

By Grace Mugoya

“BEFORE WE got public water taps in our area, access to water was very hard. The little we could get from neighboring villages was not enough even for domestic use which was breeding poor sanitation and ill-health. When JICA intervened, things changed for the better,” says Alice Uwamahoro, a resident of Kigabiro Sector, Rwamagana district in the Eastern Province.

Today the World is marking World Water Day, an annual celebration to promote awareness of the extent to which water resource development contributes to economic productivity and social wellbeing of the population.

In Rwanda, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) among other development partners have closely been working with the government to ensure the population especially in the rural areas have easy access to safe water.

According to the JICA Chief Representative Mr. Tahakiro MORIYA, such efforts will be intensified even further.

“Japan is providing assistance for increment of water access as one of its pillars. JICA is also providing assistance for development of safe water resource and technical cooperation for sustainable operation and maintenance of water facilities. This technical cooperation is for capacity development for public organizations through a ground level and conducted by collaborative work between Rwandan and Japanese people. JICA will keep supporting Rwanda’s promotion of operation and maintenance for water facilities and as many stakeholders as possible are wished to realize and focus this issue more,” he says.

Residents in areas that have benefited from the joint effort to avail safe water say it is worth celebrating; emphasizing that the government target to enable them access safe water in less than 500 meters has been met with the support of JICA.

JICA has supported to develop safe water Master Plan in Easter Province; constructed water facilities to increase safe water access to more than 80,000 people in Rwamagana, Kayonza, Ngoma and Kirehe Districts and strengthened capacity building of water associations in operations and maintenance of installed facilities. JICA also sends volunteers to support community management of water facilities as well as promote hygiene.

### Community ownership of water supply

To ensure community direct involvement in water supply, maintenance and sustainability through the district authority, Rwamagana District has mandated “Ubuzima Bwiza MKM” a cooperative comprising of 72 members to run the day-to-day activities of water supply system.

The cooperative that started its operation in 2008 has been able to reduce the cost of a 20 litre jerrycan to Rwf20 from Rwf30. John Nkuzurwanda, one the heads of the cooperative says this has been made possible due to the availability of power that is used to pump water from the main source to other areas which is considered cheaper.

Nkuzurwanda says that operation and maintenance costs are the major challenges. This, he says, poses a big threat to the sustainability of the infrastructure.



Children fetching water in a source in Kirehe District.



Water users association member repairing hand pump with support of JICA volunteer.

“There is need for more support if the infrastructure is to be maintained. Although the cooperative is doing all in our means to cover operations costs, spare parts are rare on the market and expensive if found.”

The cooperative has managed to make some savings used to maintain the system. Districts records indicate that access to safe water in the Eastern Province has increased to 84 percent from 70 percent last year. This is largely attributed to joint effort by JICA and the government, according to **Francisca Mutiganda**, Rwamagana district Vice Mayor in Charge of Economic Affairs.

**Mutiganda** says that although there is still a lot that needs to be done, JICA’s contribution towards government’s effort is demonstration that hitting 100 percent access to safe water is possible.

### Need for Government intervention

Despite government commitment to have the population have safe water, there is still need to further intervene in supporting private water distributors as well as development partners.

As a resident of Kigabiro Sector in Rwamagana district buys a 20 liter jerrycan at Rwf20, one in Mutenderi Sector of Ngoma district gets the same quantity at between Rwf20 and Rwf40.

Vedaste Hitimana, a prominent businessman who joined the business to supply water in the area is in partnership with the district to have water supplied in the area from the Kagoma water source. His company has opened 52 public taps for people to access safe water.

cur maintenance up of to Rwf15,000; and that if it exceeds this cost, we as the district will come in to ensure that anything broken is rectified,” he says.

### Energy Water and Sanitation Authority (EWSA) contribution

In 2012 **Energy Water and Sanitation Authority (EWSA)** initiated the District Support Unit with the aim of bridging the gaps and supporting private and public operations as well as addressing challenges faced in the rural water system mechanisms.

This is done through the Private Public Partnership, according to Marie Josee Mukanyamwasa, the Director of DSU at EWSA. She says that support is provided in planning, designing and implementing of water supply systems in rural areas. A triplicate agreement or partnership is to be signed so as to bring together the three players of effective implementation of water supply systems. This, according to Mukanyamwasa will strengthen the coordination to deal with challenges.

He says the taps are estimated to be serving 3000 households a day.

Ngoma District Vice-Mayor in Charge of Finance and Economic Development, George Mupenzi, admits that the cost blocks many from getting access to clean water.

“We are addressing the issue. Plans to have electricity in the area are underway, since it’s the only way the cost of water can be reduced to enable residents have water at a cheaper cost,” he says.

On operation and maintenance of water system, Mupenzi says the district has designed a plan to ensure sustainability of water system in the area.

“We decided that these cooperatives will in-

“We have engineers who are actually on ground to respond and work with WASH District Officers. We also engage in training the population to ensure that they take good care of the water infrastructure as it has been observed that poor handling is another factor that leads to breakdown,” she says.

JICA plans to implement further technical cooperation project with DSU for sustainable water services provision.



Japanese ambassador and Government officials inaugurating water stand in Kirehe District.