Improving water point functionality in rural Uganda through Self-Help Groups

EVIDENCE BRIEF | May 2022

SUMMARY

In 2022, the World Bank financed The Water Trust to undertake a water point census and functionality survey of every public water source across Masindi, Kiryandongo and Kikuube districts in western Uganda, with the survey covering 4,862 water points in total.

The survey found that water point functionality was significantly lower than recorded in official records, along with low levels of active water point management and community capacity to operate and maintain water points. The survey also found that the 744 water points with Self-Help Groups trained to support water point management had high levels of water point functionality and management. Self-Help Groups are financial cooperatives that also maintain a reserve fund for well maintenance and repairs. This brief summarizes key findings from the full study, "Improving water point functionality in rural Uganda through Self-Help Groups: A Cross-Sectional Study," which is available to download here.

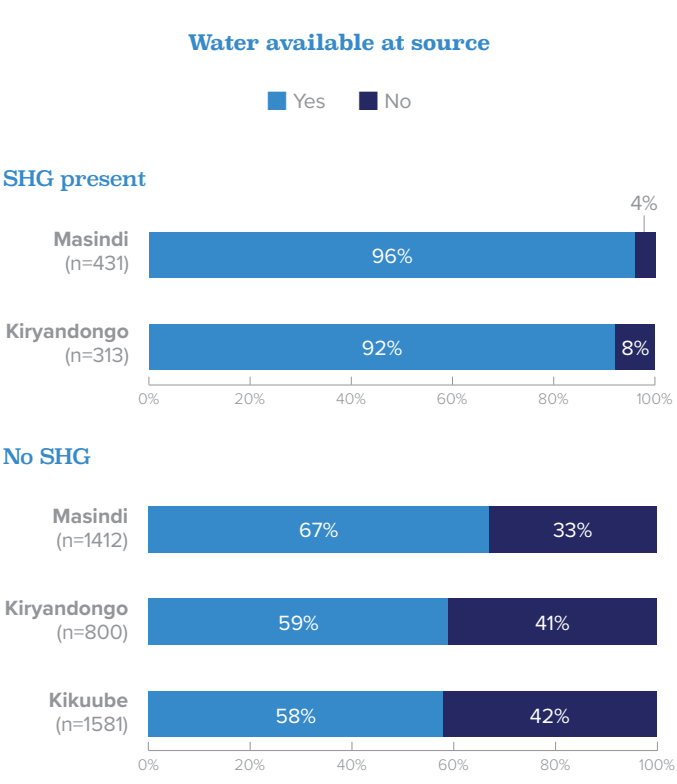
In the two districts with Self-Help Groups, **92% to 96%** of water points had water available. In contrast, **58% to 67%** of water points had water available in communities where there was no Self-Help Group.

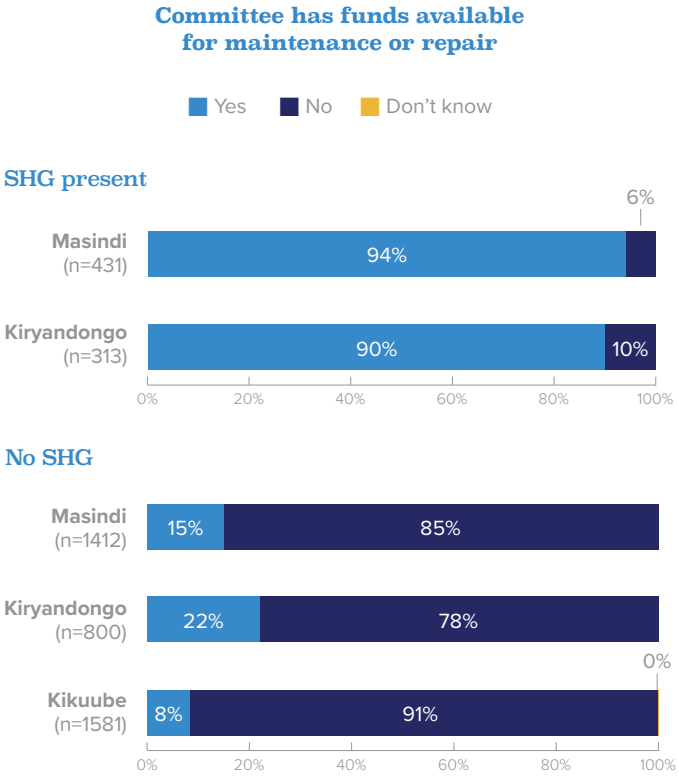
METHODOLOGY

The Water Trust developed a survey of water point functionality and management practices and data was collected by third-party enumerators contracted and supervised by The Water Trust. They collected data from January 2022 through March 2022. Water points were identified by soliciting lists from the District Water Offices, as well as then meeting with the Local Chiefs of each village to confirm the number and locations of water sources used by the community.

FINDINGS

Water point functionality was significantly lower than official data would suggest. For example, while official data from Kikuube district shows 93% rural water point functionality, The Water Trust's survey found only 58% of protected sources had water available. This variance is attributed to under-resourced data collection processes for maintaining an accurate water point database. Water point functionality in Masindi and Kiryandongo was meaningfully higher than in Kikuube. This is largely explained by the 744 water points reported to have a Self-Help Group supporting their water user committee in the functions of collecting user fees from group members, and managing the reserve fund. The indicators below reflect significantly higher water availability and functionality than comparable water points.





While water point functionality was high, the survey did find a meaningful minority of water points that are functional but have visible mechanical problems that have not yet been addressed by the groups. Communities appear more likely to fix water points when there is not water available rather than perform preventative maintenance. For more information please download the full study from The Water Trust's virtual library.

CONCLUSIONS

Official government statistics understate the rural water sustainability crisis that limits basic access to clean drinking water. The SHG model for improving sustainable water is associated with significantly higher functionality and related indicators of water point management. The Ugandan operations and maintenance policy framework provides a clear direction for improving rural water sustainability, and SHGs can support this initiative through critical funding and management capacity at the last mile. We hope to replicate this approach in partnership with government and peer NGOs across Uganda and beyond.

CONTACT US

Chris Prottas
Executive Director
cprottas@watertrust.org