



Sustaining and Scaling School Water,
Sanitation, and Hygiene Plus
Community Impact



The Number One Priority

A poor rural community finds itself gifted with an exemplary head teacher

By Carol Meyer

June 2012



"I have the ability to send my son to private school, but I want to lead by example. If this school is good enough for my own child, it is a good school."

Peter Otieno Rachier

When you look around Peter Otieno Rachier's office, there is no question as to whether he leads by example. The walls are covered with quarterly teacher schedules, a teacher-on-call list and a motto he clearly lives by, "To provide the best learning environment for our pupils to enable them to succeed in life. Let's aim high."

Peter is the head teacher at God Abuoro Primary School in Miongwe village of Kenya's Muhoroni district. He is responsible for the school's administration and ensuring that 198 students, including one of his own, have a healthy learning environment. Today, Peter is not scheduled to teach morning class, but he arrives at school at 7:30 a.m. just the same. "I always come to school first, regardless of what my morning schedule is. I want to show my students and fellow teachers that school always comes first; it is my number one priority," he says.

The community of Miongwe village is forever grateful that Peter landed in their community in 2008. Grades were poor when he arrived, with an average Kenyan Certificate of Primary Education (KPCE) score of 244 out of a possible 500. The water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) situation was better than most, but not up to Peter's standards. The school's health club had won trophies in a competition with 10 nearby schools. But there was room for improvement. The handwashing water vessels were small, with no tap, only an old stick to plug the water hole. Students either drank directly from the handwashing container or from the nearby borehole. Children were always sick, resulting in high absentee rates. Peter knew this wasn't healthy and that somehow they could do better.

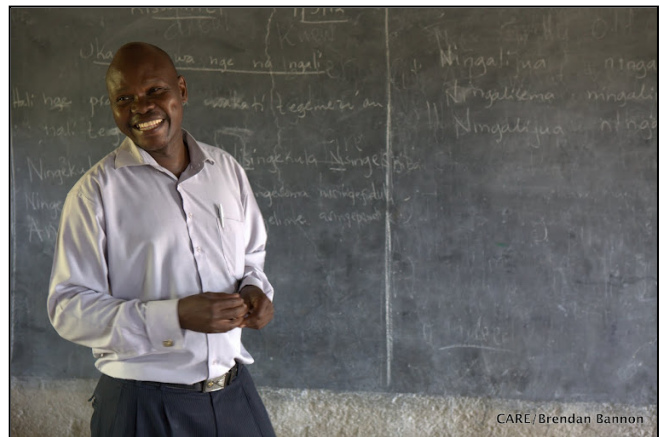


In late 2008, Peter learned about the *Sustaining and Scaling School Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Plus Community Impact* (SWASH+) project during a regional teachers' meeting. Grateful to be chosen as one of the implementing schools for one of the research pilots of the initiative, Peter rallied his students, teachers and health club members to introduce them to the program. The school received new handwashing and drinking water containers, along with a limited supply of WaterGuard to kill bacteria in drinking and handwashing water, bleach and detergent to clean the latrines, soap for handwashing, and toilet paper. A man of process, Peter set up another schedule on his office wall to designate two teachers as weekly health patrons to oversee the health club and to take responsibility if the WASH activities were not completed. He also asked for two students to volunteer for one year, to be in charge of treating the drinking and handwashing water with WaterGuard each day. The volunteers have the support of other students to make sure the latrines are disinfected, water is gathered, and the containers are cleaned properly.

Peter's next project was new latrines for girls. Using plans provided by the government, he recalls that it was like they were constructing a house. It really improved the face of the school. "When people come to visit, they see the nice latrines and they know we are serious." The students have embraced the new WASH facilities, showing their pride by adhering to the school's new sanitation and hygiene standards. Peter observes, "The children behave differently now; they bring a bottle from home to collect safe water; they ask for a cup in my office when they need one. Absenteeism has been reduced. Now that my students are healthier, using proper hygiene and clean water at school and home, they have a chance to succeed. That is the pride of a teacher."

School test scores have also followed suit, rising on average to 284 out of 500 in 2010, a 16% increase. But despite the welcome new WASH additions, Peter quickly realized that the supplies would not last an entire year. The government's budget allocation did not provide for things like toilet paper or bleach and the guidelines for how funds can be used are very strict. He's constantly faced with the question of what to do next?

In times of financial need, God Abuoro Primary School relies on the school's management committee, which is composed of parents from the community, to seek additional funding. Years ago, the school was given a small plot of land—approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre. The committee, along with the school's teachers, decided to cultivate the land with sugar cane and place any earnings in a separate bank account to use for school emergencies. A typical harvest can yield roughly 170,000 Kenyan shillings (\$2,053) every 14 to 16 months. The funds have been used to pay for teachers' travel expenses to workshops, furniture, maintenance and even WASH supplies when the yearly allotment runs out.



Peter's leadership style is fueled by his passion for teaching. His experience and ability to empathize builds credibility among his staff.



Peter wasn't always determined to be a teacher. Originally he wanted to be an accountant, but needed money to help pay for his education. His uncle is a teacher and convinced him to become an "untrained teacher" as a way to help pay for his studies at the university. For two years, Peter taught pre-school children, which requires only a high school education in Kenya, and saved his money for a bachelor's degree so he could teach higher grades. Two years was all it took to spark his interest and he continued working as an untrained teacher while studying education at Egerton University in Nyahururu, Kenya. Today, in addition to his head teacher duties, he teaches Math and History

Peter has developed a great working relationship with the school's management committee and says they make his job easier. Peter recalls an incident in 2009 when he almost transferred away from the school. The Ministry of Education was looking to fill a head teacher position at a nearby school. To his surprise, 13 members of the school's management committee wrote a letter to the District Education Officer, delivering it in person to stop the transfer. As a result, Peter is still the head teacher at God Abuoro. "It made me feel really valued because they have a lot of trust in me."

When asked what makes him such an exemplary head teacher, Peter Otieno Rachier, says humbly, "It all boils down to relationships. I never forget that I am a teacher too."

SWASH+ is a five-year applied research project to identify, develop, and test innovative approaches to school-based water, sanitation and hygiene in Nyanza Province, Kenya. The partners that form the SWASH+ consortium are CARE, Emory University, the Great Lakes University of Kisumu, the Government of Kenya, and formerly the Kenya Water for Health Organisation (KWAHO), and Water.org. SWASH+ is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Global Water Challenge. For more information, visit www.swashplus.org.