

Research Brief

Sustainable WASH Systems Learning Partnership STRENGTHENING LOCAL SYSTEMS FOR WASH SERVICES: LEARNING FROM KABAROLE DISTRICT, UGANDA

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Introduction: Kabarole's WASH Journey

Over the last 5 years, Uganda's Kabarole District has seen positive change and development for water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). Key building blocks of the WASH system have been strengthened with improvements in policy and planning, as well as more efficient maintenance and support structures. The district is on track to meet its targets for basic and safely managed water services under the sustainable development goals, as well as for basic (but not yet safely managed) levels of service in sanitation.

There remains much to do; however, WASH services in Kabarole District are generally underfunded, with only \$292,000 allocated to WASH in the 2020–2021 financial year. The 2018–2030 Kabarole District WASH Master Plan (WMP)¹, launched in 2019, estimates that the financial needs are much greater. The cost of providing universal access to water services by 2030 is \$24 million, and the cost of providing access to sanitation services by 2030 is \$48 million.

The district of 403,000 people includes one municipality (Fort Portal city), one county, five town councils, three municipal divisions, 13 sub-counties, 67 parishes and wards, and 503 villages. Most of the population (80 percent) is engaged in farming.

Key Takeaways:

Improving knowledge sharing leads to increased uptake of technology and capacity for operating and maintaining water infrastructure, as well as improved soft skills such as community engagement.

Influencing policy leads to a newly formulated District WASH Ordinance.

Better understanding the WASH situation through data collection and using data for planning and goal setting enables increased advocacy for finance and other resources to meet targets.

Increasing the use of evidence for decision making, including optimizing investment through focusing on full coverage in one area at a time, maximizes impact.

Transitioning toward large-scale piped systems that reach beyond the geographic challenges of point supply systems results in a more inclusive and equitable WASH system.

Working together maximizes resources and helps involve a wider group of stakeholders in WASH.

¹ Kabarole District Council. 2019. Kabarole District WASH Master Plan 2018-2030. Available at: www.ircwash.org/resources/kabarole-district-wash-master-plan-2018-2030

The remainder of this brief introduces an innovative structure that has had a role in making some of the changes in Kabarole. It is based on a review of project data, project documents, and interviews with stakeholders.

The District WASH Task Team

Kabarole has a special structure that does not exist elsewhere. The District WASH Task Team (DWTT) is led by the District Secretary for Works and Technical Services and complements the work of the District Water and Sanitation Coordination Committee. The Task Team comprises about 25 representatives from the political and technical wings of the local government at all levels, as well as other government agencies, the private sector, and civil society such as NGOs, religions organizations, the media, and individual stakeholders.



Figure 1. Map of Uganda's Districts, with Kabarole Highlighted in Orange

The Task Team was established in Kabarole by IRC in March 2017 with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Sustainable WASH Systems Learning Partnership. It provides a forum for reflection, learning, and collective action that supports other structures in the district and provides capacity to support the district in changing the way it operates. The DWTT also provides a mechanism to connect people on the ground, sub-national organizations and agencies responsible for providing services and support, and decision makers at the national level to influence wider WASH policy and practice.

The Learning Alliance Approach



Figure 2. DWTT Meeting to Develop the Road Map for Establishing the District and Sub-County Water Boards (Photo credit: IRC)

IRC has supported the application of a learning alliance approach in Kabarole District to engage a wider group of stakeholders in finding new solutions to the challenges faced by the local WASH sector.

Learning alliances are platforms for convening stakeholders with the purpose of developing a shared vision and change agenda.² The learning alliance process can be used to strengthen capacities, generate evidence, document the outcomes of interventions, ascertain needs and gaps, and inform public and private sector, as well as local and national policies.

² For more information on the learning alliance approach, see <https://www.globalwaters.org/resources/assets/driving-change-strengthening-local-systems-water-and-sanitation-sectors>.

Findings: Influence and Impact of the DWTT

A common vision and targets against which progress is tracked: The WMP serves as a planning blueprint. It provides a baseline upon which priorities are defined, targets are set, and resources are allocated. Figure 3 shows the 2030 vision against the 2017 baseline and progress made by 2020.

The WMP target for Kabarole District is to provide basic water services to all by 2030, with 21 percent of the population having access to safely managed services and 79 percent having access to basic services. According to 2020 water services monitoring data, the overall level of water service improved. Twelve percent of the population had access to safely managed services, up from 0 percent in 2017 and exceeding the 2021 target. Thirty-three percent had access to basic services, up from 22 percent in 2017, while 26 percent had access to limited services and 29 percent had access to unimproved services.

The 2030 target set by the WMP is to provide basic sanitation services for 72 percent of households and safely managed services for 28 percent of households. The 2020 sanitation services monitoring data indicate that the proportion of households with access to basic sanitation increased from 28 percent in 2017 to 63 percent in 2020, exceeding the 2021 target. The proportion of those with access to limited services declined from 53 percent to 22 percent, also exceeding the 2021 target. Open defecation, however, remained a challenge because the evidence showed that it was still practiced in 15 percent of households; the target is 0 percent. Safely managed sanitation also remains a problem, with the 2020 achievement still at 0 percent against the 2021 target of 5.9 percent.

