

# HOW EXCLUSION IN SANITATION PROGRAMMING

# Disabled and neglected

## The sad story



**ISSUE AT HAND**  
Designs of latrines do not cater for persons with disabilities



Sababa has to drag herself by the buttocks to access a latrine

"When I have diarrhoea, it is best that I spend the days and nights nearer to the latrine so I can be able to quickly roll to ease myself. Short of that, I would never make it to the latrine in time."

Such is the story of Naome Sababa, a 30-year-old woman who has lived almost all her life with impairment in both her arms and legs. Her only mode of motion is by dragging herself by the buttocks. She suffered a measles attack when she was nine months old and has been paralysed.

When I arrived at her home, which is approximately one mile up the Rwenzori Mountains, I found her seated at the veranda of her mud-and-wattle house; helplessly looking at her seven-year-old nephew, Benjamin

A recent annual assessment and community visit done by Water Charity, a non-government organisation, discovered that out of the eight schools in and around the Rwenzori Mountains, none has a nearby water source.

The children in these schools drink dirty water from far-away rivers. This poses a risk of contracting waterborne diseases such as diarrhoea, typhoid and cholera by school-going children.

But for children like Benjamin Kato of Kararuga sub-county in Kabarole district, who cannot go to school because he is paraplegic, the situation is even worse. The seven-year-old lives in abhorring sanitation conditions and is unable to access water by himself.

After Kato's uncle (and my guide), Elikana Kahuzo, quickly picked him up, I noticed a freshly wetted patch where Kato was lying, prompting me to ask whether it was his urine.

"Yes, that is his urine. Kato cases himself wherever he goes the urge because he cannot move himself to the latrine. He cannot speak, so it is even difficult for him to call out for help whenever he wants to go to the latrine," Kahuzo says.

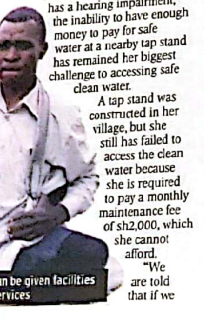
Nathan Kahuzo, Kato's father, says the seven-year-old cannot walk or sit on his own due to a neurological

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impairment. The family was told that he got the problem as a result of a delayed delivery process, which his twin sister was lucky to survive. She is now studying in P1 at a school down the mountain.

Naome Sababa, 30, also a resident of Kararuga sub-county, relies on young children like Kato's sister to fetch for her water. "If the children are not around, I have to wait until they are back. Going to the latrine, I have to drag myself by the buttocks as I," she says in a tone that hardly hides her pain. The latrine she uses is used by about seven other members of the family, including children who defecate and urinate around the pit.

But, Kato and Sababa's anguish is just, but a small representation of what several more persons living with disabilities (PWDs) around the country go through to access water and sanitation services. Many argue that they have been left out and only when they are a thread of hope that the situation could change for the better someday.



PWDs in urban centres can be given facilities where they can access services

Kagenda says he moves on his knees, which in most cases leaves them swollen and very painful.

The distance from his home and the nearest water source is about 200m and he says accessing the source on his wheelchair is troublesome. He survives on the mercy of fellow children who fetch water for him.

At school (Kazingo SDA Primary School), he uses teachers' latrines because they appear cleaner since they have a concrete slab.

And for Evelyn Nyakaisiki, who has a hearing impairment, the inability to have enough money to pay for safe water at a nearby tap stand has remained her biggest challenge to accessing safe clean water.

A tap stand was constructed in her village, but she still has failed to access the clean water because she is required to pay a monthly maintenance fee of sh2,000, which she cannot afford.

"We are told that if we

cannot pay that money, then we should not use the tap water," she says. Nyakaisiki has since stopped using the tap water and risks her life by fetching muddy water from the nearby river Mpanga. Most people in this village have also resorted to using the unsafe river water.

**SIMILAR SITUATIONS**

Taking a look at the situation in urban centres, one would expect that life is a little better for the PWDs, but living in such areas also comes with its challenges.

For Happy Simburiregye, a person with disability and resident of Fort Portal town, paying with money to access a sanitation facility is something he has vowed never to do.

He has been on the Fort Portal streets for about three years now, having moved from Bundibugyo. Simburiregye says he faces a challenge accessing toilet services within the town because most of the facilities are built with steps (stairs) made of usually slippery tiles, yet he cannot climb them without help. To make matters worse, he has to part with some money to access the toilets yet he hardly earns a shilling.

"The truth is, I do not have money. But even when I have little, I would rather spend it on getting what to eat than pay for toilet access. I, therefore, find places where there

# HAS IMPAIRED PWDS MORE



Inclusive safe water sources must be set up closer to PWDS to boost their self-reliance

are no people and ease myself or get a Polythene bag," he admits.

This seems to contrast the 2016 Uganda Water and Environment Sector Performance Report, which indicates that in the 2015/16 financial year, a total of 29 public toilets in 26 towns were constructed by the Water and Sanitation Development Facilities. The toilets, according to the report, have stances for both men and women, and each of the toilets has two stances for the PWDs, with one on the male side and the other on the female side. But maybe, Simburiregye's town is not among the 26.



