

Geita, Tanzania:

## Access to Water in Healthcare facilities Yields Massive Dividend in Geita



Geita region sits just a stone's throw from Lake Victoria, is the world's second largest freshwater body. However, our baseline study revealed that there is limited access to water in healthcare facilities in Geita and Nyang'whale districts. As a result, the respective healthcare facilities rely on seasonal boreholes, unprotected wells and dams as their main sources of water. The challenge does not end there as it also obliges women in the area to spend half of their day fetching water, walking a long distance, even if they are pregnant. This is particularly worse for the pregnant women who are compelled to take with them a bucket of water to the maternity wards as a pre-condition during child delivery. Inaccessibility of water also means that hygiene as well as infection prevention and control (IPC) practices at the healthcare facilities are extremely difficult to maintain. Worse still, lack of water in toilets in the healthcare facilities also remain widespread in the area, this needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency to help control communicable diseases.



For over four years (2015-2019), we've implemented the Tanzania 'Canada-Africa Initiative to Address Maternal, Newborn and Child Mortality (CAIA-MNCM)' project in Geita and Nyang'whale districts, where in addition to the construction of infrastructure for WASH in healthcare facilities (HCFs), we've also fostered initiatives focusing on generating change through engaging the government towards prioritisation of WASH in HCFs during councils planning and budgeting process.

- We believe that accessibility of clean and safe water within HCFs plays a critical role in protecting health workers and new mothers and newborn babies against life-threatening infections in healthcare settings during pregnancy and childbirth. The feat would ultimately contribute to gender inclusiveness. (WaterAid).

A-38-year, Everlyne Okello, is a labour ward nurse in charge at Kharumwa Health Centre, says that access to running water would go a long way in enhancing health care services provision with dignity. "Before the intervention of WaterAid, as a nurse, the first thing that used to occupy my mind, was where I could fetch water and the patients came second. We used to walk long distances to collect water from seasonal wells." Everlyne recalls.

It was the worst moments no one either want to remember or forget the plight. She says that nurses were exhausted as they used to endure long walks in search of water, leading to poor health services delivery to patients against health protocols.

"As I was going to collect water, I often got wet. Imagine walking a long distance carrying a bucket of water on your head all the way to the ward. This makes you lose a lot of energy even before starting serving the patients" she explains.

Owing to lack of water, at some point, Everlyne started thinking of quitting her carrier altogether against her dreams. "When I was a little girl my dream has always been to become a nurse. I promised my parents that I would be a nurse because I was an outgoing person who enjoyed working with and helping others" Everlyne narrates.

She added: "I had a deep conviction that I could make a difference in each patient's life that I encounter, it might be as small as just talking to a patient to get their mind off pre-surgery. Indeed, after hardwork and dedication in my studies, I realized my lifetime dream. However, the poor working condition at Kharumwa HC without water, was so difficult".

Everlyne underlines that: "As a caregiver I enjoy doing my work now, I've enough time to serve the patients with dignity. Kharumwa HC is clean, there is a place to wash my hands with running water! I can now adhere to the patient care protocol in serving sick people."

She is grateful indeed with the WASH investment in Kharumwa HC because it has brought about a revolution to the service providers and service users.

"We the service providers of Kharumwa HC, are really happy but in other facilities around us, the situation is extremely wanting. When we pay a visit to nearby health facilities as part of our supervisory role, we encounter unpleasant situation, and we feel very sorry to our colleagues for the hardships they are going through" Everlyne said.



Richard Raphael/WaterAid

- **Half of health care facilities in the world's 47 least developed countries lack basic water services (WHO\_UNICEF, 2020). These findings are confirmed by the studies that show substantial water deficiencies in healthcare facilities in Tanzania (NIMR, 2016) (WaterAid, 2020).**



● **Good hygiene is crucial for preventing and controlling the spread of infectious diseases, and to curb the rising risk of antimicrobial resistance - it must be an investment priority for government, donors, and private sector. (WaterAid)**

Richard Raphael/WaterAid

Joseph Siame, 34, a clinical officer at Busolwa Dispensary is owing to the situation that most of time when a pregnant woman goes to deliver at the facility, they had no choice but to request a relative to go fetch water for the baby delivery.

“Also, after baby deliveries, there was no handwashing facility present so we could not wash our hands properly. Sometimes we used to request the clients to hold the utensil with water and pour it to wash our hands, mind you, this is the same water that was brought by the clients.” he said.

In one of the scenarios, Joseph recalls, a woman who went to deliver at Busolwa dispensary, whose relative went to fetch water to clean the area where baby delivery took place, but she didn't get water at that time, so they had to leave with dirty clothes back home. At home, they did not clean those dirty clothes properly, and used the same clothes to cover a newborn, of which the baby ended up with sepsis.

“Let me tell you that things have completely changed after improving the supply of water here in Busolwa. When I leave home before I enter the HCF I wash my hands with clean water and soap because, water is always available.” Pointed out Joseph.

Joseph argues that with reliable water supply, they can keep the environment clean and improve public health to allow the population to engage in their economic activities instead of visiting the hospital regularly seeking medical attention.

He is grateful with WASH investment, pleading with the government and development partners to replicate the WASH infrastructures in all healthcare facilities across the country.

"I would like the whole world to know that our facility is now in good condition because of the water infrastructure. We invite everyone to learn here about the quality of our facility. But even for us, the water availability now keeps us safe because we are immune to diseases and even protect the community. It is our pleasure to provide services to the community. Imagine a situation where the service provider is sick due to lack of water, who will serve the patients?"  
Nyaganga Samwel, 39, a midwife nurse at Nyamalimbe Dispensary.



Good hygiene saves lives. It is one of the most cost-effective ways for health workers and their patients to protect against deadly diseases. It is fundamental for public health, quality healthcare and its hygiene that can protect us all from future health crises. Without good hygiene, healthcare is in danger. Investment in hygiene must be given a priority in healthcare from now on. (WaterAid)

**For more information**, Karibu sana to our head office, which is based in Dar es Salaam. You can find us at: 1469 Rufiji Street, Msasani Peninsula, PO Box 33759, Dar es Salaam.

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