

Telling the story of Rural Water Services from the Users perspective

Introduction

This case study presents summary findings from three years (2013 -2015) of monitoring rural water services in Kabarole and Lira districts. The monitoring was done using a framework of Service Delivery Indicators (SDIs) that was developed by IRC Uganda for use by the sector to broaden the scope of the existing national monitoring system, the golden indicators, beyond tracking performance of systems to actual services delivered. The SDIs were developed based on sector norms, standards and guidelines set by the Ministry of Water and Environment.

The purpose of the survey was to get a better understanding on the status of rural water services and the perception of users towards service delivered. The survey covered 264 point water supply facilities and 2200 water users. Users of the sampled facilities were interviewed on the level of service delivered, and their of satisfaction. Interviews were also conducted on performance of service providers and Authorities.

Methodology

The survey focused on point water supply facilities (Hand Pumps and Protected Springs). 11 water facilities were randomly sampled from each of the rural sub counties (15 for Kabarole and 9 Lira). The sampling frame was based on the updated Water Supply database accessed from the districts. Hand Pump Mechanics (14) were identified and trained on the data collection protocol and on use of mobile phones for collecting data. The choice of selecting mechanics for the data collection process was based on a decision to use already existing structures for easy replication of the approach. A total of 2640 water users (10 per water facility) were interviewed as they collected water. Water and Sanitation Committees for all sampled facilities were also interviewed.

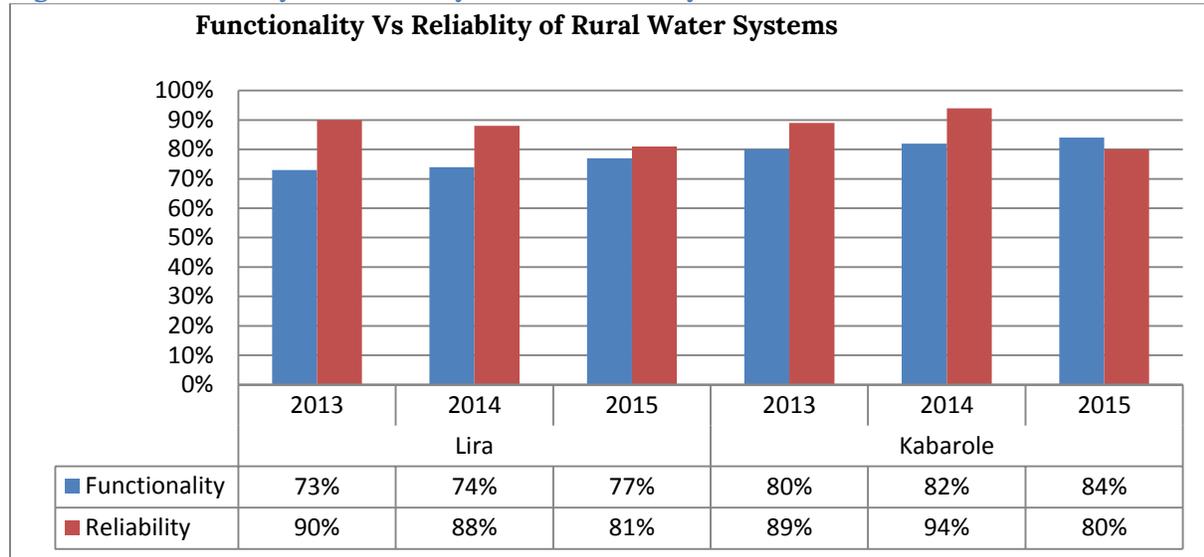
Summary of Findings

Functionality

Functionality is one of the golden indicators used to monitor water services. It is defined as the percentage of improved water facilities that are functional at the time of Spot check. As at June 2015, the national average for functionality was 88% from 85% in June 2014. (MWE 2015)

This study showed that there was a steady increase in functionality of rural water supply systems over the three years in both Kabarole and Lira. Functionality increased from 80% to 84% in Kabarole and from 73% to 77% in Lira during the period 2013 to 2015 as shown in Figure 1. The major reason attributed to the increase in functionality was the increased budget allocation for rehabilitation of water supply facilities. In Lira the budget allocation for capital maintenance was increased from 2% in 2012/13 to 12% in 2014/15 and in Kabarole from 12% to 14%. Other reasons advanced include increased proportion of Water Source Committees (WSCs) conducting preventive maintenance and water user fee collection especially in Lira.

Figure 1: Functionality Vs Reliability of Rural Water Systems



In a bid to get better understanding of the functionality indicator at water system level, data was collected on the reliability of the systems. The national norms set 95% as the acceptable level for reliability of water supply systems. This implies that any water system should be functional for at least 347 out of the 365 days in a year. Both districts realized increase in functionality between 2014 and 2015 yet there was a rapid decline in reliability in the same period.

Kabarole data for 2015 shows that functionality improved by 2% while reliability declined by 14%. At district level 2% increase in functionality reflects a good achievement. However, the 14% decline in reliability shows that 40,000 users did not have access to the water source they frequently use because it had broken down and had to walk for a longer distance to access an improved water supply facility.

