

HAS IMPAIRED PWDS MORE

PHOTOS BY RONALD MUGABE



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.

AREA LEADERS SPEAK OUT

Kahuzo, who is also the LC3 chairperson of Karangura 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 Karangura 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 Karangura alone.

He says most of the PWDS he interacts



A woman with a hearing impairment fetching water from River Mpanga

with say they cannot fetch water for themselves. "Some tell me that when they go to fetch water from a water source, the able-bodied persons insult and sometimes assault them, telling them to go away from the water source because they are not supposed to fetch water there. This is demeaning," he says.

Baguma adds: "This makes them feel they are not valued members of society. What makes matters worse is that the water sources are not enough and most of the few available ones are far away from residences of these PWDS."

He gives an example of a tap stand near his home that is meant to serve more than 30 households. "When I want to fetch water from there, I have to get someone to go fetch it for me or guide me there. But not many visually impaired people have such social support mechanisms. This leaves majority of the kind under the mercy of good-hearted people, who might not be there every day," he says.

On issues concerning latrine access, Baguma says the designs of latrines in the area do not put into consideration the needs of PWDS.

"The minimum standard latrine that a PWD can use is one that has a ramp, but in this area, I have not been told of any. And that only caters for those with arms, but what then can a person with no arms do to hold onto the ramps?" he wonders.

Baguma says PWDS in this community

are still stigmatised and this has forced them to hold back whenever they are called upon to participate in developmental activities.

"Therefore, as PWDS, we have many challenges. As a leader, I am required to move through the entire sub-county looking to help other people like me, but I have limited resources, including lack of transport means. More so, many of the villages are hard to reach because they are in the mountains. This makes it very difficult for me to mobilise them," he says.

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 Kirangira 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 Kirangira village, says on several occasions; before the borehole was constructed, she would

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 majorly 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 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 Bufunjo, Kyenjojo district, where a visually impaired man did not have 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 Kyalusozi, 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.

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 facilitators of comfortable living like proper hygiene? Something should be done.

