



Celebrating an Early Adopter

How sanitation improvements create promise for healthier households in Northern Uganda



By **Tetra Tech International Development**

IN WATER, SANITATION, AND HYGIENE

MARCH 30TH, 2021

Fifty-one year-old George Okumu is a farmer based in Baro-Lemo village in Gulu district. He is married to two wives and has nine children. George attended a USAID Uganda Sanitation for Health Activity (USHA) community training on sanitation and learned how basic sanitation services hold promise for healthier families. After learning, George volunteered to be the team leader of the Sanitation Committee in his village.

Prior to joining the sanitation training, George said that sanitation was not a priority for his family. As a result, his children often suffered from sanitation-related diseases like diarrhea and typhoid which meant frequent visits to the local health facility. **“I used to spend a lot of money on transport and medical bills. I did not know that my family and I were eating food contaminated by flies that were attracted to our unimproved latrine with an uncovered squat hole which carried germs to our food,”** George recalls.

Describing his previous
latrine facility as unsafe and

risky for his family members, George said, **“the squat hole was quite large, the floor unwashable, and the facility had a weak door shutter with no proper walls or roof.”**

The latrine facility was shared by his two wives and four other families in the neighborhood, which caused a lack of ownership and responsibility for cleaning, resulting in a consistently dirty latrine. Due to the unsafe state of the latrine, children opted for open defecation. The lack of a handwashing facility made the situation worse.

The turning point for George was in October 2020 during the village sanitation training and house-to-house sanitation status evaluation, conducted by the Grassroot Transformation Initiative (GTI), a Gulu-based USHA sub-grantee, and community members. George was embarrassed when feces were found outside his home. “That was the most shameful moment of my life and at that point I just knew that I had to change my situation,” said George.

George immediately embarked on a toilet construction journey, spending the next three days personally digging a new two-stance latrine pit. He later sought the services of USHA-trained mason who constructed the structure at a cost of UGX 120,000.

“Since I constructed my latrines, my children have not fallen sick. I am very proud of my home and can, without a second thought, show it to people.”

George is an early adopter of USHA's 15-month sanitation improvement program covering 700 communities in northern Uganda. Drawing from his personal experience, George is now an exemplary sanitation leader in his community, inspiring more people to adapt improved sanitation.

“I’m grateful to USAID USHA for the positive change brought in my home and I pledge to extend the knowledge to the entire village until every household has a toilet and handwashing facility. This will save us from unnecessary costs on medical bills,” George explained. He has taken it a step further by offering to install a handwashing facility for every household that constructs a latrine in his village.



