

Shelter news

Issue 1 Vol. 3



A Bi-Annual Newsletter produced by Shelter and Settlements Alternatives: Uganda Human Settlements Network (SSA:UHSNET)

Editorial

Welcome to our first Issue of the Network Newsletter, which will be produced and disseminated twice a year. A lot has been happening at the Secretariat since the year started notable of which is the 2nd Annual General Meeting (AGM) held at the end of May 2011 where the General Assembly elected the Board of Directors. We would like to commend you for your participation in the AGM.

On the other hand, we also organised and held a training workshop for Network members at Board and staff levels in Gender and HIV/AIDS Mainstreaming and Policy formulation during the month of April 2011. The workshop was based on the recognition that the majority of the Network members do not have gender and HIV/AIDS mainstreaming policies hence lack set guidelines and procedures on how to mainstream these important cross-cutting issues within programmes and activities. At most, it remains something that is done haphazardly, accidentally and unconsciously within programme initiatives. It is our hope that the participants trained will be ‘ambassadors of mainstreaming’ within their organisations. More capacity building activities are planned for Network members in the last half of the FY 2011 towards achieving our goal of strengthening the institutional capacity of our members.

Outside the Secretariat, in the Housing sector, the National Housing Policy is being reviewed and as a Network we have been actively involved in the reviews through the Land and Housing Working Group and Gender and HIV/AIDS Working Group. Currently, the two groups are compiling issues that as a Network we feel should be addressed, which will be forwarded to the Ministry of Lands Housing and Urban Development (Molhud) for incorporation. Network members are welcome and encouraged to be part of this process because it affects us in one way or another!

We hope that you will find the Newsletter informative!



2

8

4

News	3
Annual General meeting	
Training on Gender and HIV/AIDS	
Opinion	5
Why the President Must...	
Features	6
I'll Take My Water Prepaid! HIV/AIDS and Informal Settlements	
Food for thought	10
Thoughts from a PhD Student in Kampala	

CONTENTS



Shelter & Settlements Alternatives: Uganda Human Settlements Network
(SSA/UHSNET)

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SSA:UHSNET Holds Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Shelter and Settlements Alternatives: Uganda Human Settlement Network held its Annual general Meeting (AGM) on 31st May 2011 at Grand Imperial Hotel, Kampala. This is the second AGM since the transformation of SSA into a Network. The meeting, which was attended by over 50 participants representing organisations, professional individuals and students, was very significant because it was an opportunity to find out what is happening in the housing sector generally, elect new Board of Directors for the Network and review & adopt the Network Constitution.

Mr. William Walaga, the Director for housing under Volhud gave a keynote address which highlighted what was happening in the housing sector and the opportunities of the Network. He commended the progress and achievements made by SSA and the Network to date and pledged continued support to the Network for as long as he was in the sector. In addition, Mr. Walaga appreciated the Network's active involvement in the on-going review of housing policy and assured members that all their concerns would be addressed within the policy. His address also highlighted the following key sector developments:

- The unknown future effect of the current boom in the housing construction sector, which has led to increase in prices of building materials as well as the disparity between income groups.
- Massive investment in high-rise buildings, which are far beyond what the market can absorb.
- Challenges of coming up with models for low-cost housing in Uganda considering that the definition of low-cost housing is still way above the reach of the low income person (lowest being \$500,000). He pointed out that the Network could contribute in this area by working with professionals to develop low-cost housing models.
- Current building materials vis-à-vis their impact on the environment i.e. the rise in demand and usage of the clay bricks has led to a lot of environmental degradation. He added that in future, the bricks would become even more unaffordable hence the need for environment friendly alternatives.
- Rise in Estate development by private real estate companies like AKRIGHT, Jomayi etc., which if not guided could end up causing numerous problems especially considering that estates are built with little or no consideration of the surroundings e.g. sanitary/sewer facilities, drainage, greenery etc. He urged the Network to take this opportunity to lobby



The newly elected SSA: UHSNET Board Members

and ensure maximisation of benefit from the real estate developers.

