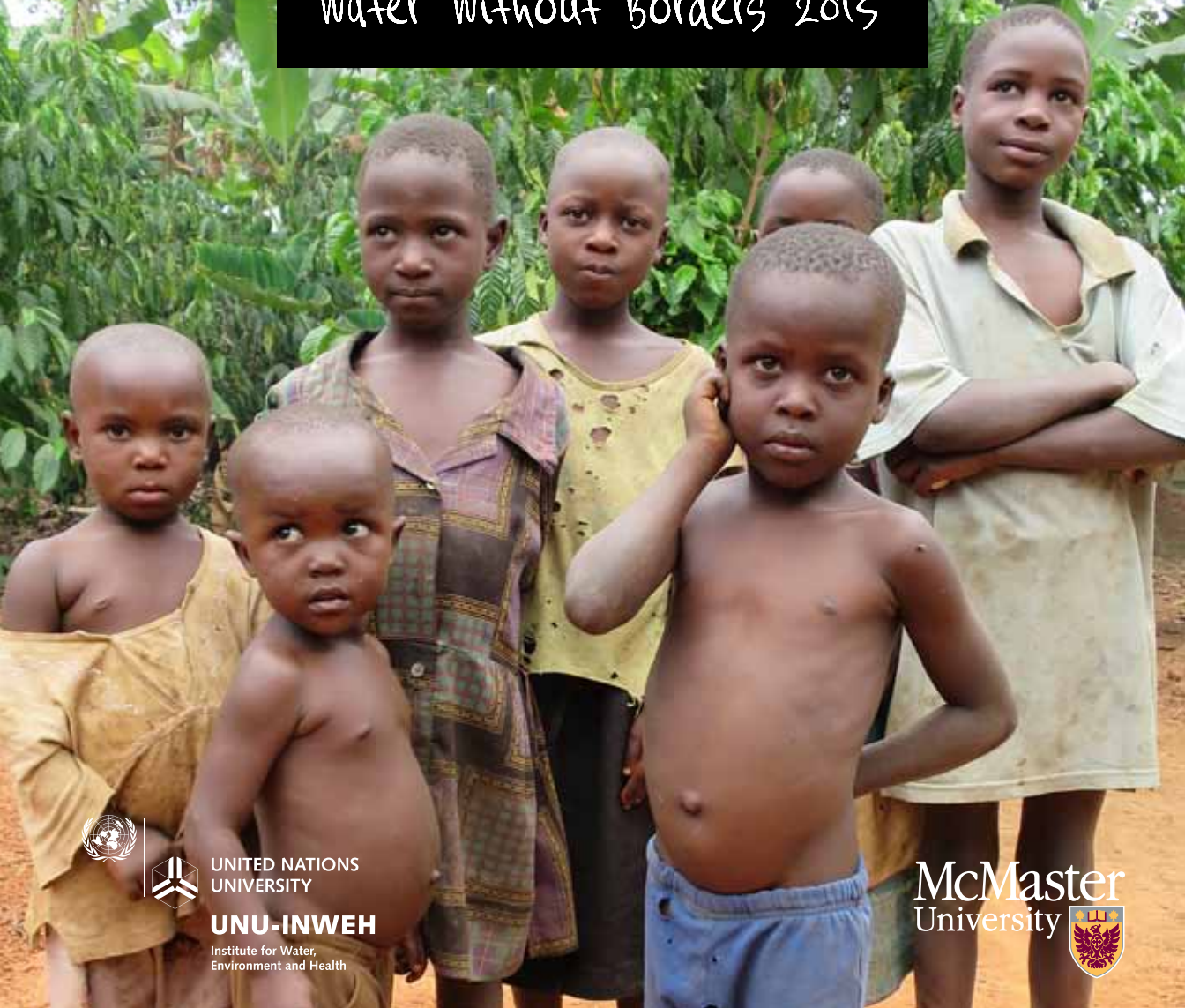




UGANDA

Water Without Borders 2015



UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY

UNU-INWEH

Institute for Water,
Environment and Health

McMaster
University





AMAZZI-

(Water)

The meaning of Water

Our experience in Uganda provided countless opportunities to better understand the meaning of water as it impacts mothers, children, and families, as well as the need for sanitation, which is truly required for the health and wellbeing of all people.

This year, the Water Without Borders programme had a diverse group of students who had different understandings of water prior to our trip. By the end of our field course in Uganda, we all had new ideas regarding water and how it could be applied to to each of our fields (Sociology, Social Work, Philosophy, Globalization) and future projects.



OKUYIGA

- (Learning)



Having spent the entire week together with only a few hours apart, I can now say that we are much closer to one another, having experienced a trip to Uganda. We learned a lot about one another and, most importantly, we learned a lot from each other.



