



Ambition to Impact powered by Climate Impact Partners

Episode 1: Turning on the Climate Action Tap with John Nyagwencha and Faith Temba

Hannah Blackmore: Welcome to Ambition to Impact, a climate action podcast powered by Climate Impact Partners. In today's episode, Faith Temba, our Africa Sourcing Manager, speaks with John Nyagwencha, CEO of Aqua Clara Kenya, a social enterprise designing and distributing innovative water products and services to bring safe drinking water to people in rural Kenya and rural East Africa.

In a world where safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene are still out of reach for billions, John is passionate about using entrepreneurship to solve this challenge. The results of this passion speak for themselves. Over the last 10 years, he has overseen the growth of Aqua Clara from a small community based project to a globally reputable organization, which has enabled more than 300,000 people to access safe drinking water.

But, unwilling to stand still, John has his sights set on even greater impact. Over the next three years He wants Aqua Clara to provide safe drinking water to 1 million people and improve incomes for at least 3,000 others. Let's find out how John plans to achieve this and tap into his story from ambition to impact.

Faith Temba: Welcome John. It's really good to have you at our podcast today. Thank you for joining us, and we're going to talk about your journey from climate ambition to impact. So, we've spoken quite a number of time, but I'm very excited to have our listeners to hear more about your journey in Aqua Clara, your business, and how you your company is making impact in terms of climate change.

To begin with, it would be great to hear about your journey to becoming CEO at AquaClara Kenya. What steps did you take to achieving this? Maybe you can just share about that journey?

John Nyagwencha: Thank you, Faith, and thank you for having me. yeah, so it was a chance meeting with AquaClara. I, all through my life was very keen on Issues relating to the environment, you know, climate change a lot more than water initially. But with Aqua Clara, it was a very interesting episode in my life that led me down that path.

So when I was a student in university, I was doing my postgraduate studies in environmental legislation and management. Sorry, that's a mouthful. Really keen on looking at climate change. I remember a lot of my presentations were on this topic. I was aware of the challenges we had with access to safe drinking water, but I had not personally related to that challenge. But for

some reason, at that point, I came down with typhoid, which can be quite a severe waterborne disease.

After getting a bit better as most of us typically do, I ran back to my mother so that she could nurse me to good health. And my mother, all through my childhood, had boiled water religiously. She believed that for us to be safe and healthy as a family, we needed to drink safe water.

And coincidentally, it's at this point, remember, I've just come down with a waterborne disease, typhoid. I come back home and I find my mother has stopped boiling water.

That was shocking. So the reason she had stopped boiling water, she had put all her faith in this dubious looking object that was sitting at the corner, a bucket that had sand in it. So somebody had convinced her, that instead of boiling water, all she needed to do is get the dirty water she was getting from the shallow well behind our home, put it through this mysterious object, and whatever came out was good enough for her to drink.

And so as somebody who thought I'd gone to school, a scientist, so to speak, I said, this is a scam. And I set out right away to prove that this thing cannot work and we need to go back to the tried and tested way of boiling water.

After putting up with my annoying questions, my parents said, you know what, you can talk to these guys, this NGO that has come from the U.S.: Aqua Clara International, they had a brochure from this organization, reach out to them and bother them with all these questions you're bothering us with.

So I reached out to them and, you know, very suspicious that I found this thing that my parents are using, I'm a student and would really like to test it and see whether indeed it works as claimed and compare it with some of the more commonly used methods like boiling and chlorination.

So to cut the long story short, I then got an opportunity to meet the guys from the U. S. that were running Aqua Clara International. They were happy enough for me to volunteer and test the water filters that have been installed in my village and other villages. For them, I think what was interesting was to have an opportunity to bring credibility to what they were doing.

And so me doing the water testing to really verify that these filters were making the water safe was going to be an important instrument to continue convincing people around our communities that we are not asking you to put faith in this thing. It actually works. There's science behind it.

So I joined in 2010, as a volunteer, as you said, faith, I did water testing for a few hundreds of filters. in many communities. My intention at that point was to prove that it wasn't working and go back to things that I thought worked better.

