



BRINGING LASTING SAFE WATER
AND SANITATION SERVICES TO THE
ENTIRE POPULATION OF RULINDO

Lessons from the Rulindo Challenge Program



water for people
RWANDA



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INTRODUCTION

In 2010, a partnership between the district of Rulindo, Rwanda's Ministry of Infrastructure (MININFRA), the Water and Sanitation Corporation (WASAC Ltd.), and Water For People launched the Rulindo Challenge Program – an ambitious plan to bring full water and sanitation coverage to Rulindo. At that point, less than one-third of the district population had access to clean water.

The inception of the Rulindo Challenge Program marked the beginning of a new journey and a new philosophy: The Everyone Forever. Thanks to the model, Rulindo District has reached full water infrastructure coverage and demonstrates a journey of deep transformation that concludes with access to water, improved sanitation, better health and more opportunities for its population.

This document outlines some of the lessons learnt throughout the implementation of the Program in the journey to bring lasting water and sanitation services to the district's population.

EVERYONE • FOREVER

The Everyone Forever model was born out of the Rulindo Challenge Program and has since been replicated and scaled to Water For People's nine country programs across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This sustainable approach ensures that reliable and lasting water and sanitation services are brought to every family, school, and health clinic in the districts where we work. We partner with local governments, businesses, and individuals to build capacity of the communities, we provide tools, and all technical and financial support needed to bring clean water and sanitation systems to the communities, schools and health care facilities. Most importantly, we ensure that partners have the resources and knowledge they need to maintain water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services for current and generations to come. We do not leave a district until we are confident that water systems and sanitation facilities can be sustained for generations. We call this impact model Everyone Forever, which has been domesticated and replicated by the Government of Rwanda under the name of "District Wide Approach".

METHODOLOGY

Over the past nine years, the Rulindo Challenge Program has brought safe water and sanitation services to thousands of individuals, families, schools, and clinics across the district – something which had been seen as a mere dream for years. This is the first time in Rwanda that a rural district has achieved this level of water service: bringing water to every single village, community, healthcare facility and school. The Government of Rwanda has set 2024 as the year when everyone of its citizens will be able to access safe water near or within their homes. The Rulindo Challenge Program is a living proof that this is possible.

This document is not a recollection of what the situation was before the Rulindo Challenge Program and how the Program improved water and sanitation services in the district. Rather, it documents the lessons learnt from the program and best practices which may inspire other WASH actors in their efforts to bring safe water and sanitation services to communities across the country and around the world.

To come up with the lessons, we reviewed existing documentation on the Rulindo Challenge Program and what it took to bring it to success. We also interviewed current and former partners in the Program, including former and current government leaders, WASH actors, healthcare providers, communities, and Water For People staff who have worked and continue to work on the Program and the sustainability of its achievements. This allowed us to capture key lessons that could be drawn out of the Rulindo Challenge Program, which we summarize in this document.

LESSONS LEARNT

Each single step made throughout the implementation of the Rulindo Challenge Program was unique and generated a pool of knowledge. Below are some lessons we have learnt throughout the implementation of the Rulindo Challenge Program.

A GOOD PLAN IS CRUCIAL



Before the Rulindo Challenge Program was devised, the District had been implementing randomized water and sanitation interventions in some sectors and villages. Such projects, often at a small scale and serving a limited number of communities, would mostly be hard to monitor and maintain over the long run; and mostly ended up non-functional over a few years. The Rulindo Challenge Program was different. The Rulindo Challenge Program is a result of an extensive and detailed planning exercise

undertaken by all partners for a long period of time with the aim of bringing water services to all the district population and ensuring that the service is sustainable. The planning phase took three years before actual activities started on ground and involved extensive consultations of all stakeholders, discussions, resources mobilization, and community engagement.

When the Rulindo Challenge Program was conceived, the District lacked a clear and strong

plan to bring water and sanitation services to all its population. So, it relied on random and scattered interventions with no prospect in sight to bring water to all its population.

For the Rulindo Challenge Program to take off, the Program held intensive planning sessions with the district partners to plot how the entire population could be reached and what it would take to reach the target. The extensive planning exercise was critical in mobilizing partners and



It was three years before we got started because we needed design studies of the water systems for the entire districts to guide the implementation. The pump stations in these communities are far bigger than anything you would imagine. They require giant pumps and enormous electricity is required to power these pumps. We had to collaborate with the Government of Rwanda to supply electricity to all pumping stations.



EUGENE DUSINGIZUMUREMYI,
Program Manager, Water For People in Rwanda



When you have got a very specific objective and a good plan to achieve it, nothing can stop you from achieving it. Proper planning [...] allowed us to bring the Rulindo Challenge Program to a very successful completion."



GISELE UMUHUMUZA
Deputy Chief Executive Officer, WASAC Ltd

galvanizing their support for the Program.

