

Community empowerment through Village Savings and Loans Association.

Introduction

Link to progress is partnering with We consult and TGS water limited to implement a Wash project in Northern Uganda with support from Charity water where Village savings and loans association is integrated into the management of Operation and maintenance of rural water sources.

Aromo P7 borehole in Aromo Sub County, Lira District that was constructed by LTP in 2013 to relieve the school and the community from the problem of no safe water. The borehole serves 741 pupils, 13 teachers, 61 households, the church and road users. The community members and the WSCs had for a long time been struggling with poor O&M of the borehole and hence resorting to unclean water and most times quarrelled among themselves. In January 2015, the borehole was selected to benefit from the project, “the integration of VSLA in to O&M of the borehole has helped to improve the O&M of their borehole and also empower the community members.” says Okello Cosmas the secretary of the WSCs.

Description

Link to progress and We consult carried out Consultative meetings with the different stakeholders including the ministry of water and environment, district local government, sub-county authorities like the Community development officers and Health assistants. The staff from Link to progress were then trained on Village savings and loans association (VSLA) methodology. Thereafter, Link to progress (LTP) staff went down to the communities to meet the communities to assess the conditions of the boreholes, revamp the water source committees, form VSLA groups, carry out baseline surveys, refresher trainings of the water user committees and VSLA leaders were also done on both O&M and VSLA concepts respectively, VSLA kits distributed to all the VSLA groups, Hand pump mechanics of the different sub counties were also trained and major repairs done on all the boreholes that were enrolled on the program. This aimed at equipping the committees with knowledge and skills in Operation and Maintenance (O&M), preventive maintenance, record and financial management, sanitation and hygiene and ensuring that all the boreholes remained functional.



Aromo P7 Borehole at the time of baseline, the borehole was poorly managed.

From September 2016 to date, The Water sources committees and the VSLA groups are being monitored and supported by Link to Progress (LTP) staff and the extension staffs at the different sub counties who go down to the communities to check on how they are progressing. Monitoring is also done through phone calls made to all the WSCs and VSLA groups every month.

Results

- Aromo P7 borehole now runs all year round without breaking down, if it's faulty, a Hand pump mechanic is called to fix it before it breaks down, therefore down time of the borehole has been reduced to 3 days.
- As a result of access to clean water, there is evidence of improved sanitation and hygiene. For example availability of clean water for hand washing and personal hygiene and the environment around the borehole is very clean.
- There is increased operation and maintenance fee contribution by the water users because they see the VSLA as a guarantee for the safety of their money.
- The borehole has helped 61 households and the entire school population of over 700 people to access clean water.
- By laws have been set to guide the water users which has contributed to an improvement in collection of funds for operation and maintenance.
- The VSLA has brought the water users in an organised group putting them to be priority groups to benefit from government programs like operation wealth creation, youth livelihood programs and others.
- The VSLA members have been empowered through the loan that they borrow from the VSLA GROUPS, this helps them to construct houses, buy seeds for cultivation, capital for small businesses etc, therefore improving on their livelihoods.
- The culture of saving improved among members
- The members of Aromo VSLA plans to be the lending group in the whole of Aromo Sc.



Beneficiaries of Aromo P7 VSLA poses for a photo during a monitoring exercise.

Lessons learnt

- The integration of Village savings and loans associations in to operation and maintenance has been seen as the driver for operation and maintenance because water users guarantee the safety of their money.
- Village savings and loans association has empowered the community members, through loans borrowed from the associations, they can improve on their livelihoods, for example, widows have bought iron sheets and built small houses, the youth borrow loans and buy seeds for cultivation and to use as seed capital for small businesses
- The involvement and continuous monitoring of the community from the inception of the project increases their participation and ownership, this has made them responsible for their boreholes and this is key for operation and maintenance of their water source.
- The engagement of the sub-county extension, staff and community leaders has increased the level of follow up and monitoring. This has improved the operation and maintenance of boreholes in the area and the general household sanitation, hygiene and cleanliness of the water points.
- The VSLA has also brought people together to discuss their problems and find solutions on their own, they cooperate and are obedient to each other.

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