

Interview JT.mp3

James Tebyasa: [00:03:17] Thank you Joe.

Joe Long: [00:03:18] Maybe what we can do is we can just introduce you, so how do you introduce yourself?

James Tebyasa: [00:03:27] That's such an interesting question. How would you introduce yourself and starting the introduction in this way that James Tebyasa is a formerly poor person who is now transformed and being of impact with our community? I'm working as a program support specialist in complementary interventions, and basically complementary interventions are additional programs or support given to the Church partners. And particularly I am a graduate environmental engineer, I did environmental engineering and management bachelor's degree at a University which is called Kyambogo University that's in Uganda here, Kampala. I'm using that expertise to specifically minister in the area of WASH that's water sanitation and hygiene, as well as infrastructure development to the organization as a ministry to the children.

Joe Long: [00:04:33] Oh that's great. When I've heard of compassion Uganda and especially in regards to your water and sanitation initiatives that you have. I've heard a lot of people say that the really ambitious that you're really trying for some big goals within the country. Can you outline some of those goals that Compassion Uganda is outlining?

James Tebyasa: [00:04:55] The overarching goal for their WASH programming at Compassion is basically to reduce or eliminate their disease burden especially water borne diseases and to be honest to you practically it is very impossible to talk about sanitation and hygiene without water because ideally everything that goes onto your body associates with water in one way or another. Say food, you need water to prepare the food you need water to wash that food. Say clothing you need water to cleaned the clothes that you put on. Say drinking, you need clean water to drink. Say bathing you need clean water to do that bathing. The interesting thing in Uganda is different regions have different settings of water quality. And the challenge here is some communities can get comfortable with the continuous problems that are happening within them because of the quality of water for example we are trying to do number of water interventions and I want to say thank you so much to Canada!

They are indeed supporting in number of water interventions in Uganda. The community there has salty saline water. It has caught some bacterial and fungal infections in them and when people use this water you find that their heads... They develop scales on their heads and with time they turn white. So, these people were having white hair or white scaled, bald heads (after shaving their head) and their community it can seem okay. But as activists of improved health and sanitation it is not okay. And when you get to the community and you tell them that "you know what the problem here is the kind of water that you use" people how brown teeth and wonder why do we develop brown teeth a child is not born with brown teeth. But as they continue to use the kind of water used in the communities they say "Well, this is fine!" And they suffer the repercussions as I've just explained to you.

[00:07:30] So Compassion does not just do water interventions anywhere. And I'll tell you that our interventions are identified because the way church partners have identified Compassion

moves out to their needy of the neediest areas whereby access to the National Water Grid is just not expected in the near future. Even the people that are kind of voted into power try to push for it. But you know they have their national strategy in this direction and they're a bit variable and it's difficult to ascertain when this will be put in place. So, the interventions have been used strategically in these areas to mitigate this kind of impact in the lives of the children. Some people move a distance or as much as 10 kilometres in search of safe water. Others rely on rainwater, where the dams in their communities are filled up. But these dams are the same dams that are shared with animals because some community members own animals and there is competition for the same water just for them to survive.

So, what Compassion has done is to do that "Water Sources Assessment" for church partner that have not had such interventions, to determine what exactly should be done in that community. And I will assure you the community takes charge in ensuring that the intervention is well implemented and is managed for sustainability. For example, on some of them say that "on a monthly basis. I will contribute 2000 shillings" and 2000 shillings, that is like a half a dollar. Half a dollar, accessing safe water, and contributing under free will is something that we have found to be very amazing within the communities that receive these interventions. And this money does not go to anyone but it is saved in case of anything. For example, a tap breaks down. They will use that money to fix the tap. In case a pipe gets a challenge. They will use that money to fix the pipe. In the case that something goes wrong with the water supply system, they are kind of ready to carry on with their repairs and the maintenance of the system.

[00:10:14] So the whole thing is we took it back to the community management. Compassion does not get money to hire a contractor or a service provider takes them down into the community and tell "them you know what we are putting up a borehole here and after we are handing it over to you."

