



# Striving to Fix Social Problems

## The Better Woman Foundation, Uganda

This case was written by Aynsley Dunham while a graduate student at the University of Delaware, with the supervision and guidance from Professor Amanda Bullough, and based partly on classwork conducted by undergraduate students Ava Gill, Cam Hayden, Christine Baker, & Shihong Peng. It is intended to be used as the basis of class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a management situation. The case was compiled from published sources and interviews with the business leader.

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## **Abstract**

This case study examines the Better Women Foundation (BWF), a Ugandan nonprofit organization with the goal of helping Ugandan women and girls who face challenges related to education, healthcare, income generation, and gender-based violence. Topics included in the study include difficulties in promoting the organization, obtaining funding, recruiting and retaining volunteers, and infrastructure issues—particularly a lack of access to clean drinking water and reliable internet access and poor website construction—that hinder the ability of the organization to obtain funding or promote itself.

## **Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this case study, the students should:

- Recognize common issues of financial resource scarcity facing nonprofits.
- Learn about the challenges that women in rural areas like Uganda face daily related to accessing clean water.
- Understand the importance of human capital to the success of a nonprofit organization.
- Appreciate the challenges and value of internet marketing and website formation for nonprofits.

## **The Challenge**

Esther has just finished another training session and meeting with 15 of her most dedicated volunteers. She's feeling humbled, hopeful, and grateful for their dedication, and yet worried and frustrated about the sustainability of their commitment and the viability of her organization, the Better Women Foundation. She feels prideful about what the organization has accomplished in just a few years. They've led public health campaigns for sanitation and hygiene for maternal, neonatal, and child health, including nutrition, malaria prevention, contraceptive use, obstetric care, mental health, trauma, and HIV/AIDS and pandemic awareness. Her small team has supported education to help the most vulnerable children stay in school to complete secondary and tertiary education. They've also developed a community-based network of female, male, adolescent, and youth mentors for mothers, young women, and girls to help them with life skills and income generation through craft making, improved and diversified farming, and selling products in the markets. They have even coordinated counseling and social support for vulnerable children, women, their families, and other members of the community in collaboration with other stakeholder groups.

They've done amazing work, but she can't help but focus on all the other women and girls who need them, and they cannot serve with their limited resources. Esther knows that her passion isn't enough. She needs money to fund the operations of her organization. How is she going to grow BWF and what they do, so that more people can benefit from what they have to offer?



## Community Health in Uganda

Lack of access to clean water is a problem in Uganda. This negatively impacts access to opportunities and successes for people in the country—especially for girls and women. In Uganda, more than 21 million people do not have access to clean water (WaterAid Global, n.d). That is about half of the total population. Since most men work during the day, women and girls are saddled with the responsibility of getting water while also expected to work and aid the family. This causes many girls to drop out of school. Due to poverty, girls and women are often expected to work to increase the family's income further impeding their opportunity to attend schools (Robinson, 2019). Being out of school also leads to a lack of female reproductive health education which has caused a high percentage of unintended pregnancies, including teenage pregnancy (Grilo, 2018).

Water scarcity also affects the health of the whole family, particularly children. The unavailability of water at home means water has to be sourced, collected, and transported from sources outside the home for usage and storage. Even when water is collected from a safe and clean source, the collection, transportation, and storage process increases the risk of contamination. This, in turn, increases the risk of diarrhea, the fourth leading cause of death among children under the age of 5, and a leading cause of chronic malnutrition or stunting, affecting about 159 million children worldwide (UNICEF, 2016). Those in rural areas are further affected by water scarcity in Africa, with 85% of those without water and 70% of those without sanitation living in rural areas (Gouredon, 2023). This also affects the farming activities of households in Africa, especially the rural areas that are primarily agrarian. As identified by the students, “lack of clean water also affects food security. Since it impacts crop cultivation and livestock maintenance.”

Sub-Saharan Africa suffers from chronically overburdened water systems under increasing stress from fast-growing urban areas, leading to water stress. “Water scarcity happens when communities can't fulfill their water needs, either because supplies are insufficient or infrastructure is inadequate (Klobucista & Robinson, 2023). “Water stress refers to economic, social, or environmental problems caused by unmet water needs. Lack of supply is often caused by contamination, drought, or disruption in distribution. While water stress occurs worldwide, Sub-Saharan Africa has been the most affected by it. Water stress leads to disputes between neighboring cities and countries. The crisis in Darfur was reported to have stemmed from water disputes. The dispute led to a crisis between nomadic groups competing for water and grazing land which were scarce due to expanding Sahara Desert (Tatlock, 2006).