- Social housing concept i.e. where housing is generally provided by local governments (Districts, Urban Authorities, NGOs, Donor or Charity Institutions) and provided on the basis of need. To this he added that there was need for regulation so that it is not abused by its proponents.
- Slum upgrading – this he said remains an expensive venture to implement hence the need to re-think the concept in terms of strengthening Public, private, partnerships to ensure that buildings constructed take care of both residential and commercial needs.
- Lastly, Mr. Walaga informed the participants that the country has been declared a planning area and urged all stakeholders to take advantage of this law and ensure that it is implemented.

In addition, two ladies from Kwefako Positive Living Women's Group also shared their experiences highlighting their challenges as women living with HIV/AIDS. Housing came out strongly as their greatest need because most of them live in Kisenyi, a Kampala slum, where evictions and demolitions are a daily occurrence. It was recognised that without security of tenure, the women even die faster and not because of the effect of the disease but due to hopelessness and living in make-shift shelter with poor surroundings, which in turn aggravate the opportunistic infections. A call was made to all stakeholders to work together in helping women such as these to improve their conditions.

The last part of the AGM was taken up by review and adoption of the Network Constitution and election of Network office bearers (Board of Directors). The Constitution was passed as legal and binding document for the Network and following a motion to dissolve the old Board, which was passed by the General Assembly (GA), the elections commenced. Nine (9) Board members were elected by the GA as follows:

1.	Mr. Emmanuel Byaruhanga	–	Chairperson
2.	Mr. Alex Kamukama	–	Vice Chairperson
3.	Mr. Eddie Nsamba – Gayiyya	–	General Secretary
4.	Ms. Eunice Kyomugisha	–	Treasurer
5.	Ms. Deborah Kaijuka	–	Board Member
6.	Ms. Clare Ruhweza	–	Board Member
7.	Ms. Amelia Ankunda Ssemuju	–	Board Member
8.	Mr. Michael Mpalanyi	–	Board Member
9.	Mr. Derek Muhwezi	–	Board Member

Besides the Executive Director, who is recognised by the Constitution as an ex-officio member of the Board, Mr. Edward Balinda was also co-opted under the same status to represent slum dwellers.

The meeting was closed by the newly elected Chairperson, Mr. Emmanuel Byaruhanga who thanked stakeholders for their participation and then called on the newly elected Vice Chairperson, Mr. Alex Kamukama to award Certificates of Membership to the paid up members. 28 paid up members (Organisations, students and Professional individuals) received their certificates.

Network Members Trained on Gender and HIV/AIDS Mainstreaming

SSA: UHSNET held a four (4) day workshop to build capacity of its members on gender and HIV/AIDS mainstreaming with a particular focus on policy formulation. The workshop, which was held at Sports View Hotel, Kireka on 18th to 21st April 2011 was attended by representatives from different organisations i.e. National Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS in Uganda (NACWOLA); Community Integrated Development Initiatives (CIDI); WELLSPRING; Mariam Foundation; Foundation for Rural Housing; Uganda Land Alliance (ULA); POLYSACK Housing Cooperative; Uganda Women's Land Access Trust (UWLAT); and the SSA:UHSNET Board members and staff.

The training was organised to respond to a need identified by the Gender and HIV/AIDS Mainstreaming Study. The study

revealed that the majority of the Network members surveyed did not have gender and HIV/AIDS mainstreaming policies and as such, had no set guidelines and procedures on how to mainstream these cross-cutting issues within programmes and activities. At most, mainstreaming was done haphazardly, accidentally and unconsciously within programme initiatives i.e. with no situational analysis or related studies are carried out to inform the mainstreaming process.

The objectives of the workshop were to: establish a common understanding and clarify on concepts of gender and HIV/AIDS; clarify on the dynamics of "cross-cutting" issues- HIV/AIDS & gender in development programmes; enhance capacity



Training workshop participants



Some of the participants during a Group discussions

and skills of staff and Board members for gender and HIV/AIDS mainstreaming in Network member organizations in formulation of gender equality and HIV&AIDS work place policy documents; equip participants with critical steps to take for appropriate policy formulation; share generic frameworks outlining minimum contents/ sections of a policy document with reference to gender equality and HIV/AIDS; facilitate formulation of at least one gender equality and/ or HIV & AIDS work place policy documents as an example and guide and assist the participants to come up with an action plan on how to complete the remaining sections of the example policy documents they will be practicing on.