[00:10:33] No, no, no, no get the money. Tell them the good news. They have a procurement process known to them and they are supported to do the implementation and monitoring and at the end of it all. They have that solid ownership of "yes. This is our thing. We need to fight for it. I need to ensure that it is functional and working well."

Joe Long: [00:10:58] That's great. And when they have that ownership it even just gives them a little bit of pride. "Yeah we put this together" and gives them that hope that there are other things that they can do towards the kingdom as well. Right?

James Tebyasa: [00:11:11] Yes, yes, yes.

Joe Long: [00:11:13] So we're kind of at a break in the podcast. Would you like to maybe tell a little bit about your story how you got to be a member of the Compassion organization but maybe start at the beginning of the story when you were a little younger.

James Tebyasa: [00:11:28] Well there is something I love to talk about. Actually, around 1997 when I first came to Kampala. I had the opportunity to come to Kampala because my father had got a driver job, He was given a job to drive someone around Kampala. So, he said, I have got a small house. We can go together and I can kind of try to struggle around and see how to look

after you. So, I came with my little sister, that follows me. And as I was growing up I started going to school and over those days people were moving around talking about people registering children at a church called Kyambogo Chapel that's in Kyambogo University (where I actually went to university) and at the time I was going to a school called Kyambogo Primary School. It is a very interesting school that very many people have gone to.

[00:12:27] People also found in that same place had registered to the project and - you need to know who took me for a restriction to that project. The way it was being talked about - how people perceive it that orphans are being registered - and here I was with a struggling father and with a mother deep down in the village doing agriculture. My stepmom was working within the university doing some secretarial work, it wasn't paying her a lot, but she also had children to look after. The most challenging thing, that I still ask myself now, is how did she conclude to hand pick me and take me to the project for registration. So, I wasn't taken by my father, but that lady picked me and took me for registration at the project. At that point of time it seemed like they are just registering orphan. I'm not an orphan, but my parents are struggling. I'm equally an orphan with parents that are alive by the fact that either were not able to support me. So, I identified with that! I accepted it and I continued moving along with it.

[00:13:47] So, I was registered in the project in 1997. I was given a number. They took my photo. I was so excited. The thing they told me you're going to get a sponsor, and that was something amazing! I was like "oh, now all my problems are sorted"! Young as I was, knowing that I'm going to get a sponsor something at least automatically rung in my mind that "You know what?!? Worry not! Everything is OK!"

[00:14:15] The lady is called Gillian. Gillian was, or is, the first person who sponsored me in Compassion. I cannot afford to forget her name! She wrote to me very amazing letters and she is the first person who told me I love you in a letter. It seems so normal cause she whenever she could write. "I love you James. Please keep reading hard. You have a bright future ahead of you." It kind of built a lot of confidence inside of me that whenever they'd say that "You have letters, please come and write letters" I'd run very fast to the project knowing that I have some good news to receive. Someone believing you, even when they have not seen you is something that really caught my attention and gave me a lot of encouragement in that, even if someone around me does not feel I'm something, someone who doesn't even see me knows I am a very important person. That alone moved me a lot. And as we kept going out with our projects their menu was or is very amazing. At home you're not very sure about dinner, especially if you have had lunch at school. Where do you go back home?

[00:15:35] Probably a cup of tea can await you and a bun to accompany it. You of course you understand the situation, sleep and tomorrow you have lunch at school, but over the weekend on Saturday I was sure that I would have a piece of meat. I'd have a cup of milk, and the milk was just good, and a banana. Oh my, to eat a banana at that time you need to have had money.

[00:16:07] Things kind of kept me looking forward to going for the programs and the programs were also interesting because it is where I got to know Christ had my personal Lord and Savior I was at the project, one time they made an altar call and I put up my hand I went in front. I said "I'm giving my life to Christ" and as a child I did that a number of times. It just felt nice just

going in front to give my life to Christ. The greatest turning point was when I was almost finishing my senior six, when a conference was organized and a number of people came and this wonderful man of God spoke. And I felt they were speaking to me. Everything they said was just about me and I give my life to Christ! And to date I am still fully committed to Christ. Through that project I came to know Christ, so that's why I'm very proud of it, I am not about to lose it.

