

Improving water point sustainability through savings groups

EVIDENCE BRIEF
MAY 2019



BACKGROUND

45% of wells in rural Uganda are broken. The majority fall into disuse after several years of inadequate maintenance. In communities where two-thirds of households lack cash savings, the challenge of collectively saving for future repairs is evident.

Yet savings groups have a long history helping the poorest rural communities to mobilize one or two thousand dollars a year in savings across 25-30 households. In 2017, we tried adapting this methodology to save for a shared water point. In 2018, we began scaling this program to another 100 communities. In this brief, we summarize the year-two results of the pilot as well as the year-one results of the initial scaleup.

HIGHLIGHTS

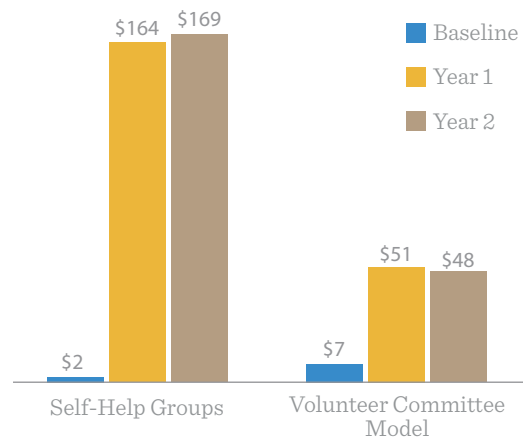
- 111 groups trained and actively financing water point maintenance and repairs
- 94% of pilot groups and water points active and functioning after two years
- \$169 spent on water point maintenance or kept in reserve fund after two years of group operations
- Total annual group savings and interest generated increased from \$1,500 in year one to \$2,300 in year two

YEAR-TWO RESULTS SHOW THAT GROUPS ARE STRONG, GROWING, AND FINANCING REPAIRS.

We monitored the initial pilot groups and water points to see if groups would continue to function effectively in their operations both as a savings and credit cooperative as well as steward of water point maintenance funds. We contrast the results with 28 sites that received intensive coaching of their volunteer management team at the same point in time. Key proxy indicators for long-term functionality, such as the amount saved or spent for water point maintenance and repair, demonstrate that there is a significant increase in the financing mobilized for necessary maintenance. The average expenditure for self-help groups was \$42 in this period.

At the moment, 94% of pilot water points supported by self-help groups are functional and 94% of groups renewed for their third cycle. While the functionality rate is high, it will take several years to demonstrate that increased maintenance spending translates into meaningful, sustained impact on long-term functionality.

Funds reserved for or spent on water point maintenance in prior year:



SUCCESS CONTINUED WITH EXPANSION SITES, INCLUDING WATER POINTS BUILT BY GOVERNMENT AND OTHER NGOS.

Indicator	Year 1 Pilot	Year 2 Pilot	Year 1 Expansion
Number of groups	18	17	101
Average age of group (months)	12	23	5
Average group membership	33	40	27
Percentage of women members	56%	60%	56%
Weekly meeting attendance rate	76%	91%	76%
Membership growth rate	33%	18%	28%
Average annual group savings	\$1,094	\$2,270	\$1,053*
Average group payout at end of annual cycle	\$1,532	\$2,316	-

*This is the annualized rate given the groups had been operating for less than a year.

Based on these results, The Water Trust plans to scale up this approach for water point sustainability through partnerships with government and peer organizations. We aim both to scale up this program in western Uganda through direct implementation as well as provide technical assistance and support to other organizations to adapt and implement this approach across Sub-Saharan Africa.

ABOUT THE WATER TRUST

The Water Trust empowers poor, rural villages to sustain clean water and build healthy, resilient communities. Since 2008, The Water Trust has partnered with more than 400 communities in western Uganda to improve water, sanitation, and hygiene access for more than 230,000 people. The Water Trust works to scale its impact both through its direct operations as well as equipping peer organizations and government institutions to implement evidence-based programs with lasting impact. For more information, contact Chris Prottas, Executive Director at cprottas@watertrust.org.