But, interestingly, in that experience, not only did I end up being convinced that this was the best solution for a very pressing challenge, which I had now recently felt personally, but it ended up being my life's work, that experience over the last few weeks that I did, it, compelled me to stop everything else that I've wanted to do with my life and said, this is it is what I want to do with my

life to bring this impact to as many people. So listening to the stories of the people that have been impacted and the lives that have been changed, was just too strong a pull for me to resist.

And so I ended up joining in 2011. At that point Aqua Clara had no staff on the ground, I just relied on volunteers coming from the U. S., a few people trained locally. So I joined in 2011 to help manage a small team of local employees. And so, then started the journey of Aqua Clara that we continue to date.

Faith: Interesting. That's quite interesting, actually, you joined to disprove, and you ended up being convinced. And now you are the CEO speaking about this technology. But maybe what are some of your early learnings, rising into that role as a CEO? What are some of the things that you're able to pick up, about the technology or the impact, broadly speaking?

John: Yeah, I think the first thing was just because it's good, like just because we're doing good work and we're making an impact in the world, doesn't mean it's easy. In fact, it means it's difficult. In our experience, we are trying to solve a challenge that is probably the most complex and in a way that is probably the most complicated way to do it.

When Aqua Clara started, I think the initial idea, the philosophy behind it was, we're going to go to these communities that don't have safe water, and we're going to look at them, not as beneficiaries or objects of our pity, we're going to look at these people as customers. And so we have to convince them that they need these solutions.

And it's interesting that you go to some of these communities, you find, first of all, people don't have an appreciation of the problem. So you can't go in with a solution. You have to take many steps back and talk about the problem that they're facing and make sure that that is understood.

And then talk about your solution in a way that is, of course, compelling, as you would do as a business with your clear value proposition, looking at them with all the respect you would have to a customer of a business, only to realize that a good number of them that now know they have a problem, now need the solution, and know they need the solution, don't have the money to pay for the solution. Well, you open another door challenges of how do you then help these customers acquire your product? And there are many ways that we've been able to do that.

So the first lesson was that just because it's good, it does not mean it's easy.

And there's a lot of things that we've had to do and we continue to do. There are a lot of lessons we've had to learn, a lot of experimentation, to really end up at a place where we are able to support our communities with the right education, support them with the right technology that is effective, and also prepare a path or a means or a method through which they can pay for the solutions that going to enable even those that are living on 5 dollars a day or less, which coincidentally is a population that really needs this solution because they've been left behind by all other alternatives. To be able to help them also pay for this and respect them as customers and design solutions that are going to be convincing for them to, to acquire for themselves.

Faith: I mean, I love hearing that it's not easy, but I think the impact of the work you do is so much worth it. There's a science behind it, there are commercial models behind it, really, to make it work. And we'll talk more about how the carbon market comes to support that. But I

think we just back to your role as a CEO. Has your leadership Style changed in the last eight years. So much has happened, I suppose, has there been any change in the way you lead Aqua Clara?

John: Yeah, certainly, Faith. I'd love to hope so because I started out, as I said, very green and came in also, once I realized how big the challenge was, I think the first thing was a lot of impatience because we needed to move very quickly.

Make sure we have millions of people. In Kenya, for example, we're talking about 40 percent of the population doesn't have access to safe water. 40 percent of 50 million – what's that? 20 million plus people that don't have safe water. So you can't afford to go slowly. You have to move quickly.

And so I was very impatient with myself. I was very impatient with my team. So over the years, I think I've realized that it's a marathon. It's not a sprint. You can run very quickly and get exhausted and you don't achieve much. We need to obviously not lose that impatience. We still have to look at this as a pressing and urgent challenge that needs solving.

But I think one of the things for me over the years that I've had to adjust is, as you work with people, it takes time, even for the people that I lead to get to the place they need to get to in terms of their role and being able to play their role effectively. So, changing from just pushing people to achieving goals, really supporting them to learn and grow, as I do that for myself. I think has been one of the critical learnings and continues to be one of the things I've invested a lot of my time is how do I lead my team to ensure that they get to perform to their best level possible.