The workshop, which adopted a participatory approach, highlighted the following issues:

understanding basic concepts of gender and HIV/AIDS; gender and HIV/AIDS in development; the link between HIV/AIDS and housing; mainstreaming concept (gender and HIV/AIDS); social construction of gender; gender analysis frameworks as well as policy formulation (components of a policy, implementation & challenges of implementation).

It is envisaged that the participants will be the resource persons guiding mainstreaming initiatives within their respective organizations' programmes and activities as well as spearheading gender equality and HIV/AIDS policy formulation. At the end of the training, participants developed Action Plans for implementation according to the needs of the respective organizations.

SSA Participates in the National Civil Society (CSO) Fair 2011

SSA: UHSNET Secretariat participated in the Civil Society organisations fair, which took place at Hotel Africana on 6th to 7th June 2011 under the theme 'NGOs and Uganda's quest for socio-economic transformation'. The fair, which was organised by the Uganda National NGO Forum (UNNGOF), was an opportunity for NGOs across the country to showcase their work and contribution to Uganda's social and economic wellbeing. The CSO Fair attracted over 500 NGOs, CBOs, corporate and public institutions in Uganda. SSA: UHSNET exhibited and disseminated a number of information materials (i.e. brochures, posters, flyers, newsletters and advocacy sheets) on a number of issues pertinent to human settlements. The fair also provided an opportunity to participate in different thematic side events for purposes of information sharing and Networking. SSA:UHSNET attended some of the sessions on HIV/AIDS, Resource mobilisation and Land. During the course of the fair SSA:UHSNET was also able to link up with different stakeholders who were interested in the Network as a unique forum dealing with an important sector that has not been given enough attention both by government and other development partners. Some of the stakeholders pledged to partner with the Network for purposes of contributing to human settlements in Uganda. The Network was represented by Mr. Justus Tumuhimise, Project Officer and Jennifer King, Information, Networking & Advocacy Officer.

In a related development, SSA:UHSNET, represented by the Mr. Justus Tumuhimise participated in the UNNGOF Annual General Meeting (AGM) held on 8th June at the same venue.



Jennifer King at SSA: UHSNET stall during the CSO Fair

Why the President Must Intervene In the Housing Sector

SSA:UHSNET Participates in the 23rd UN Governing Council Meeting

SSA:UHSNET also participated in the 23rd UN Governing Council meeting held in Nairobi on 11th to 15th April 2011 under the theme "Sustainable Urban Development through expanding equitable access to Land, Housing and Basic Services and Infrastructure". The Network represented by the Coordinator, Ms. Gloria Kabwama. The Network participated in the exhibitions at the meeting, together with other partners supported by the Swedish Cooperative Centre (SCC) from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

Besides the exhibition, the Coordinator attended some relevant side events i.e.

- Women's caucus meetings at which a resolution on gender issues was drafted for adoption by the Governing Council. The resolution was passed at the end of the meeting
- Dialogue on the special theme where different heads of delegation presented on the situations in their respective countries. The situation on Uganda was presented by Hon. Michael Werikhe, Minister of State for Housing.
- Launch of the Global Housing Strategy 2025. At the same side event, the Housing profile on Uganda was also launched.
- The event was an opportunity to further publicize & disseminate information about the Network as well as establish linkages with potential partners.

From around 2003 to date I retire in my bed thinking about housing and / or shelter and wake up to the call on what I can do to cause a positive change in the human settlements sector. I have continued to worry as statics trickle in on the state of human settlements in the Pearl of Africa; worse to mention in urban settings where the housing backlog is worrying! It is not surprising that what I can do is a drop of water in an ocean. It is more surprising that what WE can do still remains a drop of water in an ocean. We must, however, acknowledge that water is water; which is why FOUNDATION FOR RURAL HOUSING continues in the struggle to cause a change in the human settlements sector.



By Charles Ofwono, Foundation for Rural Housing

In September 2007 we made a push in parliament of the Republic of Uganda to present a petition demanding government attention in the human settlements sector. The document was received by the deputy speaker then (Hon. Rebecca Kadaga); currently the speaker of parliament. I am convinced that the best place to find the said petition is the shelf, dust bin or both! The media took much of the day broadcasting the petition; I must applaud them.

