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### **Uganda: W.A.S.H. as the Solution to Health and Hunger**

Kwame walks three and three-quarters miles to collect five gallons of dirty, disease-infested water for his family to drink and use. He then walks the same distance back to his village, carrying the 44 pounds of water on his head (Thirst Project). This is occurring all throughout underdeveloped countries in communities that do not have direct access to water. This story is synonymous with Ugandan families. The Global Water Crisis is significantly affecting Uganda's citizens. It is causing high disease rates and many deaths. Solving the water and sanitation problem is crucial to improving health and reducing deaths in Uganda.

Uganda is a relatively small country with regard to land. It is located in eastern Africa with a population of around 45.74 million people ("Uganda- Habitat"). Uganda is a country with a big population that has shown to be urbanizing and growing, yet so many people still lack access to clean water. Of that population, 85% of people live in rural areas and 21.4% of people live below the poverty line (*The World*). Many people living in poverty are located in rural areas without access to essential daily needs. Countless people have limited access to food, health services, and clean water. As a result, disease runs rampant due to the lack of sanitary conditions. Furthermore, the lifestyle of families in Uganda adds to the problems within the country. Early marriages are common, with more than 50% of people marrying before the age of 18 (*The World*). Many of those marriages are arranged by families. There is also a high fertility rate within the country. That rate has caused a huge increase in the population that has gone unchecked in the past few years. Over half the population, around 60%, is between the ages of 0 and 25 ("Population of Uganda"). Consequently, resources like food, water, and healthcare have been strained even more. Families need access to those resources to better their lives, but there are too many issues within the country right now for families to receive access.

There are various problems within Uganda, with some being more pressing than others. A big issue is poverty. Over 10 million people in the country live in poverty ("Life in Uganda"). Those people have few opportunities to earn money, causing them to be in poverty. That circumstance makes it difficult for them to buy healthy and adequate food for their families. That point leads to another problem within the country, which is health and food security. Disease rates are extremely high because there is a low access to doctors and midwives. Additionally, there is low food availability and unsafe food. Those two aspects lead to low health and more disabilities. There are also problems with water and sanitation, which is one of the most pressing issues in rural areas where most of the population lives. It is difficult to find safe and clean water. Some examples of water sources include puddles, streams, and ponds that are shared with livestock. The dirty water largely contributes to the spread of disease. On top of the unclean water, mothers and children often have to walk miles to collect that water. Sanitation is an issue because there is usually no proper disposal of waste in rural communities. Trash often piles up on the streets and in the towns. Community members are then walking past the trash every day and being exposed to dirty conditions. Another problem in Uganda is education. Children, often males, have to work to provide for

their families. Female children have to care for their families in the home. Those two circumstances prevent children from attending school and receiving an education. Even if the children can go to school, families do not have a lot of money to buy school supplies. Lastly, housing is an issue in Uganda. Rural community members live in mud huts with thatched roofs and dirt floors. Those conditions are unsanitary and spread disease. All of the problems mentioned contribute to the high disease rates in the country. In 2000, the deaths caused by communicable diseases in Uganda peaked at around 275,000 people (“Top Causes”). That statistic means 1 out of every 165 people died from a communicable disease. A more recent statistic in 2015 showed that around 190,000 people died from communicable diseases in the country (“Top Causes”). The decrease in deaths over the years may be in part to the World Health Organization (WHO) establishing offices in Uganda in 2000. Since then, members have been able to directly work in the country to solve some issues. The WHO is working hard in Uganda, but they have not been focusing on water and sanitation as much as what is needed. Some organizations are focusing on water and sanitation, but their efforts are not spreading throughout the country on its own. Without the spread of information through Ugandans, the organizations have to re-teach each community every time they work with people. If water and sanitation is focused on a small scale in Uganda, it can spread easier through the people in the community and eventually beyond the community. The deaths from communicable diseases are still extremely high and need to be reduced by focusing specifically on water and sanitation since that problem is one of the main causes of disease spreading throughout the country.

Water and sanitation availability is specifically causing obstacles for families and communities. In rural areas, there are few washing and sanitation facilities with soap and water. Hand hygiene has been proven to save lives because it significantly reduces the spread of communicable diseases. Communities must have access to soap and water to reduce disease spread. Two out of three households in Uganda do not use handwashing practices after defecating (“Life in Uganda”). Also, only eight percent of mothers with children under five have soap and water readily available for handwashing (“Life in Uganda”). Without handwashing, bacteria is transferred when preparing food or to other surfaces in the home. If families had access to washing facilities, disease rates would decrease. Additionally, one out of ten people practice open defecation in fields and bushes in Uganda (“Life in Uganda”). This action is due to only three out of ten households having a latrine (“Life in Uganda”). Pathogens transfer to food both directly through the people and through the water and crops surrounding the areas where people defecate. Having access to sanitation facilities would help stop the spread of disease. Water access also plays a part in disease spread. There are few drinking water services available to families. Furthermore, the water they collect is often contaminated with disease-causing agents. Diarrhea is one common illness that kills 33 children every single day in Uganda (*The World*). Diarrhea is not thought of as a deadly disease in places like the United States, but in underdeveloped countries its effects are appalling. Children are especially affected by the lack of water in Uganda. Around 33% of children do not have access to safe water and 60% live 30 minutes walking distance from a water source (“Life in Uganda”). Additionally, many children are tasked with collecting water. They have to walk miles to the water source, then miles back carrying heavy jugs of water. The problems caused by low water and sanitation availability are resulting in the deaths of families from communicable diseases. The problems are also causing the country to struggle economically. One system that has been implemented in other countries in Africa is a W.A.S.H. program. W.A.S.H stands for “Water and Sanitation/Hygiene.” The program has been successful in decreasing disease rates in other African countries like Eswatini and Kenya. There are barriers to helping communities with water and sanitation though. One crucial barrier is changing behaviors. People who are used to their lifestyle will be

