Improving Water Supply Sustainability in Northern Uganda (IWAS)
In Uganda, it is difficult to maintain rural water sources that are managed by local communities. Poor functionality is blamed on the limited capacity of community water source committees (WSCs) and weak institutional support mechanisms for operation and maintenance at the district level. Lack of spare parts results in expensive repairs that water users can’t afford.

Based on SNV’s experience, functionality can only improve when the following two structural issues are in place:

- Preventive maintenance and proper savings mechanisms at the community level.
- Strong post-construction support at the district level and bundle services to attract the private sector.

Improving Water Supply Sustainability in Northern Uganda is a three-year project being implemented by SNV with funding from the Coordination Office for Development Cooperation of the Austrian Embassy in Uganda. The project aims to enhance the functionality and sustainability of rural water supplies in 600 communities.

It has a specific focus on improving existing water sources in the districts of Apac, Lira, Alebtong and Dokolo in northern Uganda. In these four districts, the functionality is slightly higher, ranging from 71% in Apac to 92% in Alebtong, although they have a much lower functionality rate than the 88% national average.

The capacity of WSCs varies greatly throughout these districts. The four districts have 2,539 water sources that operate under community-based management systems (CBMSs). About 512 (20%) sources are not functional.

The project aims to improve the functionality of existing water sources by building the capacity of WSCs and their support structures. Functionality has two dimensions:

- Ensuring that the existing water sources remain functional and
- Repairing non-functioning water sources.

Since the project does not include a hardware component, the project will focus on the following activities:

- Capacity building of 300 existing and 300 new water source committees in the selected sub-counties to oversee the operation and maintenance of their water sources including repair of the non-functional water sources. SNV will use its experience in the Yahura Yehoza (YY), or “save and borrow” approach to train water user groups (WUGs) on how to mobilise resources for operation and maintenance of water sources. Adopted from a pilot in Kamwenge District, SNV and other partners have scaled up the approach, supporting WUGs to provide credit to members. The goal is to strengthen the collection and utilisation of funds for repairs, empower WUGs to ensure proper operation and maintenance of water facilities and promote a culture of saving and investment among WUGs.

- Establish and train water source committees to manage water sources that have been rehabilitated by the district local governments or where other organisations are drilling boreholes or rehabilitating existing water sources.

- Support four existing handpump mechanic associations (HPMAs) to develop and implement business plans in order to improve their capacity to carry out preventative maintenance and repairs. These will be commissioned directly by WSCs and district local governments (DLGs).
Support DLGs to oversee and guide WSCs and HPMAs, as well as provide post-construction support. Mentoring and coaching support will be provided to 32 technical staff at the district and sub-county level and 125 political leaders in the four districts will be trained on their roles towards improving functionality. This will be further supported by the formation of sub-county water supply and sanitation boards to oversee the management of all water sources within their sub-counties.

Progress as at December 2015

Improvement in operation and maintenance of water sources: Water and sanitation committees were formed for all the 225 water sources and sensitised on their role in operation and maintenance. Households are now contributing operation and maintenance funds. As a result, 25 non-functional water sources were repaired, bringing the total number of functional water sources to 218. 54,500 people now have sustainable access to clean water. Amocal Borehole in Ibuje sub-county in Apac district was one of the non-functional water sources. With support from the SNV Improving Water Supply Sustainability (IWAS) project, the water and sanitation committee (WSC) in Ibuje sub-county was elected and trained on their roles and responsibilities. The WSC mobilised water users to collect money and the borehole was repaired. The committee now meets monthly and follows up on the 2,000 monthly operation and maintenance contributions from each household. Agnes Obonyo is one of the water users who is earning income from the borehole.

“Amocal borehole has become a source of income for most women in our village because we use the water to make orange juice which we sell to Beb Wine Company Ltd. The company accepts juice made using clean water only, which our borehole is able to provide. Now I’m able to earn an average of 150,000 every month,” a happy Agnes said.

In addition, WSCs were encouraged to open bank accounts for their operation and management funds. To date, eight WSCs in Apac District have opened accounts with Centenary Bank.
Community Members fetch water from a repaired and functional borehole

**Capacity assessment and training:** One of the key deliverables of the project is to build strong and knowledgeable sub-county extension staff teams that actively support the WSCs to maintain water sources. 50 extension staff, made up of community development officers, health inspectors and parish chiefs from Lira, Dokolo and Apac districts, were trained. They learned how to identify capacity gaps, mobilise communities with a focus on rural water supply and sanitation and development of joint plans for field activities in each sub-county. The project also supported the Ministry of Water and Environment to roll-out the HPMA framework to all of the districts in Technical Support Unit 2. This will strengthen the linkages between HPMA and water and sanitation committees to ensure the sustainable management of water sources. 12 sub-county water boards in Lira, Alebtong and Dokolo were also formed and trained to provide management oversight to all the rural water sources within the sub-county.