I have a belief that shelter, which is a fundamental human right, shall one day be guaranteed and preserved by a responsible government. I will continue to call on donors to direct their support to the housing sector if actually they desire to support the pearl of Africa. They need to work with healthy partners any way.

Decent shelter is good accommodation with enough space, ventilation and sanitation facilities with the entire infrastructure that surrounds the homestead. This explains why children from homes with decent shelter do better in schools. The children sleep well, eat well and generally they have peace of mind.

The predominantly rental nature of shelter in urban centers explains why average households in predominantly urban centers, like Kampala, spend at least 40% of their incomes on accommodation. This percentage of income is worth owning a home in town. This trend is worrying! It means that the over five million people living in urban centers of Uganda are mainly working for house rent. Why should the government watch, sit and do nothing without a strong intervention? Why is the government watching Uganda grow into probably the world's biggest slum and yet the whole country is a planning area?

While the president and his family lives in the cool view of Entebbe as the number one Ugandan, we equally need decent accommodation, good medical care, security, good roads, and better standards of education as a payback for our votes. I will continue to wonder whether when the president flies over Kampala and Uganda as a whole, he does or doesn't see the rotten rooftops of our houses!

Why is housing NOT a planning priority of the government of Uganda? As long as the Government of Uganda continues to create strategies to fight ill health without addressing the issue of human settlements, we will continue to live in poor health, continue to be poor, continue to invite tourists to come and tour slums.

Mr. President in the 2006 campaigns you pledged to pump lots of millions into the housing sector through Banks like the Housing Finance Bank. How much did you inject to housing sector? How many housing units did we realize to that effect? How much support do you give to the Directorate of Housing? Why don't you show your political will and strength to boost a sustainable growth and development in the housing sector? Why don't you leave a legacy in the housing sector just like you will leave a legacy in the defence and security? We need healthy lives in order to play key roles in the defence and security of our nation.

Health, an element which is paramount in the fight against poverty, can only be sustainable when people have access to decent shelter and nutrition. Mr. president why don't you increase on the budgetary allocation from the current 5% to the agricultural sector as a way of building the capacity of the rural population to raise incomes that can be directed to decent shelter acquisition?

Mr. President, are you aware that you have set a 'marking guide' in the fight against HIV and AIDS in the whole world? Why don't you embrace a comprehensive approach that addresses the challenge of poor housing among the HIV and AIDS infected and affected people?

Mr. president, are you aware that your statement is stronger than a policy document lying in the shelves of parliament and judicial offices? Why don't you make a statement on the housing sector? I believe my hope will not wane.

The HIV and AIDS epidemic is one of the biggest challenges contributing to poverty in Uganda. The disease has left thousands of orphans and widows homeless and created a general state of despair and hopelessness among the majority of the population. Improving human settlements in Uganda should be everyone's common goal but directed by the president.

Thank you Mr. President. I will continue to knock on your door.

Housing Cooperatives and Development

By Angella Sempala, Uganda Cooperative Alliance (UCA)

A housing cooperative is a corporation that exists primarily to provide housing and housing related services to its members. Its ownership and governance structure reflect this purpose, making it unique.

