

**From nothingness to Sustainable
Sanitation approaches in two Rural
Growth Centers in SW Uganda -
Situation, Approach, Experiences
and Current status.**

By

Atukunda Abu Victoria



Background

- **The South Western Towns Water and Sanitation Program (SWTWS) covered 7 of the 56 districts in the South Western Region of Uganda.**
- **Government of Uganda program, funded bilaterally with the Government of Austria.**
- **Operated mainly in Rural Growth Centres of populations ranging from 1,000 – 10,000 in the years 1996 – 2006.**
- **In 2007, the program changed its mode of operation and changed from an implementing program to a Water and sanitation development fund operating in 20 districts of the same region.**
- **Currently, operating as the Water and Sanitation Development Facility it is funded by the Governments of Uganda and Austria, and the European Union.**
- **It is a water supply and sanitation program, mandated to provide appropriate technologies for the Rural Growth Centres of operation.**

Background cont'd 1



Map of Uganda showing program area

-  Ishasha & Rwenshama area
-  South Western Towns Water & Sanitation Project Area

Background cont'd 2

- **The mandate of the SWTWS project was to provide WS facilities with the use of appropriate, manageable, sustainable, adaptable and reliable technologies and systems.**
- **Promotion of health living through hygiene education, water safety, and total sanitation.**
- **The program insisted on promotion of the latrine and it was a policy to achieve 100 % coverage (pit latrine with a sanplat as the bare minimum). Unless 100% latrine coverage was achieved in the towns of operation, the water component could not be released to the community.**

Background cont'd 3

- **Ishasha town lies in the Western rift valley**
- **Its topography is flat.**
- **It is a wild life conservation area characterized by savannah grassland type of vegetation and sandy loam soils formed during the recession of Lake Edward.**
- **Porosity and evapotranspiration are high.**
- **The sanitation of Ishasha was very poor, during the wet season (almost every season) people suffered from dysentery, diarrhea and cholera, yet a pit latrine only lasted utmost one month before collapsing.**
- **Consequently only two communal latrines existed; at the market and mosque.**
- **These facilities were very poorly managed yet all the community including traveling visitors and traders on market days used them.**

Background cont'd 4

- **Rwenshama is a fish-landing site that is water logged and sandy. It is flooded almost all year round.**
- **Like Ishasha, it lies in the rift valley area and has the savannah grassland type of vegetation mainly.**
- **The community suffered cholera outbreaks almost every rainy season, which apart from the abhorring sanitation situation had a water crisis-despite living on lakeshores.**
- **With such and many other community problems therefore, the Program started looking for suitable alternatives .**
- **In 1997 came about a book “Sanitation without water” which introduced us to Ecological sanitation.**
- **SWTWS project became the pioneer in the introduction and promotion of Ecological Sanitation in the country.**



Some project team members visit Rwenshama during floods.



Latrines in the park in Rwenshama

Why Ecosan?



Some common latrines
in program towns

- Most of the towns had ground water as their source, yet the kind of sanitation alternatives in place was mainly pit latrines.
- The concept of sanitation focused on waste disposal rather than a closed loop sanitation system.
- Communities are very poor; several options did not apply due to costs. (e.g. VIPs are mostly for schools)
- The options in place had limited provisions for persons with disabilities (PWD), elderly, and children.
- Cultural barriers (taboos and myths about human excreta management) barred the application of some sanitation options.
- Communities had other problems that affected the application of the options available, e.g. rocky areas, sandy soils, water logged areas e.t.c. Families did not have latrines / toilets due to these problems.

Why Ecosan? Cont'd 1

- High prevalence of lack of awareness on sanitation, especially concerning:
 - Ø Sanitation as a system
 - Ø Other excreta disposal methods
 - Ø Indiscriminate disposal as a source of disease
- Due to the problems highlighted problems above, communities were living in a resignation kind of attitude; a “let come what may” scenario. There was widespread lack of sanitation facilities and rampant water borne diseases; especially cholera and diarrhea.