Strengthened WASH systems: Other measures of the system also reflect change. The Local Government Management of Service Delivery Performance Assessment in 2019 and 2020 assessed the water and sanitation sector in Uganda on human resource management, environmental and social safeguards, and six performance measures related to service delivery, reporting, management, and environmental and social requirements. Kabarole was ranked second out of 134 local governments, with a score of 79 percent for water and 76 percent for sanitation.

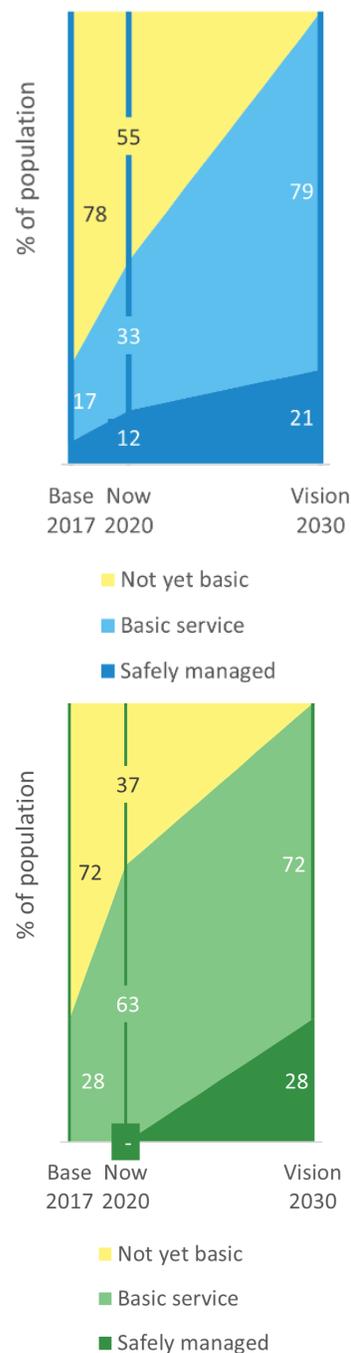


Figure 3. 2017 Baseline and 2020 Interim Data Against the 2030 Vision for Water (Above) and Sanitation (Below) in Kabarole

IRC has worked with Kabarole District to track a range of indicators for key system building blocks that make service delivery possible, alongside other indicators of capacity, partnership, political and financial commitment, and service delivery models. The work of the DWTT is reflected in improvements in building block and qualitative information system (QIS) ladder scores that track these aspects of system strength and stakeholder behaviors (Figure 4).

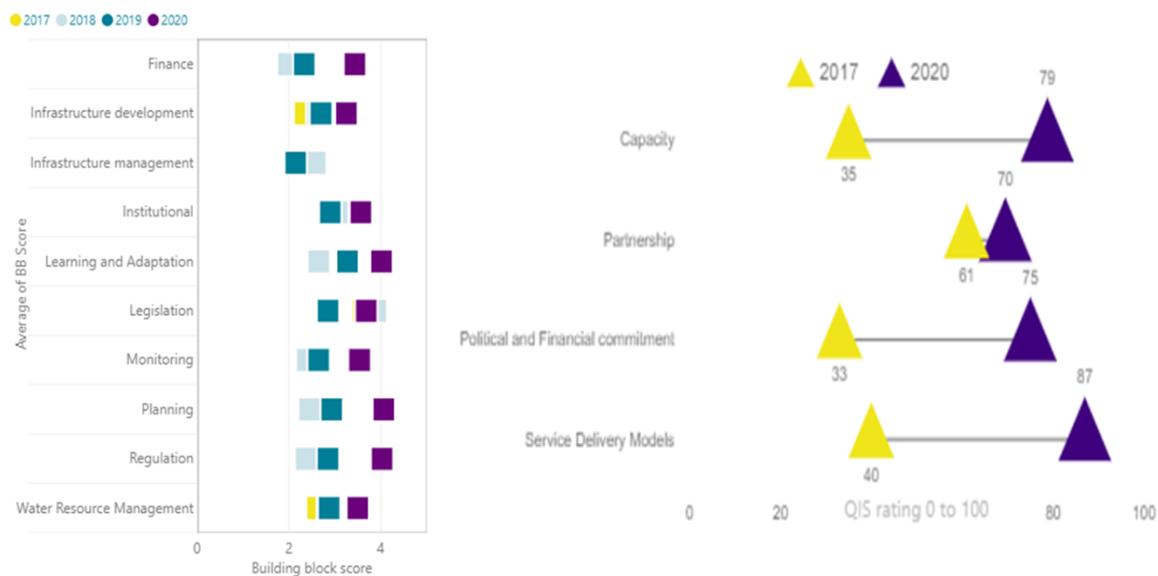


Figure 4. Building Block Assessment (Left) and QIS Ladder (Right) Results Showing Positive Trends in Kabarole. Source: IRC Monitoring Report, 2020.