The high pregnancy rate poses health risks to Ugandan women because the country's medical system is overburdened and underfunded, made worse by a high illness rate due to contaminated water. “People get their drinking water from ponds, rivers and lakes which are watering holes for livestock, downhill from latrines, and catchments for mudslide debris, containing dangerous contaminants that can contribute to life-threatening illnesses like diarrhea, cholera, dysentery, and hepatitis. Over 70% of all diseases treated in Uganda stem directly from a lack of clean water or



poor sanitation and hygiene techniques (Water.org, n.d). This contaminated water contributes to high numbers of diseases and death in the country, so between illness and the high rate of pregnancies, there is substantial demand for health centers, medications, and other medical resources. Although Uganda provides free health care at public clinics, these clinics lack funding, medicine, and staff, which negatively impacts patients (Why wait for death, 2020).

Not all health care in Uganda is free though. Hospitalizations cost money, and this disproportionately affects the poor, who are unable to obtain preventative care needed to avoid the hospital. Uninsured patients sometimes run from their hospital beds to avoid paying medical bills. Still, even insured patients sometimes cannot afford their hospital bills. This means that the chronically underfunded clinics close when they do not make money. This ultimately has an extremely negative effect on women, as “women receive inadequate care and ineffective treatment because most health facilities in Uganda, especially in the rural areas, persistently lack the necessary medicines and equipment to care for mothers during pregnancy and at the time of and after delivery,” resulting in high infant and mother mortality from preventable causes daily (Awor, 2020).

With all these issues facing the country, it is no wonder that organizations have been founded to alleviate the burden on the Ugandan people. This advocacy movement has only been increasing in recent years. One of these is the Better Woman Foundation, founded by Esther Kebirungi which focuses on helping women and girls break free from these negative societal cycles to find better lives.

## **The Better Woman Foundation**

Nonprofit organizations address societal needs like providing religious services, aiding the homeless, helping the poor attain education, and more. Because they do not make profit from the services they provide, they often have limited funding and resources, including money for a lacto pay workers to carry out their mission. This is the issue faced by the Better Woman Foundation (“BWF”), a Ugandan nonprofit dedicated to reducing the social problems faced by Ugandan women and girls, including gender-based violence, poverty, lack of healthcare, and more.

Esther Kebirungi founded the Better Women Foundation after an eye-opening experience during an academic internship at the Human Rights Commission of Uganda. The internship exposed her to the challenges faced by women across the country which Esther recognized as happening in her home province of Mbarara. These challenges include gender inequality, gender-based violence, and over-dependence of women on men. The Better Woman Foundation’s mission is to reduce the vulnerabilities and gender inequalities among women and girls in Uganda by establishing and building community systems to provide a holistic, enabling environment. Goals included in this mission include improving women’s health; eliminating social inequality, female gender marginalization, female dependency, and violence against women; and increasing young females’ educational opportunities. The desired outcome of these changes is sustainable livelihood, socioeconomic development, and stability in Uganda and beyond.



Esther is the executive director at BWF. Her responsibilities include promoting the organization's vision, mission, and strategies. She works tirelessly to mobilize stakeholders, including volunteers, local leaders, and vulnerable women and girls facing gender inequalities, discrimination, mistreatment, marginalization, hunger, poverty and illiteracy in their communities. She also directs mentorships and community mobilization and sensitization sessions, while monitoring and supervising all the ongoing projects at the Foundation. Unfortunately, BWF is currently hindered by a lack of funding, volunteers, website and internet marketing, and adequate health care and sanitation.

### **Problems with Funding**

Funding is essential to the success of any organization, especially charitable organizations that seek to provide aid to others. Any organization's activities require financial resources to acquire supplies, rent space and pay employees. Currently, the only funding BWF has is an occasional donation and Esther's personal savings, which is not sustainable in the long term. Successful nonprofit organizations survive and expand by ensuring a stable flow of donor-funded projects (Rasmussen, 2017). For BWF to not survive but to succeed in its mission, it will need donors and a plan for ensuring stable financial flow.

