

# IMPROVING WATER ACCESS THROUGH SUB-COUNTY LEVEL EQUITY PRIORITIZATION

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POLICY BRIEF NO. 3/17



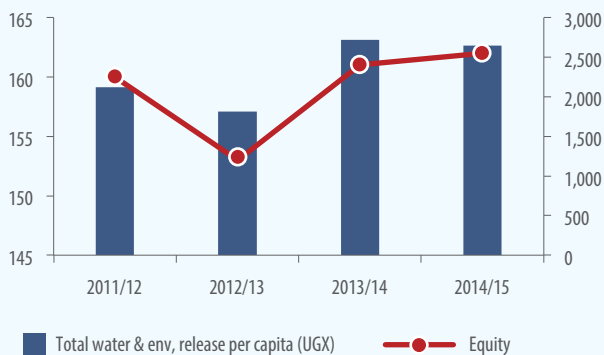
## INTRODUCTION

Equitable promotion and provision of water supply services across social and geographic clusters remain a significant challenge in Uganda. To this end, in a bold effort to capture the degree of equitable access to improved water sources the Water and Environment sector developed and introduced an equity index designed to measure “the mean sub-county deviation from the district average in persons per water point”. Low numeric values of the equity index indicate a more even distribution of improved water sources between sub-counties within a given district; and vice-versa.

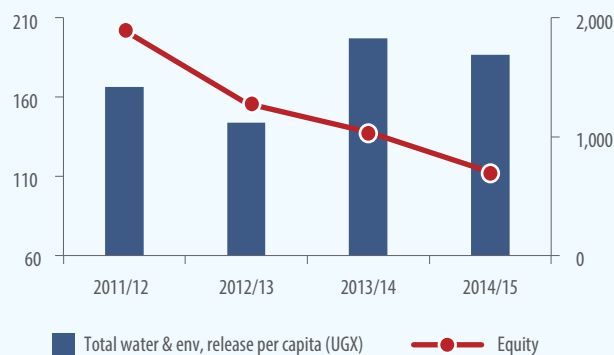
According to the Water and Environment sector performance report (FY 2015/16), in 2014/15 water access in Uganda stood at 65%. During the same year, however, the equity index was reported at 162 persons per water source. Put differently, this means that even though on average two-thirds of Ugandans had access to water, access to improved water sources varied greatly from sub-county to sub-county by an average of 162 persons per water source.

*Figure 1 juxtaposes total water and environment releases per capita vs. the national equity index between 2011/12-2014/15. National averages notwithstanding, a number of sub-regions registered significant improvements in their ability to deliver more equitable water supply services within their constituent districts. To illustrate, between 2011/12 and 2014/15 the Busoga sub-region witnessed a marked reduction in the level of the equity index from 202 to 112 (figure 2). The remainder of this policy brief focuses on a case study of the Busoga sub-region to identify key determinants in the promotion and provision of equitable water supply services.*

**Figure 1: Equity vs. Total water and environment release per capita**



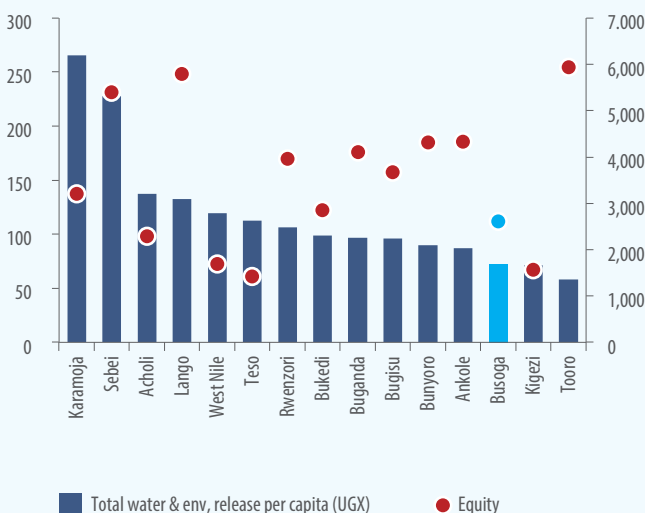
**Figure 2: BUSOGA sub-region Equity vs. Total water and environment release per capita**



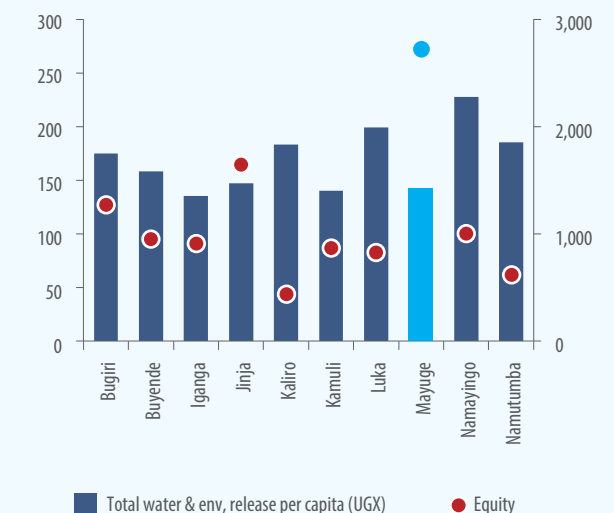
## CASE STUDY: BUSOGA SUB-REGION (FY 2014/15)