OBULAMU

- (Life)

Connected to One Another

The people of Uganda seemed to be so much more full of life in comparison to what one typically sees in the western world. In Canada, we have become accustomed to "walking with a purpose" or getting to our destinations as quickly as possible, that we forget to stop and look at the beauty of the world around us or to give a warm smile to a passerby. The people of Uganda were connected to one another, and if that is at the expense of time, then I say we give up the clock.







OMUKULEMBEZE

- (Leader)

Investing in the Future

One of the most interesting aspects of the trip occurred during our conversations with local people. We met a grandmother who had invested in a new toilet for her family. In her community, this grandmother acted as a leader who taught others how safe sanitation practices, like washing hands, could improve lives. She actively promoted this resilient, healthy practice to her grandchildren, who will hopefully also teach others the same in the future. This grandmother was a source of inspiration that reminded us of the importance of community leadership for sustainable development.



OKUDAMU OKUKOLA EKINTU

- (Recycle)



We also learned about anaerobic digestion — a process that could be a real game-changer in Uganda, which turns organic material, like human waste, into renewable energy (biogas) and fertilizer.





ENFUNA

- (Resources)

Turning Waste into Wealth

Anaerobic digestion is simple; the waste (which we all know is inevitable because we all do it!) produces gas, and the digestion system then turns this gas and waste into a useful and sustainable profit. This innovative process literally turns waste into wealth, which was the main thinking behind UNU-INWEH's project, *Waste to Wealth*. The process is simple, easy for students and teachers to use, and provides many useful economic benefits for schools (including excess funds to improve other areas of their facilities).



OMUKAGO

- (Partnership)

Water and Sanitation Up-Close and Personal

Being in Uganda with UNU-INWEH, a UN think tank on Water that has long-standing relationships with local African communities, NGOs, and different levels of government, allowed us to learn about water and sanitation in the most up-close and personal way. We were very conscious of the fact that this kind of access was unprecedented and only made possible through years of relationship-building by UNU-INWEH.