[00:17:17] And I was about to tell you that at the project, one of our teachers was a lady who got interested in how I lived my life. Sometimes I would come home miserable because of the situation at home and add because of my quiet nature sometimes she got so concerned and kept asking me "how are you doing? What is the problem? How can I support you?" She committed to walk with me throughout my journey. She always checked on me. She always encouraged me. She became my second encourager. On top of Gillian. So, I had two people! Someone near me and someone was away from me, that believed in me that something good can come out of James! And Oh! My God!

When I look at myself today and they look at that lady, God positions people in people's lives for a purpose and I do not take it for granted that in the position I am in now I need to be of greater influence. For such a time as you said the Lord has set me in this place. So later on, in the program I got another sponsor that is Phil and Elizabeth. Philip used to play piano in church, and I hope he still does. I don't have contact with him now, but I hope he still does! So, he motivated me to learn how to play piano and really got to know that I've started learning piano. Oh my God. He could always check on me and say in the letters. "How far are you going?" "Which songs can you now play?" So, it helped me and motivated me to learn more and more so with time I learnt how to play piano. I started playing piano in church. even to date. I play piano in Fellowship's when I went to go for an outreach I play piano. And where does this start from? It started from the project, where I got all these opportunities. And to be honest I am the only person in my family who has graduated with a bachelor's degree. Not just a bachelor's degree, but a bachelor's degree in engineering.

[00:19:39] I've taken up the courage to sponsor and support one of my siblings to also reach somewhere, at least to close to where I am so that they're also able to continue with their academic life as they are able to support themselves.

[00:19:56] So the program whenever I remember the program. You would never think about poverty while you are the project. So, I'm very much proud of the sponsorship program that I went through. I went through a government sponsorship and I did my university, graduated and I got a job in a consultancy firm, an engineering firm. I started working there for about three years. Later on, a job was advertised at Compassion!

[00:20:29] Had just given an intern an opportunity to come and do training with our consultancy firm. I was working as the administrative assistant as well as the graduate engineer, so I was doing double work in that in that area. So, I was in charge of the interns who would come to train from the University and the interesting thing is this gentleman was also a sponsored child. This is how much impact this has caused into the lives of children. I find myself giving an opportunity to a fellow sponsored child to train in an organization or company. It was such a joy I couldn't hesitate or think ten times but tell him, "You know what? You have the opportunity to

come and train" and he is the one who saw the job that was advertised in their newspapers, and told me "James, this is your job!"

[00:21:30] I applied for the job and I want to assure you it is not because I'm a sponsored child that I was employed at Compassion but I went through the normal process of scrutiny that any other employee to be employed in an organization but they had to take me through all the series of interviews. I did the first interview, I did another interview, I did a Skype interview, and then I met the national director, so it was not very obvious that I would be given a job at Compassion, but here I am! Later on, I was called and they said "You are the best candidate out of the five people that applied for this job."

[00:22:22] And I was so excited because it is more than a job to me. It is a give back opportunity to the community and to the children. I look at them now and I'm like "In 1997 I was putting on a shirt like you so even as they go out into the community telling them about Sanitation and hygiene. It is a testimony of someone who has gone through the program and knows the challenges, has experienced the same challenges, and possibly worse challenges, that they're experiencing now. So, they are also encouraged to respond and pay more attention to their program activities. Be more vigilant to their program activities to ensure that they also benefit from the program.

Joe Long: [00:23:20] Yeah that's excellent. You definitely do a wide range of things for children in poverty in Uganda. Could you maybe go a little more in-depth into some of the things that you do through the WASH programs?