And that's not something that you will do overnight. That's something that takes a lot of patience, a lot of intentional investment of the organization's resources, intentional investment of my time and their time to really get to that place. And I'm very happy with the team we have today because we've gone through a lot of lessons, a lot of change, a lot of growth, not that we're anywhere where we need to be, but I feel we're on the right path.

And if we continue with those lessons and the patience that goes with that, the millions of people that need access to safe water, I think we'll come very close over the years to helping as many of them achieve that

Faith: Great. I certainly resonated what you're saying. It's an urgent problem. I think, the approach to it: It's a marathon. Same with climate change. And we're going to talk a bit about that. So shifting, so specifically to aqua Clara: How exactly do you work to bring clean drinking water and sanitation to people in Kenya and East Africa, broadly speaking?

John: Yeah, it's a great question. So just to give you some context. The vast majority of Kenyans rely on water sources that are polluted. So, if you're thinking about shallow wells, you'll find that many of them have pit latrines, which is the toilets that most of them use, just a hole drilled on the ground. And some of these latrines are very close to, the shallow wells or very close to springs.

And so you have contamination of these water sources with the human waste, because our sanitation is also not being managed very well. You have contamination of surface water. And so a lot of the water sources we rely on are not safe. They're not providing safe water.

Municipal water supply is very minimal in most parts, and even that is also not 100 percent reliable. I would think even you, Faith, you don't drink water straight from the tap.

Faith: Absolutely not.

John: And we live, and we live in the big city where the water should be safe. So even municipal water treatment is not at the level where you can say 100 percent of the time that the water is safe. And so what has had to happen is that, people are advised that they need to treat this water in one way or another for it to be safe.

When you go to the hospital, the most predominant advice you'll be given is you need to boil your water. And so for many of our population, many families, many schools even, and healthcare facilities, they've had to boil their water to make it safe.

It's easy to say, as professional advice, but the reality is that boiling water is not easy for majority of people because it takes a long time, you need to collect fuel, mostly firewood or charcoal. That costs money. That takes time.

And then you have to go through the horrendous process of boiling water that is always filled with smoke and tears and all sorts of fluids around your face as you're boiling the water. And unfortunately, the end product doesn't taste that great, so the water that is boiled at the end, most people don't find it quite palatable. It's not the most interesting thing to drink. And so even there you find people still resort to drinking water that they know to be contaminated just because it tastes a bit better.

And so for us, what we do is provide an alternative to boiling. 80 percent of our customers come having previously been boiling water.

The other methods like using chlorination are effective, but again, most people are objected to the smell and taste of chlorinated water. And so the alternative we provide them is a natural means that makes this water safe.

We have water filters that are able to remove disease causing pathogens like bacteria that cause typhoid, cholera, these types of diseases, parasites, water that is turbid, water that looks brown, is coming from surface water sources or things like that. The filters are able to remove this contamination without interfering with the natural structure of water, the taste of water, the smell of water, which doesn't smell less, so making the water a lot more interesting to drink, but more importantly, safe: getting rid of all the contamination.

So the filters that we design and sell, distributing these communities, enable families and schools to make their water safe quite quickly and importantly, I know we're going to talk about this, make it affordable, so that it's a cost that is manageable

And then also get rid of the recurrent costs. So, if you're buying chemicals, for example, to treat your water, you're buying firewood, that is a cost that you have to incur week after week, but with the water filters lasting up to 5 years without any need for replacement or parts or repairs, it means that you, once you invest in these filters can forget about that cost and, channel your resources, which are often very limited, to more important things like educating your kids, or getting food and putting food on the table for your family.

Faith: Yeah, True. And thank you for providing context. I think it's so important because some of our listeners don't really appreciate what it means not to have potable water. And as you were talking, I was just remembering growing up, and that time element, like you come home, you're thirsty, very thirsty. But, your mom says the water is still warm, you have to drink warm water and it's not the best. So that's super, super important.

But let's really then talk about the impact, so it'd be really nice to hear some of the impact stories, specific examples, and especially around women and how, when they take on this filter, what type of impact we're seeing on the ground?

