

**Social movements in Kumi and Bukedea push
for good governance to achieve social Justice**

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Background

Uganda is a richly endowed country with fertile soils, great tourism potential, a young vibrant population and large deposits of natural resources among others.

However, despite being blessed with all these, majority of the population still live below the poverty line with most households living on less than a dollar per day.

One of the biggest factors responsible for this has been poor governance and lack of accountability which has a direct bearing on the livelihoods of the people.

ActionAid International-Uganda has been at the forefront of trying to change this status quo by strengthening struggle for social justice through empowerment of the masses who are the rights holders to be able to hold their leaders duty bearers accountable in provision of quality equitable gender responsive services.

Mr. Emmanuel Wafula Kumi Cluster coordinator says that "ActionAid believes that people are poor because of poor governance which has a direct bearing on their livelihoods. Resources are allocated by people in governance; human rights are protected and guaranteed by people in leadership so ActionAid focuses a lot on good governance and accountability. We believe that if there is good governance there will be good public service delivery and there will be good health services, schools, roads, infrastructure and the livelihoods of the people will be better"

ActionAid engages the citizens to challenge their leaders and to hold them accountable for the delivery of quality public services and gender responsive public services. It supports communities, social movements and young people to be able to engage with their leaders demand for accountability and good public service delivery. When this happens, people will have good schools, hospitals, infrastructure and good agriculture services. This will enable people fight oppression and injustices that keep people in a vicious circle of poverty.

Emmanuel adds that "ActionAid ultimate goal is to ensure that there is social justice, freedom at expression and enjoyment of rights. To achieve this we work around the three Rs – Rights, Redistribution and Resilience. People have rights and if these are guaranteed then there must be equity in the distribution of resources and power – people should have the power to demand. To redistribute these (resources and power) there is need to strengthen the resilience of the people to be able to demand and challenge negative power.

These three Rs are what we work around to ensure that we attain good governance"

Emmanuel also says that "Related to this is our theory of change, this is around how rights are guaranteed and how power can be espoused and how people can work together and we believe that this is how change happens. First in theory of change, people have rights and they have to be supported to understand that they have rights and have the power to demand for their rights and we believe that people should be empowered to demand for these rights on their own. As ActionAid we create the space and environment, build power and confidence of the people because we believe this is how change will happen"

ActionAid has supported the people in terms of capacity building, carried out training, provided information, mobilized them and empowered them to have dialogues with their leaders.



Emmanuel Wafula Owor,
ActionAid Cluster Coordinator-
Kumi

Partnerships

To achieve social justice, ActionAid has been working with partners both institutional and informal partners. It works with NGOs, CBOs, Donors, religious and cultural institutions, lower and higher local governments, ministries and departments. They work by complementing one another to avoid duplication.

In Kumi and Bukedea ActionAid is working with community groups and local governments of the two districts, Iteso cultural union, cultural union of the Bagwere, CBOs like Teso Anti Corruption Coalition (TAC) and the media to popularize peoples struggles.

Fred Malinga the Principle Assistant Chief Administrative Officer Kumi District says that "Kumi District was ranked one of the best performing local governments in Uganda in 2019 assessment performance because of the commitment of the leaders, partnership with ActionAid and other stakeholders to promote good governance and using the limited resources to fill up the gaps. The district scored highly on issues of accountability, service delivery, classrooms, and agricultural production which are at the center of good governance. Kumi has 69 parishes each with a development committee assessing and prioritizing the needs of the people at that level. The chiefs ensure that they effectively monitor government programmes including schools, roads and health facilities. The district also holds quarterly meetings to different levels which enabled it to perform very well on issues of governance.

On partnerships, Fred says that "we have a very strong partnership with our NGOs on issues of governance and service delivery, ActionAid has greatly supported Kumi and within the areas they are operating is where we are doing very well. We make sure that every quarter at sub county level we hold a dialogue meeting and these are district led activities with ActionAid just facilitating the process. This has been important because we are able to account to our people on what their money is doing. Also at the district we have accountability dialogues and through regular meetings we have been able to hear the voices of the people. They raise issues like quality of constructed roads and buildings because of empowerment from ActionAid.

As a result the duty bearers have to account and some have been interdicted because of the voices of the people.

People's consciousness is improving every day 2 -3 years back Kumi district used to perform very poorly but now it is one of those districts that cannot be taken for granted, duty bearers have to deliver services to the people. People are now actively taking part in planning and budgeting process thanks to efforts of ActionAid.

