



Water+: Annual Innovation in Sanitation Award

World Toilet Day 2023

ISOKO Y'UBUZIMA

Although access to basic sanitation is somewhat high in Rwanda (62%), not all toilets are improved and many need upgrades. In Rwanda, the government (GoR) is focused on addressing sanitation challenges around use of unimproved toilets and the lack of handwashing facilities and behaviors (**Community-Based Environmental Promotion Program – CEBHPP**).

To address these challenges, the Isoko y'Ubuzima project implements a **market-based approach to sanitation (MBS)** to meet the GoR's sanitation goals to increase the purchase and sustained use of improved toilets and handwashing facilities. The MBS approach has three pillars: strong enabling environment, demand creation and activation, and strengthening supply of products and services. Key cross-cutting components are increasing access to finance and Gender, Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI). **The Water+ team is proud to award its Annual Innovation in Sanitation Award to Isoko Y'Ubuzima for all the hard work and success in supporting communities in Rwanda to increase access to upgraded and new toilets.**

Project Overview: Isoko y'Ubuzima

Dates: 2021-2026

Project areas:

Donors: USAID

Budget: \$21 million

Consortium partners: Water for People (prime); CARE, IRC WASH, Vitens Evides International, and African Evangelist Enterprise

Objectives: Strengthen WASH governance, improve drinking water services, and increase demand and use of sanitation and hygiene services and products

Interview

This year, the Water+ team interviewed two staff from Isoko y'Ubuzima **Marie Nicaise Ugabinema** (Project Manager – far left in picture below) and **Liliane Uwineza** (Social Behavior Change Technical Advisor – middle in picture below). **Nicaise** has over 17 years of experience in the WASH, maternal child health, and nutrition sectors. **Liliane** is an expert in international development and environmental health sciences with more than 11 years of experience in WASH. Marie Nicaise and Liliane are supported by **Judith Mukeshimana** (far right in picture below) who leads Isoko y'Ubuzima's cross-cutting Gender, Equity and Social Inclusion component.



Isoko y'Ubuzima Team

Q: What are Rwanda's challenges in meeting SDG6 sanitation targets in rural areas?

In Rwanda, 72% of people have access to improved sanitation – with disparities between rural and urban areas (69% vs 88%). However, access to basic sanitation services, which means improved toilets that are not shared with other households, is only at 62%. We can see that **Rwanda is still lagging in achieving SDG 6 objectives**.

We attribute this to many reasons. COVID-19 required diverting attention and resources from planned sanitation campaigns and community mobilization efforts. Economic recession heightened poverty, particularly in rural areas, where **sanitation is not always prioritized due to competing needs**. Furthermore, existing toilets are not always resilient to climate change. Many toilets are **not built with durable materials and appropriate techniques**, so they are easily destroyed during heavy rainfalls. Although behavior change strategies promote knowledge and raising awareness, **sustainable behavior change is still limited**. On top of that, sanitation products are not always available, especially in rural areas. Households willing to improve their toilets are often faced with the **lack of needed products and the technical capacity** to build strong toilets.

Q: How are you and the team tackling these challenges?

We started with getting a **clear understanding of key challenges through a gender analysis and formative and market research**. That was core to our programming and allowed us to develop an informed strategy with a strong foundation for what to do. We opted for a market-based sanitation (MBS) strategy, which allows us to engage and support different actors to own and take up their roles to increase sustainable access to sanitation. We also leverage existing CARE models like VSLAs to address finance challenges and serve as entry points for community mobilization to introduce healthy sanitation behaviors.

To complement Social Behavior Change (SBC) activities, our strategy includes the following components:



Supply of sanitation products and services: We collaborate with representatives of hygiene and sanitation products manufacturers at national level to ensure products are available at the district level. We work through **District Sanitation Centers (DSCs)**, whose goal is to display and sell sanitation products and train sanitation entrepreneurs. To improve the reach of DSCs, the project created **Community Showrooms (CSs)**, which help bring trainings, products, and services closer to households, and work with a network of trained **sales agents** and **hygiene focal points (HFPs)** that help market and sell products.



Climate change: We engage sanitation engineers to **adapt existing technologies** in districts facing soil challenges to prevent toilet damage during the rainy season. Our approach aligns with low-cost technologies the government promotes, ensuring adaptability and resilience in the face of environmental changes.