John: So I think to start with, we've been able to impact so far around 300, 000 people. The vast majority of them are school children, as well as families living in rural Kenya. Although in this number, we do have a few outside of the country in Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda, especially that we've been able to work with partners to supply with water filters and also with our education, which is, as I mentioned, very critical for people not just to appreciate the problem, but to also embrace the technology and use it correctly.

In seven out of 10 homes, we find that it's the role of women to make water safe, to make water available and make it safe. And they're spending on average 14 hours every month in this process. And so when they invest in a water filter, you can imagine the savings that come with time, 14 hours saved that is now available for them to use more productively in things like agriculture, that puts food on the table or money in their pocket. And importantly as well, it's the improvement in indoor air quality. It's not to say that they stop using firewood altogether, but they have reduced exposure to, smoke and carbon monoxide, especially in very small ventilated rooms that that are used typically.

But more importantly, of course, what we measure is the improvement in health from waterborne diseases. That's the main goal we exist to achieve is to help as many people as possible live lives that are free of waterborne diseases.

For some of these people, I'll give you 1 example, very early on when I started, I met an old man who wasn't sure whether he was complaining or applauding us for what we had done, but he got a filter and he felt something was wrong after he had been drinking the filtered water for some time for a few weeks. Because for the first time in his life, he didn't have a stomach ache.

Faith: Wow.

John: He had been so used to having a stomach upset and every time his stomach was not right. And for the first time, it wasn't aching. It was settled and that was abnormal to him. That was not okay. And so he, of course, got to appreciate what it meant to be, free of this pain or upset. And for some, it may not be as dramatic as that, but when we talk to schools, for example, you

appreciate the role that safe water has in kids being able to attend school uninterrupted because waterborne diseases are one of the leading causes of absenteeism.

And when kids miss school, they fall behind in education and education still matters, regardless of advancement with artificial intelligence or things like that. Kids still can benefit from education and can move the economic situation significantly. And so when they miss school that vicious cycle of poverty will continue and so being able to support schools and school children have safe water at school and at home contributes directly to enabling them to address the challenges we have with poverty, meaning that they can have a better education, have better opportunities for employment and we can you break that cycle.

And so thinking about impact, it's what we've done, as I said, there's that impatience that there's a lot more that needs to be done. As we speak today, there's millions more that need access to safe drinking water. If you go to our schools, the situation is really dire. And that's why for us, it was very important to provide solutions, not just for families at home, because kids are the most vulnerable to waterborne diseases. And it doesn't help for them to come home and drink safe water only to go to schools where the same is not available. They're drinking water that is contaminated and inevitably they're still going to fall sick.

Faith: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. When you talk about Children, the next generation it's so critical. And those impacts are super important. Actually access to safe water is part of the SDGs, right? So really, really great work in terms of development. But then let's talk about how that links with climate change and emission reduction. So, you know, some people might just see those things as silos, but how do they really come together? How does tackling unsafe drinking water also tackle emissions?

John: Yeah, interestingly, as I mentioned, my fascination with climate existed before my fascination with water. I'm a climate evangelist. I'm sure that people around me got tired of me talking about climate and what we were doing wrong, which many years later, we still continue to do surprisingly.

But when you think about water and what I just said about the vast majority of our customer, 80 percent precisely of our customers are engaged in, activities that lead to emission of carbon dioxide. Because the water they're drinking is not safe, they are advised to boil their water and boiling then of course means in many of these communities, some trees have to be cut down to make firewood or charcoal. That's problem number one.

And then this charcoal firewood has to be burned, to boil the water. And that's problem number two, which is carbon dioxide being emitted to the atmosphere.

And so while addressing the challenge of access to safe water we are concurrently ensuring that we are reducing carbon emission by avoiding the boiling practice that emits carbon dioxide. And we've been able, of course, with the work we've done with climate impact partners, to quantify what that is. And I'm sure we'll talk about our journey in this space. But that is the premise of it is that we are providing an alternative that reduces carbon dioxide emission and, of course, protects trees that are important as carbon sinks.

