

PROMISING FLAMES FOR KARAMOJA – CLTS TO TRANSFORM BEHAVIOUR

Karamoja region is one of the remotest and poorest regions in Uganda, with the worst health, sanitation and hygiene indicators. Located in the North Eastern Part of the country, it borders Kenya to the East and South Sudan to the North. The region has for long suffered severe climatic conditions causing hunger, human and animal deaths and deplorable health conditions.

The *Kalimajong* were until recent years nomadic pastoralists moving from place to place in search of food and water for both themselves and animals. This lifestyle brought about unsafe hygienic culture of open defecation since they never had permanent settlements. Following wide spread insecurity resulting from cattle raiding among the different Kalimajong tribes and also the neighboring Turkana from Kenya, the government disarmed them. This led to them having permanent settlements but the health practices have not changed much.

Open defecation in most parts of Karamoja region is a normal practice and there are also taboos against mixing shit (say in a latrine). A brief visit to the communities will reveal heaps of faeces scattered across the pathways, in the compound of their settlements, at the water points, in the gardens and literally EVERYWHERE. The majority of homesteads do not have latrines and in some villages, the latrine coverage is as low as 5%. Even in some communities with latrine coverage above 50%, there is still widespread open defecation.

World Vision Uganda, sub granted by Mercy Corps with funding from USAID, is implementing WASH activities in Northern Karamoja. The project trained Local Government community extension staff from 3 districts (Abim, Kaabong & Kotido) on the Community Led Total sanitation.

The week long training involved piloting the CLTS approach practically in the field. Two communities in Kotido District were piloted for this exercise. Knowing the open defecation practice of the Kalimajong, participants were not very optimistic about the effectiveness of CLTS since it seemed from their practice, that these communities lacked the sense of disgust for shit.



Community members show disgust during the CLTS Triggering session

In the community, upon carrying shit to the meeting place after the transect walk in the village, it was shocking to notice the disgust and shame expressed by the community members. Surprised about what was taking place, one community elder requested *“We have been ashamed enough, now please take the shit away from the meeting and we will decide as a community on what to do”* This was before the facilitators could do or say anything. *“All my life I have seen shit everywhere in our community, but having it here in front of this community gathering has opened my eyes about our practices”* said the Village chairperson.



A natural leaders appeals to community to stop OD

World Vision staff facilitating the CLTS triggering process

Upon administering the shit and water and shit and bread exercises, the community could not hold back their embarrassment and disgust for open defecation. The community sprung into action promising they were ready to stop the habit and improve the image of their village. The realization that their open defecation practices were responsible for their children’s poor health, especially diarrhea and malnutrition, was a big trigger moment for action.

“To begin with, all the shit littered all over this village should be covered, as we start to construct latrines” Moding Madalena, a 28 year old mother of six and a natural leader appealed emotionally to which the audience loudly applauded in agreement. They appealed to World Vision to visit back in a months’ time and promised they would find a different village.

CLTS is to be conducted in close to 600 communities in Karamoja under the Growth Health & Governance project. The key lesson from this for the project and everyone is that CLTS can be effective even for unique communities with unique lifestyles, and it is a key tool for behavior change. The project team is on ground, keenly monitoring the progress and supporting the communities to sustain the positive accomplishments in their ways of living.



In the picture on the left, are Namukur villages community members declaring that they will stop open defecation. The community declared that they will bury all the faeces littered across the community within one week, as they plan to set up more sustainable solutions by constructing latrines.

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No More Open Defecation; Namukur Village members raise hands in agreement