The planning exercise considered all factors, including social, financial, environmental, and topographic, to ensure that every aspect, challenge, and any possible solutions, is well thought of before the actual work begun. The planning was essential in understanding the quantity of water needed to serve the entire district population, what it would take to bring the water to communities and families, existing water sources, and the role and responsibilities of the various people involved and communities. It also allowed for better understanding and setting reasonable timelines.

Apart from planning for the water and sanitation facilities, the District also had to plan and review existing settlement plans to ensure that water is brought to areas earmarked as residential and that its population moves out of high-risk areas to live in areas that were identified as safe and served with water and other basic facilities. In the early days of the Program, planning for settlements was not considered as a key factor; however, as the implementation got rolled out, it turned out that serving scattered villages was impossible. So, partners went back to the drawing table and devised plans to ensure that residents move into planned settlements. The District drew an extensive settlements plan and put in place measures for its full implementation, which ensured that water can be brought easily to communities.

BUILD PARTNERSHIPS FOR KNOWLEDGE SHARING, RESOURCES MOBILIZATION AND COST-SHARING

Building partnerships for a project of high magnitude such as the Rulindo Challenge Program is important in ensuring availability of human and financial resources and facilitating the sharing of knowledge and experiences.

In the beginning, the plan to bring water to all the district population looked very ambitious—the District alone lacked enough resources to implement the program. Building stronger and sustainable partnerships was important to have all necessary resources to implement it. It required proper planning, documentation and information sharing mechanisms within the network as well as transparent operations. The implementation of the Rulindo Challenge Program ensured that all these boxes are ticked in the right time so that partners remain informed of what is happening, have updated information about activities, results, challenges and solutions; know what is expected from them and undertake constant reviews and monitoring together. Active engagement of all stakeholders and partners in the Program – from government agencies, local institutions, donors, and local communities – and their

involvement at every stage in the Program was essential in mobilizing the necessary human and financial resources for the implementation of the Program.

Every quarter, partners met to discuss the progress of activities and take strategic measures to further advance the implementation. This form of collaboration did more than strengthen the existing relations between partners; it also ensured that all partners continuously contribute to the program, understand the progress and what is needed to complete it. In addition, the Program established formal structures, such as the District WASH Board, to serve as discussion forums, bringing together all actors involved in the Program, from the national to the village level.

This form of multi-stakeholder engagement and partnership enabled an environment where all stakeholders were actively involved in the planning, implementation and monitoring processes, contributed both human and financial resources, shared their skills and experiences, and worked together to put in place sustainability measures.



The mobilization of financial and technical resources can only happen when partners understand exactly your plans and objectives. That is why you need to be open and transparent to them."

GISELE UMUHUMUZA
Deputy Chief Executive
Officer, WASAC Ltd



FOCUS ON SERVICE & SUSTAINABILITY



An infrastructure is just an infrastructure; it will be just a pipe; but it is until you have water running through it that it creates a service and that service will only have a meaning when what you have people who understand why they need that service, value it and know what they need to do to sustain it."



GISELE UMUHUMUZA

Deputy Chief Executive Officer, WASAC Ltd



The Rulindo Challenge Program aimed to provide sustainable water and sanitation services for all. Instead of focusing on building infrastructures and facilities only, partners heavily invested in the sustainability of services to ensure that service can last even when the program is complete.

Prior to the Rulindo Challenge, the District had been struggling to keep the water service. It turned out that ensuring the sustainability of randomized water supply project was very difficult and most of them



would be dead and non-functional a few years after their inauguration, according to the Rulindo District Vice Mayor for Economic Development, Prosper Mulindwa. When pipes or water taps were broken, they remained unrepaired for years, rendering them useless. Day after day, and years after years, more pipes and taps became broken and went unrepaired until entire systems became inoperable. The Rulindo Challenge Program devised a new model and approach to WASH, taking into consideration all aspects of sustainability, including planning for future



repairs and maintenance costs in the district budget.

To that end, the Program put in place local structures to monitor and ensure continued service. The District WASH Board, Water Users Committees and the District WASH office are some of the structures and people working across villages to ensure that the District can provide safe water to its people for years.

MININFRA also made efforts to ensure proper water resources management, water safety plans were put in place and the WASH monitoring information system

(MIS) was developed for continuous monitoring and is being rolled out across the country.

Working with the local authority and partners, the Program developed a sustainable checklist and the full-life cycle investment plan to inform future interventions and maintenance/replacement needs. The Rulindo Challenge Program has also implemented several additional interventions to ensure the sustainability of the Program's achievements.

The District also collects loyalty fees (through the private service providers/private operators who collect water fees from users) and deposits them in a designated account to meet future demands in water and sanitation services, minor repairs, and maintenance. The private operators are also tasked, as part of their contract, with conducting regular minor repairs and maintenance on supply systems to ensure that the population is regularly served. In addition, communities have been empowered to take care of the water and sanitation facilities since they understand their importance within their lives.





