

A Journey Like No Other

Pablo Llaguno Cárdenas

"The pandemic has hit the world like a storm, nevertheless not everyone is placed on the same boat. While some navigate the storm in a yacht, others are in a row boat or on a raft while others may not even have a boat." These words were pronounced by Dr. Susan Elliott, chair of ROTOM Canada, in the opening address of ROTOM's Virtual Journey Experience. This virtual trip to the heart of ROTOM's work in Uganda did not only remind us of the power of kindness and cooperation in the world, but also showed us how humanity still thrives in the worst of times.

Uganda is a fascinating country bordering Lake Victoria in Eastern Africa. ROTOM's founder Kenneth E. Mugayehwenkyi says, "There is not a place as beautiful as Uganda." But magical as this country can be, the COVID-19 pandemic has severely hit its population as infections and deaths are increasing at alarming rates. COVID-19 vaccines, personal protective equipment (PPE) and safe water are urgently needed to help combat the spread of COVID-19. Facing this panorama, ROTOM and its donors decided to take part and help by donating money, time, and resources. Apart from its multiple programs, ROTOM's health care facilities have opened their doors in the national effort to fight the virus by providing rapid antigen testing and mild treatment for COVID-19 cases. ROTOM now not only changes the lives of the hundreds of seniors and grandchildren that receive regular attention but will also have a long-lasting impact on the lives of many more Ugandans.

Apart from these trying times, ROTOM's mission and work are as fascinating as ever. Through a virtual journey, we toured ROTOM's facilities, saw the impact they are making in Uganda, and heard from their beneficiaries. The feeling of joy, even when being thousands of kilometers away is overwhelming. Our screens were no barrier against the feelings of happiness, delight, and hope. ROTOM Uganda has changed countless lives and is an example in its effort of building the future of this country.

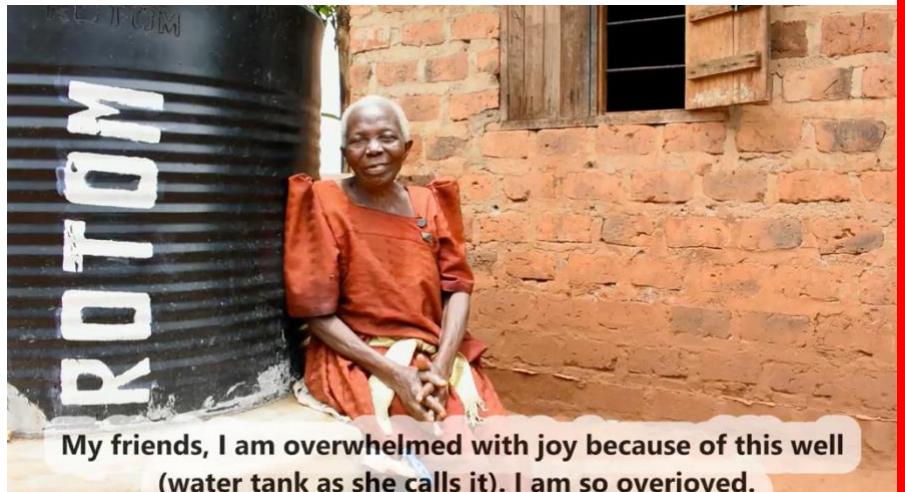
When we dove into the journey, ROTOM's beautiful grounds immediately caught our attention. Throughout the journey, we could conclude that the value of their work is placed in their people. Whenever someone appeared on our screen, we could see big, beautiful smiles everywhere. In all buildings, events, and stories portrayed in the videos, we





could always see friendly staff willing to change every life they touched. If ROTOM's work is so heartwarming through a virtual journey, I cannot imagine how breathtaking it is in person.

The work done through different projects made a difference in all of the communities served by the organization. We witnessed the story of elders who received a water tank. Again, a feeling of joy was constant throughout every one of them. With a water tank that stores water collected by rain, elders could now access safe water on their doorstep. Thus, avoiding long and dangerous trails to polluted, unsafe water deposits. Additionally, they are now not limited to taking a bath with only two cups of water.



My friends, I am overwhelmed with joy because of this well (water tank as she calls it). I am so overjoyed.

And as if all of this was not enough, ROTOM gave us one last treat that brought warmth to all our hearts. Mary, a schoolgirl attending ROTOM's school, had a few words for us. She shared her feeling of joy for learning to write, read, and pray. She loved going to school, up to the point that she wants to become a teacher when she grows up. There are no words that can attempt to imitate Mary's remarks.

This is the future of Uganda and ROTOM is helping to build it. Through joy and happiness, ROTOM is changing lives. With just a peep into their everyday work, it was impossible not to feel warmth in our hearts and a smile on our faces. Because happiness is the key to a brighter future and ROTOM, even amidst these difficult times, is continuing to fulfill its mission.

About the author

Pablo Llaguno Cárdenas is a Research Intern at the University of Waterloo's Geographies of Health in Place Lab and an undergraduate student of International Relations at Tecnológico de Monterrey in Mexico. He enjoys reading, traveling, and walking. To contact him, please feel free to email him at llaguno.pablo@gmail.com

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