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## Functionality of rural water sources is largely dependent on functional professional systems

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News

As the world celebrates World Water Day, we believe that there is no better time to reflect on the systems that we have put in place to ensure that we have safe, reliable and sustainable water. This year's theme 'Water & Jobs' highlights the impact that enough quantity and quality of water can have on workers' lives and livelihoods, and even on societies and economies.

In Uganda sustainability especially of rural water supplies is still a challenge, despite the improvement in the national functionality rate which currently stands at 88%. While there has been an increase in the number of rural water sources that are functional at the time of spot check, there is limited information on the reliability of these water sources. Operation and maintenance practices of the rural water sources remain poor and many gravity flow schemes and point water sources are not fully functional. Post construction monitoring and technical support gaps exist at the district and sub-county level, with the district water offices focusing more on development and less on maintenance.

A reliable water source should provide water for a minimum of 350 days in a year with less than 14 days of breakdown. Very few water sources are able to meet this standard and a broken down water source can take up to three months or more before it is repaired. On average, a water source functions well

within the first three years, after which it starts breaking down. The majority of the current rural water sources are over 5 years old, not regularly maintained and hence at risk of regular breakdowns. While big strides have been achieved in the management of urban water supply sources, many of which are maintained by urban water boards in liaison with private operators, similar progress is yet to be registered for the rural water supply sources.

SNV has been supporting rural water operation and maintenance in Uganda for the last 10 years. From supporting the formation of Hand Pump Mechanics Associations (HPMAs) in five districts, an initiative that was later rolled out across the country, to designing an innovative mobile based information system to collect, process and provide real time information to stakeholders on water point functionality in rural communities, SNV has actively pursued lasting solutions to address the challenge of functionality. Although significant improvements have taken place with an increase in the national functionality rate, operation and maintenance of rural water sources is still a challenge. To improve functionality sustainably, there is need to review the operation and maintenance system holistically rather than focusing on the apparent challenges like unwillingness of water users to own and manage the water facilities. Already there is evidence that water users are able to contribute user fees, with examples of some stocking spare parts at their water sources and undertaking repairs above the stipulated UGX 200,000/= (Euros 54) for community repairs.

The Amocal borehole in the Ibuje sub-county in the Apac district was one of the non-functional water sources. With support from the SNV Improving Water Supply Sustainability (IWAS) project, the water and sanitation committee (WSC) in the Ibuje sub-county was elected and trained on their roles and responsibilities. The WSC mobilised water users to collect money and the borehole was repaired. The committee now meets monthly and follows up on the 2,000 monthly operation and maintenance contributions from each household. Anges Obonyo is one of the water users who earns income from the borehole. "The Amocal borehole has become a source of income for most women in our village because we use the water to make orange juice which we sell to Beb Wine Company Ltd. The company accepts juice made using clean water only, which our borehole is able to provide. Now I am able to earn an average of 150,000 every month," a happy Agnes said.

Based on SNV's experience, functionality and sustainability of rural water sources can only improve when the following structural issues are addressed:

- Preventive maintenance and repair support from professional and business oriented Hand Pump Mechanics Associations (HPMAs).
- Security of operation and maintenance funds using financial institutions such as village saving and loan association schemes at the community level.

- Strong post-construction support at the district, sub-county and private sector level to operationalise, strengthen and monitor the operation and maintenance system structures.

This led to the development of the IWAS model which SNV is currently promoting with funding from the Coordination Office for Development Cooperation of the Austrian Embassy in Uganda. The focus of the IWAS model is to improve sustainability of rural water supply by addressing the systemic challenges identified above at the community, sub-county, district and private sector level by:

- Building the capacity of HPMAs to operate as private entrepreneurs, so that they are more professional and business oriented and can proactively operate and maintain rural water sources. The project is also linking HPMAs to the sub-county water supply and sanitation boards (SWSSBs) and the water and sanitation committees for regular routine maintenance works, as well as to the Umbrella of Water and Sanitation for easy access to genuine and fairly priced spare parts.
- Establishing and building capacity of the SWSSBs to oversee all the water sources in the sub-county. SWSSBs are being encouraged to employ a technician to solely support operation and maintenance on a day to day basis.
- Ensuring that the district and sub-county political leadership are aware of their roles and proactively support improvement in functionality of rural water
- Building the capacity of the district and sub-county technical staff to operationalise, strengthen and monitor the operation and maintenance system structures.
- Strengthening O&M structures at the community level, incorporating the saving and loans schemes as security for user fees and linking the Water and Sanitation Committee to Sub-County Water Supply and Sanitation Boards/Hand Pump Mechanics. This will address the wariness and perceived insecurities by water users about water user committees mismanaging their operation and maintenance funds and also provide clear transparency and accountability mechanisms for the water user committees.

When well organised water sources management structures, with mechanisms to ensure security and accountability of the user fees, are supported by professional post construction institutional support from the sub-county and private sector, this will lead to more reliable and sustainable rural water supply systems.





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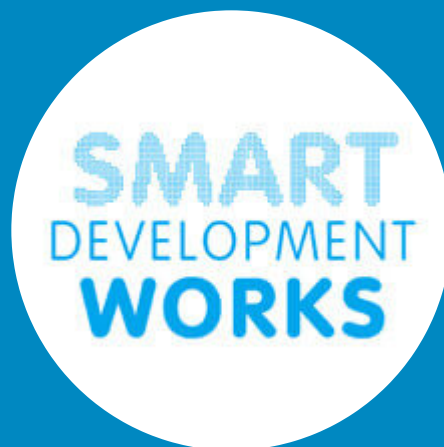


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