

- Water committees and handpump mechanics ensure safe and reliable services
- Radio spots highlight importance of paying for water
- Communities know their rights and demand better water services

The number of people who can access safe water in rural areas in Uganda has increased greatly over the past 25 years – from 39% in 1990 to 64% today. However, progress is held back because one in five rural water points is not fully functional.

Many pumps are not properly maintained and repairs to defunct water facilities are very slow. As a result more than a third of rural people have no real access to safe water because there is only a broken pump within one kilometre of their house. Lack of access to safe drinking water has a negative effect on community health and wellbeing.

In Western Uganda, the Rwenzori WASH Alliance<sup>1</sup> helps communities to access safe water by forming and strengthening Water and Sanitation Committees. The Rwenzori WASH Alliance, supported by the Dutch WASH Alliance, with finance from the Dutch government, is becoming a catalyst for change.

Supported by Simavi as part of the Dutch WASH Alliance, JESE and HEWASA have trained 40 new or existing Water and Sanitation Committees in Kyenjojo and Kabarole districts to manage local water points, collect and use water user fees, keep good records and report back to community members. The Rwenzori WASH Alliance partners meet all the committees each quarter. They raise awareness of the right to safe water, and the need for good sanitation and personal hygiene. These visits aim to ensure that after the programme ends, committees are able to continue on their own and community members are aware of their right to water and sanitation services and their obligations to pay to meet the costs.

The water and sanitation committees are made up of volunteer community members who take responsibility for operating and maintaining the water facility. The 7-9 community members who take up this unpaid role include the chairperson, treasurer, secretary and caretakers. At least three members of each committee are women.

<sup>1</sup> WASH is an acronym for water, sanitation and hygiene

### Working together

The Rwenzori WASH Alliance programme is a partnership of four members: Health through Water and Sanitation (HEWASA); Joint Effort for Saving the Environment (JESE); the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) and Protos. HEWASA and JESE implement the programme with funding from Simavi as part of the Dutch WASH Alliance. HEWASA coordinates activities while Protos and SNV provide technical assistance.



Boys fetching water in Western Uganda. JESE

## Dutch WASH Alliance

The WASH Alliance International is a multi-national consortium of over 100 partners worldwide. We work together with local NGOs, governments and businesses to make sure everyone on this planet has sustainable access to water and sanitation.

- JESE established an accessible shop where handpump mechanics can buy the spare parts needed for repairs.

Water and sanitation committees can hire mechanics with confidence, as the Hand Pump Mechanic Associations ensure that mechanics are well trained and competent do their jobs to high ethical standards.

Mechanics are paid by the district government twice a year to monitor the functionality of the water facilities and rehabilitate any that are broken. Water and Sanitation Committees use water user fees to pay the mechanics for routine maintenance and minor repairs.

This network of water and sanitation committees and handpump mechanics offers a sustainable system for safe and reliable water services for people in the Rwenzori region.

## Action-Research for Learning project

Action-Research for Learning is an initiative to improve the effectiveness of hygiene promotion and community empowerment initiatives by of Dutch WASH Alliance local partner projects in Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Ghana and Uganda. The programme is supported by the Dutch WASH Alliance with funding from the Dutch government.

## Handpump mechanics

Water and sanitation committees can look after the day to day maintenance of the water points – but what happens when something goes wrong?

The Rwenzori WASH Alliance is building a network of trained handpump mechanics in the Rwenzori region to keep clean water flowing.

- They trained 32 handpump mechanics to carry out minor repairs, rehabilitate broken facilities and install new ones where needed. Training also covers basic financial management.
- HEWASA supports the formation of District Hand Pump Mechanic Associations and encourages the newly trained mechanics to join. The association helps mechanics to find work and provides opportunities for training.

## Action-Research for Learning

The Dutch WASH Alliance is an active partner whose members support local NGOs in many ways, including finance, technical support and training. A significant contribution is the Action-Research for Learning project that supports NGOs to learn from what they are doing and improve the effectiveness of their interventions.

Rwenzori WASH Alliance partners collect information with the help of communities on the effectiveness of their interventions and analyse this information to improve their work. For example, they ask *'Have water and sanitation committees been able to apply what they learnt during the training sessions?'* or *Can committee members keep good records?* They also ask more broadly: *Are we achieving our objectives? What can we do to improve?*

Although HEWASA and JESE were training committees before Action-Research for Learning began, this has helped them to identify areas where changes were needed. The process led them to promote greater awareness among water users about the importance of paying their fees so that water and sanitation committees can ensure safe water. They organised community meetings and arranged for talk shows and short slots on the radio. This has resulted in an improvement in the collection of user fees in communities where JESE and HEWASA are active.

The NGOs also provided refresher training on record keeping for 15 water and sanitation committees in 2014. They use this new way of working in other projects too, for example to help villages to set up saving and loan schemes for sanitation.

## Demanding water

Communities are starting to know their rights and to place demands for better water services on sub-district and district governments.

- When a water source in the Hakibaale community was poisoned, the community reported the matter to the sub-district and demanded action. Kabarole district sent officials to investigate and solve the problem.
- The gravity-flow piped water system serving the villages of Magunga, Buhara and Bwanika was fractured during road works. Villagers pressed the Water Board to apply user fees to mend the pipes. The Water Board did so – with assistance from HEWASA – and villagers are again enjoying safe water.

Building the confidence of communities to exercise their rights takes time. HEWASA and JESE meet communities and local government each quarter and are able to take up the issues arising at community level and ensure that demands are heard. Community representatives and local governments will be able to continue these discussions when the programme ends.

## Catalyst for change

NGOs in the Rwenzori WASH Alliance inform water service planning and policy setting at district, regional and national levels. The Alliance has established quarterly coordination meetings which encourage sub-district, district and regional government officials and other organisations to reflect together on existing problems and possible solutions.



Handpump mechanics at work in Kabarole district. Peter McIntyre



Handpump mechanics in Kabarole district inform communities how to contact them. Peter McIntyre

## More information

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## Credits

This story has been produced (2015) for the Dutch WASH Alliance by Jeske Verhoeven of IRC in cooperation with Simavi, JESE, HEWASA and IRC Uganda. Action-Research for Learning is supported by the Dutch WASH Alliance in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Ghana. You can read about other successful projects supported by the Dutch WASH Alliance in Bangladesh, Ghana, and Ethiopia at [www.washalliance.nl/learn-more/downloads](http://www.washalliance.nl/learn-more/downloads).

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