

Social Determinants of Clean Water Access: Use of Waterguard in Fort Portal, Western Uganda

Thanks to thorough preparation for the field, my fieldwork was conducted smoothly and efficiently. After driving 2,215 kilometers across three districts in Western Uganda along minimal highways and many dirt roads, I was able to visit twenty villages in 20 days, and conduct 60 one-on-one interviews for data for this research project. The successful administration of data collection would not have been possible without the guidance of my research assistant. Through my partnership and friendship with her, data collection schedules were able to adjust to unforeseen circumstances, and interviews were conducted with maximum transparency.

These successes in the field did not come without challenges. During immersion in Kampala and Fort Portal in my first two weeks in Uganda, I had a difficult time adjusting to life. I do not recall a day where I felt entirely safe during that first week in the capital. I struggled to adjust to the chaos that never seems to cease in that city. I struggled to venture out on my own without much planning those first few days. I also became frustrated that I only felt comfortable to be outside my home during sunlight hours, so I felt trapped during that week because I felt that I had reduced freedom in the country. However, this week also helped me to contextualize the culture of Uganda for my research. Despite these setbacks, when I was ready to travel to Fort Portal after that first week, I felt more confident in my independence to move about my

residence area more freely. Although the week was difficult, the experiences I had made the transition to the slower pace of life in Fort Portal a breeze.

I faced most of my challenges in Fort Portal during my first week in Western Uganda during the piloting phase for my research. I arrived in my new home at night in what seemed to be a different country as compared to what I saw in Kampala. I did not enjoy my initial residence, so I spent my first few days searching for a new place to stay. Luckily, I found a room to rent through a local NGO that I loved living in for the remaining five weeks. The other challenges I faced included organizing my field schedule, meeting with local contacts, learning the local language, finding my way around town, and knowing the correct local prices. I definitely needed time to adjust to being a minority in a new culture, but after making friends and finding a routine, Fort Portal did feel like home.

I am still surprised at how smoothly data collection proceeded in the field. After each day, my research assistant and myself made minor adjustments in our approach to establish a rapport with research participants. Each day, I tried to learn another phrase of the local language to increase my confidence in conversation with participants. Consequently, the quality of responses to the questionnaires increased with each day. The structure of interviews never changed during the project. The data collection was executed as planned before entering the field. The village schedule had to be adjusted due to a national holiday and an absent participant, but due to flexibility of my research assistant and myself we did not need to deviate from the intended sample.

The biggest challenge that I faced in the field was the language barrier. Although most participants could speak some English, it was almost never enough for me to conduct interviews individually. To maximize the comfort of participants, I used local language to the best of my

ability in introductions. Participants would light up when they heard that I could speak some of their first language. My research assistant was critical in establishing the rapport with participants, and the interviews would not have been possible without her. She minimized the confusion of participants by answering any questions and addressing any concerns. Interviews were successful due to our emphasis on ensuring that participants clearly understood the intentions of the research. Her language skills and familiarity with the project were invaluable to my success.

I had two initial hypotheses in my initial proposal to relate to my findings:

*Hypothesis for Overall Evaluation: The Ford Family Program's randomized control trial (RCT) caused sustained, increased use of Waterguard after project end as compared to use of Waterguard before intervention in villages assigned to promoters that effectively diminished barriers of use by addressing the concerns of villagers and emphasizing the importance of using the treatment consistently.* I found that the project definitely increased the use of Waterguard in the participating villages over the course of the trial. However, the RCT failed to cause a sustained increase of demand after project end for various reasons. The most common reason that prevented use of Waterguard after the project was the absence of supply and lack of access for users during the project. Shopkeepers did not know where or how to restock village shops with Waterguard, and villages did not know where to access Waterguard after project end. The most common reason that prevented new people from using Waterguard during the project was a lack of proper sensitization to Waterguard.

*Hypothesis for Sustainability of Promoter Type: Although government leaders were more successful at promoting the purchase of Waterguard during the original RCT, demand has persisted more overtime since intervention end in villages assigned to religious leaders than the villages assigned to government leaders because villagers are more trusting of religious leaders.*

This hypothesis is not important to evaluate anymore because I found in the villages that both government leaders and religious leaders were both trusted in their own ways or roles. In some villages with a poor religious leader or a poor government leader, trust is not there. Likewise, villages with a strong religious leader or a strong government leader had great trust in that person. My findings suggest that trust was not a deciding factor in differentiating the effectiveness of government versus religious leaders. Instead, my findings suggest that government leaders are more effective than religious leaders in introducing new technologies like Waterguard because villagers are more familiar with local government leaders. A local government leader for a village is referred to as the chairperson. When asked why a chairperson was or will continue to be more effective than a catechist, people explained that the chairperson has authority over the village and has the ability to call meetings at any time. The chairperson resides in the village and is a member of the community. He or she understands the needs and concerns of the people the best because he or she is one of the people. On the other hand, catechists travel from place to place, do not live in the village, and can only lead a meeting once a week at most at weekly worship. My findings confirm that in the original project, the government leaders were more effective than the religious leaders. Most respondents indicated that work is most effective in their villages when it is conducted through the village chairperson.

With my data, I plan to elaborate more on the major themes found throughout my interviews. My present goal is to dissect my interviews to discover key patterns to include in a thorough research report this semester. I hope the report is useful to my advisor, Father Dowd, to expand and inform his findings and research report. I would love for this report to be included with his project in some way. After finishing analysis this semester, I plan to present my research at the Human Development Conference next spring. Besides these immediate goals, I hope this evaluation will inform future planning of RCTs in this target area to improve the effectiveness of projects for people in the districts of Western Uganda. I would consider this research a success if subsequent projects are planned by keeping in mind key findings discovered in this research. I know I have learned more about development in practice during those seven weeks in the field than I ever expected. I hope that this research can influence those who plan development projects to focus on maximizing sustainable impacts of their projects after they end.