

Personal Stories of Change

Helen Mbabazi: A perspective from the domestic private sector

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Helen Mbabazi is a senior member of the Association of Private Water Operators in Uganda (APWO-UG). APWO-UG is the umbrella organisation that brings together local private water operators, providing a common forum for redressing their issues as well as a platform for enhancing and improving overall service delivery. Helen first became aware of The Water Dialogues when she was interviewed by Penny Urquhart for the Scoping Study in 2004. She later attended the wider stakeholder forum in Berlin where the report was presented to sector stakeholders. Helen was then invited to join the International Working Group to represent the perspective of the small-scale domestic private sector.

Helen had previously worked with a private company in Uganda (Kalebu Ltd) and had experienced a long struggle to achieve formal recognition by the government. The view that Uganda was a private-free zone was a major issue for local companies working on the ground. Hence Helen’s motivations for joining the project were steeped in her desire to redress “the conflict that has arisen against the involvement of private water operators”. She felt that The Water Dialogues offered a forum for exchange and expressed a strong desire to “shift from perceptions to reality” and resolve conflict. Overall, she also wanted to work with the wider community to reach out to the needs of the people.

Helen was behind the initiative from its outset and recognises its practical ability. Furthermore, for Helen’s organisation, APWO, involvement in The Water Dialogues has helped to raise their profile and their ability to achieve recognition and funding, while for Helen personally, The Water Dialogues has exposed her to a range of approaches and cultures. There was a degree of change in perspectives within the sector in Uganda but Helen points to the immature closure of the Uganda Dialogues as a barrier to its ability to really ride this wave of change.