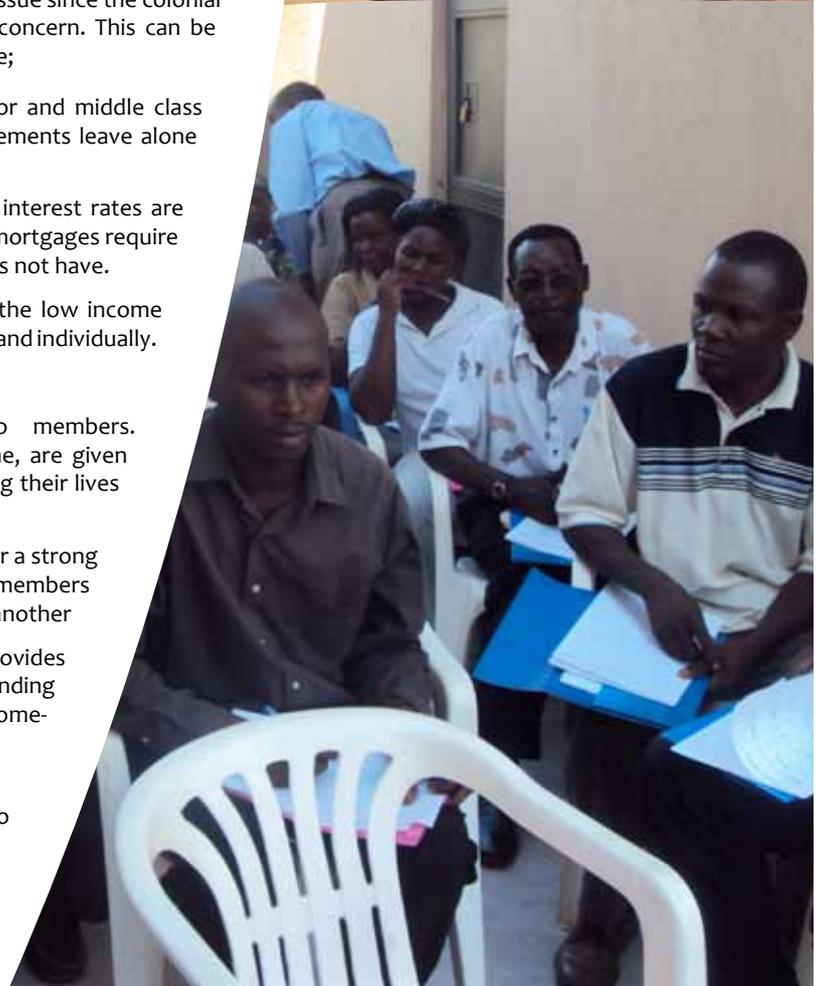
While cooperatives are often looked at primarily in terms of their financial advantages, the social benefits of cooperative living are the most valuable aspect of living in a housing cooperative. By working together as a community, there are numerous opportunities for members to live as neighbours and to know and support each other, thus enhancing the quality of life for co-operators.

Cooperative members realize intangible benefits of home ownership as well. They then depend on stable housing costs, benefit from participating in and control of the cooperative and reap the social capital that comes from having a broad network of neighbours to work with and depend on. Also the community at-large benefits from cooperative members' increased civic participation and leadership development.

Housing is not a new concept in Uganda. It has been an issue since the colonial times. However, up till now, it remains of significant concern. This can be attributed to a number of reasons some of which include;

- Low incomes for the majority especially the poor and middle class populace who find it hard to access basic requirements leave alone a house.
- Access to financial services is also an issue. The interest rates are quite high and therefore unaffordable. Secondly, mortgages require collateral which this category of the populace does not have.
- Land ownership is for the "rich" and therefore the low income earners would take forever saving for purchase of land individually.
Therefore;
- Cooperatives provide permanent tenure to members. Cooperative members, regardless of their income, are given the opportunity for permanent tenure – stabilizing their lives and their community.
- Build community spirit. Cooperatives help to foster a strong feeling of community among their members. The members learn to work together and form bonds with one another
- Expansion to other activities; A co-operative provides a legal and organizational structure for expanding into other co-operative activities, such as income-generating businesses.

Cooperative housing is therefore a major guide to successful community development and now is the time to rebuild it. Finally, co-ops are a unique way for communities to support economic development without displacing low-income earners.



I'll Take My Water Prepaid!

By Ineke Adriaens, BTC Junior Assistant at KIEMP

Kampala Integrated Environmental Planning and Management

Project (KIEMP) is a 5-year project (2006-2011) co-funded by the governments of Belgium and Uganda and by Kampala City Council to the sum of € 6.6 million. The project aims at improving the quality of life of poor communities in informal settlements in Kampala by strengthening the capacity of Kampala City Council in environmental planning and management; changing the behaviour of local communities towards local infrastructure; and improving environmental and housing conditions.

One very important aspect of improved environmental conditions is access to affordable clean water. The solution that the project has adopted from another pro-poor initiative is brilliant in its simplicity—a prepaid water meter.

Situation Before

Before the project was launched, the residents of Katwe I and Bwaise III parishes in Kampala had to rely on either scattered springs or on water through a standard (household) connection. These springs are protected, but as the groundwater in many parts of Kampala is polluted by the many unlined pit latrines, it is advisable to use it only for washing and cleaning—not for drinking and cooking. Families can also get connected to the national water supply via the National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC), but that generally doesn't last long. At the end of the month, when the bill is sent out, there is often no money to pay it, and the water is immediately cut off. These families are then forced to turn to water vendors whose charges are usually several times higher than the official rate. Furthermore, water is only sold at certain times.



