Protecting Water Points

To better protect water sources around Gulu from pollution and degradation, partners conducted catchment restoration measures in identified hotspots. These were based on the partnership's jointly developed Oytino 2 Water Source Protection Implementation Plan and included the protection of ten water points and springs which provide water for around 300 households. Also, partners jointly organised afforestation activities to restore the micro catchment. In addition, to incentivise micro-catchment restoration, they promoted vegetable growing and apiculture as alternative livelihood options for local communities.

Finally, to ensure the sustainability of these sustainable income opportunities, partners established a 'Community Environment Conservation Fund'. This revolving fund can be accessed by community members previously engaged in environmentally harming practices, like sandmining or bricklaying. The fund allows them to access an initial source of capital to venture into alternative livelihood options that allow natural regeneration to increase water quantity, quality and protect biodiversity within and along the wetland system. This catalyses the construction of a strong social support system for communities to promote catchment-based water resources management in Otiyino.



The jointly developed Oytino 2 Water Source Protection Implementation Plan.

Looking ahead

To meet the growing solid waste management challenges and pressures on natural resources, experiences from the Gulu Integrated Catchment Management Partnership show that stewardship partnerships can be an effective way to overcome traditional silo-working, prevent conflicts, avoid duplications and inefficiencies, and leverage each sector's capacities. Partners strive for Gulu to become a thriving city with a buzzing economy and good living conditions for its inhabitants, while protecting vital natural resources for generations to come. Only by collaborating across sectors, effective solutions to achieve this goal can be developed and maintained in the long run.



Attendees of a training for waste handlers and collectors organised under the Partnership.

The Natural Resources Risk and Action Framework

NatuReS supported the Gulu Integrated Catchment Management Partnership throughout the whole process from its initiation to the joint implementation of activities, facilitating a participatory approach to natural resources governance. This is essential, as no single sector actor has the mandate nor the capacity to address natural resources risks by itself. If the root causes of natural resource risks are to be addressed, collaboration among different sectors is needed.

However, multi-stakeholder stewardship partnerships are not easy to realise. Often, stakeholder groups are used to working in silos, gaps in capacity impair joint decision-making and implementation, intentions and objectives are not always easy to align, and power imbalances between partners pose integrity risks.

Therefore, NatuReS has developed a framework, guiding the set-up of stewardship partnerships from their preparation to scaling, until partnerships are self-sustaining: the Natural Resources Risk and Action Framework (NRAF). The NRAF framework follows five phases, consists of 27 tools, and stands strong from implementation experience in more than 45 natural resources stewardship partnerships across the world. The lessons, experiences, and best practices documented make the NRAF a powerful framework.

Natural resources stewardship means that all users of natural resources take responsibility for the shared resources nobody owns but everybody relies on. By forming partnerships, public sector, private companies and civil society work together on eye-level to ensure the sustainable management of natural resources.



PARTNERSHIP CREATION

PARTNERSHIP EXECUTION

Prepare

- Identify stakeholders and markets
- Share problems and recognise interests
- Prepare road map

Assess

- Assess risks and opportunities
- Determine costs and benefits
- Shape partnership
- Socio-economic analysis

Commit

- Develop business cases
- Develop modes of delivery
- Secure commitment of actors
- Business case support

Act

- Empower and advise actors
- Coordinate and manage implementation
- Monitor progress

Scale & Exit

- Evaluate impact and lessons
- Leverage impact at scale
- Phase out

About NatuReS

The partnership is supported by the Natural Resources Stewardship Programme (NatuReS) in Uganda. NatuReS is a multi-donor programme commissioned by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), co-financed by the European Union (EU) and the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO), and implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). It is currently active in Ethiopia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.

In Uganda, the NatuReS programme aims to reduce water and environmental threats that pose significant social and economic risks to sustainable economic growth in the Greater Kampala Metropolitan Area and Gulu City.

NatuReS has so far contributed to creating or safeguarding more than 72.000 jobs and investments worth more than EUR 232 million through 14 currently active partnerships across the five countries of implementation.

Scan to find out more:



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