unwilling to change their behavior because people from outside their community are telling them what to do. Citizens will need to be both educated and motivated to make a change in their way of living. Another barrier is making the services and resources readily available. It will be difficult to find sources within the country. Moreover, it will be difficult to find funds to build wells for water resources. There are ways to get around those barriers though to successfully implement a program within communities.

One solution to the water and sanitation problem in Uganda is implementing a W.A.S.H. program. For the program to be successful, it will need to start small in a rural community. Bundibugyo is a township in Uganda with a population of around 20,000 people (*The World*). Sempaya is a village within Bundibugyo with a population of a little less than 8,000 people (*The World*). Sempaya could be a starting point for the W.A.S.H. program. The program has two different parts, with the first part relating to water. To provide clean water to the village, engineers and materials will need to be sent in from non-profit organizations like Thirst Project or The Water Project. The Thirst Project organization incorporates the W.A.S.H. program into their work already. In addition to building wells, the organization makes sure communities have latrines for safe waste disposal. Workers also teach community members about hygiene. Thirst Project is a key organization to work with because it incorporates every aspect of the W.A.S.H. program into its work already. The Water Project organization is also a key partner organization for this proposal as they already have experience working in Africa and with locals. To build the freshwater wells, engineers and materials, like bricks, tools, and drills, will be sent to Sempaya. One freshwater well provides water for around 500 individuals, so one well would not be enough for Sempaya with a population of 8,000 people (“Reporting”). To help build more wells, engineers will teach members of the community about how to build the wells. The community members can then use that knowledge and pass it on to other communities. Labor will also be sourced from people in the community. Having members of the community build the well will provide work and give them a sense of connection to the well. That connection will hopefully help motivate them to use the well. Members will also be educated on how to maintain the well so it can be used for years to come once the organizations have left the country. The access to clean water from the wells means people will no longer be using unclean water to cook food and drink. Furthermore, women and children will no longer have to walk miles to collect the water each day. The organizations will finance the first few wells being built in the community, but once they are gone the community will need money to build more wells. To solve this obstacle, the International Finance Corporation will go into Uganda and work with the local government in Bundibugyo to improve financing allocations (“Clean Water”). As of right now, Uganda’s national government’s funds do not meet the goals of providing clean water to rural areas (*Implementing Water*). The International Finance Company will work with the smaller local government to prioritize money to areas that need it most. Reworking the budget will help with the water aspect of the W.A.S.H. program and the sanitation/hygiene aspect.

Sanitation and hygiene is the second part of implementing the W.A.S.H. program to solve the sanitation issue. For this part of the solution, professionals from an organization like Community Approaches to Total Sanitation (CATS) will be sent in to educate Sempaya. Through that organization, 24 million people have been declared free of open defecation (*Implementing Water*). They teach about hand washing, cleaning yourself, cooking food properly, and where to relieve oneself. Once families know how to prepare food safely and cleanly, disease will not be spreading as rapidly. Additionally, knowing where to defecate will help decrease the spread of human waste products to water and crops. In order to educate the

community, the organization will focus on teaching students in the Kinyehembe Primary School. The school is the only one in the village of Sempaya, and it teaches elementary through high school students (*The World*). Focusing on teaching children will be beneficial because they are more open to changing their ideas and lifestyle. They will hopefully then go home to their families and share about sanitation and hygiene with them. The organization will focus on engaging with all types of community members as well. Working closely with town leaders, the organization can help them take lead. With community leaders in control, they can decide what practices work best for their community rather than implementing standards used in all countries. It is highly important that the community decides what practices are best for them to ensure they continue to use the sanitation and hygiene practices. CATS is there to teach and guide but not to regulate exactly what is done. Once CATS is gone from the country, there is no guarantee people will continue to practice what they were taught. To solve this obstacle, the organization will implement a W.A.S.H. education program in the Kinyehembe Primary School. This program will provide teachers and students with things like pamphlets to follow and use. Educating children about sanitation and hygiene at an early age will gradually change their ideas through generations. That education program will also be shared with other schools in surrounding communities. Uganda has one of the highest mortality rates attributed to unsafe water, sanitation, and hygiene in the world (“Death Rate”). That point is why it is so important to solve this problem in the country.

Helping Uganda allows the country to provide people with the human right to clean water. Children like Kwame do not have to walk miles to collect dirty water if they have access to a freshwater well in their community. Clean water and sanitation significantly reduce communicable disease rates and deaths. By sending in organizations to begin building wells and educating communities, citizens will have help. They will then be able to pass on and use their knowledge to manage water and sanitation sustainably within the country.

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