

## A glass of clean water...or is it?

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*Above: Two young men use the hand pump at Nyakihanga shallow well*

When Joshua Bwanero, the County Health Inspector of Kamwenge district, placed a glass of water on the table at the start of his meeting with members of the Nyakihanga community, he was not politely offering anyone a drink, although some licked their lips in anticipation. The water in the glass looked clean and shiny, with sunrays from the nearby window passing through it.

What Joshua was really doing was sensitizing the community about Water Safety Planning.

“How many faeces do you see in this water?” He asked. Some of the members cringed at his blunt use of the word ‘faeces’. Others answered his question.

“None!”

Joshua then paused dramatically before saying, “The water in this glass, which is from your well, has been tested and contains 80 percent E.Coli,

which comes from faeces.”

There was an audible gasp in the room. Joshua then went on to explain that just because the water coming out of your source looks clean, does not make it so.

He ended the meeting, the first of many to sensitize the community, by cheekily asking, “Whose waste are you taking in when you drink your water? The local madman, or the witchdoctor?”

Alex Mucunguzi attended this meeting. He is the Village Health Team member in charge of overseeing the maintenance of the Nyakihanga shallow well. “We were all shocked, we thought our water was clean,” he says of the community’s initial reaction to the findings about their beloved water source, from which they pumped water daily. It certainly looked clean.

In March 2016, Water For People, together with Kamwenge District Local Government carried out a water quality survey on 321 water sources in the district. Nyakihanga shallow

well was one of 14 water sources found to have an unacceptably high concentration of bacteria, precisely 80%.

This survey was the first of a series of Water Safety Planning activities carried out under Water for People's 'Everyone Forever' program, which aims at having every household, every school and every clinic accessing safe water and appropriate hygiene and sanitation. Water safety is implemented through the rehabilitation and construction of water supply systems, to ensure a safe water chain right to the end point – the household.

When the users of the Nyakihanga shallow well were told that their clean-looking water contained unacceptably high levels of bacteria, they wondered, what is the next step? How do we stop drinking people's waste?

Firstly, Water For People encouraged the community to form a sanitation committee comprised of trusted local government leaders, water source caretakers and village health team members (VHT) like Alex Mucunguzi, who already have some sanitation knowledge.

According to Brenda Achiro-Muthemba, Senior Programmes Officer at Water for People Uganda, "Sanitation committees are one of our best practices, and they help us build capacity of local government as well as bring people from different sectors together."

Before the Water Safety Planning approach, Alex would occasionally go to the well and check its cleanliness. If the water had become dirty, he would inform the community and have the well cleaned, but nothing was put in place to prevent the water from becoming contaminated again.

When Water For People introduced their Water Safety Planning approach however, Alex's role expanded. Now he had to oversee the creation of a fence to keep animals from entering the water source and the digging of a channel to divert dirty water away. Bylaws were also put in place to prevent children below 10 years old from coming to fetch from the well, as they tended to openly defecate in the water.

These preventive measures have reduced the



*Above: Channel diverting away dirty water, now used for nearby farming*

instances of water contamination and the proof is in the statistics. According to water quality testing carried out in July 2016, just three months after the first survey was carried out, Nyakihanga shallow well was found to contain 0% bacteria in its water, down from 80%.

Alex is very happy about these results and people's changed behavior. "Now people have the right attitude towards the well."

These days, whenever people drink a glass of water from the Nyakihanga shallow well, they know that the water is as clean as it looks.