A woman with a hearing impairment fetching water from River Mpanga

**AREA LEADERS SPEAK OUT**

Kahuzo, who is also the LG3 chairperson of Kararuga sub-county, says the area found in Burahya county, is a mountainous one and the residents get several challenges when it comes to water coverage. The area is not well-served with safe water and most people use the nearby River Mpanga.

When they need water, people in this area have to go deep in the valleys to draw water. "You can imagine how challenging such a terrain can be for someone who is visually impaired. I request the Government and NGOs to consider this sub-county and bring enough safe water sources closer to the people," he urges.

Kahuzo says what makes the situation worse is that when it rains, the valleys in which people fetch water are affected by mudslides, which contaminate the water. "It would be better if we were given gravity flow schemes or water harvesting tanks to enable bring water closer to the people in the mountains," he adds.

When it comes to the latrine patterns, PWDs in this area have a huge challenge because the designs do not cater for them.

**INABILITY TO FETCH WATER**

Joseph Baguma (visually-impaired) is the councillor for PWDs in Kararuga sub-county and also serves as the chairperson of the visually impaired in Kabarole district.

According to him, access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in the area is a huge challenge for the PWDs. He says there are about 100 PWDs in Kararuga alone.

He says most of the PWDs he interacts

## WHAT SECTOR PLAYERS ARE DOING

Stephen Birungi, working with Health through Water and Sanitation programme (HEWASA), an organisation under Fort Portal Catholic Diocese, says in as far as equity and inclusion of PWDs in water and sanitation programming is concerned, more concentration has been put on the sanitation aspect than water.

"In sanitation, we design special stances for people with disabilities when we are constructing latrines at the institution level such as schools and health centres," he says.

Birungi explains that in terms of water, although not much has been done, HEWASA is employing models aimed at bringing water closer to the people; including those with impairment. This has been made mainly through gravity flow water systems.

"With this system, we use tap stands, where even PWDs can be able to draw water since they are easier to open unlike boreholes that may require one to be strong," he says.

But, disability being a complex concept that includes those that have visual, hearing or neurological impairments and cannot be able to move by themselves to the tap stands, Birungi reveals that a software component has been developed. It aims at making sure that such people have support from the people they live with.

"The software component focuses majority on the sensitisation of the communities, specifically targeting PWDs and their relatives. This is aimed at making sure they are able to give support to their persons with impairments," Birungi says. "He adds: "We have also come up with a consortium of partner organisations, which will mainly focus on advocacy for community empowerment of marginalised categories and in this case, PWDs are at the core."

He says in many times, these have been overlooked, especially in technology designs. "Under this programme, we are trying to give them a voice such that they can be listened to and the duty bearers come up with technologies that can take care of PWDs," Birungi adds.

Monica Komucunguzi, also working with HEWASA, says several interventions in sanitation have been made to promote social inclusion.

"We have a case in Bulunjo, Kyejojo district, where a visually impaired man did not use a latrine. He was using the bush to ease himself. We worked with community members to construct for him a latrine and a hand-washing facility," she says.

Komucunguzi adds: "We have also employed a mechanism of creating stone pathways to the latrine so a blind person can find their way to the latrine even without a guide. Using their walking sticks, they are trained that if they identify where the stones are, they can slowly move along the stone path to get to the latrine by themselves."

She also states that in some other cases, ropes are used along the path to the latrine so that such a person can hold onto that rope to guide them to the latrine.

"More so, in places like Kyalusozzi, there are albinos who for long have been marginalised by their communities. We make sure that when we are holding WASH meetings in the community, they participate and their views heard. This has made them feel part of the community," she states.

**WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?**

Baguma says sensitisation of PWDs and the rest of the communities on how to care for them should be done. "The water should also be brought closer to homes where PWDs are identified to be living. This will improve accessibility," he says.

For places like Kirarungga village, in Buyende district, simple technology has seen the construction of inclusive boreholes. These have improved access to clean and safe water, but more so are user-friendly for the elderly and PWDs. Constructed by Plan International-Uganda, the boreholes have a ramp that allows people in wheelchairs to access them. In addition, there is a concrete base built purposely for them to sit as they pump water.

Mary Magoba, 27, a PWD in Kirarungga village, says on several occasions; before the borehole was constructed, she would

go to bed without showering if at all there was no Good Samaritan to fetch for her a jerrycan of water.

She says she previously was unable to climb the hills leading to the village spring well. But today, she can afford to ride her wheelchair to the borehole and get water.

Judging from the experiences above and many more that are left undocumented, living with any kind of disability comes with limitations. These pose a huge challenge in the search for comfortable living. So what then can you make of a situation where one who already has the limitations caused by disability also has to endure the pains of lacking essential facilities of comfortable living like proper hygiene? Something should be done.

What is your say? sunday@newvision.co.ug

