



Photo credit: Patrick Meinhardt

Background

The Aquaya Institute ([Aquaya](http://Aquaya.org)) is a non-profit research organization focused on water and sanitation. With support from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, Aquaya assists government agencies in their efforts to achieve 100% coverage of safe, sustainable, and equitable drinking water supplies.

Supporting Rural Water Operation and Maintenance in Kabarole District

Motivation

In rural Uganda, **around 40% of handpumps**, the primary source of drinking water for over half of the population, **are non-functional at any point in time**. To improve water access in rural areas, Uganda's National Framework for Operation and Maintenance of Rural Water Infrastructure (the "O&M Framework") proposes a strategy relying on: **i)** professional area service providers to maintain infrastructure, and **ii)** financial participation from water users. In Kabarole district, however, **inadequate professional capacity for handpump O&M and limited water user payments** hinder implementation of the O&M Framework and progress towards achieving universal coverage of safe and sustainable drinking water supplies.



Image 1. Study area, Kabarole District, Uganda.

Prior Research

In 2021-2023, Aquaya worked with Kabarole's District Water Office to experiment with village savings and loans associations (VSLAs) as a platform to collect water user fees. In this approach, water users form a VSLA, which then maintains a savings account dedicated to water system management, called the "water fund." **The pilot was promising: ten communities that used to have no reserve funds for handpump maintenance raised an average of 112 USD annually.** Additionally, the VSLA-water fund approach improved community participation in water point management, as seen through source protection and cleaning schedules. These results prompted the District Water Office to expand the approach to an additional 25 communities.



Average annual water fund contributions per VSLA (n=10)

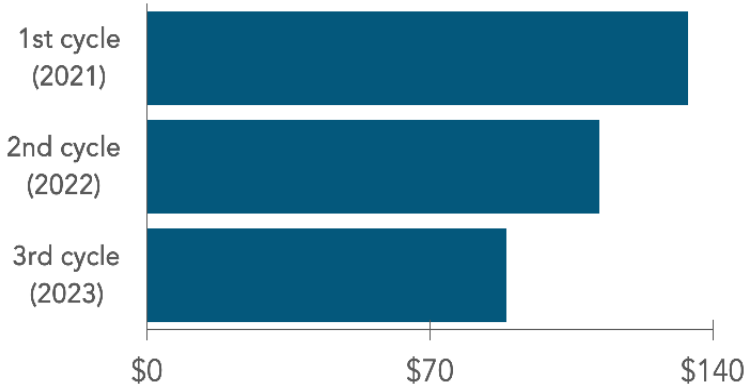
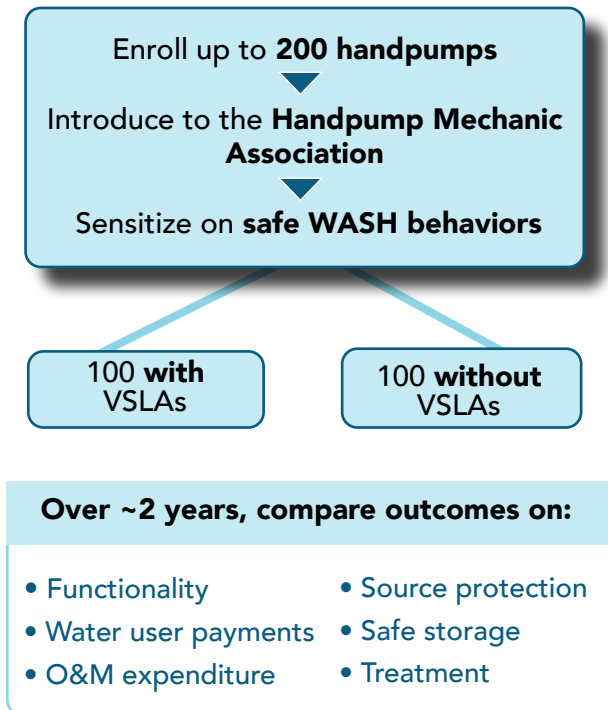


Image 2. VSLA members pay water funds monthly along with making contributions to their personal savings. Credit: Patrick Meinhardt

Current Research

This project aims to support the implementation of the O&M Framework in Kabarole district through:

1 Evaluating the extent to which VSLA-based water funds improve handpump maintenance and community WASH behaviors



2 Understanding the key challenges and good practices to strengthen handpump maintenance service providers



- Provide technical and management training to the Handpump Mechanic Association in Kabarole and support them to establish a preventative maintenance service, for example using a circuit model.



- Support the Handpump Mechanic Association and District Water Office to work towards establishing a working performance contract.



- Document good practices for implementing the O&M Framework through Handpump Mechanic Associations.