Empowered Women, Transformed Societies

Raising the Bar with Voice, Accountability and Leadership

Water and Solar Power Make All the Difference at Kjunjubwa Health Center III, Masindi

Make-Shift Outdoor Classrooms at Sidimbire Primary School, Busia

UGX 63 Million Raised for Kibaale Primary School, Mityana
Raising the Bar with Voice, Accountability and Leadership

The Voice Accountability and Leadership Project (VALP) has enabled Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE) to empower thousands of citizens in the districts of Wakiso, Lyantonde, Busia, Masindi and Mityana. Our work has encouraged people at the grassroots level to take charge of their lives by getting involved in decision-making processes and holding their leaders accountable. Most importantly, VALP has made it possible for citizens who are usually overlooked, such as women and girls, to voice their concerns and contribute to improving service delivery at the district level.

Through the work of our Village Budget Clubs (VBCs), health centers and primary schools are improving their services and local leaders are being held accountable. Empowering people starts with ensuring that they are not denied their basic human rights. Education and health are fundamental rights yet, many Ugandans do not have access to good education and health services. This is especially true at the district level. Many health centers run out of essential medicine, don’t have electricity and some do not have beds in the maternity wards. As for schools, many teachers do not show up due to low salaries, school dropout rates are high and dilapidated classrooms put pupils and teachers at risk.

Without a guarantee of basic human rights, sustainable development is not achievable. FOWODE understands the need to empower people not only by merely ensuring they have access to schools and health centers but by encouraging citizens to get involved in decision-making and by creating spaces where citizens can hold their leaders accountable. VALP has succeeded in equipping more citizens with knowledge about their rights and responsibilities, and the role of their leaders in developing their communities.
Maternal mortality is one of the biggest killers among women of reproductive age in many African countries and Uganda is no exception, grappling with the deaths of 336 women out of every 100,000 live births (UDHS 2016). While this figure has steadily decreased over the years, a lot remains to be done to ensure that no woman dies while bringing life into the world. One way of doing this is by guaranteeing that health centers are well-equipped and have enough well-trained midwives to serve expectant mothers.

Several health centers across the country report few deliveries due to the fact that many women opt to give birth in their homes with the assistance of Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs). An example of one such health center is Kijunjubwa Health Center III in Kimengo Sub-County, Masindi. When our VBC started monitoring this health center in 2016, they reported that on average, only 5 mothers delivered at the health center in a month.

Over the years, the health center has experienced a number of challenges such as lack of electricity and running water. Pregnant women generally opted to travel about 10 miles to the main hospital in Masindi town, a truly tedious journey. The few mothers who did deliver at the health center had to buy paraffin or torches to light the room, which many could not afford. This resulted in many mothers giving birth in their homes.

With the persistent commitment of the VBCs in monitoring the health facility and organizing meetings with duty bearers, there has been a lot of improvement at Kijunjubwa Health Center III. The health center now has running water and solar lights have been installed. The new lights are not only cost-effective and environmentally friendly, but save expectant mothers the cost of paying additional fees for lighting. The lights have also improved security around the health center. As a result of these changes, it was noted that in February 2018, 26 mothers gave birth at the facility with no still births. The increasing number of deliveries from 5 to 26 is also attributed to the continuous follow up on action plans by the duty bearers on the issues at the facility which led to the installation of solar power and restoration of running water thus encouraging more mothers to deliver at the facility.
The state of several primary schools, especially in rural areas, continues to cause great concern. The problem does not only lie with teachers who are underpaid and overworked, but with the physical structures of the schools as well. A vast majority of school buildings are dilapidated with no hope of rehabilitation. This puts the lives of the children at risk and hinders their learning. What is meant to be a safe learning experience is potentially a death trap as some of the buildings could cave in at any given time. This is the case with Sidimbire Primary School in Bulumbi Sub-County, Busia.

During a monitoring visit, VBC members discovered that the school did not have enough classrooms to accommodate all the students and the few classrooms available were in terrible shape. The school has resorted to teaching pupils from Primary 1 to 3 outside, under trees, which is especially problematic during the rainy season. Heavy rains force the school management to cancel classes which interferes with the pupils’ education, degrades the quality of education and creates an unfavorable learning environment.

VBC members met with key education stakeholders at an interface meeting and demanded for the construction of classrooms at Sidimbire Primary School. They expressed concern about the poor learning environment that was negatively affecting the pupils. The first three years of school are vital and need to be prioritized by duty bearers, creating safe and favorable learning environments for children. While the leaders pointed out the fact that the current budget cuts in the education sector restricted them from fully renovating some schools, they vowed to work with parents and school management committees to support the setting up of temporary structures at Sidimbire Primary School. The district plans to prioritize schools like Sidimbire in the subsequent financial years.

Interface meetings are vital as they give community members a platform to communicate their needs and dialogue with their leaders, a key feature of democracy. The monitoring exercises carried out by the VBCs enables them to generate information on key service delivery and gender issues in the schools monitored and share this information with their leaders. During the meetings, leaders are made aware of the communities’ problems and can be held accountable at the following meeting if promises were made and not kept.
VBC members, organized a fundraising ceremony on March 16th, 2018. The Vice President of Uganda, Edward Ssekandi was the chief guest at the function which was also attended by the area MP, Mityana District Local Government legislators and technocrats and Bulera Sub-County Local Council members. The mobilized stakeholders were asked to contribute towards a four classroom block which is currently under construction.

The fundraising ceremony was well attended and shed a light on our advocacy work. It demonstrated the importance of creating spaces for citizens to voice their concerns and hold their leaders accountable. The function generated a total of UGX 63,000,000!

Such successes make our work worthwhile as we continue to dedicate time, effort and resources to ensure that community members in the target districts benefit from our interventions. Our VBCs are great examples to the rest of the community, demonstrating that change is possible when citizens come together and work towards solving community problems together with their local leaders.

The work we carry out at the district level is largely successful because of our VBC model. These community led clubs enable us to be catalysts of change while at the same time empowering community members to monitor service delivery and present their leaders with their community’s concerns. VBCs in Mityana district monitored Kibaale Primary School in Bulera Sub-County. The school was in a terrible condition. The classrooms were run down, the latrines unhygienic and teachers’ houses dilapidated. After their monitoring visit, the VBC realized that to fully rehabilitate the school, all relevant stakeholders had to come together and make a contribution. They therefore suggested a fundraising ceremony.

The School Management Team and the organizing committee, which included

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Classroom block at Kibaale Primary School

VBC Members at the Fundraising Ceremony

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