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Clean water renews hope in the Eastern Uganda communities of Buffujja and Naluhonjohe

Life has been renewed for the community members of Buffujja and Naluhonjohe by two back-to-back water, sanitation, and hygiene projects coordinated by the Rotary Club of Bweyogerere Namboole (E. Uganda, Africa) and the Rotary Club of Bellingham (Washington State, USA). The people of Buffujja (population 6,000) and Naluhonjohe (population 10,000) now wake up every day with assured access to safe drinking water thanks to Rotary. These two impactful projects were funded by grants provided by the Rotary Club of Bellingham, District 5050, and the Rotary Foundation (GG 1417543 and GG 1743510). The Buffujja Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Project was developed in response to the persistent water flooding in Butalejja District caused by the overflow of River Manafa. This flooding destroyed gardens, which affected food production and cash crops. Already problematic sanitation was worsened as toilet facilities were often filled to overflowing by the flooding, which in turn forced the river's now highly contaminated water into the only open water sources for the village of Buffujja and its surrounding communities. This flooding dramatically and negatively affected the health of the people living in these villages and communities by spreading a number of diseases, such as Cholera outbreaks and diarrhea. Over 80% of illnesses were linked to poor water and sanitation conditions: over 90% of the area residents lacked access to safe drinking water; and over 80% of the residents lacking access to adequate sanitation facilities.



(Pictured at the right is a BEFORE picture of an open well overrun by flooding. The AFTER picture shows clean Water stations)

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

Following a comprehensive community-needs impact assessment, the Rotary Club of Bweyogerere Namboole developed 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. For example, Uganda Water Rotary Plus, an action group for WASRAG, advised that focus be fixed first on the Water and Sanitation component. This advice, which coincided with the community-needs assessment, led to the project entitled; *Buffujja Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Project*, which was in turn discovered by the Rotary Club of Bellingham (D 5050) on the WASRAG project online database. 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 USD. The Buffujja Project 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 the only three clean-water stations in the area.

During the post-project evaluations, it became clear that another result of the Buffujja Project was that the village of Buffujja and nearby communities began to experience more and more of a burden from residents of the outlying communities. This was caused by the thousands of outlying community members who trekked long distances to also access the safe drinking water provided by the Buffujja Project. With the devastating effects on the women and children, primarily girls, who spent long and exhausting hours walking to the new water points, another community impact assessment was conducted to find out what could be done to improve this developing problem. The result of this assessment was clear: the same project must be implemented in the neighbouring villages and communities.

(Pictured to the right is an eco-recycling toilet)



This prompted the birth of the Naluhonjohe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Project, GG 1743510 valued at USD \$ 35,000, under the same needs assessment and model as the Buffujja Project. As with the Buffujja project, the Naluhonjohe Project would include three water stations and three Eco System toilets, energy- (and wood-) saving stoves, and re-usable sanitary pads, as well as all the related training to assure the new Project's sustainability.

The implementation of this second project is on-going and has generated more and more excitement in the communities. As of this writing, all the water stations have been installed and are up and running with great and positive impact. The construction of the Eco recycling toilets is about 75% complete,

construction of energy saving stoves has begun, and distribution of the re-usable menstrual pads is underway. Community leadership and end-user training is also in process. The project is on target to be completed in January 2018.

Project milestones

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 youth groups, the religious leaders and the entire community have all enthusiastically unified to support the Project's sustainability and embrace it as part of their daily life.

- Women are no longer stressed and exhausted with getting clean water
- Girls are no longer exposed to predators while in search of water
- Children can consistently attend school
- School enrollment and attendance has increased
- School grades have increased
- The overall health of all community members has greatly improved



The community leadership has fully embraced the project and they are gainfully managing the minimal user fees to sustain the water supply.

Over time, the project has been gradually shifting from the hands of Bweyogerere Namboole Rotary Club members to the community's leadership elected to be ultimately responsible for the Project's sustainability. Likewise, ownership of all equipment and related documentation have been passed to the communities' trained water committee. This committee, which has received highly-participatory trainings, has already demonstrated its capacity to manage, maintain, and repair the equipment to ensure the equipment's and system's sustainability.

Outcomes and what we have learned

The outcomes of these two sister projects has been impressive; 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.

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 communities—have learned that when we are inspired to work together in the interest of an engaging cause, there is no problem bigger than we are! The water stations are now “centers of health” in these communities.

Before, these community residents were afraid to go for health treatment because all they were told was that they must stop drinking water from flood-contaminated open sources, but they could not stop doing so because these were the only sources they had available to them. Now, with the help of each of us that fear is gone. 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, contributed its expertise to the project's construction, and allowed 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.

Just as the Rotary Foundation work has helped save millions of lives around the globe, it has also transformed the mindset of the many Rotarians involved in the Buffujja and Naluhonjohe Projects, who were galvanized and energized by the Rotary Foundation's support.

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The Water & Sanitation Rotarian Action Group is a group of Rotarians whose purpose is to support Rotary clubs to effectively plan, finance, implement, monitor and evaluate water, sanitation, and hygiene programs, where they are most needed in a collaborative, cost-effective, timely, and sustainable manner, true to the principles of Rotary International. Wasrag operates in accordance with Rotary International policy but is not an agency of, or controlled by, Rotary International

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