

## From our water correspondent

**Our competition is now in its second year, and we have awarded the prize for the most interesting diary entry from the field to Hester Kapur, working in Rwanda.**

During a year in Rwanda I've seen the seasons change from dry, to wet, to dry, to wet again. I've felt dust in my eyes, the kind that gets under your eye lids and scratches the eyeballs red raw. I've walked through mud thick as chocolate, the kind so thick that you need weight training to lift your sodden boots. I've seen faces lit up by the New Year fireworks at the football stadium; and faces darken watching the images from the latest genocide movie, 'Shooting Dogs'. I've heard myself called a thousand times, 'Muzungo!', 'Muzungo!', by children excited to see a visitor in their village, and I've climbed, in part, some of the thousand hills that mark this beautiful country.

My contract is for two years; I cover: here, Burundi and DRC. I'm technical godmother to four local NGOs. A good bunch of guys (all guys, gender hasn't arrived in WATSAN in all parts of East Africa yet): sound 'teccies', who like to build things, like to walk in the mountains that fill all corners of these countries, seeking out a clean water supply, looking for a spring which they can then protect, to bring water to their people.

There is no typical day, only different partners, different challenges, different needs and different people. I'm a driver, mechanic, secretary, donor, technical adviser, hygiene promoter ... I'm here to help the NGOs with what

they need, to give my ideas, training, experience, which they are free to accept, adapt, change or ignore as they choose. We, PROTOS, have a partnership, an open dialogue, where, through co-operation, we work together to find the best solutions.

One of these local NGOs, COFORWA, decided they want to look at their hygiene promotion programme. The guys have been doing PHAST for about nine months now, but have realized its limitations and that there is a need to adapt it to address the prevalent diseases in their communities. They have already visited the health clinics in the districts in which they work, collecting data on the frequency of diseases. They've come back with the top six as: malaria, respiratory infections, worms, skin diseases, diarrhoea and bloody diarrhoea.

We set off for the hospital in Giterama to find out more. We leave early, driving into the sunrise, passing marketers setting up their stalls, people on their way to work, women off on the long walk to collect water, and children, only knee high, gathering firewood.

We spend about three hours at the hospital talking to doctors, nurses, patients and family relatives, learning about the symptoms, transmission, prevention and treatment, from all angles. By the time we leave we are full of information, our eyes bright with knowledge, excited by our new understanding. We head now to the NGO's office, turning off onto the road for Nyakabanda. Carved out of solid rock, initiated by a Belgian priest in the 1970s, this is probably the bumpiest road

known to mankind. The car slips and slides, we spin round 360 degrees, I yelp, covering my eyes with my hands, and the staff laugh, as if they were on the Ferris wheel at the fairground. Still, in 32 years of the road being open, no car has yet left the road. I repeat this to myself like a mantra, hoping it will calm my nerves. After about two hours of being in a car journey that makes you feel

like you were in the washing machine on spin cycle, we fall out, into the office.

They start with presentations, each covering a different disease. We clarify, question and argue about what we heard or understood and fill in some extra details. We talk about the different diseases, discuss why some are more prevalent at different times of the year and plan when we should do the promotion of each one. We work out a training session on these diseases for the other 72 promoters and plan a laminated fact sheet they can carry around with them on rainy days in Rwanda.

Then we look through the PHAST pictures. There is not much here that relates to malaria, or skin diseases, so we make a list of the new pictures we will need, and one of the animators volunteers to draw them. We agree to incorporate them into the community discussions and house-to-house visits. (Later in the year as part of the child-to-child trainings the same information will be used to make up songs and dramas in schools and communities).

A guard interrupts our meeting: two bodies have been found in the village, lost bodies from the genocide. There will need to be an exhumation tomorrow, everyone will gather. My stomach turns over, how many more? Days go by here when you think you are living in a normal country, with power, water, phones, and work 9 to 5. Then you are dragged back to the reality that scarred and continues to scar this country; where will it end?

It's only around 6 p.m. but the sun is beginning to set, a side effect of living near the equator. We're all glazed and tired, shaken by the turn of events, and we've been slumping in our seats and lying on the desks for the last 30 minutes. Time to call it a day, time to think, to reflect, to forget, to repeat a different mantra, asking for peace for these minds, in Rwanda Ndiza, Beautiful Rwanda.

*Hester Kapur is Regional Co-ordinator, Rwanda, Burundi and DRC, PROTOS (A Belgian NGO promoting water management and sanitation).*



COFORWA staff stand by a Mozambique latrine slab