

The background is a scenic landscape of a rural area. In the foreground, a dirt road winds through green fields. A few people on motorcycles are visible on the road. The middle ground shows rolling hills and lush vegetation. In the background, there are blue mountains under a sky filled with white and grey clouds. The overall tone is bright and natural.

# IRC

## A decade of systems strengthening Lessons learned by IRC WASH

Global South Academic Conclave, Ahmedabad 6<sup>th</sup> Feb 2026  
Dr. Patrick Moriarty, CEO IRCWASH

Kabarole Uganda | Photo by Jeroen van Loon



IRC – an international think and do tank—  
specialised in water, sanitation and hygiene systems  
strengthening

**Founded in 1968**, as  
International Reference  
Centre for Community  
Water - linked to the  
World Health  
Organization.

**Today**, actively building  
strong water, sanitation  
and hygiene systems –  
from the bottom up and  
the top down.

**We exist to ensure that  
everyone, everywhere  
has access to safe  
drinking water and safely  
managed sanitation**

**We do so by supporting  
countries to build strong  
local and national  
services**, underpinned  
by resilient systems, that  
transform lives and build  
equity, justice and  
opportunity for all.

## The context of our work in 2024

**124 people**

in our flexible workforce.  
More on pg xx.

**110**

Active programmes/  
projects in 24  
countries

**€11.2**

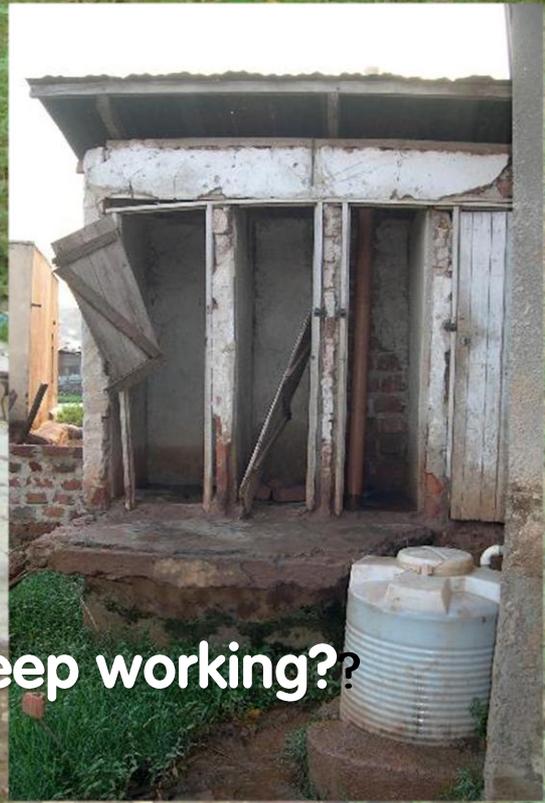
million spent from  
37 donors and  
47 clients



### Index

- The largest part of our work happens in the following countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mali, Niger, Rwanda and Uganda. Although we work in Bangladesh and India, we do not yet have IRC offices there.
- Through the One For All alliance we contribute to impact in Bolivia, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Malawi, Peru, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.
- Through projects, consultancy and partnerships, we also worked in Cambodia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, The Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe.

The challenge: a chronic lack of service sustainability



If we know how to build it... why doesn't it keep working??