The median Ugandan nonprofit revenue is roughly 22,000 US dollars, the bulk of which comes from outside sources such as international Non-Governmental Organizations and bilateral donors. For BWF to succeed, it needs to find newer and more stable sources of income. Unfortunately, this has been difficult because of two other issues facing the company: Lack of volunteers or qualified staff, and unreliable internet access and website.

### **Lack of Volunteers**

BWF lacks the appropriate human capital to carry out its work. The foundation is staffed entirely with volunteers but has a goal of having some full-time, committed, and accountable staff to handle projects in the future. Unfortunately, it has not been easy for BWF to recruit volunteers. BWF aims to improve the lives of women in the rural areas of Uganda who have limited resources and are often in areas without employment opportunities. To help these women, the volunteers need to spend a great amount of time on the road visiting different villages and encouraging them to join the organization. This makes working conditions of the volunteers tough and unstable. It also makes it hard for BWF to find willing and able volunteers to carry out the organization's work.

The lack of an empowered and reliable human resources department at BWF compounds this issue. This is because they need staff with the proper training and/or education to provide professional human resource knowledge and support. Human resource specialists are meant to support an organization through a well-structured system of policies and procedures that assist staff with solving issues ranging from recruitment, compensation, and solving personnel issues. Teaching



volunteers to deal with problems, educating them on local status and culture, training them to communicate and collaborate with locals are all basic functions that a human resources department would offer. However, Esther's background is in Public Health, not human resources and business management, so she feels ill-equipped to fill this role and needs to find appropriate personnel.

## **Internet Marketing Problems**

Internet access is often unreliable in Uganda as the government has the power to temporarily suspend internet access. Fred Ojambo from Bloomberg stated, "Uganda closed social-media sites and blocked access to the internet on the eve of presidential elections on Jan. 14. Access to (only) the internet was restored on Jan. 18 (Ojambo, 2021)." Political unrest and corruption limit advertising for BWF through radio. However, internet access and a clear internet presence are still necessary for the foundation. Websites are often required by foreign (especially Western) companies to prove that an organization is legitimate when they apply for funding. Since most Ugandan nonprofits rely on foreign funding, this is a significant issue.

BWF's website has several significant issues. Although it operates a website, Facebook page, and blog, they are either outdated or have technical issues. For example, though BWF's website is very organized and visually appealing, several pages are incomplete, and the links need to be repaired. This includes the links to the foundation's social media sites and recent activities and events. The Facebook page is not regularly updated, so visitors cannot see the foundation's current activities and developments. These issues make the organization look less legitimate to potential funding organizations and this also prevents people from seeing what the organization really does. This also hinders BWF's ability to spread the word of its work and need for volunteers via means other than radio, and further compounds the organization's problems with funding and finding volunteers or employees. With a lack of people to provide updated content for its website and carry out other social media maintenance, or a lack of funding to hire a professional to handle all of this, BWF is again left in the lurch.

## **Healthcare and Sanitation**

Although Uganda offers free health care at public clinics with a vast majority of the population in poverty, the government accounts for only 15% of health spending, with 42% of their funding coming from donor aid (Why wait for death, 2020). BWF focuses on women's healthcare and tries to connect women with the information and products they need for proper reproductive health. One of the biggest ways to reduce unintended pregnancies has been found to be education.

Other health and sanitation issues for women in Uganda include rape and domestic violence, which worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Improving social conditions without adequate funding and support is difficult but the process can be commenced with educational opportunities geared toward poverty eradication. One of the biggest obstacles to girls attending school is a lack of indoor plumbing. They spend hours every day walking miles to access clean water from streams to bring



home to their households. Increasing access to clean water can have exponential benefits, including increased food security by reducing costs for gardens and crops, improving overall health and reducing illnesses, allowing girls time for school, and girls' enrolment and attendance in school. Something as simple as access to clean water can help break the cycle of poverty (The Water Project, 2011).

### **A Tangled Web of Problems**

Looking over BWF's situation, it was clear that its challenges were interrelated. The organization did not have sufficient funding, which was due in part to a lack of volunteers able to raise funds to maintain BWF's web pages and internet presence. Lack of funding meant BWF could not carry out its mission, nor could it afford to hire professionals to help update the website or staff its human resources department. Finally, a lack of volunteers or staff made it harder for them to market themselves to obtain more staff, apply for funding, maintain the website, or carry out BWF's mission. Esther had identified the problems, but now it was time to figure out where to start solving them. Which was the right problem to tackle first? How should she approach solving the priority issue? She had many questions but few answers.



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