

Rift Valley Water and Sanitation Program Update

February 8, 2010

Good Day!

I'm John Boot and I've just completed a quick visit to Kenya to review the Rift Valley Water and Sanitation Program. The Summerland Rotary Club has been involved in this Program since 2002. As a former Summerland Rotarian (and now Niagara-on-the-lake Rotarian) I thought I'd provide members of Summerland RC and friends an update on the program's status.

This program was developed by the late John Mbugua to provide Rainwater Harvesting Tanks to the area in the Rift Valley of Kenya around the town of Nakuru. The program focused on the rural poor who were resettled in the area due to post-election violence in the 1990's and also those who lived on the margins of large agricultural estates. We specifically are focusing on difficult areas such as Kiambogo and Laikipia and where Rainwater Harvesting makes sense (basically adequate rainfall 30 or more inches per year and the lack of other sources of clean water).

The emphasis on Rainwater Harvesting (RWH) was due to the ground water containing high concentrations of naturally occurring fluoride caused a weakening of bones and bad teeth. This eliminated the option of drilling wells. The people, mostly women, were forced to walk long distances to contaminated streams and ponds for their daily water needs. The RWH tanks are constructed from cement, hold up to 10,000 liters and have a life span of 25 years. They collect and store the rainwater from the corrugated roofs of the recipient's home during the rainy season that is used during the dry season.



Figure 1: RWH Tank recently completed by program

The program was designed to be economically (from a donor perspective) and environmentally sustainable, set-up like a medium sized business using a systematic and well-documented approach. The program is managed in Kenya by experienced and dedicated Rotarians from the Rotary club of Nakuru acting very much like a board of directors. The program employs over 30 artisans who were trained to build quality cement RWH tanks. There are two "Facilitating Teams" working in the field who manage the construction of the tanks and are building an average of over 30 tanks per month. They provide training on irrigation techniques and health related workshops on hygiene, HIV/AIDS, etc. For each tank built the recipients are required to pay a small commitment fee; provide manual labour; have a functioning latrine; and plant 100 trees. Since many of the rural and remote communities are poor, the program also established a community based microfinance program that is overseen by the Facilitating Teams.

So where are we now?

Since 2002, Rotarians have funded the construction of 2,194 tanks in the Nakuru and Naivasha District. There are detailed records for each tank built, including photographs and GPS location. A Rotary Club in Holland has adopted this program as their international service commitment and provided funding for 541 of these tanks.

The program has evolved from a “Nakuru Program” into a “Rift Valley Program as it expands into southern and northern Kenya. In the south, 154 tanks were built in the Kajiado District working specifically with the Maasai communities. The Ryan’s Well Foundation provided the funding to build tanks in one of these communities. Funding support is also received from the United Nations Environment Program and from the Government of Canada through the Canadian Rotary Collaboration for International Development (CRCID). In Northern Kenya tanks were built at schools and orphanages in the Samburu region.

What will be happening in 2010?

There is one year left of funding in the Rotary 3H (Health, Hunger, Humanity) grant, which will allow the program to continue its support of the facilitating teams and, with some funding from Holland, build about 250 tanks by September 30th 2010.

CRCID approved the Program for approximately \$340,000 over the next 3 years but unfortunately CIDA is holding up funding to CRCID. This is very unfortunate and it may be time to voice our concerns for these delays (now over 9 months) to our local MP’s. It would be very disappointing that in the year Rotary has its annual International Convention in Canada, celebrating Canadian Rotary’s centennial, that CIDA decides it no longer will partner with Rotary. Especially considering that the Rotary system of delivering programs for the poorest of the poor has possibly the lowest overhead ratio of any international development program.

