



## ‘Now I can develop this business’: SWIFT’s work in the village of Lulinda helps support women’s livelihoods

### What has changed?

Lulinda is a rural village in South Kivu, in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In the past, the nearest water source was a river some distance away, to which the women of the village would make a two-hour round-trip first thing in the morning, and again in the afternoon.

‘I would have to leave home at 4 or 5 in the morning to fetch water to drink,’ says Ungwa Sangani 52, who lives with her three children, aged 18, 14 and 10. ‘I left so early so that I didn’t meet anyone else there. We thought that if there was no one there washing clothes, the water would be okay to drink, so that is why I went so early. But we had a serious problem with sicknesses like diarrhoea, typhoid, and fevers.’

Ungwa is a single parent who earns money from producing palm oil, but says she used to have little time for her business. ‘I would have to stop work early and leave my field to go and collect water, because it would take two hours to go to the river, collect water and take it home,’ she remembers.

The contaminated water Ungwa collected had to meet all her family’s needs in terms of drinking, cooking, washing, scrubbing plates and any other cleaning Ungwa could manage. But it often wasn’t enough. ‘Washing clothes was a problem,’ she says,

and ‘the children were often sick.’

Defecation in Lulinda took place mostly in the bush surrounding the village; 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 and other water-borne diseases were rife, with children suffering in particular.

Now, however, as a result of work done through the SWIFT programme, the community has access to clean, safe water 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 Assainies) 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 Lulinda 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 Lulinda. 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' to encourage hand-washing as people leave the toilet, and disposing of rubbish in designated pits.



Ungwa Sangani sorting palm nuts

### Why does it matter?

Ungwa says there has been a significant improvement in the health of her children since Lulinda received access to clean, safe water and the 'healthy village' process began. 'I've noticed that my children are less sick and we don't have to go to the clinic like we did before,' she says.

And the health benefits of the process have been felt across the community, she adds.

'The whole village is benefitting from the lower rate of sickness. You can see a difference in the cleanliness of the town and people's properties. Everyone is managing their waste, as they have rubbish pits. Every family has a latrine, and everyone now washes their hands with soap or ash.'

### ***"I can spend more time in my field and I have more time to make palm oil to sell"***

Having clean, safe water close at hand has changed Ungwa's life in other important ways too.

'Now I don't have to get up so early in the morning, I can spend more time in my field and I have more time to make palm oil to sell,' she explains. 'I can now develop this business, because I have the time to go to the market in Uvira.'

As a result, Ungwa is now able to buy more food for her family to eat, as well as some new clothes for

herself and her children. She even manages to get some much-needed rest. 'Now I have more time to relax and think,' she says. 'And the water point is close, so I can even send the children by themselves to collect water.'

### What are the challenges?

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

To keep their 'healthy village' status and maintain the health benefits the community has already seen, residents must also continue to practise improved hygiene and sanitation behaviours, including using latrines, hand-washing with soap or ash, and disposing of rubbish safely.

### 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 sustainability of the tap stands in the village. Each household now pays 500 Congolese Francs a month (£0.37) for water, and this can be used by the committee to pay for any repairs and maintenance work required.



Ungwa Sangani's home in Lulinda

Lulinda's community motivators are working hard to reinforce the positive health impacts of improved sanitation and hygiene behavior that are already being felt, and the 'healthy village' management committee, whose members are drawn from across the community, is focused on ensuring long-term change.

Ungwa herself is delighted with the improvements Tearfund has supported Lulinda to make. 'I never imagined a project like this would come to this community,' 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.**

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