But importantly, of course, it's to appreciate the fact that the customers that we are serving are already, facing some of the most severe challenges with climate change because water sources are becoming, a lot less reliable. Rainfall patterns are erratic, you have prolonged droughts, like last year, we had a prolonged drought in parts where we work that has not been experienced before, and so they have to move to sources that are even less in terms of quality, and being able to equip them with a solution first as a way to avoid carbon emission.

But secondly, our water filters are able to then help them be more resilient because if you had a source that was fairly safe, so if you are relying on rainwater, for example, yeah, which is not always safe, but it's safer than using a spring that is next to a latrine, and now because you don't have rainwater, you have to go to that spring, your life is deteriorating. You're moving from a source that was probably not going to make you sick, to one that is certainly going to make you sick.

But being able to provide them with a water filter means that even as they move from one source to another, what will be constant is the fact that the filter will effectively convert whatever water they put through it, as long as it's contaminated with waterborne diseases or microbial matter, it will make that water safe.

So when we think about climate finance, we're looking at not just the mitigation through avoidance of carbon dioxide emission, but also the adaptation role that we play, ensuring that families are more resilient, so that they're able to provide safe water regardless of what source they're going to be using.

Faith: Well said! I think you have been working, we have been partnering with you for a number of years. Way before I joined the company. I believe so, I'd be interested to know why. It's very clear there is a link, but why did you decide to engage in the carbon credit space? And what impact does this financing from the carbon market have in your ability to scale as a business?

John: Yeah, it's a great question. And as you said, 2012 is when we got in on the game, which was many years ago, but for us, I mean, that that journey started very, very early on. I think when the opportunity was, we were aware of the opportunity.

And the main reason we jumped on it was we had a problem. As I said, our philosophy was to bring safe water to communities that don't have access to it. But look at them as customers. So we sell these solutions to them rather than give them away. And in 2012 and going back, that was a predominant way people looked at the challenge of safe water: These are poor people. We need to help them. So with good intentions, big hearts, you know, money would be collected, you'd have NGOs that give out products for free.

But it became very clear very quickly, that that was not working because some of these communities didn't appreciate the problem was there. So when you give them a solution, of course, it's free. I'm going to say yes, but because I don't appreciate the need for the solution, I'm quickly going to go back to my typical way of functioning. And so for us, selling products to communities was important, but we realized that for these communities, because they don't have that much income, it was going to be a tall order to sell these products at what it actually costs.

If we want to transfer all our costs, including our overheads, the salaries we have in the team that is putting these products together and distributing them, it was going to be impossible to provide safe water to the people who really needed it. And these are people that are living on less than 5 dollars a day.

So carbon credits became right away a very interesting opportunity because it would allow us to cover some of our costs and ensure that, whereas the customers would pay, we didn't need to transfer all our costs to this customer and burden them with the responsibility of paying even our salaries and some of the costs that go to research and development and the operations that we have.

And so that was the main motivation behind it. And we said, because we are making an impact on climate anyway, why not benefit from that? So we set out, of course, with, this idea of setting up a carbon credit project. I think remembering we were so early in on the scene that we were Guinea pigs for the methodologies that were being developed. I remember we had to push back on some of the methodologies to just say that, yeah, we are working out in the bush. There's not much that we can do in terms of, you know, we don't have a World Health Organization set up a lab that can test, to the level that you want, but can we work out something that is practical, but still robust enough to give credibility that these products are working, but these communities are benefiting.

And so we ended up arriving, I think, at, a methodology that was sensible that continues to benefit us and the rest of the sector. So the rest of the sector is welcome for that.

Faith: Yeah, I think that's a very interesting point. When you think about, the development of the carbon credit space, most people don't appreciate that there are people who actually started, the process, the methodologies and the tools that I used to quantify, and one of the challenges that African projects face is exactly that. You know, you said it jokingly, but access to data that can make that process even faster. And so I think from my experience, it was like one project developer would lead and then the others would kind of jump on that bandwagon in the sense that, yeah, these guys have found this value. It's been accepted, let's all use that. But that is so important. I think I would hope that people would be able to appreciate just how much goes into, developing these methodologies to ensure that that carbon credit is legit. It is genuine. But, it's been a number of years. So is there anything that has changed in terms of your engagement in this space in the last decade? Are there things you're seeing that...is it the same kind of the same market for you just generally?

