

Water, sanitation and hygiene projects in Africa

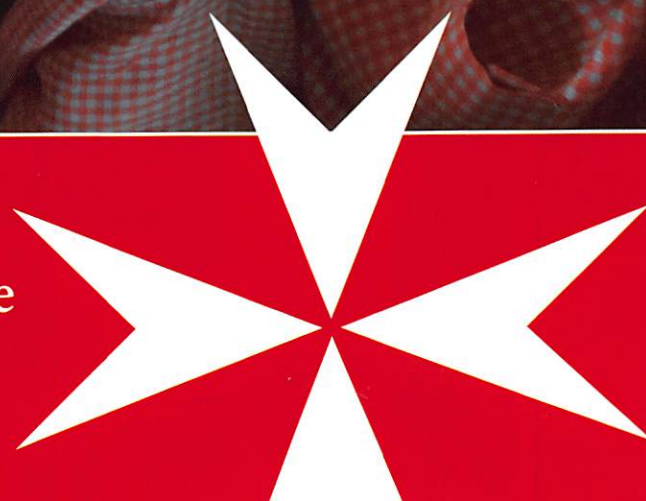
Implemented by the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta
in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary



*Humanitarian diplomacy
in action in Africa*



Hungarian Charity Service
of the Order of Malta



Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta

is an independent Hungarian non-governmental legal entity. The Hungarian Charity Service is one of the biggest charity services in Hungary with an operating budget of over 220 million USD in 2016. It is funded through government subsidies, international funding sources and private donors from Hungarian citizens. It was founded as the relief organization of the Sovereign Order of Malta in 1989. The organization is an NGO providing relief to people in need, the sick, the elderly, the disabled, the disadvantaged, the homeless, the refugees, the pilgrims and the victims of natural disasters and war. The HCSOM has developed social policy strategies and recommendations focusing on such important themes which have not been highlighted previously on national or international level.



The Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta implemented water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) projects in several East African countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda to provide shower and toilet access to vulnerable populations to economically disadvantaged areas (frequently referred to as “slums”). The population affected is approximately 330,000 of which 70% (231,000) are women and children. The short-term goal of the projects created the WASH sites and the long-term goal transferred its management to the locals for sustainability of operations. Both project goals were successful, however a need for assessing its effectiveness exists, particularly in the area of humanitarian diplomacy.



Areas of activities

The Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta has set up four water sanitation facilities in Africa – supported by the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The water sanitation facilities provide clean, legal and healthy drinking water and adequate hygiene at economically disadvantaged areas (frequently referred to as “slums”) and in primary and secondary schools in East African metropolises. The facilities include toilets, while taps are installed along the walls of the established buildings provide slum habitants with access to fresh drinking water. The sanitation centres that were built provide minimum necessary sanitary conditions for the local inhabitants, including showering facilities and latrines in addition to clean drinking water. This is particularly important because they are forced to pay well above market prices – if they can afford them – for drinking water supplied by cartels. Thus, many families resort to tinkering illegal connections to the urban water supply, which break down frequently, exposing the families to unsafe groundwater. There is no sanitation network: wastewater flows freely in open ditches through the densely populated, hut-lined streets. Although sometimes the target places of the projects are primary and secondary schools, however, the physical locations are segregated areas in the African metropolises. The HCSOM implements WASH programs in partnership with local charities which have been active for quite some time in programs supplying healthy drinking water in East Africa. The facilities are realized with support from the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary includes, in addition to water supply and other facilities, also a community hall for the use of the local population.



“I really appreciate our Hungarian friends’ longstanding efforts in the fields of water, sanitation and hygiene and for everything the Hungarians have achieved.”

Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, 2012 – New York



Three key beneficiaries exist to and can persuade decision-makers in the humanitarian space to act responsibly for protecting vulnerable populations:

1. Direct recipients of WASH access include personal hygiene benefits, prevention of communicable disease risks that are a concern in non-hygienic environments, and respect for personal dignity—all fundamental rights that are within the scope of International Humanitarian Law;
2. Local employment opportunities to sustain WASH practices and build local partnerships among community non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international NGOs, such as IFRC, and private-sector partners. Investing in these populations provides opportunities to develop community ownership for sustained WASH practices; and
3. National governments that engage in the humanitarian diplomatic process, e.g., providing permission for implementing partners to provide services and accepting WASH resources as an advocacy message of caring for its vulnerable populations.



Topic importance

Inherent challenges of providing WASH programs exist:

1. Severely economically disadvantaged areas rarely dissolve. Often their initial goal of being a temporary facility evolves into long-term challenges that require community infrastructure planning. The benefits of assessing this program will provide insight into the transition of short – to long-term planning strategies that will inform specific practices for the WASH humanitarian community at large.
2. WASH facilities in economically disadvantaged locations are vulnerable to corruption. Humanitarian field workers face local, illegal water vendors and potentially inflated costs of commodities and need safeguards that protect the fundamental principles of the humanitarian space. Refining diplomatic policies and guidelines will equip locals with tools that support humanitarian principles of ethics and equal access to WASH resources.
3. Relevant WASH decision makers and opinion leaders must be engaged in ethical WASH program implementation. Documenting best practices that align with the IFRC Protocol Handbook is essential to providing long-term assurance that WASH activities support humanitarian diplomacy principles and that respect the cultural context of nations.



Summary

Effective WASH strategies rely upon the principles of humanitarian assistance. Given that humanitarian diplomacy, assistance and international development require long-term relationship building, examining programs that develop and respect the humanitarian space of coordination and collaboration, are often the most successful, e.g., the long-standing model of the international organizations. The unique activities of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta could have an impact on exerting influence on decision makers across the world—and supporting humanitarian diplomacy to not just be a choice, but a responsibility.