

One man uses his hat, and the other his pen, to make sure their village has clean water.



Above: Caretaker Leo Katimbiko, 2nd from left and LC1 chairman Moses Kwesiga, 3rd from left.

If it were at any other landmark in the village of Iryangabi 3, Western Uganda, Leo Katimbiko and Moses Kwesiga might not be standing next to each other. As they peer down into the village spring, Leo removes his hat that has been shielding him from the afternoon sun, and Moses fiddles with a ballpoint pen between his fingers. These items are indicators of their work.

Leo Katimbiko is the caretaker of the water spring in Iryangabi 3, and Moses Kwesiga is the Local Council 1 chairman (LC1)

of the same village.

Together, these two men collaborate, communicate and brainstorm to protect their village's water source from contamination. Their working relationship took off when they joined the same sanitation committee, which was formed as a first step towards Water For People achieving their goal of safe drinking water in Kamwenge district.

Under their 'Everyone Forever' impact model, Water For People 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 re-construction of water supply systems such as Iryangabi 3 water spring, to ensure a safe water chain right to the end point – the household. The communities do all these by themselves.

When Water For People together with Kamwenge District Local Government carried out a survey of water quality at the beginning of the program, Iryangabi 3 water spring was found to be contaminated with 50% bacteria, which was an unacceptable level even for a rural supply, as per government standards.

On how the community reacted when they were informed about their contaminated water, Leo says, “We were scared!” Thankfully, they were also sensitized on how to get their clean water back, starting with changing the way they behave at the water source.

And so every week under the unforgiving sun, Leo puts on his protective hat, grabs a walking stick for balance and walks down to the bottom of a very steep hill, to inspect the water spring.

“I inspect the area around the spring to make sure no one has allowed their children to play there as they usually practice open defecation, nor allowed their cows to graze there.”

If he notices any of this behavior, he has to report it. This is where LC1 chairman Moses and his pen get involved.

According to Loretta Nakayima, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer at Water For People-Uganda, “One of our best practices as an organization is working through a respected local government leader, whose performance in Water Safety Planning is in turn monitored by other leaders such as the sub-county chiefs and health assistants.”



Above: Grass blocking footpath above spring, surrounded by fence

Once Moses gets the report from Leo, Moses has to enforce the recently enacted bylaws which were put in place under Water For People’s Water Safety Planning approach, and according to him, no one has an excuse.

“When we found that our water had 50% E.coli, we were all sensitized about what causes this and what behaviors to change. We were also taught how to care for the water source and work on it.”

Indeed, every two months, Moses takes a day off, rounds up a large group of community volunteers and together they go down to the water source to assist Leo in general maintenance of the spring, such as digging around it and creating channels that divert dirty water away. They also water the grass they planted above the spring, which blocks the manmade footpath previously there.

It is no wonder that evaluation tests carried out by Water For People reveal that as of July 2016, the bacteria level of Iryangabi 3 water spring stood at 0%.

Whether toiling under the sun in a hat, or using a pen to write down the names of those who do not want to play by the rules, Leo and Moses plan to continue their collaboration, to keep the village water source as clean as possible.