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Abstract: The article focuses on the author's trip to Africa where he encountered several problems of the region. Over 40 percent of the world's population does not have basic sanitation. Over one billion use unsafe drinking water. More than 50 percent of Africans suffer from water-related diseases such as cholera and infant diarrhea. On this recent trip to Africa, under the auspices of Diageo North America, the parent company of Guinness Nigeria, the author was among a group of journalists who visited Kenya, Ghana, Uganda and Nigeria. One project in particular was the Water of Life campaign. When Guinness Nigeria came in and said they wanted to build a water station, there was a great outpouring of support.

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When water is life

The continent of Africa is diverse in landscape, people and culture. From east to west, north to south, there are vastly different Africas.

From the coast of Ghana to the mountains of Uganda to the Great Rift Valley in Kenya to the city of all cities, Lagos, Nigeria, this is Africa, or just a small part.

Recently, on a whirlwind trip through these amazing countries, I saw many Africas. From the wealth to the poverty, from the great open spaces to the crowded slums. My eyes were not immune to the hurt, suffering, pride and joy.

Consider these facts: Over 40 percent of the world's population does not have basic sanitation. Over one billion use unsafe drinking water. More than 50 percent of Africans suffer from water-related diseases such as cholera and infant diarrhea. Five million people, mostly children, die from water-borne diseases each year.

These statistics are shocking but true. There are communities all over the world that do not have any sources of clean water. On this recent trip to Africa, under the auspices of Diageo North America, the parent company of Guinness Nigeria, I was among a group of

journalists who visited Kenya, Ghana, Uganda and Nigeria. As we traveled the continent we visited several programs that Diageo was involved in.

One project in particular was the Water of Life campaign. The program, which brings clean drinking water to those without, had recently completed a new water works in Badia, a slum in the center of Lagos, Nigeria. The area of a mere one square mile is home to over one million people. And there was no running water.

We drove into Badia, where the winding roads were lined with makeshift homes that all had storefront businesses with the goods neatly stacked on tables near the street. The order among such chaos was eye opening. The shop owners, dressed in multicolored dresses, neatly pressed, maintained their shops with the utmost of care. There were people selling bags of clean water out of buckets carried upon their heads. There were shops that sold milk, meat and other sundry items.

As we continued through the streets we came to a school that had over 3,000 students. Until recently, the school day was very short due to the school's lack of water, so children had to return home in order to stay hydrated.

So when Guinness Nigeria came in and said they wanted to build a water station, there was a great outpouring of support. The company had been active in providing clean water to local communities in Nigeria, under its Water of Life program.

While the school and the overall community were ecstatic, there were those, according to reports, who felt that free water would eliminate the business of selling water, thereby putting people out of work by making the water free. Others contended that the water in the area would lead to job growth. Nonetheless, Guinness stuck to their plan and built a water station that provided water for the 3,000 children at the school, allowing them to spend more hours in the classroom each day; at the same time, over a dozen spigots on the outer wall allowed over 250,000 people to have access to fresh water on a daily basis. This access is all because of Diageo. In addition, Diageo has initiated programs across Africa that provide water for an additional 250,000 people.

According to a report by Water Aid, Nigeria ranks fourth among countries with poor sanitation practices. 81.5 million Nigerians lack adequate sanitation, India has 772.4 million, People's Republic of China, 736.9 million and Indonesia, 106.9 million.

While Diageo is working toward more Water of Life projects in Nigeria, this is something that they are expanding in their operations across Africa. "Over the last few years, Diageo has initiated programmes that have improved water supply to over half a million people in Africa, giving some people access to clean drinking water for the first time," said Nick Blazquez, managing director, Diageo Africa.

March 22 was World Water Day and, according to the IRC Water and Sanitation Center, there are not a lot of public/private partnerships bringing clean water to communities.

"At Diageo we are committed to making a significant contribution to the communities in which we operate and one way that we do this is through our 'Water of Life' initiative. [*Water of Life' is the English translation of the Gaelic 'uisge beatha,' which is the origin of the modern word 'whisky']," said Blazquez.

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By Elinor Tatum, Amsterdam News Staff

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