

# THOSE WHO SELL WATER ARE ABLE TO GENERATE EXTRA INCOME

## Lots of water, but just a few drops to drink

By Prisca Balke

**U**ntil five years ago, Deborah Kanyogooga, a resident of Kalangala town council would buy water got from a well, far away. She had to wait, sometimes for many hours as the man who used to collect water for most of the people in the neighbourhood served all his clients on a first come first serve basis.

Despite her willingness to pay the sh500 for a twenty-litre jerry can, she, on many occasions went without water in her household.

"Sometimes there would be no one to collect the water from the well and it is too far," narrates Kanyogooga.

In addition to the long hard hassle, the water was not safe as it wasn't treated, leaving her and her family members with waterborne diseases such as bilharzia, dysentery and Typhoid fever among others.

Kanyogooga and her household are, but a mere fraction of the thousands of the Kalangala district residents who were hit by this sad reality.

It is upon this backdrop that the government of Uganda commissioned Kalangala Infrastructural services in a public private partnership to address among other issues, the safe water crisis that had perturbed the island for years on end.

"Our children used to miss going to school because of constant sickness," says Kanyogooga.

However, five years ago, with the introduction of safe piped water, Kanyogooga confesses that life is a lot easier.

"The water is there when you need it and it is safe," says Kanyogooga who got her own tap and meter two years ago. Prior to this, she used to buy a jerry can at Shs.200, which she says was a big difference from the five hundred shillings she used to pay in the past. Recently however, the price went to 300 shillings due to the treatment and maintenance costs.

### Costly venture

Engineer Aaron Kabirizi, the Director for Water Development at the Ministry of water and environment says that pumping and treating lake water to a level that is safe for domestic use is very expensive.

According to Kabirizi, there are two chemicals that are used. One is for clearing the water to make it colourless while the other, chlorine is for killing all the bacteria in the water.

Both these chemicals are imported and expensive," Kabirizi says.

Bruno Mugabe, an engineer with KIS explains that to make it safe for human consumption, lake water is given a five-step treatment process which includes addition of aluminium sulphate, sedimentation,

filtration, aeration and addition of chlorine which kills disease causing organisms.

"This kind of treatment makes the water safe for Human consumption," notes Mugabe.

Mugabe says that through their five water systems on Bugala island and the construction of public stand pipes that extend water pipelines closer to settlement areas, they are able to serve about 7,500 people in Kalangala Town Council, Murole, Kagulobe, Mulabana and Kasekulo.

"We provide about 1,200,000 Litres of water weekly according to the current demand, but we have capacity to produce much more than that," Mugabe says.

Each unit of water (1,000 litres) according to Mugabe is sold at sh3,025 less VAT and all water is distributed through a pipe network up to the end user where a water meter for purposes of measuring individual monthly consumption rate.

### Improved Lives

Mugabe reiterates that there is a tremendous reduction in water borne diseases due to improved sanitation

He notes that water services have also improved the social economic standards of people. Those who sell water are able to generate extra income.

These services however, only cover Bugala island which is the biggest island, leaving the other smaller islands to their own means as far as safe water is concerned.

Kabirizi explains that the major hindrance to rolling out this project is the financial implications.

He says that most islands don't have underground water sources thus leaving lake water purification as the only solution.

"You have to keep buying chemicals and also incur high costs of maintaining the purification plant. This is not the case with underground water which is purified by nature," says Kabirizi.

He however notes that government is trying to devise ways of making it cheap to operate and maintain such systems.

"Now that we have solar, we are looking at using it to pump lake water," says Kabirizi, "Solar is initially expensive but it gets cheaper in the long run."

According to Willy Lugolobi, the Kalangala district LCV chairman, Safe water coverage is at 65% on Bugala Island. The areas without



Scarcity of water leads to long queues



water on Bugala island include Kasamba, Buyiri, Lwabalega, Dajje Buswa and parts of Bujumba and a few parts of the town council. For these areas, Lugolobi says, they are proposing shallow wells to provide safe water.

For the other islands, Lugolobi says that safe water is currently pumped using solar, treated and stored in reservoir tanks. The treated water is then supplied to the end users through pipes.

In Mugabe's opinion, KIS is capable of supplying water to all the islands that constitute Kalangala district.

"Government can provide inputs such as pipes and accessories which can enable us to cover more Areas," says Mugabe.

Although some of the residents, according to Kanyogooga are not comfortable with the strong smell of chlorine in the water, she says that the water is safe and it has eased her life and that of her family.

"We use it for bathing straight from the tap and we have not got any problems with it," says Kanyogooga, "We only boil the one for drinking."

About the smell, she says, it only takes a matter of time for one to adjust to it.

While Bugala Island quenches its thirst for clean safe water, other islands still await a cost effective intervention.

In the interim, Kabirizi maintains that all districts in the country are availed with conditional grants to install water supply systems. Part of this money, he says has provided tentative solutions to the rest of Kalangala although a permanent solution to this crisis remains top on the ministry's agenda.

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