James Tebyasa: [00:23:35] Thank you Joe. Some of the things that we do. We do both hardware and software training. Under hardware, we support church partners that do not have access to safe water supplies systems, safe water and sustainable supply systems in their communities to have that opportunity to either extend water to the project and to the community or, if there is no existence at all, design an intervention through surveys where we find out what with what the supply system can best suit that community and how we do interventions, like underground water tanks. And that is for areas that do not have any underground water potential They're located in a, for example, dry category or with very low underground water. These underground water tanks are designed in such a way that they are supported by a motorized or pumping system.

So, it works like a gravity flow system at the end of its all, so someone does not have an interaction with dipping a bucket into the tank, but all they need to do is to go to the tap, open it up and they have water which is collected during the rainy season. We make sure the tank is big enough at least, 60000 litres to 100000 litres. That's what we do. We also do gravity flow schemes that is extending water from a certain source. For example, it can be an existing scheme that is managed by, for example a co-operative in the society and the community is not able to extend that water or for a distance of seven kilometres. So, what we do is, we design interventions to ensure that that water reaches the church where the children gather, and also the nearby communities. We also do hand pump boreholes that is up to the hydro geological survey and this time round was simplified because we conducted a Water Resources Assessment for over 40 church partners that were in similar need. So, we kind of have an idea of what needs to

be done where. So, we do hand pump boreholes and we also do motorized boreholes whereby the hand pumps are made to drill deeper and we insert a pump. To that overhead tank and still water is dispensed by gravity. That system saves a larger group and the community is able to extend the water as far as they are able to take it afterwards.

[00:26:50] Then in the area of sanitation before we go in partnership with a church they possibly have like two stances only, for toilets. Two stances. That's able to accommodate barely to a community of 50 or 60 people that come around on Sunday. The fact that it is not a consistent program over a week, unless it is a conference of which the attendance is usually no more than 60 people.

So, when Compassion gets in partnership with their church, you find that the two stances, after registration of over 200 children. You see it is not enough. So as part of the WASH program the public health policy in Uganda provides for one stance covering a maximum of 40 children. I know he has a church that has two stances, one for boys, one for girls and we have registered over 300 children. mathematically, you can compute the ratio as one stance covering over 150, that's very interesting. So, we designed such innovation to assure that the ICP (Frontline Church Partner) has at least eight stances! When you divide by the 8 the 300 can somehow be catered for within the 8 stances and we are being compliant to the public policy.

[00:28:53] We, as part of the software, provide software toolkits to the Church partners. And the purpose of these interventions is to work as models or as demonstration points to that entire community. So, it does not necessarily end up as a benefit to the church and the children come around but to the entire community, it is a demonstration model that kind of gives them an encouragement. So, this training goes on in the community, the software trainings. We do community presentations. That is where we take it to the community to identify the challenges. What would I like to be happening in my community? And how best can I be of importance to the community? And that pace is set, right from the church Partner site where we make sure that, at least, these facilities are available.

Joe Long: [00:30:02] That's great. So, it really allows the church then, to be a hub not only for the community, but also for sanitation and for water and those kinds of things as well. That is great. I think maybe this is a good spot for us to end the conversation. But thanks so much for giving so much of your time to talk about this amazing story that you have and also about the amazing work that you're doing in Uganda. Do you have any closing comments for the people that will be listening to the show?

James Tebyasa: [00:30:38] I really want to say that the impact or the cause or sponsorship to a child. Does not only end with that child. But it is a seed into a generation. Right now, I'd say that I'm a married man, but I am a married man with a child! I Am able to look after my own family. I'm able to provide a good meal to my family. I'm able to support them in all that they need to have, under my care. Now to me, that is it child released from poverty! And you don't know what the future holds for this child!

[00:31:23] As they also look at supporting another child. I know what my seed in the life of that child means. As you write that letter to the child, that child treasures that letter they're only

looking forward to that opportunity! As you provide that water supply system, you have bailed out or you have contributed to child protection to that child who has been walking very many kilometers after school looking for water. Because it's an obligation to fetch water home and it's a burden with children after school. Go look for water to bringing it home in the morning some do it before going to school and it affects their academic life. But if these interventions are in place you are greatly contributing to the life and success of this child. And I assure you right now poverty is history in my life.