The Intervention

With the prepaid water meter, families finally have access to clean and affordable water, day and night. The water from the prepaid water meter has the same quality as the standard tap water, and is perfectly drinkable once it has been boiled. But there is one major difference: this water is truly inexpensive—just 1 Ugandan shilling per litre!

How exactly does it work?

At the Urban Pro Poor Branch of NWSC in Kisenyi II, you can pick up a token, for which you pay a security deposit of 5,000 UGX. You can upload credit to this token, just like you would for your mobile phone. It is also possible to upload very small amounts of as little as Ush. 500, and that is important for the residents of the slums in Kampala. Uploading credit is possible at the NWSC Urban Pro Poor Branch in Kisenyi II, or through neighbourhood residents who have been appointed by NWSC and have a special vending machine for uploading credit. Once you have credit on your token, you can obtain water from any of the prepaid water meters. To check the balance, all one needs to do is insert their token in the machine and they will be able to see the amount of credit left on the token. Water starts running as soon as the token is inserted into the machine and it is removed after your 20-litre jerry can is full—having used only 20 Ugandan shillings! KIEMP financed the extension of the NWSC mains water supply network and the installation of 32 prepaid water meters after selecting locations in Katwe I and



Bwaise III through a participatory process involving the local leadership, landlords and community. Additional meters are being installed to further improve access to safe water. The landlords in the slums voluntarily donated land on which to install the meters. NWSC, through its Urban Pro Poor Branch, offers the water at a subsidised rate and is responsible for the maintenance of the meters since KIEMP handed them over. Users can call a toll-free number or go directly to NWSC offices to report defects.

There is, no doubt, room for improvement. For example, people sometimes try to collect water for free by inserting other objects than the token into the prepaid water meter, damaging the meters by so doing. There still is a need for behavioural change among the communities in the use, operation and maintenance of local infrastructure. That is why KIEMP is currently implementing a behavioural change communication strategy. One of the things KIEMP is promoting is the proper operation and maintenance of the prepaid water meters. We emphasise that people should not insert objects other than the token into the prepaid water meter; children should not play with the meter; people should keep the surroundings clean to avoid blockage; and they should contact NWSC once the meter breaks down or develops technical problems!

HIV/AIDS and Informal Settlements: Identifying the Connections



By Jennifer King, Information, Networking and Advocacy Officer, SSA:UHSNET

*i*n June 2011, the world marked the 30th anniversary of the discovery of HIV/AIDS. Over the past three decades the disease has spread globally, but has had a very heterogeneous impact. Areas where the context was well suited for high numbers of infections, suffered the full catastrophic impact of the disease. Although significant progress has been made to understand and mitigate the physical and socio-economic effects of the disease, there remains important links that have yet to be thoroughly explored. One such connection is the link between HIV/AIDS and informal settlements. Specifically, the links between people who are living with HIV/AIDS who end up living in informal settlements and people living in informal settlements who end up becoming infected with HIV/AIDS. Identifying the connection between HIV/AIDS and slums is important to be able to effectively lobby and advocate for the strengthening of health and housing policies and the strategies to manage them.

Financial and societal elements associated with HIV/AIDS directly affect an infected individuals housing situation through loss of income; increased expenditure; stigma and discrimination; and lack of tenure security and inheritance rights. These issues combine to force individuals and families onto the street or into informal settlements.

The impact HIV/AIDS has on a household's income can be devastating. Absenteeism of infected individuals from work as a result of declining health reduces savings and disposable income. Those who are frequently absent may lose their jobs and become unemployed, severely limiting household's ability to save and pay for basic services such as water, electricity, sanitation,

school fees, routine medical costs and rent/mortgage payments. New costs associated with HIV/AIDS place an additional burden on family income. The cost of medication, medical treatments, doctor fees, transportation fees and other medical costs all have an adverse influence on household income. In certain cases the only way to generate required funds to cover medical costs is to liquidate assets, which includes property. The cost of burial and funerals are often high and effect household savings, as not only is an income earner lost, whatever savings previously existed is compulsorily depleted. These HIV/AIDS affected households face a significant risk of falling deeper into poverty and inability to afford their homesteads. Families may have to move into less expensive accommodation if savings haven't been completely depleted. If new income is not generated to cover existing debts and new costs, families end up living in informal settlements or on the street.

