



## ‘It’s no one’s responsibility but ours’: the community at Katungulu takes over the water network built by SWIFT

### What has changed?

Katungulu is a rural village in South Kivu, in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In the past, residents had to make a two-hour round trip to a contaminated river to collect water. Defecation took place mostly in the bush; the few latrines were dirty and poorly maintained; rubbish was left to rot around the village; and hand-washing with soap or ash wasn’t practised. Diarrhoea, malaria and water-borne diseases were rife, with children suffering in particular.

‘The water situation was having a very negative impact on the community,’ remembers Katungulu resident Juma Idi.

Now, however, as a result of work done through the SWIFT programme, the community in Katungulu has access to clean, safe water from taps in the heart of the village. Many families have constructed latrines with ‘tippy-taps’ where they can wash their hands, and pits where they can dispose of their rubbish. Hygiene behaviour has improved dramatically.

### How has the change been achieved?

The Healthy Villages and Schools (Villages et Écoles Assainis) approach is a step-by-step process of village mobilisation that is supported by DRC’s Ministry of Public Health and UNICEF. Under the SWIFT programme, Tearfund is working with the residents of Katungulu to

implement the approach.

Tearfund has constructed a new gravity-fed water system at nearby Lusenda, from which water is piped to a number of villages, including Katungulu. Tearfund has also helped the community elect a management committee to oversee the process of working towards ‘healthy village’ status, and a water sub-committee which collects fees from each household to pay for maintenance and repairs to the system.

A number of ‘community motivators’ have been trained and now visit each household to check that good hygiene behaviour is being practised, including keeping latrines clean and installing ‘tippy-taps’ to encourage hand-washing. Tearfund has also trained two men chosen by the community – Juma Idi and Ngumoya Bya’eta - to be plumbers.

‘We learned a lot about water, tap stands, construction and how to connect pipes,’ says Ngumoya Bya’eta. ‘We also learned about the different tools and construction materials. We learned what they are called and what they are for, and we learned how to fix the water system.’

Juma and Ngumoya are now paid by the management committee - using the fees collected from users by the water sub-committee - to maintain and repair the village’s water system and ensure that it functions effectively.

### Why does it matter?

The Katungulu community reports a sharp drop in the incidence of sickness in the village since it received access to clean, safe water and the 'healthy village' process began; water-borne diseases and diarrhoea in particular have decreased, residents say.

In addition to the many health benefits, the women of the village have more time to spend in their fields or looking after their families now they no longer have to make the long journey to the river or take their children to the clinic, and domestic arguments related to water have stopped.

The training provided by Tearfund has also enhanced the employment options of some villagers, including the new plumbers. 'In the future we hope to use these skills we have learned to help us with our livelihoods,' says Juma.



The gravity-fed water system at Lusenda

### What are the challenges?

Among the challenges facing the village in maintaining the changes that have been implemented is to deal with the fires that can damage the new infrastructure. A neighbouring pastoralist community traditionally burns land in the dry season to prepare it for grazing by its cows, and one of Katungulu's water pipes has already been damaged by a bush fire, cutting off the connection.

The management committee is also concerned that farmers may damage pipes accidentally through their work, or that damage may be done deliberately; about some residents refusing to pay for their water; and about the need to update the system's infrastructure. 'The pipes will eventually get old and will need replacing,' says Ngumoya.

### How will the challenges be met and what makes this change sustainable?

The management committee has been working both with the village itself and the neighbouring pastoralist community to raise awareness of the potential impact

of fires. The neighbouring community was invited to the ceremony at which Tearfund handed over the new water system to the village, and now members take advantage of it when they come down from the hills.

'Working with them has been important, because they are the ones who tend to light fires and they're also benefitting from the new water system,' says village chief Kasindi Anzuruni.

### ***"If you come a year from now, you will see a sustainable system"***

Kasindi says the committee has also been working with local farmers, showing them where the pipelines are in the fields, and warning them that if they damage the new system, they will be responsible for paying for repairs. Meanwhile, the two plumbers plan to monitor the pipes carefully during the rainy season for any signs of landslides or erosion.

Anyone damaging the system deliberately will be brought to face local justice, Kasindi says, while general repairs to the infrastructure will be paid for with the money collected from water users. Each household pays 500 Congolese Francs a month (£0.37) for water, except vulnerable people such as the elderly, widows and the mentally ill, who are identified by the community and the management committee. Anyone who refuses to pay will be prevented from collecting water and dealt with by the village chief.



Makyambi Angya collecting water

'Any problems that happen with the water system now are our responsibility and not Tearfund's,' says Kasindi. 'It's no one's responsibility but ours.'

Juma is similarly determined. 'If you come a year from now you will see a sustainable system,' he says. 'All the water tap stands will be working, and people will still be benefiting from this water system.'

Stories and photos collected by Jane Beesley, freelance humanitarian communications specialist, and edited by Emma Feeny (Oxfam).

**The SWIFT Consortium works to provide access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene to people in Kenya and DRC, and builds capacity to ensure services are sustainable. It is funded with UK aid from the British people.**

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