John: Yeah. So I think even before we come to the market, I mean, the first thing I would say what has also been beneficial: obviously, the money is good because it keeps us operational, it helps us to make our products affordable, which increases our impact, just because our products can be afforded by a lot more people than if we didn't have come on credits.

But what has also happened concurrently is we've had then to manage data a lot better. We have a customer support set up that I think is unrivalled in the sector, if I may say so myself.

But it's something we pride ourselves in because every customer that buys a product from us will receive a follow up: 100 percent of our customers. And that follow up is critical to ensure that

they understand how this product works, how to maintain it. And because of that, we've seen our products are used for a lot longer than is the industry standard.

We have families using our product for the five years that it's meant to be used very well. Very limited attrition, drop off rate, so that for us it's truly not a business of selling water filters. It is a business of providing safe water and there is a big difference because we can sell a lot of filters and these filters are not used, or they're not working properly. And so the people we are trying to help still end up drinking dirty water.

But because of carbon credits, we've had to develop a very robust setup for following up on customers and supporting them with information, supporting them with spare parts, because for us now there is a dual motivator, which is not just the fact that we are selling filters for money, but we are paid for these filters to actually work. And so that is one of the things I would say over the years that I have seen improve in us as an organization.

And then coming to your question around the sector. Obviously, as I said, there's now a lot more awareness. We're seeing the Kenyan government is getting in on the game for carbon credits. I see many organizations now very curious to hear our story on what we've learned from that space. The market has obviously been an interesting aspect to keep an eye on and I think you're the expert, Faith, you would know where the market is heading...

But for me, I think what I would say is important. And what we've seen is that hopefully they increased awareness and there's a lot more scrutiny now, as you know, there's a lot more scrutiny because unfortunately, not everybody that is talking about carbon credits or wants to be part of it is coming in with pure motives, if I can use that word. But the idea that there are real projects that are making a real impact in people's lives and, we need to be open to scrutiny, of course, and show credibility in the, in the projects that we do.

My hope is that the market will be willing to support these types of projects, hopefully even pay a premium for these types of projects that are genuinely making an impact, both on climate, which is important, but have these additional benefits, whether it's providing safe water that reduces waterborne diseases or as an impact on poverty, as an impact on women, creating income opportunities.

So what I'm seeing in the market is that. I think we're going through a cleansing period, if I can call it that, where there is now separation of what is a credible project and what is not. My hope is that we come out of this, yes, with very robust setup for, for setting up projects that are credible and are real, that are making a real impact in people's lives.

And then hopefully there is resource available to pay for these types of credits. What would really enable us to move even further along time we've moved to accelerate the growth that we're having. That would be my hope.

Faith: Wow. I think what I resonate with you is that for African projects, the impact is unquestionable. The impact is not even to be disputed. And so therefore these projects should be valued. I think, when we think about the avoidance-removal conversations -this is my personal view - I think we need to really consider what you said, you know, women getting

access to clean water Children getting access to clean water, better health care, more time in school, and carbon being a facilitator. Thank you for that.

I think we share between Aqua Clara and climate impact partners, we are in the business of urgency. Our focus is on climate change. Yours is on clean water and carbon credits are a means through which you're able to achieve this ambition. But how do you plan, to reach your, is it one million target, over the next three years?

John: Yeah. And the ambition keeps growing. But as I said in the beginning, there's millions of people across Kenya alone. Our ambition is to grow beyond our borders and start looking at East Africa.

But even in Kenya, we've decided to actually start the Western side of the country. Western Kenya.

Faith: Why Western Kenya, actually?

John: A great question. I was hoping you'd ask me that, actually, because many people say, Oh, it's just because you come from there as well. But there wouldn't be anything wrong if that was the answer. They say charity begins at home.

But the bigger reason, actually, the more important reason is Western Kenya has an interesting mix. In Western Kenya, you'll find water is generally available. Not necessarily within the homestead, but within a short walking distance, people are able to access water from a spring from a shallow well or surface water sometimes, which is not the case for the rest of the country, the majority of the country.