# Political Economy

## WASH System



**Policy & legislation:** sector policy & strategy, legal framework, norms & standards, laws



**Planning:** planning & budgeting, capacity & frameworks for planning



**Institutions:** coordination, user responsibilities, capacity, sector mechanisms



**Finance:** flows & responsibilities, clear frameworks including life-cycle costs & source identification



**Infrastructure:** development & maintenance, project cycles, asset management, roles



**Regulation & accountability:** accountability mechanisms, regulatory framework & capacity



**Monitoring:** framework & routine implementation, service levels, use of data



**Water resources management:** allocation & management of resource abstraction, water quality, coordinated efforts



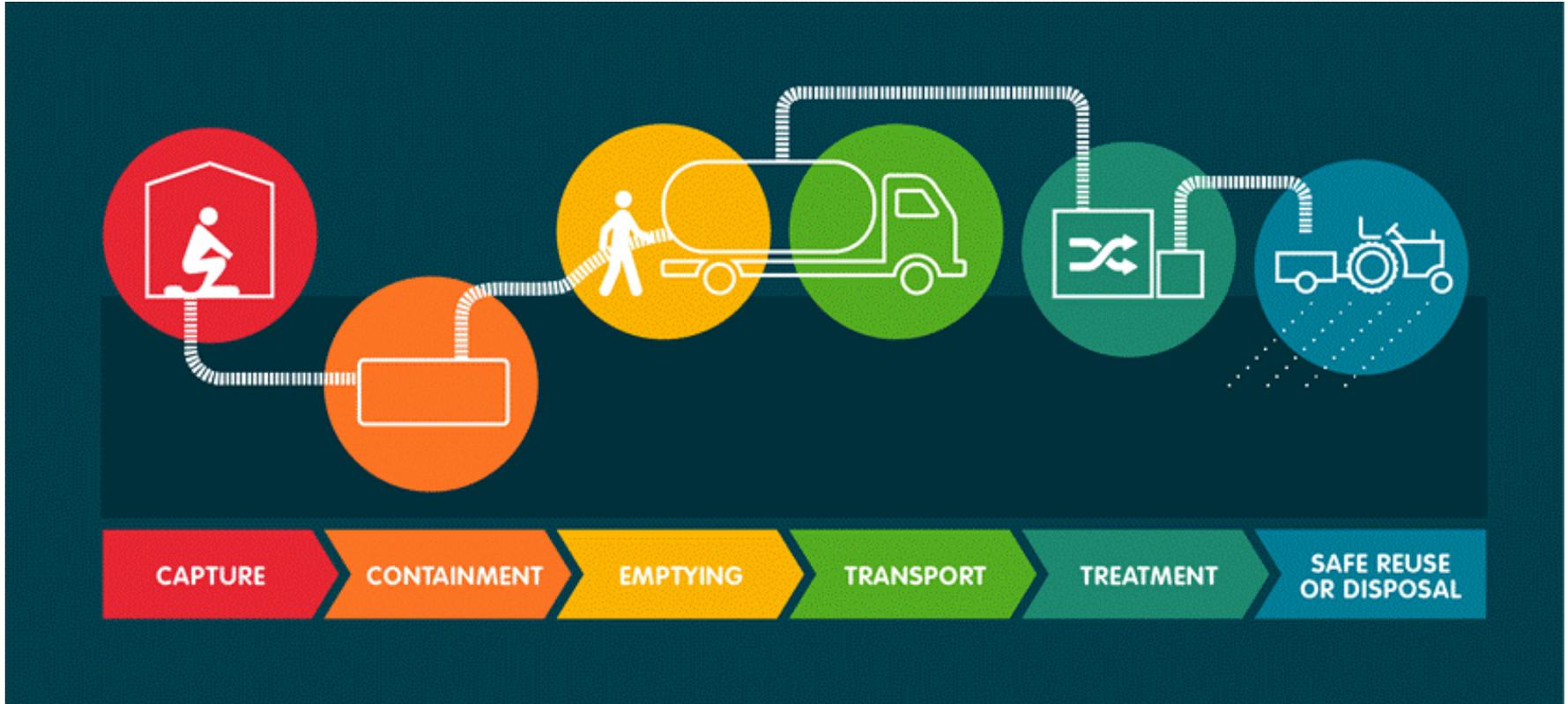
**Learning & adaptation:** capacity & frameworks to capture and feedback lessons learned, update & adapt various building blocks

Education System

Health System

Infrastructure # Service

# The sanitation service chain



# Political Economy

## WASH System



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Education System

Health System

# Our Theory of Change

## WHAT WE DO

### Global Transformation

Global, regional, and multi-country, multi-sector partnerships (influence)

### Strong Country Systems

System strengthening at local level beyond partner areas and national level in 20+ focus & non-focus countries (scale)

### Local Impact

Full model implementation in 150+ partner areas (proof)

### Research and Innovation

### Quality and Access to Data and Information

### Technical Assistance

### Advocacy and Influencing

### Co-Investment

- Institutional arrangements & coordination
- Service delivery infrastructure
- Monitoring
- Planning
- Finance
- Regulation & accountability
- Water resources management
- Learning & adaptation

## WHAT THAT LEADS TO

High level political will accelerates progress

Key actors have adequate capacity

Sector finance is secured

Citizens demand higher levels of service

Collective action drives transformative change

Organizational change supports Destination 2030

## WHAT THAT DELIVERS



### Global Transformation

Radical change in how WASH services are delivered globally

# 200M

### Strong Country Systems

Strong national WASH systems that provide improved services for 200M people

# 20M

### Local Impact

Strong local WASH systems that provide improved service levels for 20M people



## SDG 6

Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, including closing the gap for over 2B people globally

# 2B

LEVELS  
(where)