People living with HIV/AIDS may also face discrimination, which has a direct impact on income and housing. Individuals who previously earned profits by selling food, drinks or providing services may be stigmatized by members of their community for being contagious and lose their business as a result. Individuals who are renting their houses may also face discrimination by landlords and neighbours. Once an individual's status is known they may be evicted from rental properties over fears surrounding the disease.

In addition, families affected by HIV/AIDS confront issues of tenure security and inheritance rights. When a family member passes, women and children in particular encounter tenuous circumstances if a will or other arrangements were not in place



to ensure the homestead is given to them. Family members can be forcibly evicted from their land by third parties claiming the property. In such circumstances, not only are families left without a home, but their primary financial asset is also usurped. The long term implications of such tenure insecurity and lack of inheritance rights leave families in very difficult situations from which to recover.

With the loss of an income earner due to HIV/AIDS, families face difficult choices. Desperate circumstances can lead to women and young girls to engage in prostitution in order to generate enough money to survive. This puts them at a much higher risk of violence and assault and of becoming infected and subsequently spreading HIV. Children and youth also face particular challenges in regards to housing needs when parents become infected with HIV. If a parent becomes infected and subsequently ill, children are often required to miss school or drop out to care for them. If the child or youth becomes orphaned and is able to stay in their home, they are most often not able to afford school fees, pay rent, afford mortgage payments, or pay for basic services and can be forcibly evicted. Children and youth in such situations who do not have other caregivers often end up living in the streets or in informal settlement areas because they are unable to afford any other type of accommodation. Children and youth affected by HIV/AIDS face a very difficult future as they fight off disease, violence and negative influences in informal settlements or on the streets.

Once living in informal settlements, the risks of contracting HIV are heightened as several contributing factors exist in these areas. Such risk factors as overcrowding results in young adults

and children who are living in shared rooms with adults being exposed to both sexual activity and sexual abuse at an earlier age, including rape and defilement as children are sent out to give parents privacy, creating a higher risk of HIV transmission. Higher rates of crime in informal settlements including sexual assault contribute to the spread of HIV.

For individuals already living with HIV/AIDS there are also serious challenges. Lack of access to clean water for new mothers with HIV/AIDS means they are unable to safely bottle feed their children, and are otherwise at risk of mother-to-child transmission of the disease if they are forced to breastfeed their babies. Based on the realities of informal settlement conditions, HIV sufferers who are living in dire conditions of poverty or are homeless are much more likely to experience a faster decline into AIDS-related illnesses as the risks for contracting opportunistic infections, including both viral and bacterial respiratory infections are much higher. HIV infections and the impacts of AIDS will thrive in conditions of socio-economic vulnerability and inequity, as living in an informal settlement without proper access to security, health services, sanitation and housing exacerbates all of the diseases contributing factors.

The relationship that exists between HIV/AIDS and informal settlements is important to recognize and acknowledge as it has an overarching effect on the lives of both people living with HIV and their communities. The connection should be included in housing and health policy with accompanying strategies on how best to mitigate its effects.

Thoughts from a PhD Student in Kampala



By Stephanie Terreni Brown,
PhD Researcher, University of Edinburgh



i first came to Uganda in 2006, and was utterly transfixed by its people, landscapes and places; I have been coming back to Uganda ever since, finding various excuses to visit another district or sample life in yet another of Kampala's burgeoning suburbs. And so it seemed a natural fit, when I received funding for doctoral research that I should come back to Uganda and carry on exploring. Except this time, the research has taken a somewhat unexpected, and at times rather malodorous, turn...

You see, the subject of my PhD is defecation, that most basic and simple of human needs. And yet it is one that is not particularly well provided for in Uganda's capital city. Less than 10% of the city's population is served by the sewerage system, and an alarming number of people here have to resort to buckets and kaveera for their toilet needs. Kampala's residents are growing in number by nearly 5% per year but their bottom requirements are rarely being satisfactorily met.