Three quarters of Kenya is really dry. And so people have long distances to cover before they get water. And if you go to those communities, the immediate concern is not water quality, it is water of any quality.

Faith: Oh, yes, sure that's true.

John: And so if we go there as a business and we're talking about your water needs to be safe. They'll be like, what's water? Yes, bring us that safe water. Yes. So in Western Kenya, people do then have an appreciation that water quality needs to be addressed. So you'll find also here is where your population density. Communities are very packed densely, and that means if the sanitation is not done properly, which in many cases is not, you end up having contamination of the water sources with human waste. And so if you think about cases of cholera outbreaks in the country, you'll mostly see that happening in Western Kenya.

There are challenges across the country. So central Kenya has water availability. The water quality is better. Perception of water quality is also that the water is not bad, but even there it's changing, now there's a realization that even the water that used to be safe is no longer what it was, as population density also grows.

So we decided to start in Western Kenya because the problem is felt most severely, and we have around 10 million people living in the counties we cover in Western Kenya. And so the goal for us is to start in Western Kenya and the way we do it, we have, three major channels that we are using to access these communities.

The first and most important one is schools. Schools are a very interesting. Launchpad for knowledge, of course, but also we are seeing technology. Schools are neutral grounds for communities to take their kids for education and enlightenment. But it also gives us a population that is most vulnerable to waterborne diseases. So we partner with schools and provide water filters to these schools.

This is one area we are hoping carbon credits can play an even bigger role, is to support the filters that we put in schools, which sometimes also include rainwater harvesting, just to make sure that there's water available. Schools, unfortunately, don't have big budgets, so they don't have the money to pay for this. We've had to rely on NGOs to pay and sometimes other philanthropists. But increasingly, the idea would be, can we use carbon financing to support schools to have safe water? But what we then do with these schools is, we use these schools as a demonstration of the standards that needs to be met even at home.

And when these kids go back to their homes, they're the best ambassadors of encouraging the parents to embrace safe water through the water filters. And one question that they would typically pose to the parents is "how come I go to school and they give me safe what I come back home and look at what you're giving me?"

And so the parents are guilted, sorry to use that word, to do what they should have done, and then come to school and find out what is this kid talking about. And that becomes a teachable moment to share with the parents that, these are ways you can make your water safe. And through our business model, we are then able to support these families to also acquire water filters at a price they can afford, sometimes even allowing them to pay for these solutions over 3 to 6 months.

So that's the most important channel and the idea over the next 3 years really to achieve the goal of 1 million plus people we need to impact, is to partner with as many schools as possible.

In fact, we've mapped out 1500 schools that we need to partner with over the next three years and from each of these schools, of course, will support them with improving their water quality faster in school, and then the school gives us access to the parents who we'll educate and provide solutions for, within their homes. Tied to that, there are other channels like working with community health promoters - there's a network of them across the country, and they help us act as ambassadors that are supporting their communities to provide that education piece that is important. And once people then show demand for these solutions, link them back to us.

Faith: Cool, I think you've also spoken a bit about income because obviously you're running as a business. How does that piece fit into this? You know, there's a lot of talk about green growth and providing jobs to young Kenyans. How is Aqua Clara also contributing to that vision?

John: Yeah, so firstly, of course, we have, at the office level, we have staff teams that are looking at different aspects of our operation, whether it's marketing, or sales. Of course, sales is the

biggest component that we have, which I'll talk about shortly. But we have, of course, people looking at even assembling of these products and monitoring that I talked about.

We have an after sales support team that is making sure every customer is followed up on and is supported with information or spare parts as needed. But the vast majority of the jobs you're creating are around sales and distribution of our products. So we're looking at total around 160 direct jobs created over the next three years.

And then we have a network of over 3000 community health promoters that we are mobilizing, within various counties in Western Kenya, through our partnership with the Ministry of Health. And this community health promoters make a commission for any sales that is generated within their network, and their role essentially is to do what the government hopes they would do, to educate households within their catchment about the need to drink safe water.

And talk about some of the solutions that exist for these families and so when they do that role and sometimes they are able then to have three or four people that are interested in our water filters, they can improve their income by recommending that these people acquire products from us.