Fred adds that "We have had to do a lot of priority setting that is bent towards the needs of the people though increment in terms of resource envelop has not been much. In Kumi we try to respond to all the demand driven needs of the people unlike before when we were doing top bottom planning. We have also been able to help the communities to generate their own resources within their own means and they have built classrooms, teacher's houses and constructed feeder roads because of the engagements we have. We believe that as they wait for government support, they can be



doing something"
Fred Malinga, Principle Assistant Chief Administrative Officer Kumi District

One of the biggest problems Kumi district is facing is meeting the demands of the people on public services besides the meagre resources. Looking at education as an example, school enrolment has doubled and in some places it has tripled and this increases the demand for more classrooms, teachers and more resources compared to what we are now having. Health facilities are experiencing shortage of staff, machines, space and medicines all these requiring substantial resources.

Kumi district is reviewing its district development plan while taking stock of what's not right and re-strategize its position in making sure that it achieves objectives highlighted. In the next five years, it is projected that Kumi will be having a well-informed population, improved service delivery and increased household incomes because of good governance.

He concludes that "a lot needs to be done to improve accountability both from duty bearers and rights holders. People should be empowered to account for the little resource that they get and they should also be empowered to take advantage of the structures. Why should we ask duty bearers to account when he misuses 10 million and we don't make the community account for a project of 100 million? Once we take accountability right from the village up to the district then we can say we have done it"



Kumi District Administration building



Benson Odeke – Coordinator Activista Ongino Sub county, Kumi District in Eastern Uganda

Benson Odeke – Coordinator Activista Ongino Sub county in Kumi district reveals the importance of the trainings given to them by ActionAid "Through these trainings we were empowered, we didn't know our rights as citizens of Uganda like we have a right to monitor government programs but since we attended the trainings organized by ActionAid we have known our rights and what we are supposed to do - monitoring as citizens of Uganda .We are now empowered as Activista and we can now hold our leaders accountable and gone ahead to challenge our leaders on service delivery"

Activista work at parish and district levels to gather issues in different sectors and when we identify an issue, we mobilize the community to a dialogue meeting with respective leaders.

Since we are volunteers, we call for support from ActionAid to facilitate our work "ActionAid should further support us Activista to form SACCOs so that we can start saving so that we can be able to work more efficiently and reach more areas"

Hon. Michael Aretor O.O Speaker Nyero Sub County says that they have been working closely with Activista “Through support from ActionAid and Activista, as a subcounty they opened our eyes and helped us plan and budget better by ensuring that every stakeholder is involved in all these processes. Through dialogues, every action that the subcounty takes is informed by different village action plans generated by the people. This bottom up planning has greatly promoted accountability and improved our relations with the community. We make Village action plan which feeds into parish action plans and at subcounty we have what we call a budget conference.

After this meeting we formulate sub county plans and the sub county technical committee takes over”. In all these, community monitors have been key in the mobilization and advocacy.

Because of this kind of planning, the subcounty has registered several successes.

- Before Kumi district was not remitting the local service tax of Nyero subcounty for more than three years but when ActionAid taught the people how to advocate and lobby for proposed public services, it now receives money to a tune of three million every quota this has raised our local revenue

base as a sub county.

- Service delivery has improved because around 80% of what is planned is implemented-service delivery is much better than before.
- The Senior Assistant Secretary of Nyero Sub county was interdicted because of misappropriation of funds though investigations are going on.
- Our planning is now in quarters and it is in a participatory way.

Joseph Oenen (in picture below) is an Activista from Nyero subcounty. As Activista we have been at the forefront of championing the push for good governance at the sub county (Nyero).



Joseph says that “because of our tireless efforts, we have been able to achieve the following among others:

- Fencing of the sub county headquarters which took three phases and we achieved this through working together as stakeholders.
- Construction of a maternity unit at Nyero Health centre III which has improved maternity services for mothers.
- We also got an access road connecting two other sub counties.
- The technical team of the sub county used to see us as witch hunters but now we have become allies because they

recognize that good governance efforts benefits everyone. They invite us for the budget conferences so that we can also add our voices.

