

Every drop of safe water counts, an extra drop of water changes lives gives birth to robust economic development in Buffujja community

About five years ago, press releases about the persistent flooding in Butalejja District in eastern Uganda caught the attention of Bweyogerere Namboole Rotary Club. Although water is a basic need, getting safe water when one is in a recurring flood area can be devastating. And yet people who have access to clean water take it for granted. The situation is even worse when women experience their monthly menstrual periods and do not have access to minimum standards of hygiene. We realized a dire call for help.

The flooding destroyed gardens, which affected food production and cash crops. The only drinking water sources, open pits, overflowed by the flooding along with the toilet facilities. The river's now highly contaminated water spilled into the only open water sources for the village of Buffujja, Naluhonjohe and its surrounding communities.

This flooding dramatically and negatively affected the health of the people living in these villages and communities by spreading several diseases, such as cholera and diarrhea. Over 80% of illnesses were linked to impure water and deplorable sanitation conditions. Over 90% of the area residents lacked access to safe drinking water and over 80% of the residents lacked access to adequate sanitation facilities.

The flooding created other problems as well; trees were destroyed, resulting in further erosion and worsened flooding and serious scarcity of firewood. Education standards were reduced because of increased illnesses and community time and energy focused on the searching for clean drinking water.

As an emergency intervention, the Rotary Club of Bweyogerere Namboole conducted a comprehensive community needs impact assessment, whose findings led to the development of an Adopt-A-Village project for this area. The project had four components; Water and Sanitation, Health Care, Education, and Alternative Income for the village and community inhabitants.

The Water and Sanitation component, with objectives cutting across the other three components, received overwhelming support. The Club embarked on intervention with inquiries through which the Uganda Water Rotary Plus, an action group for WASRAG, advised that the initial priority be focused on the Water and Sanitation component. This advice coincided with the ranking results of the community needs assessment.

To develop a response, the Rotary Club of Bweyogerere Namboole partnered with the Rotary Club of Bellingham in Washington, USA on a global grant project. The match making of our two clubs was greatly facilitated by the WASRAG project inventory website. Through a series of due diligence conversations, both clubs agreed to move forward with seeking the necessary grant funding.

In September 2014, the Rotary Foundation approved the Buffujja Sanitation and Hygiene Project, GG 1417543 valued at \$35,814.00. Deliverables included:

1. Provision of clean drinking water
2. Hygiene and sanitation facilities
3. Education related to health impacts and importance of clean drinking water, hygiene and sanitation
4. Provision of energy-saving stoves to eliminate in-home air pollution
5. Construction of three Eco System toilets
6. Distribution of reusable sanitary pads to community women and school children
7. Education and follow up support to ensure the project's sustainability.

The beneficiaries of these deliverables included the village of Buffujja and six adjacent communities, for a total of about 6,000 people. The success and great impact of this project attracted many other villagers from as far as 10 km to access safe water from the three new clean-water stations in the area.

The project design was made to be self-sustaining, the community was to pay a small user fee of shillings 100 for every jerrycan of water collected from the water service points. The 100 shillings

was supposed to cater for sustainability of supply, maintenance, service and a retainer for the water point attendant.

The Birth of a community Development circle

Following the completion of the water installation as designed, a water community committee was nominated to manage and oversee the project operation. Through the committee's efforts the following was realised;

- Youth groups, religious leaders and the entire community all enthusiastically unified to support the project and its sustainability.
- Over time, the project was gradually shifting from the hands of the Rotary club to the community's leadership, elected to be responsible for the project's sustainability and becoming an integral part of their daily life.
- Ownership of all equipment and related documentation was passed over to the community's trained water committee. This committee that received training had already demonstrated its capacity to manage, maintain, and repair the equipment to ensure the system's sustainability.
- The project execution overall has resulted in the communities' strengthened ability to develop and maintain sustainable water and sanitation systems, and to provide supporting programs that enhance community awareness of the benefits of clean water, sanitation and hygiene.
- The community leadership fully embraced the project and they are gainfully managing the minimal user fees to sustain the water supply.