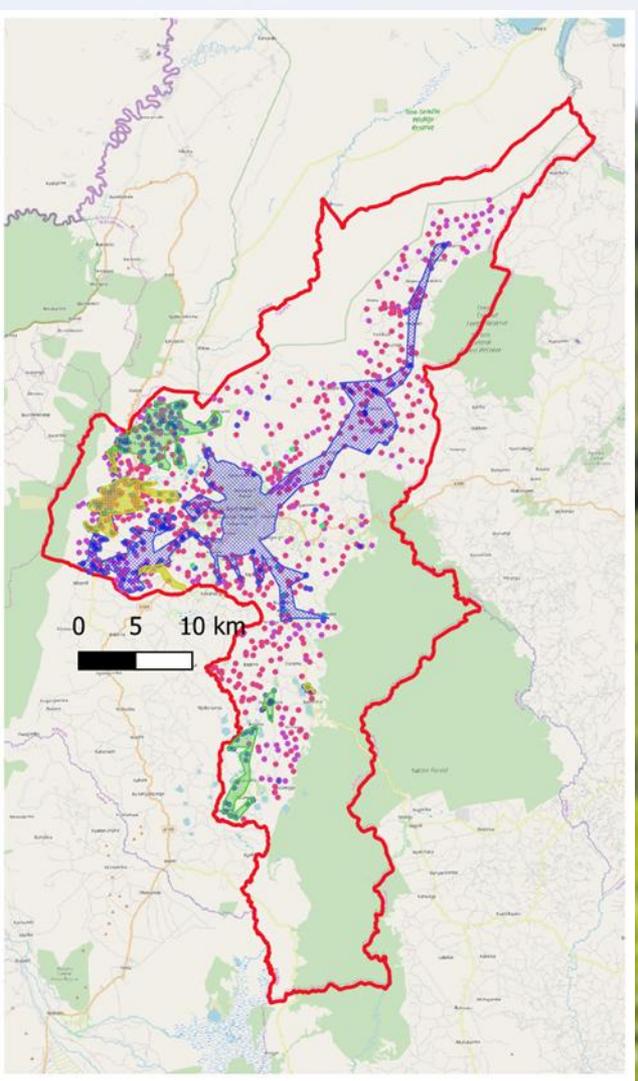
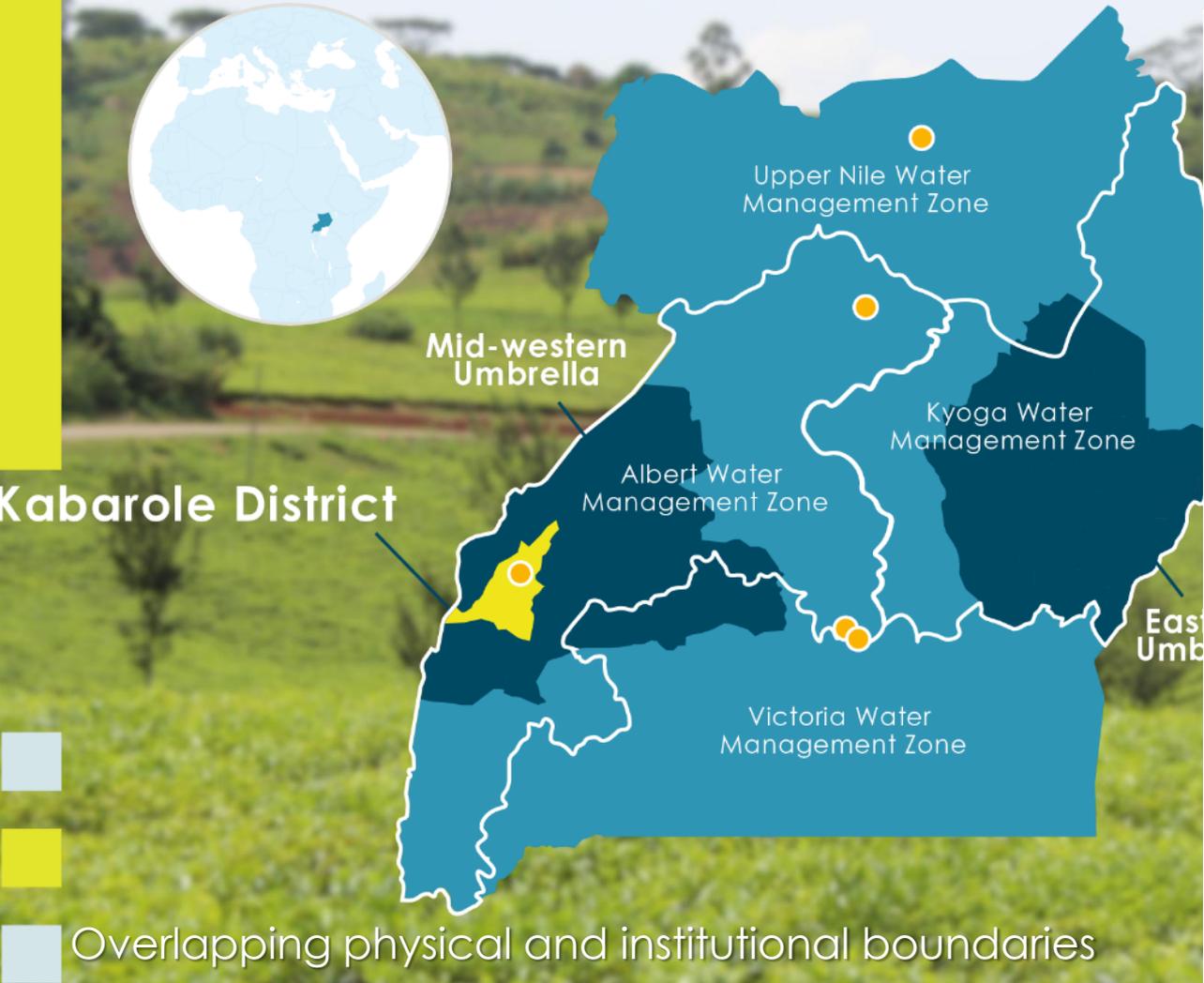
APPROACHES  
(how)