REGULAR PROGRAM MONITORING IS CRITICAL

TRENDS IN WATER & SANITATION SERVICES IN RULINDO DISTRICT



Source: Water For People in Rwanda, monitoring data, March 2019



The Rulindo Challenge Program regularly conducts annual and joint monitoring of program activities to assess progress and set priorities for the subsequent year to ensure uninterrupted service.

From this data, it is evident that water service increased from 28.2% in 2012 to 81.8% in households in Rulindo, while in public institutions it increased to almost 98% from 33%. This is a huge growth in service, which was tracked through the annual monitoring work. It is this kind of data which has been constantly informing the decision-making process at every stage of the Program.

Using data from our monitoring activities, the Rulindo Challenge partners were able to make informed decisions related to the implementation of the Program or propose changes to further speed up the implementation. The data remains critical in understanding the level of access and use of water and sanitation services, challenges and threats, as well as a way to gather community opinions and perceptions on the Program. The monitoring exercise also generates data that helps partners to seek solutions to immediate or perceived threats to the Program's sustainability.



ENGAGE COMMUNITIES

Involving communities at every stage of any project is essential in galvanizing their support and active participation in its planning, implementation, and monitoring, as well as guaranteeing its sustainability. Planning for the Rulindo Challenge Program considered all layers of the community to ensure that their ideas, opinions, and experiences

are well taken into consideration and inform the final decisions. In addition, through continuous mobilization of communities, citizens were kept informed about the Program's activities and given an opportunity to contribute ideas and opinions in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of activities, laying a strong

foundation for the sustainability of the Program's achievements.

As a result, communities became active stakeholders in the implementation of the Rulindo Challenge Program – rather than beneficiaries of the Program. This ensured full support and total community support for the Rulindo Challenge activities.



"The people we are serving and ought to serve were part of our plans from the very beginning. At the end of the day they are the ends of the service we are seeking."

GISELE UMUHUMUZA

**Deputy Chief Executive
Officer, WASAC Ltd**



Because of the citizen engagement activities, residents donated their land for pipes to be laid out and infrastructures to be erected. They also contributed labor through digging trenches for water pipes mostly during Umuganda¹. In addition, the high rate of safe water use across the District may be rightly attributed to having informed, engaged, and active communities who rightly understand the importance of safe water in their lives and welfare.

Throughout the implementation of the program, Water For People and the district of Rulindo instituted community feedback

collection mechanisms. These feedback mechanisms informed the continued review of the Program and implementation model and were critical in the adjustments the Program made during the execution of works.

The Program established community-level structures and forums, including the Water Users Committee (WUCs), and Community Health Clubs (CHCs) in all 494 villages across the District. These structures help disseminate information within communities and encourage discussions among community members on their roles and responsibilities, use of safe water, sustaining WASH

facilities as well as proper hygiene and sanitation practices. They were also forums that enabled a direct, two-way communication between communities and their leaders on issues related to access and use of safe water, hygiene and sanitation services.

The Program instituted a feedback platform, accessible by phone, to ensure that communities and leaders could continue to monitor water and sanitation service even after the completion of the Rulindo Challenge Program. The platform, hosted by the District, is an important tool in ensuring sustainable services to communities.

¹Umuganda is a monthly community work which is organized every last Saturday of the month in Rwanda. However, communities can also organize some special sessions of Umuganda to implement urgent activities of public interest. We have seen these special sessions during the implementation of the Rulindo Challenge Program, where communities would gather to contribute in digging pipe trenches or laying pipes to support the entire program



We have established community-based committees to monitor the sustainability of water infrastructures and services and ensure that families play their role in ensuring continued services. These include water users' committees, community health clubs and the District WASH Board. All these structures are essential in ensuring that water and sanitation services continue uninterrupted for generations. Apart from working to ensure sustainable services, these committees are critical channels to collect community feedback on the services"

PROSPER MULINDWA

Vice Mayor for
Economic Development,
Rulindo District





CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This document has captured some of the lessons we have learnt from the Rulindo Challenge Program. We have learnt that proper planning, seeking partnerships with all stakeholders, focusing on services and sustainability (as opposed to building facilities only), regular monitoring, and community engagement are all essential components of any WASH project. The combination of these factors ensures the sustainability of water systems and sanitation facilities and guarantees continued service to communities. Key document reviews and interviews with people with direct knowledge of the Program revealed that the Rulindo Challenge Program generated a huge pool of knowledge, critical to ensuring

that people can have lasting water and sanitation services for generations. These lessons can serve other actors as they seek to bring lasting solutions to the world's water and sanitation crisis. These lessons are replicable to almost all water and sanitation programs, anywhere in the world. It is imperative that Water For People continues to document all lessons and best practices from all its interventions so that it could continue to influence the sector and avail its valuable knowledge to other actors.