Granted, toilet satisfaction is highly subjective, but surely using a plastic bag to poop in does not rate highly on the Ablution Contentment Index.

I study defecation partly because it affects us all. Whether you're a President or their chauffeur, we all got to go! I also study it because it's important. Without decent sanitation, a myriad of social and economic factors are affected – from school absences when menstruating girls avoid going to class, to the security of self when trying to find somewhere to go safely at night, to the AIDS affected person who is often hardest hit when diarrhoea strikes, the whole community when cholera breaks out, or even the health of Lake Victoria as the sewage infested Nakivubo Channel empties out – inadequate sanitation has an impact whatever your social standing.

And it is this that I find most curious about Kampala, for it's so different to my home town of London. In parts of the city, you can drive round, live and exist, and never know that there are 3 public toilets serving thousands of people in Namuwongo. You can flush the toilet and never give a second's thought to where your

morning deposit will end up. You don't have to – you don't see it and you don't (really) smell it. One flush, gone! Such a 'toiletting-existence' is such a given in certain social classes, it's rarely even thought about. But toilets do not seem like a right if one doesn't have access to them; for those living without, toilets are very much a privilege.

The invisibility of shit seems to me to be a sign of power, and the toilet is a symbol of this. The areas of Kampala where shit is visible are often the areas that are home to the least powerful in the city, but they are also the areas that are often invisible to the very people who are in power. This relationship seemingly legitimises the unsanitary conditions in such areas, and the lack of action from the authorities to improve it.

A case in point would be Namuwongo. Parts of this area are gazetted wetlands, yet are home to many, many people whose sanitary conditions are uncomfortable at best and unsafe at worst. It is a part of the city that is somewhat out of the way, unseen by most unless you have a reason to go there. The conditions are thus made invisible and the land status – protected wetland – legitimises non-engagement with the community from the city authorities. So the conditions are unlikely to improve any time soon, and as the urban population grows, are only likely to get worse.

What can be done?

There needs to be recognition of the importance of toilets and sanitation, where the subject is not taboo and the funding from donors not all about water. There needs to be more coordinated action from NGOs working in communities, to make sure that their projects are in the interests of the community members, with a clear understanding of who, for example, maintains newly constructed latrines. And there needs to be a concerted effort by authorities to not shy away from unsavoury issues and unplanned urban areas; those in power are there for a reason and they need to act accordingly, rather than remaining as 'untouchables' whose authority cannot be challenged. Citizens of Uganda have voices, and they need to be heard. [If you have any comments, please feel free to email me at: Stephanie.e.b@gmail.com]

JOIN SSA:UHSNET TODAY!



Who we are:

Shelter and Settlements Alternatives: Uganda Human Settlements Network (SSA:UHSNET) is a network that brings together all stakeholders in the human settlements sector to more effectively address the constraints to adequate housing especially for urban slum dwellers.

Statement of Objectives:

Our vision is “a nation with accessible, decent and affordable human settlements for all” and our mission is to “address issues and challenges affecting human settlements in Uganda through advocacy, networking and information sharing”.

SSA:UHSNET Membership:

Network membership is open to all National & International Non – governmental Organisations (NGOs); Institutions; Community – based Organisations (CBOs), Corporate Organisations, Individuals and students, who subscribe to the vision, mission, values, principles & the code of conduct of the Network, support and participate in the programmes of the Network.

Membership requirements include:

Completed Membership Application Form
Payment of Membership and Annual Subscription fees
Approval by the Planning & Operations Sub-committee upon application

The members of the Network enjoy a number of benefits and these include:

- Access to information with particular emphasis on human settlements
- Participation in research activities commissioned by the Network
- Participation in relevant workshops/seminars at national, regional and international levels
- Volunteer/internship placement opportunities
- Participation in relevant trainings organised by the Network
- Partnership and collaboration in activity implementation
- Publicity of best practices
- Linkages to relevant potential partners/collaborators

For more information on how to become a member, please visit our Secretariat in Bukoto or email us at: ssa.uganda@gmail.com



WE HAVE A VISION

A vision of a nation with accessible, decent
and affordable human settlements for all.

Shelter & Settlements Alternatives:
Uganda Human Settlements Network (SSA/UHSNET)

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