One of the interesting developments is the addition of new partners supporting the Program. Ryan’s Well Foundation has supported our work in Kajiado with grants totally about \$75,000. We’ve also received amazing support from Rotarians in Holland who have provided over \$200,000 in funding. In the last year we funded 2 RWH tanks for a demonstration farm to train the Maasai in sustainable farming and now Swiss Rotarians will be funding about 75 tanks in that region...using our Kajiado team and artisans to build the tanks. We’ve also funded 2 tanks for AGRI (www.agrikenya.com), an NGO that



Figure 2: RWH Tank being built in Oleopolis vilage (funded by Ryan’s Well)

develops vegetable farms near hospitals to provide fresh vegetables to AIDS patients (antiretroviral drugs don't work very well if the patients have a poor diet). As a result of this relationship we've established a relationship with a Canadian Business interested in funding water projects.

Around Nakuru we've been working now for over 8 years and about 10 of the communities (Rotary Community Corp or RCC's) have received their allotment of tanks. I met with the Water Committee at the Nakuru Rotary Club and decided that since our focus is to help the poorest of the poor we will phase out our financial support to these communities since hopefully they are now capable of better supporting themselves....however....we will still work with their microfinance teams. These programs have been very effective (over \$50,000 of the community's own funds in circulation) in helping support small enterprises and, hopefully, will now become the means for the RCC's to continue to improve their quality of life without donor support.

As some of you may recall we specifically directed CRCID funding (about \$10,000) to help the Maasai around Kajiado during the very severe drought last summer. Instead of using those funds for building tanks we felt they needed water now and trucked in water to fill the existing tanks. I confirmed this was done and it really helped the Maasai families with water until the rains came in December.

To show how Rotary works on the ground I'd like to describe my experience last year in Kiambogo.....

This area was very hard hit with due to post election violence in 2007. Through some strategic maneuvering by Michele Leroux, an amazing Canadian Rotary volunteer working at St.Mary's Hospital in Elementaita, I landed up representing Rotary International (unofficially) at the grand opening of the World Vision "Area Development Program" in Kiambogo. I landed up sitting between the local MP (up for corruption charges) and the Director for World Vision Kenya. I was in dusty clothes and arriving in a rundown taxi and they're in fancy suits arriving in new SUV's. After listening for hours to long speeches I finally made my way out. As I was leaving a local Chief came to me and asked what Rotary could do to help. He was frustrated with World Vision since they had been there over a year and they were still assessing the situation. I wasn't in a position to offer much but since we had worked closely with a neighbouring community I said maybe we could expand our area of work.

I came back to visit this year and was told World Vision still hadn't delivered any of the water. Meanwhile, our facilitating team organized the Kiambogo RCC and built 78 RWH tanks. This means 78 families now have water for the long term and we have system in place that will continue to deliver tanks and services. This happened without public announcements or "grand openings". Rotarians just did it ...quietly and effectively...just as we we've been doing for the last 8 years.

On the last day of my trip I had a meeting with Fabian Waldemeir and Matthius Fettback. They're from Faraja Trust and we had built two tanks at their training farm (check out www.faraja.net) in Kajjado. We've agreed to find ways to work together where their focus is on agricultural training and ours on Rainwater Harvesting. We hope to send people we serve to be trained by Faraja. We will also do the same with AGRI who do similar agricultural training in Nakuru and Eldoret.

In conclusion

This truly is an amazing program that is exceptionally effective in helping the poorest of the poor in a very difficult area of the world. It deserves continued support....**including support from CIDA**. We have a very dedicated team of voluntary Rotarians working throughout Kenya and we have a facilitating team that has dedicated their lives to helping the rural poor of the Rift Valley. Over the last 8 years we've optimized a systematic program that delivers what we said it would do. Let's not lose this system and have to start over again...the model works!

While it may not be perfect I also believe that one of the best ways to deliver effective development programs is to work through Rotary. The system of clubs in places like Kenya is well developed and the experienced Rotary business people and professionals understand what works and what doesn't. The Rotary ethic of "Service Above Self" guides and inspires these amazing volunteers.

For more information on this program please visit the following websites:

CRCID: <http://crcid.org/Rift.html>

Rotary club of Summerland: <http://www.clubrunner.ca/CPrg/home/storyitem.asp?cid=839&iid=94402>

Ryans Well Foundation: http://www.ryanswell.ca/projects/water_projects.asp?projectid=53