SYSTEM  
STRENGTHENING  
(what)

OUTCOMES

IMPACT  
TARGETS

GLOBAL VISION  
(why)





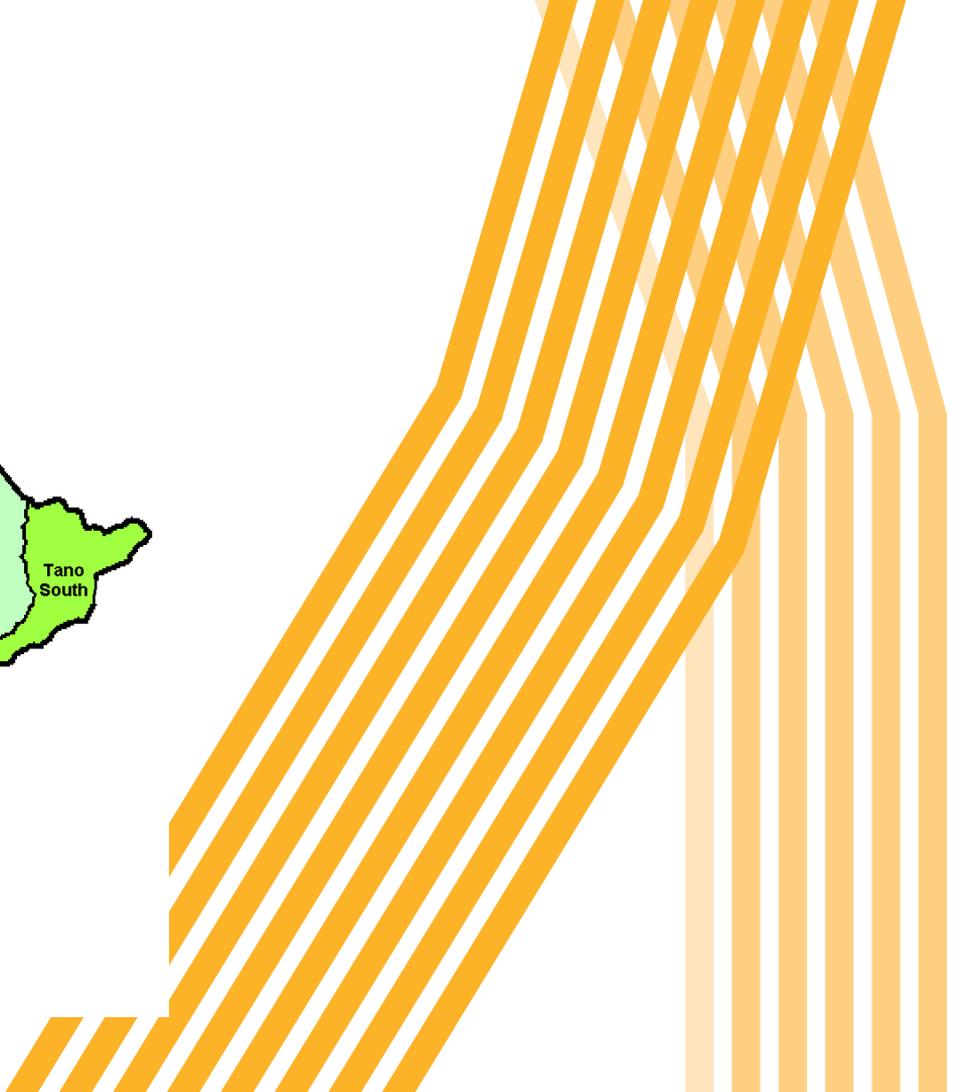
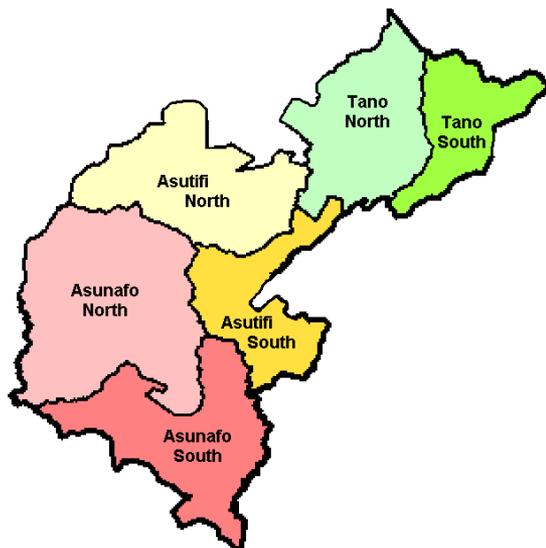
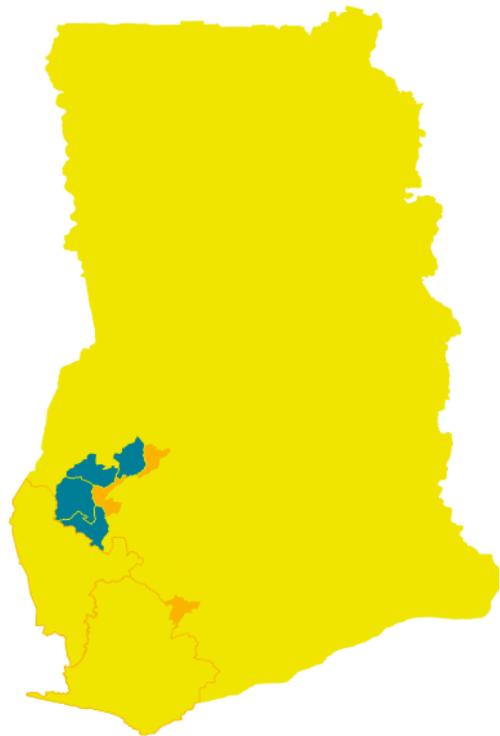
Kabarole District  
Local Government



## KABAROLE DISTRICT WASH MASTER PLAN 2018-2030

Safe Water Sanitation and Hygiene For All







## What we've learned?

Water and sanitation are hard – because they're universal public services with externalities

Water & Sanitation is political – and political leadership is essential

It is also complex and technical - professionalisation is essential

In a complex & changing world - systems leadership matters

Collective action is the engine – and patience the price



# WASH SYSTEMS academy

<https://www.ircwash.org/wash-systems-academy>

**IRC**

<https://www.systemsleadershipessay.com/>

# SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP

AN INTERACTIVE ESSAY

## AFRICA WATER & SANITATION SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM

 17-21 August 2026

 Kigali convention Centre  
Kigali, Rwanda



<https://www.africawatersystems.org/>

**IRC**  
Supporting water sanitation  
and hygiene services for life

   Africa Water Systems

 [www.africawatersystems.org](http://www.africawatersystems.org)

# IRC

A young boy is performing a handstand on a surface of reddish-brown soil. He is wearing a light green long-sleeved shirt, a green beanie, and patterned shorts. His legs are bent at the knees, and he is wearing brown sneakers. A shadow of the boy is cast on the ground to his left. The background is a vast expanse of the same soil. On the right side of the image, there are two diagonal stripes, one yellow and one light green. On the left side, there are three horizontal bars: a yellow one at the top, a light blue one in the middle, and a white one at the bottom.

Supporting water sanitation  
and hygiene services for life

Ben Curtis/AP