DOCUMENT 2: ARTICLE - The Campaign That Saved the Wetlands

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DIGITAL ADVOCACY SUCCESS STORIES


The Campaign That Saved the Wetlands


How 5 young people used social media to protect their community
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By: Digital Advocacy Team | 10 MIN READ

THE PROBLEM

In early 2024, residents of a small community near Kigali noticed something alarming. Trucks were arriving daily at the Rwampara Wetlands—a vital ecosystem that provided clean water and protected their village from flooding. The trucks were dumping construction waste, slowly filling in the wetlands to create land for building.

The wetlands had protected their community for generations. Without them, floods would destroy homes and farms during rainy seasons.

When community members complained to local officials, they were told: "Development requires sacrifice. This land is needed for housing."

But the community knew the truth: A wealthy developer had connections. The dumping continued. No action was taken.

THE TEAM

Five young people from the community—all under age 25—decided they couldn't wait for someone else to act. They formed a small advocacy team:

- Clarisse, 24 – Had attended a digital advocacy workshop
- Emmanuel, 22 – Worked part-time at a phone repair shop
- Marie, 23 – Was studying communications at university
- Jean-Paul, 21 – Loved making videos on his phone
- Alice, 19 – Was active on TikTok and understood trends

They had no money, no connections, and no experience running a campaign. But they had smartphones and determination.

THE CAMPAIGN

Step 1: Know Your Goal

The team met under a tree and agreed on one clear goal:

"Stop the dumping in Rwampara Wetlands and force the government to enforce environmental protection laws."

Step 2: Know Your Audience

They identified three key audiences:

- Local community members – Needed to join the fight
- Young people across Rwanda – Could create pressure through visibility
- Government officials – Needed to feel public pressure

Step 3: Choose Platforms

Based on their audiences:

- WhatsApp – To organize community members
- TikTok and Instagram – To reach young people with videos
- Twitter/X – To target officials and media

Step 4: Plan Content

They decided to create:

- Videos of the wetlands and dumping trucks
- Stories from community elders
- Educational content about why wetlands matter
- Petitions and calls to action

Step 5: Create a Schedule

- Daily: One TikTok or Instagram video
- Weekly: One longer post explaining progress
- As needed: Live videos when dumping happened

Step 6: Engage Followers

They committed to replying to every comment within hours.

THE CONTENT THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

The Mukamana Story

Jean-Paul interviewed 68-year-old Mukamana, who had lived near the wetlands her entire life. The video was simple—just her speaking to camera:

"When I was a girl, my mother told me: 'The wetlands are our protector.' During the 1997 floods, when houses in other areas washed away, our village was safe because the wetlands absorbed the water. Now they are filling it with rubbish. Who will protect us when the rains come?"

She wiped a tear. The video was 47 seconds long.

The video was viewed 200,000 times in three days.

The Drone Shot

Emmanuel borrowed a friend's drone. He filmed the wetlands from above—showing green, healthy areas next to brown, destroyed sections where trucks dumped waste. The contrast was shocking.

That post was shared 5,000 times.

The Hashtag

Marie created the hashtag #SaveRwampara. It appeared on every post. Within two weeks, it had been used 15,000 times.

THE TURNING POINT

One month into the campaign, a national TV station contacted them. A reporter had seen their TikToks. They wanted to do a story.

Clarisse and Mukamana appeared on prime-time news. Mukamana told her story to the entire country.

The next day, the Ministry of Environment issued a statement: "We are investigating reports of illegal dumping in wetlands."

The developer's connections no longer protected him. The issue was now public.

THE DATA THAT PROVED IMPACT

The team tracked everything:

Metric	After 6 Weeks
TikTok followers	12,000

Instagram followers	8,500
Twitter followers	3,200
#SaveRwampara uses	35,000
Petition signatures	8,700
TV news stories	2
Radio interviews	3

They created a simple graphic showing:

- 8,700 signatures delivered to the Ministry
- 35,000 people engaged online
- 5,000 community members ready to protest if needed

They posted this graphic with the caption: *"The people have spoken. Will the government listen?"*

THE RESULT

Two months after the campaign began, the Ministry of Environment announced:

- All dumping in Rwampara Wetlands must stop immediately
- The developer was fined 5 million RWF

- A restoration plan would begin within 90 days
- Three officials who ignored complaints were transferred

The community gathered at the wetlands to celebrate. Mukamana spoke again—this time smiling:

"I told you. The wetlands are our protector. And you—our young people—became the protectors of the wetlands."

WHAT THEY LEARNED

After the campaign, the team reflected on what worked:

Clarisse: *"The strategy mattered. We didn't just post randomly. We had a plan for every platform."*

Emmanuel: *"Visuals are everything. The drone shot and Mukamana's face—that's what moved people."*

Marie: *"Data gave us credibility. When we showed 8,700 signatures, officials couldn't ignore us."*

Jean-Paul: *"Stories, not facts. Everyone knows wetlands are important. But Mukamana crying? That people felt."*

Alice: *"Young people have power. We had no money, but we had phones and voices. That was enough."*

TIPS FROM THE TEAM

Tip	Why It Works
Show real faces	People connect with people, not organizations
Use simple videos	You don't need expensive equipment
Create one hashtag	Makes your campaign easy to find and join
Track everything	Numbers prove you matter
Reply to comments	Builds community and keeps momentum
Involve elders	Their stories have weight and wisdom
Never give up	They said no for months before yes

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What made Mukamana's video so powerful?
2. How did the team use all four digital advocacy skills?
3. Why was tracking data important to their success?
4. What would you have done differently?
5. What issue in YOUR community needs a digital campaign?

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"We had no money, but we had phones and voices. That was enough."

— Alice, age 19