The Busoga sub-region receives the third lowest total water and environment release per capita (1,691 UGX), yet it accounts for the fifth lowest equity index in the country (figure 3). Within the Busoga sub-region, the equity index varies significantly as do budgetary allocations. To illustrate, the equity index in Mayuge district is nearly seven times higher than in Kaliro district, two and a half times higher than the sub-regional average, and one and a half times higher than the national average (figure 4). In terms of financial releases, however, Mayuge stands 270 UGX below the sub-regional average, making it unlikely for insufficient funding to be fully accountable for such poor performance.

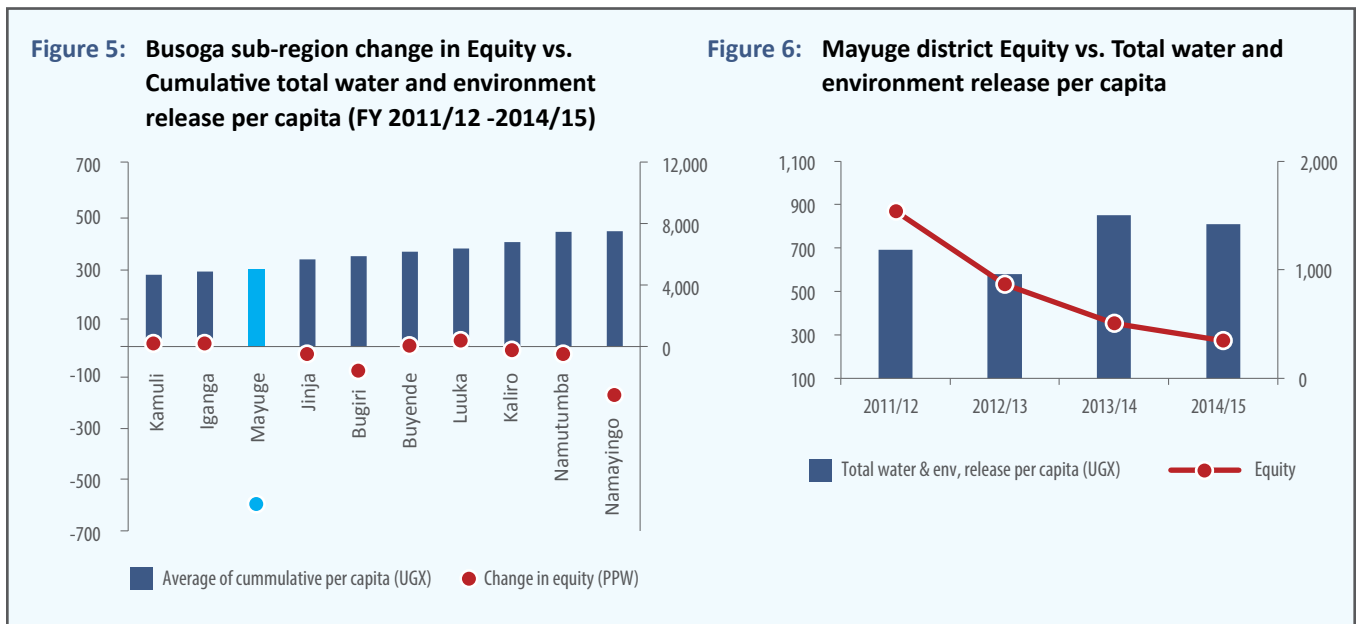
**Figure 3: Equity vs. Total water and environment release per capita (FY 2014/15)**



**Figure 4: Busoga sub-region Equity vs. Total water and environment release per capita (FY 2014/15)**



A closer look at the data reveals a very different interpretation of the state of affairs in Mayuge district. Between 2011/12 and 2014/15 Mayuge outperformed all of its counterparts in the Busoga sub-region by registering the most impressive reduction in the numerical value of the equity index – from 870 to 272 (figures 5-6). Thereby, largely driving Busoga’s good performance vis-à-vis this equity indicator.



On the basis of the analysis presented above, Mayuge’s remarkable improvement in the equity index goes beyond mere funds availability and is likely to be a direct function of good leadership and the effective implementation of results based management. Notably, leadership notwithstanding, adequate water and environment per capita releases remain a fundamental precondition for good performance. To this end, figure 6 displays a gradual and persistent slow-down in the rate of reduction in Mayuge’s equity index.

