

TEAMWORK AT ITS BEST – GLOBAL GRANT SUCCESS STORIES

PROJECT 1 - BIODIGESTERS

A very good friend and a regular visitor to Sidcup RC, Martin Steel, works in Rwanda for Vétérinaires Sans Frontières (VSF) on projects financed by the Belgian Government.

Rwanda is a country recovering from the genocides which lasted for 110 days from April to June 1994. Up to 1 million people were killed and the recovery process still continues today.

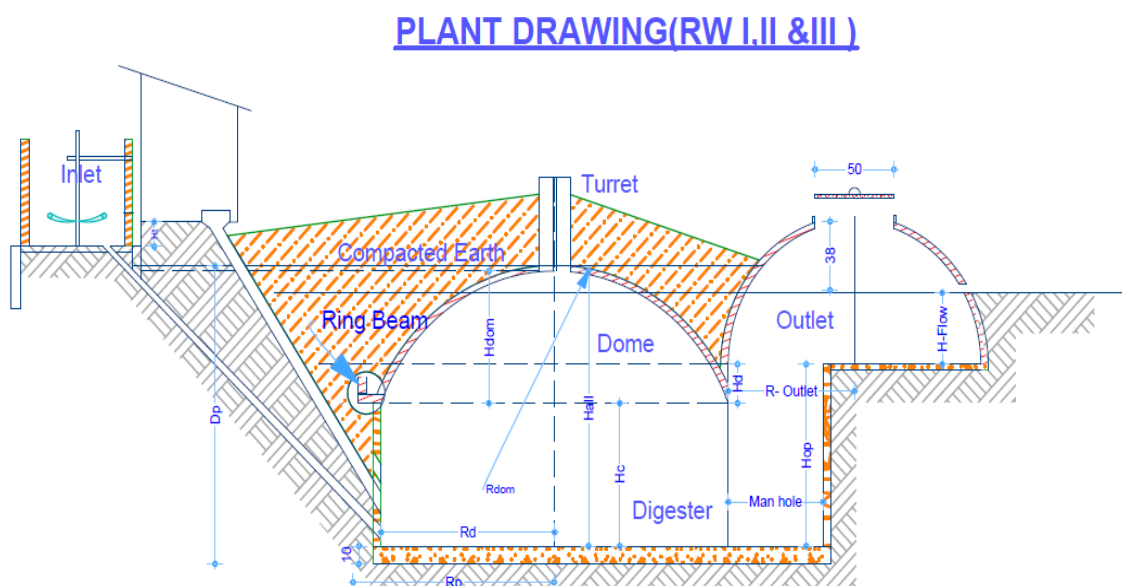
Many international aid agencies took part in this recovery, building infrastructure (roads, water supplies, electricity systems, communications and more) - mostly high-tech stuff. We are proud to say that Rotary has shared in this recovery – not in major ways but, certainly, in essential ways.

The Population, already poor, ill-nourished and without good schooling, training and medical facilities, needs appropriate support in the basic, everyday things of life to raise them from a state of poverty to a tolerable level. The Belgian Government, with a long colonial involvement in Rwanda, has invested largely in projects aimed at improving farming crops, fruit growing, animal husbandry and associated activities.

Butare RC, located in, Rwanda's Southern Province is a very active Rotary Club and has been involved in several projects, each with the aims of improving the qualities of life of the poor population by education, training and creating sustainable life-style improvements.

Martin, a Past President of Butare RC is also a Sidcup man, having attended Chislehurst & Sidcup Grammar School. In 2013 he approached Sidcup RC to initiate a joint project to provide biodigesters to 100 very poor farmers living in poor conditions on less than \$1.7 a day (supporting a family, too). Biodigesters are simply a mortar and bricks basic construction of a hole about 4m³ volume, sealed with a dome, into which water, animal dung and other vegetable wastes – even human wastes – are deposited. In this sealed chamber, anaerobic digestion takes place which produces methane that one can cook with and power lights. It also produces a very useable (not so harsh) manure slurry, ideal as a crop fertiliser. The benefits to the poor farmers and their families are huge because it is a huge improvement upon wood-burning cooking which produces harmful smoke that causes chest and eye infections. The outcome reduces deforestation, creates greater crop yields and improves the beneficiaries' qualities of life. An all-round winner.

A diagram of a constructed biodigester looks like this:



In his first visit to Sidcup RC in 2013, Martin proposed that a Global Grant be applied for from The Rotary Foundation (TRF - HQ in Evanston, Illinois in the USA). Bill Head-Rapson, the 2014-15 President of Sidcup RC, took up the challenge and, working with Martin, via lots of emails, Skype calls to Rwanda and visits to UK, worked up a project financing and management plan to implement the project. Both Bill & Martin made many presentations to RCs in Rwanda and UK so as to provide an understanding of the project, generate interest in it and raise funds. The total project value was \$50,224 and, whilst Rwandan RCs have managed to input \$4,750, 12 RCs in District 1120 (Kent and East Sussex area) managed to raise \$18,030 to ensure that the project could proceed. TRF provided the balance of funding, \$27,464 and these funds were paid into a dedicated project account in Butare, Rwanda, under a controlled draw-down scheme, to get the project under way. Management of the funds and project activities was essential and this was the responsibility of Bill, Martin and other trusted Rotarians in Rwanda. Disbursement of funds was carefully managed via micro-finance institutions (MFIs) and these were overseen and closely controlled by VSF, government departments and the farmers themselves via a farmers' co-operative organisation named IMBARAGA - a highly reliable, trusted and competent company. Training and sustainability were the key objectives, as well as improvements in lifestyle and quality of life for these most disadvantaged people. Training, especially, was a key element and an important costing, taking up 14% of all project costs. Material and installation costs – sand, cement, concrete blocks, pipes, cookers, labour - made up half of the project costs. Other costs included travel (there were many miles between sites and a limited number of project trainers, managers, etc. After all this patient preparation work and site project planning by IMBARAGA, the project implementation proceeded energetically in a structured way, starting in early 2016 and completing at the end of 2017. Bill Head-Rapson visited Rwanda in May 2016 to check out in detail how the project would be run and that the monies will be properly used - and it all looked very positive. The project managed to build 135 biodigesters (not just 100) in 15 months (the plan was for a year) and within budget - an amazing achievement for an African project. All concerned rightly deserve praise for turning this imaginative scheme into positive, healthy futures for the 135 Rwandan farmers.