Water For People is a learning organization, which always seeks to capitalize on the experiences, skills, knowledge and savoir-faire of its employees and partners, adapt it, scale it

up and replicate it across its areas of interventions so that it can serve the population in the target districts. Through the Rulindo Challenge Program, we further recognized that learning is a process and that is why throughout our work in the District, we ensured that we draw lessons from our everyday interventions, works and interactions with communities and partners.

It is important that efforts continue to be made to further understand how the replicability of the Everyone Forever model is influencing a shift in policies and approaches used by organizations, institutions and individuals involved in the WASH sector, both in Rwanda and elsewhere.



It's been a long, hard journey. We've learned a lot together. The people who lived in Rulindo have been very helpful in this process. We learned what worked, what didn't work. We learned where we succeeded and where we failed."



**ELEANOR
ALLEN**

**Chief Executive Officer,
Water For People**



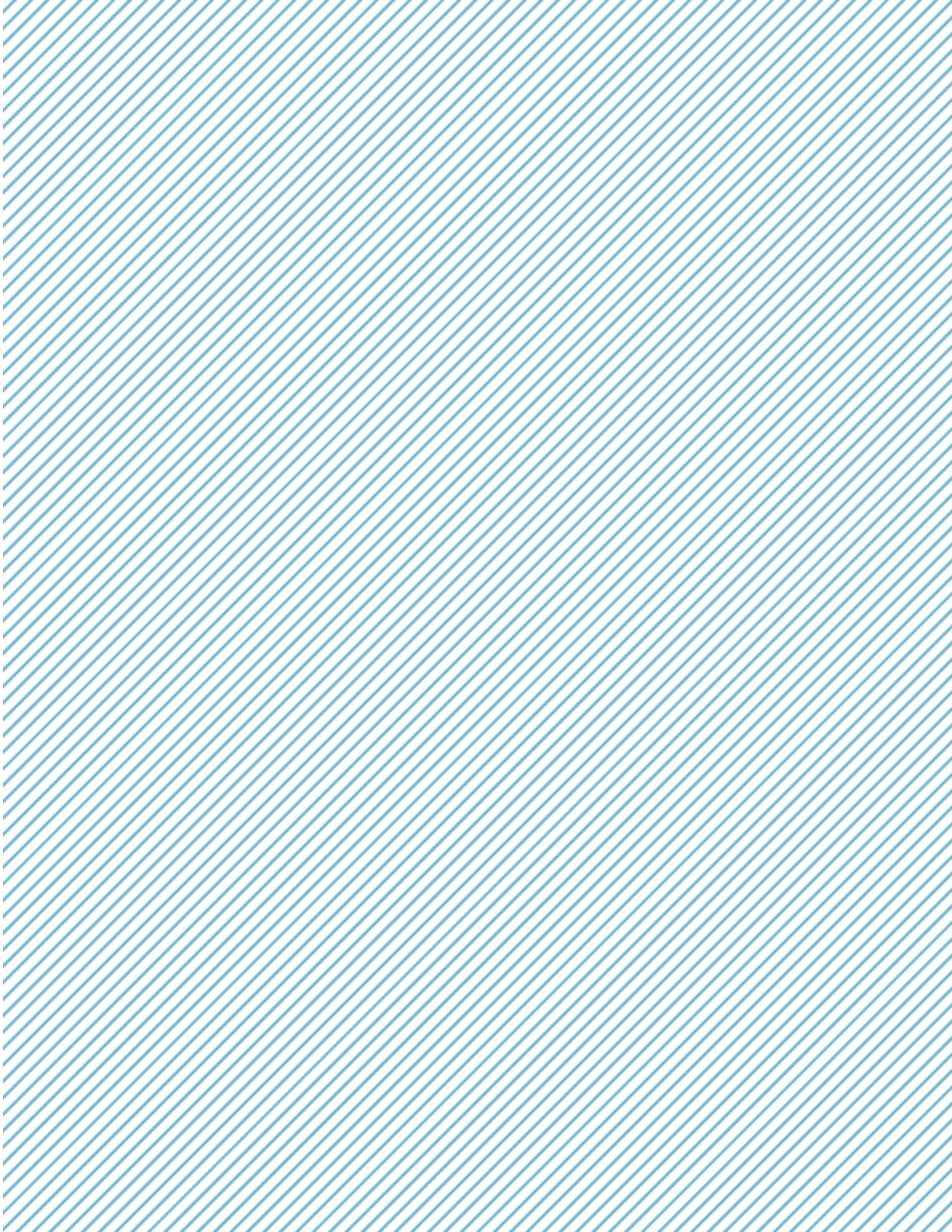
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