Faith: Brilliant. Great. There's a big challenge, John. You said billions still remain without access to clean water. What challenges, according to you remain, what are some of the biggest challenges and what action should, could some of our listeners take?

John: Yeah, I think the two biggest challenges, Faith, so the first one is awareness. Awareness still remains low in many communities. And so that is a challenge that the government has to take on. We continue to engage government to leverage the influence that they have within these communities, but also the workforce that they have, to ensure that as many people as possible, stop drinking dirty water, but are also provided with an alternative that is effective suitable.

The second challenge is affordability. First, I think there has to be an appreciation that for the vast majority, maybe not everybody, but the vast majority of the population we're talking about, especially at the household level, I think we need to get away from this idea of giving things for free. So the idea would be perhaps subsidizing costs for those that really can't afford them, but there has to be a price that is paid because that price then comes with ownership and the pride that people have, having invested in a solution. But affordability remains a challenge.

For the listeners. I think, depending on where they are and who they are, of course, they can play a role in awareness to some extent, but affordability is more accessible. So, for us, with the work we're doing with schools, it will be really beneficial to us to have partners, even as individuals that can support us to install these solutions for schools. That cost right now cannot be covered by schools, unfortunately, and with schools, we see that when we provide this solution, of course, with the accompanying education, there is that multiplier effect that comes in because we are then able to use our business model using that school as a launch pad to the village to then reach hundreds of homes with household solutions.

And so for listeners who are in a position to support one school the funds that are needed to install a water filter, perhaps a rainwater harvesting systems, it will be one way to support the initiative. If they're in a position to buy our carbon credits, obviously, that is also going to come

back as a major benefit, because that carbon credits revenue will extend our reach in terms of the impact we have, by ensuring that that revenue is leveraged to, increase the size of our sales team. That is then able to convert as many families as possible to beneficiaries of the water filters that we are distributing.

Faith: Cool. That's a great challenge to our listeners.

...And finally, we always ask our guests this question: Who do you know, or follow, that has moved their ambition to tangible impact? And why do they inspire you?

John: Yeah, that's a great question. And I didn't want to veer too far off from my sector because the first challenge I had was we have this grand ambitions to support millions of people with safe water in East Africa. Is this possible? Has it been done anywhere? Has there been any company that has set the pace or done something that we can emulate? And so several years back, I got to know of a company that had been doing some really tremendous work that continues to do very tremendous work in our space. in Guatemala, there's a company called Ecofiltro. And so the, guys from climate impact actually might know Ecofiltro.

And so the founder of Ecofiltro, Philip Wilson, who I had the pleasure of meeting this year. He was in my eyes like a rock star. This is the guy who's done it and shown that it can be done.

Faith: Wow.

John: And so when I think about this challenge, and it is a huge challenge, and sometimes I feel like we are being unreasonable with the ambitions that we have, it is good to be able to look across the seas and see that it can be done. It has been done and that then gives us no excuse for not getting where we need to get to.

And so Philip and I had interesting conversations and because of that, I'm encouraged more than I was before that it is a challenge that can be taken on and we can achieve the ambitions that we have. We need to keep going and, need to keep investing in the right things. But it can be done. And because it's been done, it can be done again. Even though it's been done in a different part of the world, it can be done here and hopefully even be done to a larger scale.

Faith: Of course. Of course. Excellent. We'll make sure Philip hears this. He's a friend of Climate Impact Partners. Thank you so much, John. This was really, really nice. It was great to hear your story. And we want to wish you all the best and see you sometime in Nairobi.

John: Thank you, Faith. It was a pleasure. It was really a pleasure talking to you and, all the best. Yeah. Thank you.

Thank you for joining us for today's episode of ambition to impact. We hope you enjoyed it as much as we did and are left feeling inspired. Be sure to subscribe to our podcast on your favorite platform. So you never miss an episode. And if you found today's conversation valuable, please consider leaving us a review.

Your feedback means a lot to us and helps others discover the show. Don't forget to follow us on LinkedIn at Climate Impact Partners, where you'll have access to behind the scenes footage, updates and much more.

Stay tuned for upcoming episodes where we'll continue our journey from ambition to impact.