

Nakawa Youths Lead Community in Advocating Affordable Water and Sanitation Services

By Judith Omondi

October 2019 - For the over 50,000 residents of Banda village, one of the populous informal settlements located on the hilly fringes of the Nakawa division of Uganda's capital Kampala, access to clean and safe domestic water is often not a guaranteed amenity. A 20-litre jerrycan of tap water purchased from vendors at the average cost of UGX 200, is neither affordable nor within manageable distance to many households, forcing disadvantaged families to opt for unsafe sources like polluted springs.

The neighbourhood, which also is notorious for violence and crime, has only one functioning public toilet, shared by many residents with no latrines of their own. Solid waste disposal can also be problematic here with majority of families unable to prioritize the minimum payable monthly collection fee of UGX 3000 charged by the Kampala City Council Authority (KCCA) and its sub-contractors.

However, this grim picture is beginning to gradually change for the better, thanks to the diligent efforts of a small band of local youth, who have initiated a campaign to promote better hygiene practices within their neighbourhood and advocate for improvement in the quality of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services.

A casual walk through the narrow and winding residential pathways of Banda now reveals better flowing drainage channels devoid of the usual clogging debris. The absence of garbage heaps in between houses and in open spaces also is evidence of ongoing local clean-up activities.

"We have been able to mobilize the community to clear garbage in the neighbourhoods and clean up the water springs," states Juma Ali, the overall coordinator of the Youth Advocacy Committees in Nakawa. "Some people take water directly from the springs because tap water is expensive and located far from many homes. The springs are now clean and this has reduced diseases in the community."

These encouraging sentiments are shared by representatives from the other five slum areas of Nakawa, where similar Youth Advocacy Committees have been established under the new Danish People's Aid (DPA) Program, which is supporting improved WASH governance in four counties in the eastern Africa region.

DPA PROGRAM

The three-year program entitled "*Civil Society Action for Improved WASH Services in Uganda, Tanzania Kenya and Somalia*", and funded through the Danish Civil Society Fund, is aiming at strengthening civil society engagement in the prioritization and investment in WASH, with the ultimate goal of improving access to WASH services delivered both by government and private service providers in the target countries.

In Uganda, the program is being implemented in partnership with two organizations, namely the Uganda Water and Sanitation Network (UWASNET), a national member-based umbrella organization coordinating civil society organizations around WASH advocacy at the national level, and the Community Integrated Development Initiatives (CIDI), a non-governmental organization which promotes community empowerment in 28 Ugandan districts.

CIDI facilitates the program's ongoing WASH advocacy in the informal settlement of Nakawa primarily by promoting citizen engagement with the Kampala City Council Authority (KCCA) and the national government in the development of policy guidelines, including the ongoing KCCA five-year strategic planning, which is expected to incorporate the views of local citizens.

Close to 10 million people in Uganda live without access to safe water, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) Annual Country Report 2015, while only 19% have access to improved sanitation, and eight percent practice open defecation. WASH challenges in Uganda are particularly critical in rural areas and in informal settlements and slums, which are home to over half of the urban population.

Uganda has ratified international treaties that enshrine the fundamental right to water and sanitation services, including the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). However, while the policies and regulations to support the WASH sector are in place, the sector remains under prioritized and underfunded, standing currently at three (3%) percent of the national budget (765 billion down from 5% for the FY 2018/2019 (1.2663 bn thus falling behind on the SDG targets of realizing universal access to WASH by 2030.

With about 77 percent of Uganda's population estimated at 39 million considered to be under the age of 30 years and mainly living in the informal settlements or slums that are most prone to substance abuse and crime, the entry point for the DPA program has strategically targeted engagement with the youth as the most critical demographic segment of the community.

ADVOCACY STRUCTURES

Therefore, at the grass root level, CIDI has prioritised the setting up and training of the local youth advocacy structures in the five informal settlements as action groups to lead their communities in promoting better hygiene practices and engage local authorities to improve WASH services. So far the established Youth Advocacy Committees in Nakawa consist of 30 members and 7 leaders working in the target wards of Mutungo, Naguru 1 and 2, Mbuya -Katoogo and Banda.

"The advocacy structures are predominantly youth. They have identified issues and generated evidence on the status of WASH within their community," explains CIDI's Hellen Kasujja who is coordinating the program's advocacy component in Nakawa.

As expected, the committees have effectively assumed leadership within their communities on matters involving water and sanitation, based on the knowledge and skills acquired from their training. "We went door to door and carried out awareness campaign in the community. We drained out the water channels, removed garbage from draining systems, encouraged them to drink boiled water and maintain a clean environment," states Openji Ben, coordinator of Naguru parish youth advocacy committee.

Local land lords are especially being targeted in this campaign under the new slogan "*No latrine, No Tenants*", which encourages prospective tenants to reject houses with no toilets. As a result, at least 5 new household pit latrines are known to have been built in the target area so far.

The youth are going as far as converting spaces previously used as a dumping grounds into playing grounds for children. "All the piles of garbage have been cleared, but we fear that people will start dumping on the site if we leave it. So, we are trying to convert it into a children's playing ground," adds Mr. Openji.

IMPROVING AFFORDABILITY

Through the formal platforms, created under this program to facilitate dialogue between citizens and local authorities and service providers, the advocacy committees are lobbying the KCCA and service providers to consider providing waivers on water and garbage collection tariffs for poor neighbourhoods that are struggling with affordability. “The KCCA should take some responsibility for garbage collection in poorer areas,” adds Kasese Geoffrey, an advocacy committee member from Naguru ward.

In particular, they are pushing for the reduction of the current 18 percent value added tax (VAT) levied on water services and a full waiver on garbage collection fees in slum areas. “Solid waste management in the city is a big one,” explains Ms. Kasujja. “Poor communities face challenges with the cost of transportation of garbage. We are in discussion with authorities to find ways of addressing the issues raised by citizens through the established dialogue structures and at the policy levels.”

RECYCLING

To further improve the long-term management of solid waste within the communities, the youth advocacy team has introduced recycling as a sustainable way of reducing garbage as well as a potential income generating opportunity for the large numbers of unemployed youth in the target wards.

In Naguru Parish, where this practice has taken root, plastic bottles and banana peels are already being picked up in sacks for recycling. “The biggest percentage of garbage is biodegradable. Plastic and paper can be recycled,” says Mr. Kasese. “We have trained the community and encouraged people to sort out their garbage to make the plastics ready to sell.”

According to Ms. Kasujja, the components of recycling will create important links with the private sectors while sustainably addressing garbage reduction within the communities. “We can build business models that can provide income to young people,” she says.

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