Dealing with the Sanitation Situation in Ishasha and Rwenshama

- **After assessing and analyzing the situation of both areas, it was necessary to implement Ecosan.**
- **Ecosan toilets had earlier been tested in Kisoro and other areas.**
- **Our responsibilities included awareness creation, defining the methodology to be used during implementation and to ensure 100% sanitation coverage in the two areas.**
- **The approach taken was to organize communities into groups and induce them to participate.**
- **Households were lumped into groups of neighbors and neighborhoods, with large families grouped with single man families. This was done to help them come up with the required contribution on each toilet. Families of less than three people grouped themselves together to own one toilet per three homes while the larger families owned one toilet.**
- **Resource mobilization was done, including carrying out a charity walk for the poorest of the poor.**
- **For each toilet, the families made a contribution of 13% of the total toilet cost.**

Dealing with the Sanitation Situation in Ishasha and Rwenshama Cont'd 1



An Ecosan toilet in
Ishasha

- Construction of sanitation facilities and post-construction training were done. Masons from the communities were identified and recommended by their Local leaders for training.
- These masons are currently responsible for the replication of the technology.
- Key members of the community were targeted, opinion leaders contacted (including a witch doctor who for long had claimed to cause cholera and extorted money from the community to heal it), and involved in the change process.
- These leaders were also trained and taught about Ecosan concepts.
- Sanitation was promoted with stringent measures e.g. ensuring that the communities achieve 100% toilet/latrine coverage before water supply, including use of the law wherever possible.

Dealing with the Sanitation Situation in Ishasha and Rwenshama Cont'd 2



Staging the Ecosan play in Ishasha

- The community was presented with several options, their pros and cons and induced them to demand for Ecosan options.
- Drama was used as a promotional tool; an Ecosan play was developed and used.
- Demonstration toilets were built and an experimental/demonstration garden made to show the community how Ecosan products could be applied for agriculture.

Situation after intervention

- 20 Urine diverting toilets were built in Ishasha and 60 built in Rwenshama.
- A public facility with an office built in each place.
- In Rwenshama, a school facility for the primary school in the place was also constructed.
- Every household had access to a toilet, (100% toilet coverage was achieved) turning them into two Ecosan villages. They are the first Ecosan villages in Uganda.
- Ishasha, which was completed in 2001, the toilets are still working and performing well.



An Ecosan toilet in Ishasha

Since the place is mainly a commercial area dealing in trade with DR Congo, there aren't many gardens available. Three traders from the place collect sanitized material from all the toilets and transport them about thirty kilometers away to their villages. They apply them mainly in banana plantations.

Situation after intervention

- **Rwenshama was completed in 2004 and is still well performing and replication of the Ecosan system has taken place to spill over to neighboring villages and towns.**
- **Urine and sanitized faeces are used in gardens, even though many households do not own gardens, the ones who do, pick the material from their neighbors and use it in their small gardens around the house.**
- **They grow mainly vegetables and maize.**
- **Since completion, no dysentery and cholera outbreaks have been reported in both places.**

Challenges and how they were overcome

- **Resistance:**
 - **In the community it was unheard of to reuse human excreta as a soil conditioner and fertilizer in agriculture.**
 - **Washer communities who are the majority in the two areas, having negative beliefs about the use of urine and any contact with urine and faeces.**
 - **Other members of the community especially the witch doctor, used his serpent for to terrorize and hence demobilize the community not to support the sanitation program.**
- **Ishasha being a trading community, multilingual and multicultural, there were many taboos regarding the use of Ecosan. (Pregnant women were not allowed to sit on any pit toilets as they believed this would cause them fail to give birth. Faeces were seen as a source of trouble and a witch's medium to perform scare enemies. However, urine had been used before as pesticide and cure for drunkenness).**
- **The community was so carefree about the ownership of toilets leaving the responsibility to the leaders.**

Challenges and how they were overcome

- **The elderly and people with disabilities needed special features on the toilets for them to be able to ease themselves easily. Special designs with provision of a ramp were made catering for this vulnerable group of people.**
- **Organizing and training communities along lakeshores proved a big challenge. They did not have time or the will to listen to anything apart from fishing and fishing accessories. At times, the project team had to assemble information and demonstration toilets along the shore to be able to capture the fishermen's attention.**

Conclusion

- **Despite the challenges faced during implementation, the project managed to achieve the set targets; achievement of 100% toilet coverage, promotion of Ecosan and improvement on the quality of life for the communities. The two Ecosan villages are currently demonstration areas on sustainable approach to water (Solar pumping systems were used) and sanitation promotion, technological development and management.**