Finance: We have partnerships with **Umurenge Saving and Credit Co-operative Societies (SACCOs)**. SACCOs extend loans to VSLA groups without collateral. VSLAs also leverage other loans packages that result in reduced interest rates on sanitation products or, in some cases, offer no interest at all. Additionally, customers are encouraged to save towards a **specific sanitation goal**, enabling them to purchase sanitation products using their accumulated savings.



Enabling environment: We work to operationalize the government's **CBEHPP** strategy, and have **strong and working partnerships with the people and structures in the GoR** that have a mandate to provide, resource and monitor hygiene and sanitation. We also created **municipality-level committees** made up of 15 HFPs and Village Agents (VAs) that represent different groups (e.g. youth, women, men, people living with a disability, community health workers, etc.) to strengthen the role of the community in championing sanitation and coordinate and implement sanitation and hygiene activities.

Q: In 2023, Isoko y'Ubuzima helped 30,000 people gain access to basic toilets. What made this possible? And, why is it so important to focus on latrine upgrades?

The 30,000 people now have access to basic sanitation through upgrades from existing unimproved toilets or newly constructed toilets. This was made possible by using the market-based strategy described above. Some of these upgrades were achieved thanks to the **Human-Centered Design (HCD)** process, which allowed entrepreneurs to design products tailored to community needs. Right now, HCD has helped us to identify a focus on promoting the SATO-brand pan (pictured below) and cement slab. We also help the community make informed decisions. Our sales agents use the **Decision Intelligence (DQ)©** approach to take customers through a journey that helps them understand the problems they face and how much these financially cost them. When people understand the high costs of poor sanitation, they make improvements to their toilets. We work with VSLAs to encourage groups to set sanitation goals, make savings and consider improvements for their toilets.



Another key component that contributed to this success is the promotion of **Gender, Equality, and Social Inclusion (GESI)**. Our project team and sales agents ensure that men and women participate in conversations and decision-making. Joint household discussions, men's participation in VSLA hygiene sessions, and active Male Champions help increase men and boys' contribution to household WASH tasks. We also encourage interested women to step into WASH businesses and provide training and support to build their skills as business owners, increase confidence, and help facilitate access to finance.

We take pride in many success stories. One of our HFPs engaged her husband in making a joint decision to invest in a SATO pan. Another HFP, who lives with a disability, feels empowered and treated as an equal through his training in Isoko y'Ubuzima. GESI-sensitive programming creates impacts and meaningful change at the community level.

To answer the question of upgrades, **many households have toilets, but they are not improved** and therefore do not meet standards for basic service level. In prior interventions, the government focused more on having toilets but not really on having appropriate toilets. That's why we focus on improvements to the slab. The cost to build a new toilet is high, so **upgrades allow households to start slowly**, and gradually improve their current toilets, which should not be seen as a burden and should be comfortable to use.

Q: How have you integrated market-based approaches? What is the impact so far?

We integrated market-based approaches by using 1) **HCD** to design products and 2) support to the supply chain through **local hardware shops** already in the business and coordination with **national distributors of SATO pans**. Working with **community influencers** like HFPs is key because they support demand creation and foster demand fulfillment by linking with the supply chain. We also integrated MBS in **capacity building for district government teams**.

Some impacts we can share are **increased toilet sales** in our intervention areas and the **availability of prototypes** like SATO stools for customers that live with a disability. The project's MBS strategy is well-received by the national sanitation working group, which means other partners will adapt and use Isoko y'Ubuzima activities and approaches where we don't operate – greatly contributing to scale.

We recognize there is a long way to go in our journey; we will adjust and adapt based on feedback from our staff and the different actors we work with. We learned that to implement MBS, we need to shift mindsets from direct provision of sanitation products to selling toilets that meet the needs of communities. Households are now beginning to understand the value of toilets and invest in them.

Our advice for other projects or countries that would like to implement MBS: (1) **make sure that supply and demand go together**, including planning, managing, monitoring etc. (2) Ensure **support from the government** and work hand in hand with local government, (3) Make sure that **MBS is contextualized** so you can assess and address context-specific issues, and develop context-specific activities.

To read more about Isoko y'Ubuzima please visit <https://www.globalwaters.org/HowWeWork/Activities/rwanda-isoko-yubuzima>

For more information, please contact:

CARE USA Water+

Avo Ratoarijaona, Senior Technical Advisor avo.ratoarijaona@care.org

Isoko Y'Ubuzima

Marie Nicaise Ugabinema, Project Manager marienicaise.ugabinema@care.org

Kurt Henne, Chief of Party khenne@waterforpeople.org