- As Activista we spearheaded the call for the interdiction of our Senior Assistant Secretary recently because we discovered that he had misappropriated funds meant for road construction in 2019. We even reached to the extent of threatening to lock the sub county office unless we got answers. Because of this the Senior Assistant Secretary was interdicted”

In picture below is the fenced Nyero Sub county headquarters

“We have been engaging with leaders without fear or favour and in any place and at any time. At first people were very reluctant to come for dialogue meetings but when we kept explaining to them the importance of the dialogues, they started embracing the process. They have been participating in dialogues, barazas and recently a bicycle caravan”



Charles Auruku Records assistant Nyero health centre III says that "Activistas have been instrumental in the improvement of service delivery at the health unit. They came with a score card exercises and started identifying areas we were not doing well and helped us lobby for support from Sub County and the district. Previously the community had issue with the health facility in terms of service delivery but with the changes done by the district Health department like transfers and recruitment, we were helped to deliver better services and the community is very happy. Staff are always on duty and people get timely services. We used to deliver 8 mothers every month

but because of improved changes we now deliver up to 50 mothers.



Mr. Charles Auruku (pictured left) Records assistant Nyero health centre III chats with one of the nurses at Nyero Health Centre III

Akurut Esther (fetching water in purple dress), a Resident of Ongino subcounty reveals that sometime back, "this borehole which serves our village got spoilt and for two years we had challenges accessing safe, clean water. We used to buy tap water at 200 shs per jerrycan and those who could not afford had to trek long distances to unsafe streams and rivers exacerbating the problem of water borne diseases. However since it was repaired it has saved us a lot in time, distance and access to clean water"



Asire Margret Activista from Ogino Sub County says that

"As Activista we use Community dialogues and carried out community monitoring of ongoing public services to ensure quality and timeliness in completion of projects. When we discovered that money meant for setting up a fisheries project for the community had been eaten by the technical staff, we organized a dialogue and further discovered that ghost groups had been used to swindle the money. We tasked the relevant

authorities to recover the money . Also using score cards in schools we have seen an improvement in how they are run. There is now school feeding in most of the UPE schools and parents are actively involved in running these schools. These schools are also using P.T.A funds to recruit more teachers. Our efforts also contributed to the Recovery of public plots of land and stores belonging to our sub country that had been taken over by individuals"

On what motivates her, Margret has this to say "What drives me to

do this work is that I want to know government programs because I am a tax payer and also want to see that people benefit from government programs. I also want the duty bearers to know that they don't own those offices but that they are merely custodians and that they are accountable to the people"

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Ikiring Immaculate – Enrolled nurse, Ogino Health Centre III.



Using a score card, the Activista found that Ogino Health Centre III faced several challenges. They identified the need for a maternity unit as a top priority and started lobbying the district for its construction. This became a reality because of the concerted efforts of all the stakeholders.

Immaculate is very happy with the new building “before we got the maternity unit we faced several challenges like low turn up due to a small working area with only one delivery bed and so some were delivered at home. We had a challenge of poor mobilization and we had no electricity. Now that

we have the maternity building we have enough space and number of mothers delivering at the health centre has increased from 20-30 a month to 50-60. The mothers are happy because now they have space and they can rest, we also don’t have to make many referrals unless it is a complication. ActionAid has been organizing for us community dialogue meetings to address issues raised in the score card and this has acted as our eye opener because we have used them to correct our errors and adjusting to see that we perform better”

On the relationship between health workers, Activista and the local community, she has this to say “Relationship between the community health workers and the monitors is good because we often interact and the dialogues have brought us together and \helped us identify gaps and we see to it that we work on them together. The health centre now is performing better than before – in the first score card we were at about 53% but the second score card gave us around 70 meaning that there has been an improvement”



The constructed maternity ward at Nyero Health Centre II in Kumi District

Oluka Moses Acting In charge Kidongole health center III.

“The catchment area of the health facility is 35,000 people covering two sub counties and we provide a range of services. Activista have been helping us mobilize the community mostly on their rights and what kind of services they are supposed to get from us as a health centre III.

They came with a score card and as we discussed, we realized that we all wanted something better not only the patients in terms of quality service.



Some of the patients at Kidongole Health Centre III (Bukedea district) waiting for services.

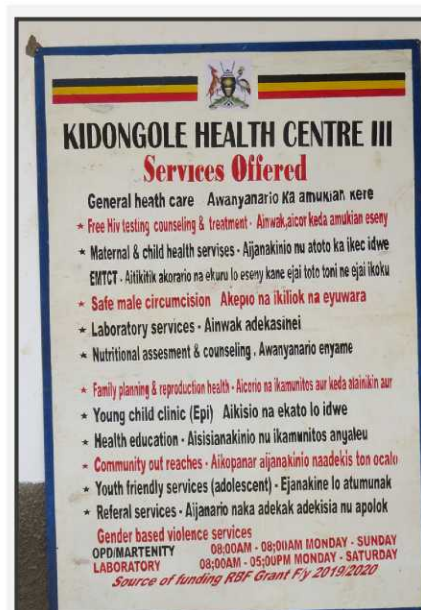
By working together we realized many changes and one of them is in infrastructure. Before the dialogues we had very few structures but after engagements, we have registered a new maternity unit which is soon going to be commissioned. The health centre also got a face lift through painting of all the structures. Our mothers did not have where to cook from and with support from Compassion assisted project, a kitchen has been built and it is already in use. Our old maternity ward was small which was occupied by 6 beds only so most times mothers slept on the floor but as we plan to shift to the newly constructed one, I see more space. The old unit was not a standard delivery unit but the new unit will cover the gap.

