



Mbilizi Malelani, Falia Angelani, Tengeneza Wabikwa, Dodie Furaha, Neema Nakitongo and Amina Tamasha, Katungulu, South Kivu

DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC
OF CONGO

S.KIVU

SOUTH KIVU

‘Now you can wash whenever you want!’: Katungulu’s women describe the changes SWIFT has supported in their village

What has changed?

Katungulu is a rural village in South Kivu, in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In the past, the women of the village had no alternative but to make a two-hour round-trip to a river to collect contaminated water. They would make the journey first thing in the morning, and again in the evening, tired after a day spent working in the fields.

The scarcity of water meant that villagers couldn’t wash themselves, their children or their clothes. ‘It was hard to keep everything clean, because we had so little water and it was too far to go and collect more if you ran out,’ remembers Mbilizi Malelani, 38. ‘I have seven children, so I never had enough water.’

The issue was also a source of conflict. ‘There used to be arguments in the household. Sometimes our husbands would want to wash, but there was no water and it was too far to go and collect some,’ says Neema Nakitongo, 50, who has nine children.

Defecation took place mostly in the bush surrounding the village; the few latrines were dirty and poorly maintained; food was left uncovered outside; 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.

Now, however, as a result of work done through the SWIFT programme, the community in Katungulu has access to clean, safe water in the heart of the village. ‘Now water is so close you can wash whenever you want!’ says mother-of-three Tengeneza Wabikwa, 27.

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 supporting 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 taps in Katungulu. Tearfund has also helped the community elect a ‘healthy village’ management committee, with a water sub-committee which collects fees from each household to pay for maintenance and repairs to the system.

The management committee is overseeing the process of working towards ‘healthy village’ status,

and Tearfund has trained a number of 'community motivators' in hygiene awareness. They now visit each household to check that good hygiene behaviour is being practised, including keeping latrines clean, installing 'tippy-taps' or other facilities to encourage hand-washing as people leave the toilet, and disposing of rubbish in designated pits.

Why does it matter?

Katungulu's women report a sharp drop in the incidence of sickness in the village since they received access to clean, safe water and the 'healthy village' process began.

'We have seen a big difference here,' says Neema. 'There are less water-borne diseases, and my family no longer gets diarrhoea like they used to. We can breathe better, because people have clean latrines and no longer throw faeces into the bush.' The fights over water with her husband have stopped, she adds, 'and our husbands are much cleaner!'

“We didn't have anyone to talk to about women's hygiene before”

Faila Angelani, 43, agrees. 'I have eight children and I was always taking them to the clinic because they had diarrhoea,' she says. 'Now I don't need to, because they are no longer getting diarrhoea like they did when we were getting water from the river. We all feel better now.'

She adds: 'And we are less tired, because now after we finish working in our fields, we don't have to spend another two hours collecting water from the river, and that makes us very happy.'



Faila Angelani, Katungulu

Faila says the women of Katungulu have also greatly appreciated learning about personal cleanliness. 'We didn't have anyone to talk to about women's hygiene before,' she says. 'We've heard about infections, what causes them, how to prevent them and that some can be cleared up with good hygiene.'

What are the challenges?

The challenge for Katungulu now is to maintain the changes that have been implemented in the village, and in particular the functioning of the new water system, which has made such a difference to the women's lives and which has been handed over to the community by Tearfund.

'We want to maintain this system,' says Tengeneza. 'We want it to carry on. We don't want to lose it now.'



Mbilizi Malelani, Faila Angelani, Tengeneza Wabikwa, Dodie Furaha (Tearfund community mobiliser), Neema Nakitongo and Amina Tamasha at the water point in Katungulu

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

The establishment of the water sub-committee and new payment system should ensure the long-term functioning of the water kiosk in the village. Each household pays 500 Congolese Francs a month (£0.37) for water, which can be used for repairs and maintenance, and Tearfund has trained six residents of the area served by the Lusenda water system as plumbers, for the management committee to employ when necessary.

'This is for sustainability,' says Tengeneza. 'If there are any problems, the money can be used to repair the system.'

Katungulu's community motivators are clearly focused on ensuring the changes in hygiene and sanitation behaviour are lasting, and the 'management committee has even joined forces with a neighbouring community, to share tools and discuss how to prevent damage to the water system.'

Tengeneza for one is keen to pass on what she has learned, to ensure the residents of Katungulu continue to reap the rewards of the 'healthy village' process in future.

'Now I want to train others, so they can benefit from this programme,' she says.

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.