## EVIDENCE FROM THE FIELD

Field work in Mayuge district consisted of 11 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with community members and 4 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with District Water Officers (DWOs) and Community Development Officers (CDOs).

The evidence from the field suggests that the improvement in water access with equity in Mayuge district, although undeniable, ought to be interpreted in a context where water access remains unsatisfactory. At 45%, water access in Mayuge district falls far below the Busoga region average of around 60% (SPR, 2015) and despite an improvement of 8% in 2016 many communities remain inconsolable due to lack of safe water sources. Progress notwithstanding, especially in terms of the equity index, community dissatisfaction was eloquently presented in all 11 FGDs conducted in 11 of the 13 sub-counties in Mayuge district. The lack of water sources, the prevalence of diseases caused by unsafe water, and the perceived apathy of politicians and district authorities were identified as clear bottlenecks to further improve water access in Mayuge.

**Strategic involvement of local political leaders by DWOs** has greatly enhanced the equitable distribution of water source investments within the district. The threat of undue political influence undermining equitable investments, identified by the Water and Environment sector in the sector performance report (2015), has been reduced through DWOs’ active engagement of politicians in transparent planning and budgeting fora aimed at prioritising the most deprived communities. To further capitalise on DWOs’ efforts to build local demand for key sector priorities such as equitable access to clean water, the Technical Support Unit (TSU) established by the Ministry of Water and Environment (MoWE) also held a successful series of advocacy meetings with local politicians to discuss marginalised areas such as landing site or fishing communities. These areas are historically water stressed because of the high cost associated with fresh water abstraction and disproportionate population increases. Moreover, **community attitudes** towards water treatment in these communities further hinder access to water even in the midst of abundance. To illustrate, community members openly declined using tap water, viewing the addition of water purification chemicals with suspicion; with some believing that they were being used “by the west for population control”. Further investigations into community attitudes also revealed that, with 40% of the population in Mayuge being Muslim, some community members were sceptical of other faith based organizations operating in the area, and pointed to **strategic partnerships and targeted investments** as key conduits to boost water access.



In terms of **water source ownership**, during the FGDs most of the community respondents recounted experiencing the constitution, de-constitution and re-constitution of water source committees in response to observed performance of its members. FGD respondents also revealed that most of the boreholes in the visited communities had broken down at least once, and that broken boreholes would usually be inaccessible for approximately one month. On this note, each community knew and valued having the name and phone number of a hand-pump mechanic (HPM).

The high degree of water source ownership by communities pointed to a **general sense of dissatisfaction** with government oversight. To illustrate, FGDs held in communities that didn't have water sources in the village showed that community leaders had a firm understanding of what was required to submit a request for a new water source and had often already submitted such a request on the basis of government's objective to prioritize deprived communities. Such communities, however, expressed clear resentment for having been in the queue for too long. Chronic neglect and harboured mistrust of government interventions and support appear to have led communities to identify alternative solutions to water problems. For instance, despite the fact that each district has a hand-pump mechanic (HPM) per sub-county, some communities often turn to untrained and unaccredited HPMS, most of whom are actually bicycle repairers. This has caused some of the boreholes with minor issues to fall into disrepair because of the avoidable complications initiated by unaccredited HPMS.

To explain this lack of responsiveness, Key Informant Interviews with the DWO revealed that the district office is simply overwhelmed by the number of requests for new water sources and repairs from the community. Most of these requests end up being shelved or ignored due to inadequate financial and human resources to keep up with local demand. In the face of Mayuge's applauded performance in improving the equity index, the evidence presented herein supports the hypothesis that having operated at maximum capacity for a number of years Mayuge's performance seems to have plateaued. Any future improvements to close the gap between Mayuge and other better performing districts within the Busoga sub-region and nationally are likely to require additional investments in the sector.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### Community sensitization in order to improve attitudes towards safe water

- DWO, DHO and CDOs to intensify community outreach programmes through radio and other available means in order to build trust in available safe water systems.
- DWO, DHO and CDOs to create and translate materials into local languages about the safety of tap water and water purification materials.
- DWO to engage local politicians, local religious leaders and other public figures in sensitizing the population on reliability of tap water, sanitation and other health practices.

### Promote community sensitive investments through strategic partnerships

- DWO to provide guidance to Faith-based organizations operating in the WASH sector in Mayuge to increase and improve community sensitive messaging

regarding interventions in the community in order to encourage universal acceptance of the water sources.

### Invest in programming that restores community trust in government intervention

- DWO to improve transparency in water resource allocation by publishing and distributing at the Local Council (LC I) level the lists of the villages receiving boreholes in a particular financial year as well as an expected date when other prioritized villages could expect to have a water source.
- DWO to devise a surveillance mechanism involving Water Source Committees where broken-down water sources are quickly identified and hand-pump mechanics are quickly deployed.
- DWO to accredit trained Hand Pump Mechanics and provide them with IDs.

#### FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

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