



The Value of a Toilet

How a USAID program in Uganda is changing perspectives and advancing health through sanitation education



By **Tetra Tech International Development**

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3.6 billion people globally still live without access to safely managed sanitation and over 494 million still practicing open defecation. Safely managed sanitation is a toilet that is not shared by other households and has a washable floor where human excreta is hygienically separated from human contact and is disposed of safely. In Uganda, according to the Water and Environment Sector Report 2020, only 78% have access to toilets and over 22% in the rural areas still open defecating as per reports from the districts. Many global efforts are rolled out to combat this including World Toilet Day (WTD) celebrated annually by the United Nations on November 19 since 2013. It was first established in 2001 by the World Toilet Organization. This year's theme "valuing toilets" aims at celebrating and appreciating how our toilets contribute to bettering our lives.

At the forefront of accelerating access safe sanitation, the five-year USAID Uganda Sanitation for Health Activity (USHA) supports households in 20 districts to construct and use improved toilets. The districts are spread in central, eastern and northern Uganda. The toilets are promoted with a positive message as prestigious, comfortable, and secure rather to counter-message the typical negativity associated with toilets. As a result, many households desire to construct such toilets resulting in an increase in sanitation coverage.

For a long time, Jane Nabulonge, a resident of Kitovu in Masaka district works as a cook at a local primary school. Together with her four children, she was using a pit latrine made from reeds, mud, and wood which surrounded the pit with no roof and no door. Nbulonge was a member of a local finance support organization, Rural

Development Foundation (RDF) and did not think twice when the organization informed its members that it was providing small affordable loans to members who did not have a standard pit latrine but wished to construct one.

Bennah Nakibuule and her husband are pineapple and vegetable farmers in Kyanamukaaka sub-county in Masaka district. Last July, they decided to get a loan to construct a modern latrine for themselves, bringing good hygiene to their home. They were able to construct a two-unit well-cemented latrine with a bathroom, a curtain wall, and even fitted the drop-hole with SATO pans (a plastic pan that mechanically and hydraulically seals pit latrines).

“We approached RDF and they took us through the criteria of getting the loan and we decided to take up a loan of Shs 1.2 million for the latrine where we are paying back Shs 185,000 every month for one year,” Bennah said.

Peninnah Mukasa, a resident of Kasozi, in Nawampiti Sub County, Luuka District worked so hard to build a good life for her family when her husband lost his sight after a short illness. The family lacked something critical for healthy living; they had no toilet or running water at home. It's hard to raise children without these things. Thus, with her grandchildren and visual impaired husband, the risk posed by the dilapidated toilet to her loved ones haunted her daily. One year later, Peninnah's smile is brighter than ever. The two-stance

improved toilet she constructed is clean and convenient and saves her worries of her loved ones contracting or otherwise facing harm because of the old toilet.

George Okumu, a resident of Baro-Lemo village in Gulu district met his turning point during the village sanitation training and house-to-house sanitation status evaluation. 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,” he said.

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 Shs 120,000.

When some people in a community do not have safe toilets, everyone's health is threatened. Poor sanitation contaminates drinking-water sources, rivers, beaches, and food crops, spreading deadly diseases among the wider population. Having access to safe sanitation is essential for the realization of all human rights. Toilets particularly drive improvements in gender equality, education, economics, and the environment. For instance, every dollar invested in basic sanitation returns up to five times in saved medical costs and increased productivity, and jobs are created along the entire service chain. This is the true value of toilets.

Happy World Toilet Day!

Footnotes

Photos courtesy of Agatha Angwech for USAID USHA

Uganda

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