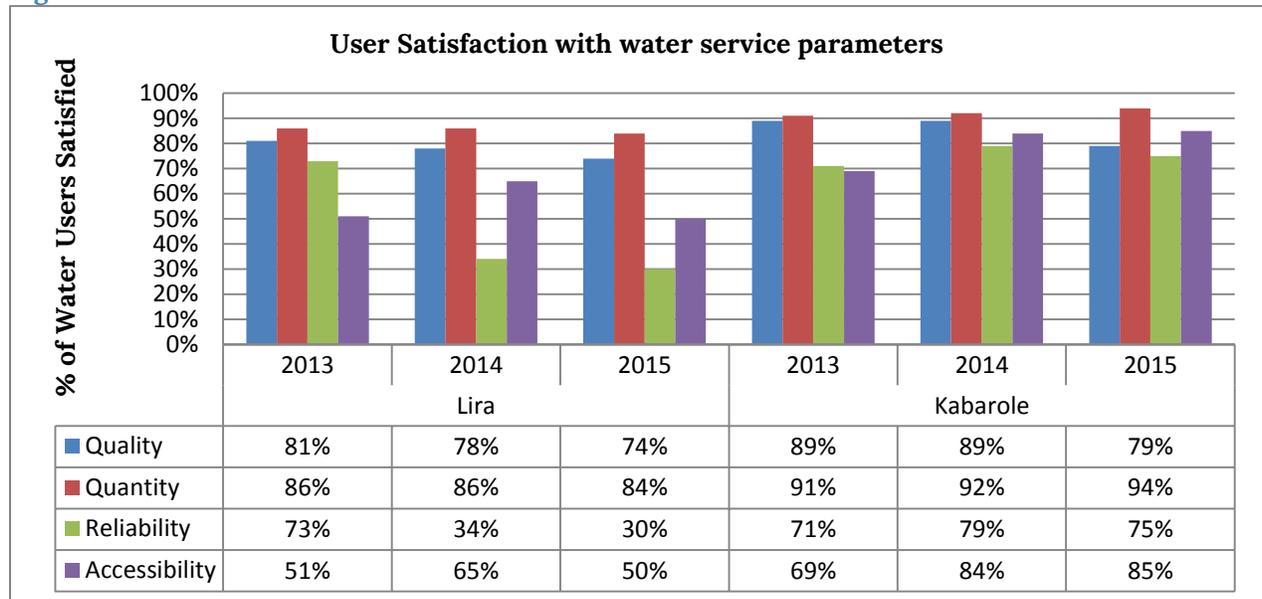
Level of Service delivered

The level of service delivered was derived by computing the proportion of water supply facilities that complied with national norms on; Water Quality, Quantity, Reliability, and Accessibility. In both Kabarole and Lira the proportion of facilities that met the national norms for rural water services stagnated at 32% to 34%.

Water User satisfaction

The level of user satisfaction was determined by asking water users at the different water points surveyed to rate their level of satisfaction with the different water service parameters; Quality, Quantity, reliability, and Accessibility. The water users were most satisfied with the quantity of water delivered.

Figure 2: User Satisfaction with the Water Service Parameters



In Kabarole the level of user satisfaction with the quantity of water they were able to access from the water facilities increased from 91% in 2013 to 94% in 2015. This shows that users are happy with the quantity of water they are able to collect. In Lira user satisfaction with quantity of water declined from 86% to 84%.

Users were least satisfied with Reliability of the water systems especially in Lira where level of satisfaction drastically dropped from 73% to 34% in 2014 then to 30% in 2015. Reliability of the systems dropped by 2% between 2013 and 2014 however, user satisfaction drastically dropped to 34%. Showing that irrespective of the scale or level of decline, water users were not happy with the reliability of the systems.

Kabarole data on satisfaction with reliability presents a challenging reality. Reliability of water systems dropped from 94% to 80% between 2014 and 2015 yet the level of satisfaction with reliability increased by 1% point. Implying that users are still unaware of the standard of service they are supposed to receive.

User Satisfaction with the quality of water showed a declining trend in both districts. This indicator focused on user satisfaction with colour, taste, and odour of water. No tests were conducted on the biological properties of water. Seasonal variation was identified as one of the main factors affecting user satisfaction with water quality. The findings show that more than 20% of the water systems are not able to deliver water of standard quality in both the dry and wet seasons.

Conclusion

Functionality of water systems in Kabarole and Lira is relatively high and has shown gradual improvement over the three years. However, the level of service delivered is still very low with only 34% of the systems compiling with national service norms on quality, quantity, reliability and accessibility. These findings show that the current definition and methodology used to monitor functionality does not capture the challenges that water users face due to unreliable water systems.

Recommendation

There is need for MWE to use the 'window' of the ongoing review of the sector performance monitoring framework to adapt the golden indicators to capture data on the actual level of service delivered to users to ensure planning and monitoring is based on actual services delivered.