



Breakthrough results on water point sustainability and hygiene and sanitation promotion

In 2016, The Water Trust piloted a new program approach to foster healthy, resilient communities in rural Uganda. The approach focused on addressing two common shortcomings in water, sanitation and hygiene programs – poor sustainability of water points and ineffective hygiene promotion efforts. Traditional approaches, which focus on short trainings of community volunteers, have not achieved adequate results. An estimated one in three wells in rural Africa is broken, and a recent randomized controlled trial of a popular hygiene promotion program in Rwanda found virtually no impact on the number of bathrooms and handwashing facilities present in the communities.

The Water Trust’s program invests in regular, biweekly coaching visits for a period of 18 months and forms community “self-help groups” (SHGs), which are trained to operate savings and credit cooperatives in the community. These cooperatives take ownership of collecting fees and managing payment for well maintenance and repairs, while their weekly meetings provide a platform for The Water Trust’s hygiene and sanitation promotion efforts. The groups also provide a number of other benefits to the community members as they offer a safe place to save and take out loans for business investments, children’s school fees, and unexpected medical emergencies.

This program approach is currently being piloted in twenty communities. After nine months, the initial results suggest that the approach significantly improve both water point sustainability and hygiene and sanitation.

Interim results from pilot

	Baseline	After nine months
% of communities with adequate savings for maintenance/repairs	0%	95%
Average savings amount designated for maintenance/repairs	\$6	\$70
% of households with improved latrine	41%	75%
% with handwashing facility	9%	46%
% with bath shelter	37%	76%
% with refuse pits	26%	66%
% with drying rack	38%	75%

Sample: 15 villages (5,514 households)

This program’s success is attributed to addressing several notable weaknesses in traditional volunteer-led approaches to water site maintenance and sanitation and hygiene promotion:

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Water point sustainability

Weakness

- Water, sanitation, and hygiene are a narrow subset of the concerns confronting households. The narrow mandate of the institution limits community interest.
- The informal WSC structure and financial management practices fail to engender adequate trust in community members to contribute fees.
- Fee collection creates a significant burden for volunteer WSC members, who have to travel to 30 to 50 households to attempt to collect fees.
- The WSC institution is inherently weak due to its lack of a material incentive to meet and fulfill its obligations, and its small member size.

Improvement

- Integrates water, sanitation, and hygiene work into an institution with a broader mandate that speaks to community priorities (i.e., access to finance.)
- Formal structure and transparent financial management practices engender trust in community members.
- Fee collection is not a significant burden; community members make payments in weekly savings meetings.
- The institution is inherently strong as members have material incentive to meet and the large size (25-30 members) allows for the institution to endure as individuals come and go.

Hygiene and sanitation promotion

Weakness

- No programming to build community confidence that can improve lives.
- Hygiene and sanitation training by NGO staff was very brief and focused on conceptual knowledge.
- Ongoing hygiene and sanitation promotion was led by community volunteers with limited training.
- No material incentive to participate in the hygiene and sanitation meetings.
- No robust constitution nor rules to support good governance.
- The group's limited mandate represented a narrow subset of the concerns confronting households, limiting community interest.
- No improvements to access to loans for investments in sanitation products nor local artisans trained to build sanitation products.

Improvement

- Initial participatory activities focus on building community's awareness of risks and developing community-led action plans to mitigate risks. Ongoing coaching builds self-efficacy through community members upgrading their homes.
- NGO staff make regular, recurring visits and coaching community leaders to catalyze households to build and use critical infrastructure.
- SHGs provide a material incentive for community participation in the form of access to a safe place to save and access loans.
- SHGs operate with robust constitution and meeting rules to support good governance.
- The SHG's mandate includes other community priorities, such as the need to pay for school fees or invest in their livelihoods.
- The SHGs provide access to loans for investments in sanitation products and NGO staff train local artisans to build sanitation products.