At first, Activistas were misunderstood because they were

seen as fault finders but as we kept engaging we realized we could work together since we all wanted to see a better delivery of public services with each one playing their role. Now we fully work together and the results can be seen"



Moses Oluka, the Acting In charge, Kidongole Health Centre III



The newly constructed maternity unit at Kidongole Health Centre III a waiting to be commissioned as of 2019



Newly constructed two classroom block at Tokor Primary School in Bukedea Eastern Uganda

Tokor Primary School in Bukedea district has risen from children studying under trees and dilapidated buildings to having a modern permanent two classroom structure and five stanza VIP pit latrine because of concerted efforts of all stakeholders and advocacy and lobbying by the Activista.

According to Mr. Okiring the Headmaster, "This school started in 2012, teaching was conducted under the trees and temporary structures put up within the compound by parents. These conditions made teaching very difficult. We got help when ActionAid came to our rescue by helping us carry out advocacy with our community members to the local leaders from Sub County up to the district level. Through their lobbying and dialogue meetings we got a new building housing four classrooms and a staff room plus a VIP latrine.



One of the temporary structures which was used as one of the classes before the new block

"ActionAid through Activista helped open up our eyes to see to it that government services reach the people" Another support we got is the construction of the 8 km road to the school. , Accessing the school especially during the rainy season was very difficult so the Activista

mobilized the local leaders at the sub county who set aside 10 million shillings to open up the road. These new structures have been of great benefit because we had no office but now we have books and other documents are kept safely.

Learners are now better taught because they are now indoors with better learning environment. One of the challenges we face is that we divide a single classroom block into two using mats which does not allow proper learning and others still study under trees poor structures hence we need more structures and the five stanza pit latrine is not enough for the school's population"



A new VIP latrine constructed at the school

Kadami Primary School has got an enrolment of 739 pupils and currently with four classroom blocks many of which are incomplete. The school has made some development strides with support from community monitors amidst several challenges.

Mr. Ojongole Samuel Head teacher Kadami says that, "The learning environment was not conducive whenever it rained but when these monitors came, they helped us mobilize the parents and the teachers to take action".



Completed classroom block at Kadami Primary School



Mr. Ojongole Samuel Headteacher Kadami Primary School

The parents started playing an active role at the school. They collected money and paid for the completion of some classroom blocks which helped us to stop sending away

children during rainy seasons because classes were incomplete now they study throughout the term. However, with the efforts put by the parents, we constructed a house for the head teacher and they have plans to construct more staff houses.

Our teachers shared latrines with the pupils but when we sat in a dialogue with the community and monitors they forwarded our challenges to the sub county who have constructed this five stance pit latrine. We were also provided with desks and text books by the district"

The main challenges facing the school include plastering the walls and fitting them with windows,

portable black boards. The school also needs to promote school feeding to reduce on school drop outs and construct more classroom blocks.

"The Community Monitors have played a great role in my community because they have managed to unite the parents and the school administration and because of this the school is developing. The mindset of the community has changed because of constant civic education. Activists are acting as the middleman between the community and teachers/ leaders and they have made mobilization efforts easy. They have also sensitized us on how to give accountability in case the community demands for it which has made me a better leader" says Mr. Otto Lambert L.C I chairman



Mr. Omodong Philemon Headteacher, Kanyanga Primary school says that the school started in 2011 as a community school and currently has an enrolment of 354 boys and 316 girls – 670 pupils in total. He adds that, “the school started with few grass thatched shelters for classrooms and because of bad weather we just decided to study under trees. For some years now, P.1 – P.7 have been studying under trees until recently when few have entered into the small semi-permanent structures.