Mobilization and targeting of resources: WASH is now integral to the district development strategy, which has resulted in improved funding for the sector. Due to the budget allocations for WASH following the enactment of the WMP, the number of unserved villages dropped from 60 in 2017 to 13 in 2021.

However, the 2030 targets call for dramatically increased investment in water and sanitation. The DWTT and the WMP and its baseline³ have supported more evidence-based decision making based on this evidence of service levels, investment needs, and targets to allocate resources, focusing on areas that were the least served, such as Kabende and Kasenda. Data on financing gaps equip DWTT members to engage in advocacy and resource mobilization efforts.⁴

For example, IRC combined resources with Kabarole District and the National Water and Sewerage Corporation to provide safe water in Kabende sub-county that was lagging far behind in levels of service. In a similar scenario, the African Agency for Integrated Development partnered with the local government in a cost-sharing arrangement through which the two pooled their resources to fund the supply of water in Kasenda and Kichwamba sub-counties.

³ Magara, P., Houston, A., and Anobe, F. 2018. A Baseline of the Strength of the WASH System in Uganda. Available at: <https://www.ircwash.org/resources/baseline-strength-wash-system-uganda>

⁴ Magara, P. 2021. Counting the Cost: A Financial Gap Analysis of Kabarole District WASH Master Plan, 2021. Available at: <https://es.ircwash.org/node/88087>

Despite resistance, consistent advocacy among local leaders and community engagement have also yielded increased acceptance of the idea of consumers paying for water. As recommended by the DWTT, the District Council passed a resolution that requires every household to pay a monthly water tariff.

Optimized investments: The tendency to invest in multiple water systems simultaneously across sub-counties resulted in resources being spread so thin that they could not create meaningful impact. To rationalize investments, the DWTT advised against scattering resources. The district subsequently adopted a policy that focuses on attaining full coverage in one area at a time. Likewise, WASH in schools and health facilities used to be treated as a responsibility of the Ministries of Education and Health. The DWTT was instrumental in the policy shift that led to the integration of institutional WASH into mainstream planning for the sector.

Kabarole local government has also decided to only invest in new piped systems, as opposed to water point sources. This clarity in policy has encouraged the private sector, such as financial service providers, to create WASH-related financial products and facilities for their clients.

Improvement in sanitation standards: Following development of the WMP, the DWTT embarked on the formulation of a District WASH Ordinance, currently going through the ratification process. The ordinance provides legal backing to measures to promote safely managed sanitation facilities. Today, drainable pit latrines are recommended and ecological sanitation (commonly known as “eco-san”) practices are gradually taking hold.

Many of the recent local improvements in sanitation and hygiene also originated from discussions within the DWTT. These have included introducing safe toilet (SaTo) pan latrine technology and replacing tippy taps with hands-free or pedal taps.

Efficiency in operation and maintenance of infrastructure: During a visit to Kamuli District, members of the Kabarole Hand Pump Mechanics Association learned that the district maintained a stock of equipment to ensure that spare parts were readily available when needed. This approach eliminated the frustrating delays that often happen when parts are ordered through lengthy procurement procedures. Back in Kabarole, the DWTT recommended adoption of the same approach. Today, the District Water Office maintains a stock of equipment that allows for quick responses when repairs are needed. This ensures minimal interruption in service and reinforces communities’ belief in the system of paying for water.

Knowledge and skills: As well as developing the understanding of members, the DWTT has facilitated learning and capacity development through training water user committees on best practices in operating and maintaining water infrastructure, messaging around hygiene, and protecting water sources. The DWTT has also facilitated capacity development for water and sanitation committee members and community development officers in the “software” aspects of WASH, such as managing group dynamics, community engagement, and mindset change.

Looking Forward

With funding support from the Sustainable WASH Systems Learning Partnership ending, the DWTT has requested financial resources from the district, and there is commitment across the board to continuing the platform, including from government stakeholders. However, funds have yet to be made available, and the DWTT and its development partners will need to adapt in the face of the constraints and opportunities that the future brings.

The source of the DWTT’s influence is its membership. It is composed of individuals who are well connected and therefore able to carry its ideas and proposals directly to decision makers. Individual members in positions of authority can influence the actions and decisions of their respective organizations, thereby accelerating the change process. The success of the DWTT in mobilizing action is proof of how a diverse array of actors — including political, technocratic, private sector, and civil society actors — can synchronize interests and effect change.

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About the Sustainable WASH Systems Learning Partnership: The Sustainable WASH Systems Learning Partnership is a global United States Agency for International Development (USAID) cooperative agreement with the University of Colorado Boulder to identify locally driven solutions to the challenge of developing robust local systems capable of sustaining water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) service delivery. This report is made possible by the generous support of the American people through USAID under the terms of the Cooperative Agreement AID-OAA-A-16-00075 with the University of Colorado Boulder, USA. The contents are the responsibility of the Sustainable WASH Systems Learning Partnership and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government. For more information, visit www.globalwaters.org/SWS, or contact Karl Linden (karl.linden@colorado.edu) or Ryan Mahoney (rymahoney@usaid.gov).