The water committee in its operations drew up a working program. Key item in the program was to conduct community water user monthly meetings where they were to present the monthly water usage, payments due to NWSC, reports from the water service points attendants and to receive feedback from the community.

It was at one of these community meeting that it was confirmed that a very fair cost of shillings 100 per water Jerrycan was given by NWSC. In actual sense computations revealed that the actual cost as per water meter was 40 shillings per Jerrycan.

Following the revelation, the water committee upheld the water cost per Jerrycan at 100 shillings breaking it up as follows

No	Cost category for one water jerrycan	Cost in shillings
1	Repayment for NWSC	40
2	Attendant retainer fee	20
3	Savings for the circle	40
	Cost of a water jerrycan	100

Strict accountability tools were instituted and were agreed upon by the community. They agreed to form a community circle initially with the saved 40 shillings out of every water Jerrycan sold from the three water serving points. Strict computations and necessary monitoring were put in place. Community members were urged to join the proposed circle with a monthly contribution of 2000 shillings.

For every jerrycan of water, the circle receives 40 shillings. This amount has overtime grown to high figures. This is boosted by the monthly contributions from community members currently with a membership of 300 people. The District community-based organization took interest in the group by providing seminars, roles and rules of management. The community is excited with what the circle is enabling them to do.

Management of the circle controls and operates the borrowing mainly for Rice growing by the registered community members, who are planning to take it to another level by the creation of a cooperative society where they pull together the harvested rice, shell it as a unit and marketing it in bulk.

A community savings scheme has further been established within the circle based on the savings made from the water user fees and boosted by members' savings. Here members also open up their secondary members savings numbers within the circle to act as a village Bank.

Outcomes and what we have learned

1. The outcomes of every drop of safe water counts, an extra drop of water changes lives gives birth to robust economic development in Buffujja community has been real.
2. Along the way, we Rotarians from the Bweyogerere Namboole Rotary Club and the Rotary Club of Bellingham, Rotaractors, and the people of the Buffujja and Naluhonjohe villages and outlying communities have learned that when inspired to work together in the interest of an engaging cause, there is no problem bigger than we are!
3. The project's established water stations are now "centers of health" in these communities and they are drivers of economic activities, fewer children suffer from water related illnesses and attendance in schools increased by 40% leading to a 50% increase in academic performances on final exams.
4. Women are no longer stressed and exhausted with trekking long distances for clean water
5. Girls are no longer exposed to predators while in search of water
6. The overall health of all community members has greatly improved
7. Just as the Rotary Foundation's works have helped save millions of lives around the globe, it has also transformed the mindset of the many Rotarians involved in the Buffujja water and sanitation Project. We have all become galvanized and energized by the Rotary Foundation's support.
8. When, at the 1917 Rotary Convention, Arch Klumph announced his vision of creating an endowment fund "for the purpose of doing good in the world," never could he have imagined just how much good in the world his idea would ultimately accomplish. A century later, The Rotary Foundation continues to touch people's lives every minute of every day of every year. Truly said, the sun never sets on the work of the Rotary Foundation.

Gratitude

We extend our thanks to the unfailing support of the Rotary Foundation and the Uganda government: the latter's National Water & Sewerage Corporation was instrumental to our projects in the permitting process, contributing its expertise to the project's construction, and allowing us to connect to an existing municipal clean-water system so that our projects could supply clean water reliably and without further treatment or pumping, an act that has led to great economic transformation of Buffujja community.



PP Peter Kasango

Pkasango20@gmail.com

Pictures for use with the article



Before - Open wells overrun by flooding



After – Clean water stations



Before - wastage of wood fuel & pollution



After – efficient clean burning stoves



Distribution of re-useable sanitary pads to school girls

Eco recycling toilets



Community hygiene training by Rotaractors

Continuous post-project training to ensure project sustainability