This year the school constructed one teacher’s house as a result of parents contribution from PTA. Due to the monitoring efforts of Activista they found that we were having challenges with the funds so they



Some of the classes at Kanyanga Primary School



Mr. Omodong Philemon
Headteacher, Kanyanga
Primary School.

managed to write several reports to district and sub county. They also participated in school meetings with the parents and because of this; the parents are now very supportive in school activities. They have been the voice of the school at the district and sub county. Through their lobbying the district has been able to give us a new two classroom block. Getting this support has taken us nine years to have our voice heard but it was only possible when Activista came in’



A newly constructed classroom block at the school

Kumi and Bukedea districts used to consistently be among the worst performing local governments in Uganda in service delivery but for the past three years these two districts have seen a remarkable improvement because of the tireless efforts of Activista and empowered communities. In the financial year 2018-2019, Bukedea district emerged the best local government in Uganda as per an assessment carried out by the Office of the Prime Minister and Kumi was second runner up largely because of its improved good governance and a committed leadership.

To mark the day to celebrate international public service delivery day, actionaid organized a series of events that included; A public dialogue bringing together stakeholders of the different districts from Teso sub region to learn from the recently declared best performing districts of Bukedea and Kumi. The dialogue was well attended and discussions very fruitful. Tree planting was integrated, best performers were rewarded with medals, new commitments were developed



The bridge connecting Bukedea to Butebo District, when the area experienced heavy rains it was washed away cutting of access to the two areas for 2- 3 years.

David the LC II secretary narrated that "Two years ago (in 2017), this bridge collapsed and it was a challenge to move from place to place to access services like schools and the health centre and markets. Some people died trying to cross to the other side including children. It affected businesses, through several dialogues initiated by the Activista, we got support and the bridge was constructed temporarily."



Emong David – Kidongole sub county secretary L.C. II



People cross over the newly constructed bridge that connects Kumi and Bukedea

“When the bridge broke down, as Activista we convened many meetings with the local leaders to see that the bridge was reconstructed. We then held many dialogues with district leaders all geared towards the bridge. 75 million was allocated from the emergency fund by the district and the bridge was constructed but it is temporary”. This has greatly eased the movement of people and goods.

Besides this, we have held several workshops on different government programmes and we have been able to task the leadership to show accountability and see if they have benefitted the local people. As a result we have registered several successes of programmes in education, health, roads etc. We have also been able to attract the attention of other development partners like CDC who constructed

a kitchen for mothers in Kidongole health centre in the same district. What drives us is the passion to see that service delivery comes to its best and based on the power mandated to us by the constitution we have the platform to ensure that the people get the services they deserve having paid taxes”Notes Mr. Omagor Ambrose



Ambrose Omagor – Coordinator Activista Bukedea district.



Bukedea and Kumi districts used to perform badly in terms of service delivery but because of the work of Activista and community monitors, they have improved tremendously with Bukedea emerging the best governed local government and Kumi third in Uganda, in a survey conducted by Office of the Prime Minister.

Achievements

- ActionAid has been able to support communities to demand for good public services and as a result, infrastructure has improved, schools, health facilities and roads have been constructed because of these efforts.
- Engaged with districts to improve on the staffing levels for health centers and schools and recruitment has been made both Kumi and Bukedea.
- Pushed for the opening of access roads, bridges over 400kms of access roads have been opened improving access to schools, health centers and markets.
- The vigilance of Activista groups and community monitors has saved government lots of money that would have been lost due to corruption and poor services.
- ActionAid advocated for enacting of audinaces forexample in Kumi a bye-law is being drafted to deal with teachers' absenteeism.
- Nationally ActionAid work feeds into national policy framework advocacy and most of the policy advocacy we do at national level is as a result of our ground work. Contributed to national policy changes.
- Committed district local governments (Kumi and Bukedea) good working relationship,partnership and joint planning and implementation.

Challenges

- Some of the Activistas and community monitors are targeted for their work, intimidated, threatened and unlawfully arrested which creates a very hostile working environment. However this is being overcome by supporting Activistas who are passionate about their work and constant sensitization of the duty bearers and the rights holders.
- Few donors are willing to fund interventions of good governance because of the shrinking political and civil space for campaigns against corruption and activism in general.
- Low funding to local governments is one of the biggest challenges to achieving good governance and accountability.
- There is need to hold everyone accountable including the rights holders but while it is easy to hold the duty bearers accountable, there is no clear way on how to hold the people accountable

Conclusion

Until we have a policy framework that can support good governance and public service delivery and efficient resource allocation then we will continue having challenges in our public service delivery and accountability. However with continued empowerment, capacity building, mobilization of the people to demand and challenge power, the future is bright.



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