

First of all, I don't speak for WaterAid as I have completed my tour of duty at the end of August 2013 after three years. Great strides have been made in delivering services to communities and working with government to ensure that water and sanitation policies are really effective.

1. First of all, I would like to know how do you started to work in the water sector.

As a child growing up in rural Uganda I fell ill many times because my family only had dirty water to drink. I saw diarrhoea and dysentery kill young ones of my age and old ones alike in my village. I dreamed many times of one day being able to pump clean water from the dried-up borehole near our home so that I could free my mother from many hours she spent walking everyday to collect the water our family needed to survive.

I know that my story contain a common thread with the stories of millions of others around the world and in Rwanda like Musabyimana Alice in Ntarama, a village in Bugesera district where the organisation I worked for, has been implementing water supply projects.

I met Alice at her nearest water source, the shockingly dirty river. She told me that since her family moved to the village, they have never clean water. "My children have suffered a lot from worms and diarrhoea," she told me. "I take them to the health centre so much that it is like my home". While my story is not a pleasant one, it is not unique, it has played out in many lives, many families. The only difference is that it happened to me and I have seen the impact of lack of this human need and have vowed to try and make a difference in the lives of those threatened by preventable diseases.

2. How is the current situation of the sanitation and fresh water access in Rwanda?

Rwanda is one of the four sub-saharan African countries believed to be on track to meet the Millennium Development Goal to halve the proportion of people without access to sanitation by 2015 – but there is much work still to be done meet the goal for access to clean water. And the main problems are in rural communities where only people are walking long distances about 2 to 3 kilometers daily to fetch water, carrying 20 to 25 litres containers on heads. According to JMP-2011, there is 73% access to drinkable water in urban and 57% in rural and only 56% access to sanitation and a report released by the National Institute of Statistics (EICV 2012) state that 74.2% of Rwandans have access to clean water and latrines, but those that meet hygienic standards are significantly low. Lack of access to safe water and hygienic sanitation can have adverse impact particularly keeping children – especially the girls out of school and, should there be contamination at a common point the whole village is at risk.

3. What was the role of the organisation you worked for in the improvement of the fresh water and sanitation services in the country?

The organisation you worked for chose to start a programme in Rwanda because as a post conflict country after the 1994 genocide which not only ruined the social fabric and economy of the country but also destroyed the infrastructure including water and sanitation. Water coverage is still low and sanitation is lagging behind. But perhaps the most important reason for starting a

programme in Rwanda was the high level of commitment to water, sanitation and hygiene by the Government of Rwanda. Rwanda presented a unique opportunity to develop an effective programme and demonstrating what can be achieved through strong government commitment and collaboration with international organizations, bilateral and multilateral aid agencies.

4. What are your main achievements?

During my tenure as Team Leader, we reached nearly 100,000 people with clean water, improved sanitation and hygiene. My proudest moment was when the Minister of State launched the new rainwater harvesting system and latrines at Juru primary school. It was incredibly rewarding to see the smiles on the pupils' faces and hear them talk about how simply having clean water and toilets had changed their lives.

5. What are the most difficult challenges faced?

The challenge of lack of water and sanitation is enormous, and there weren't many players working in the water and sanitation. So, expectations from local authorities and demands from communities often exceed the resources available. Prioritizing of startup villages was not only challenging but felt like overlooking the severity of the situation for other communities. It brings a sense shame of minds as if you are casting a whole community to perpetual misery.

6. What are the problems and the perks of working with the Government of Rwanda?

In Rwanda all intervention are coordinated by the Government through the sector working groups to avoid overlaps but also ensure each organization is contributing to the Economic development and poverty reduction strategy – a medium term plan to the country's vision 2020. Whereas there's value in working with a government that is service delivery focused, it needs to balance between service delivery, ensuring adequate policies, advocacy for sector financing, and strengthening sector capacity to plan and coordinate water and sanitation interventions. So, we worked through the sector working groups and teamed up with others to ensure effective targeting of investments, by for example setting up a network of journalists reporting on water, sanitation and hygiene (RWASHMedia Network) well as providing them with tools for monitoring sector performance progress against targets and holding the government accountable.

7. Tell me about another partners with whom the organization Works.

We worked with partners (local organisations) who implemented water, improved sanitation and hygiene education programmes through appropriate low cost and sustainable technology options and; supported the district to strengthen their capacity to plan and coordinate water and sanitation interventions and providing them with tools such as waterpoint mapping to monitor sector performance at district level.

8. What are the future projects in Rwanda?

Prior to my departure, a new strategy had been developed outlining areas where future plans would add value to the sector, including innovating of low-cost, appropriate and sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene technologies and approaches that ensure the most vulnerable groups

improve their hygiene practices and gain access to water and sanitation. Other areas of focus were equity and inclusion, sustainability of infrastructure and promoting sustainable solutions that have genuine impact on people's lives.

9. The role of water and sanitation in Rwanda's reconciliation process?

We prioritized one area of the country that experienced the wrath of the genocide because it was predominately settled by the Tutsi. Interventions have been targeted in the most poor and vulnerable communities. For instance the famous Communal Rainwater harvesting systems – a new model for collecting rainwater at large scale was piloted in Ntarama orphan village and, supported a government led community based environmental health promotion programme was targeted in the widowed villages. By giving people's access to safe water and sanitation and good health, we believe we contributing Rwanda's reconciliation.

10. What do leaders need to do to ensure everyone in Rwanda and indeed in Africa has access to safe water and sanitation?

I think leaders should shift focus away from settings targets and onto sustainable solutions that will have genuine impact on people's lives. Water plays a critically important role in food security, economic growth, resource scarcity, and climate change. Water, sanitation and hygiene play a more critical role in health and education which are fundamental to human progress.

Profile:

Nshuti Rugerinyange is an Engineer by Training and currently an Independent consultant in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene. He previously worked with International organisations Oxfam, Save the Children, GOAL and as a UNODC Representative in Western Afghanistan and was until recently the Country Representative of WaterAid Rwanda. He is currently a Doctoral candidate at The Robert Gordon University. His research interest fall in the areas of culture and leadership styles.