Sanitation options

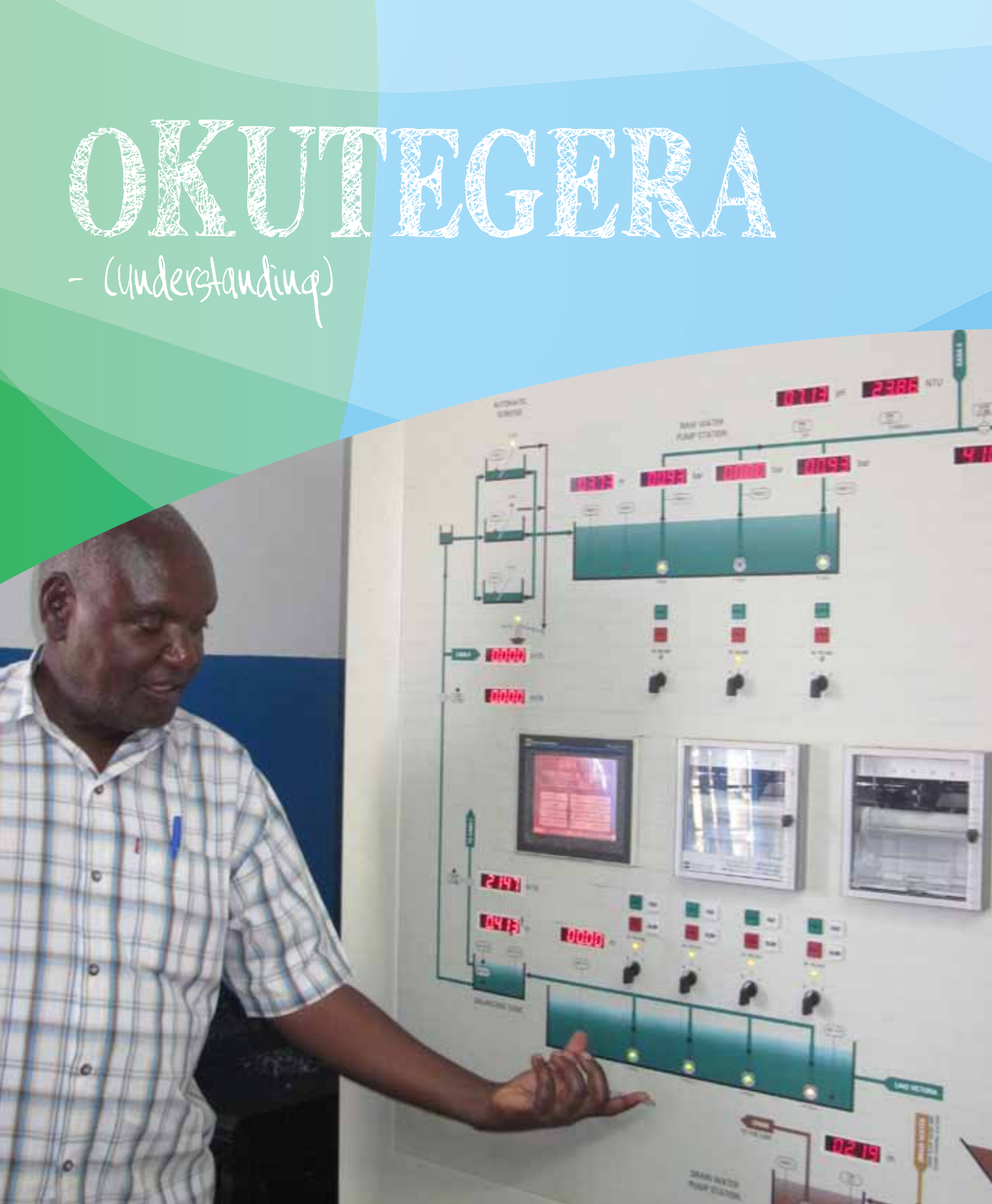
Option 1: latrine - pit latrine

Option 2: pour-flush toilet

Option 3: composting toilet



- (understanding)



The Ministry of Water and Environment provided us with a larger picture of the current water and environmental needs of Ugandan people. They also spoke with us about the various challenges and opportunities that exist in Uganda surrounding water, environment, health, and wellbeing.



EKITUNDU

- (Community)



We met the wonderful staff at the Appropriate Technology Centre for Water and Sanitation who work side-by-side with community members to identify their water and sanitation needs and determine the applicability and suitability of different technologies. They showed us that low-cost, local solutions exist to water and sanitation problems in Uganda, and that this is often the best path to sustainable development.





OKUTUUKAWO

- (Access)

Issues of Accessibility

As students, we were under the impression that the reason many people in Uganda did not have clean water was because the resources and supplies simply did not exist. However, the Appropriate Technology Centre for Water and Sanitation challenged this notion, proving that the issues are more related to accessibility than they are to technologies and resources.



OMUSANVU

- (barriers)

The Water Access Gap

What was the reason for the gap between the resources available and people actually being able to attain them? While we were able to see the physical mechanisms that were in place to provide water access, it was also evident that serious barriers existed when people attempted to do so, including broken water pumps.







OKUWONA

- (Survival)

A Symbol of Everyday Challenges

The yellow jerry can was arguably the most ubiquitous item in Uganda. Whether in a city or a rural village, it is an ever-present fixture on sidewalks, roads, fields, and in schools, shops, and houses. It is a means of survival and a fact of everyday life. It is also a salient reminder of the persistent water challenges people face. Individuals are not unaware of the risks of carrying water or using unclean water sources. However, the desperation that exists in respect to needing this water is simply severe and, without many options, subjects people to a higher rate of vulnerabilities than usual.



ENKULAKULANA

- (Innovation)

Success of Local People

The media does not give us an accurate depiction of Uganda. The Ugandan people are not helpless when it comes to addressing their water and sanitation needs. Much of Uganda does not have piped water and, for that matter, a significant amount of the population does not have access to clean water. The perspective we are given is that we need to help them develop technologies to better provide access to clean water. However, the people of Uganda are working quite vigorously to solve these problems for themselves, often relying on methods that westerners would not think of (such as purifying water through traditional clay pots filled with various filters). We need to change the way the media presents nations of the global south so that it rightly acknowledges the successes of the local people involved in addressing the nation's needs.





ETTEEKA

- (Policy)

Top-down v.s. Bottom-up Approaches

In water policy, we often debate the pros and cons of the top-down versus the bottom-up approach to water management. However, in reality, we need both. Uganda's governance model isn't perfect. Like many other countries, it is struggling to strike a balance between the top-down and bottom-up approach. Corruption in the water sector continues to be a real challenge and impediment to development. But it is evident that the government is making a concerted effort to solve water and sanitation challenges based on local needs and that this is translating into results at the community-level.







One of the best aspects of the Water Without Borders program is its inter-disciplinary approach. This year, we had students from sociology, social work, philosophy, engineering, and globalization studies. Our individual backgrounds brought a unique perspective to the program, enriching our knowledge and experience as a whole.

- Kristina



With the Water Without Borders programme, many new interests, opportunities, as well as the expansion of knowledge in water-, sanitation-, and hygiene-related issues have allowed me to further understand my own research interests in Aboriginal communities and health. With the opportunities provided for me in Uganda I truly have a new understanding and appreciation for the research and knowledge I have long studied.

- Caitlin





It is great it was to have such an interdisciplinary team. From this experience, I would like to think that this is how international aid could be best be practiced in the future; by utilizing workers from a variety of different disciplines and creating authentic relationships among locals and international workers, a rich exchange of learning and teaching can take place. It is through extending this hand of equity and "partnership" that my confidence in those around me arose to a level in which I felt constructive, utilizable, and supported.

- Morgan



There is a strong sense of camaraderie amongst us that certainly did not exist to the extent it does now... I know that there will always be a small group of people who will understand many of the things I saw because they were seeing the same things as me for the first time.

- Kerry













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