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The event was characterised by song and dance

Mwala Kalanika in
Macha, Choma

A WEIRD, and to an
extent 'insultive',
celebration took place

at Macha Community Hall in
Choma's Mbabala
Constituency last Wednesday.
Even more, strange and
what one would term unpalat-
able and hair-raising slogans
punctuated the four walls of
the packed hall during the
gathering that was chaired by
the area's traditional leader,
chief Masecha.

Some of these slogans went
as follows: 'One Family One
Toilet' and 'No S*** Please'.

Toilets revolution

Strange as that may sound,
the event drew together tradi-
tional leaders, a parliamentar-
ian, councillors, the media
fraternity, community leaders,
UNICEF and other civil soci-
ety stakeholders, among oth-
ers.

It is not every day that
Africans, Zambians in partic-
ular, and indeed some sectors
of the global community meet
to openly discuss toilet mat-

ters.

A toilet has always been
placed as a social pariah, a
place which should be
shrouded in deliberate secre-
cy despite the important role
it plays in the human physio-
logical order. It is not normal
for anybody to talk about the
toilet.

The names given to the toi-
let and the many shapes,
which it comes in are suffi-

cient evidence of the secre-
tive aura that has been
accorded to the facility.

For example a Bemba
would diplomatically
describe a toilet as *Ng'anda*
Ikalamba (big house), whilst
the Lozis would usually
describe it as *Ndu Yenuzu*
(big house) and the Lundas
call it *Ikaia Dastinibi* (secure
house). Various other tribes
in Zambia have their own
terms but none ever seems to
give the toilet its categorical
definition.

Dominic Mulaisho in his
book *Day of the Baboons*
explicitly describes the rela-
tionship that exists between a
toilet and its users, when he
wrote about the experience
that the main character in the
novel set in the pre-inde-
pendence days, had at a high-
ly stretch and dirty public toi-
let at a bus station in the
mining town of Mufulira.

Even though the place was
smelly, the man resigned
himself and he too followed
suit by relieving himself on
the available space in the
filthy toilet.

In Zambia's rural areas, a
toilet has always been a
source of controversy, both
on the cultural and political
landscape; more so at the
dawn of colonisation.

The message by the colo-
nial government that each
village should have a pit
latrine took long to hit home
in the minds of Africans,
because they found it hard to
understand that members of
the same family - parents and
children - could use one
facility to answer the call of

nature. The open spaces in
this case provided the best
alternative to this problem.

But the activities that char-
acterised last Wednesday's
event in Macha, under the
auspices of the UNICEF-sup-
ported Community Led Total
Sanitation (CLTS) pro-
gramme, was a clear sign that
the tidal wave is slowly head-
ing towards the sea of forth-
rightness in relation to the
disposal of human waste; a
subject that has been glossed
over for generations.

There are several factors
that could have triggered this
'toilet revolution' in Choma
district, but for now let us
delve into embellishing
CLTS.

The initiative, being spear-
headed by chief Macha and
some of the community lead-
ers in Macha, is aimed at
ensuring that each household
in the area that lies over 70
kilometres from Choma
bonna has a toilet, as a way of
promoting the concept of
Open Free Defecation (ODF)
communities in the area.

According to a CLTS fact
sheet that was drawn on the
basis that 2008 is the year
declared by the United
Nations as 'The Year of
Sanitation', it is an approach
that facilitates a process of
empowering local communi-
ties to stop open defecation
and to build and use toilets
without the support of any
hardware subsidy.

The fact sheet read that
CLTS is based on the concept
of self-respect rather than on
standards, or health even.

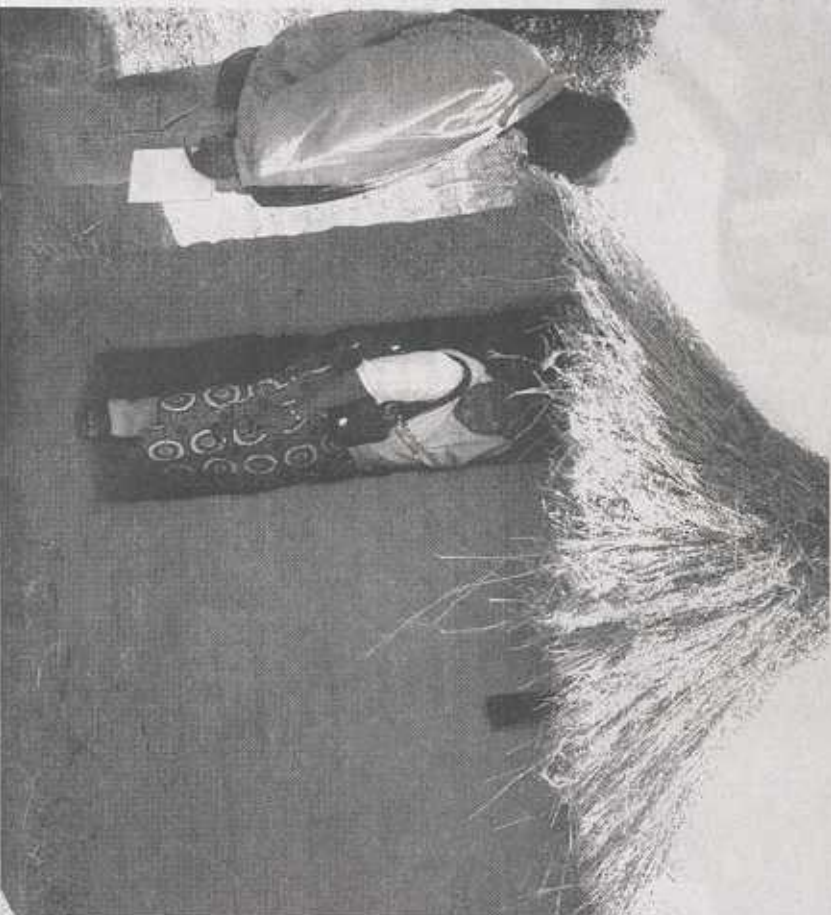
This approach was piloted
for the first time in Zambia in
November last year and 12
communities were selected in
Choma district, in Singani
and Macha chiefdoms.

"Overall latrine coverage
increased from 23 per cent to
88 per cent for a population
of 4,536. This coverage was
based on the ratio of the
number of toilets to the num-
ber of households", the fact
sheet read further. "Nine out
of the 12 villages (75 per
cent) achieved more than 90
per cent coverage. In one
community coverage
increased from nil per cent to
93 per cent, while in another
it increased from 14 per cent
to 102 per cent."

Following the realisation
that no open defecation was
taking place in most of these
communities, they were
declared Open Defecation
Free (ODF) zones.

"The role of the traditional
leaders was crucial in ensur-
ing sustained action from
communities and elected
councillors have now also
been trained in the triggering
process, so that traditional
leaders and civic leaders are
working side by side on the
programme.

The fact sheet states that
the language used in the trig-
gering process should be one
of frankness, in that the term
's***' is used openly to
impress on the people that
human waste is unpleasant
and it is therefore not nice to
have it lying around in the
open.



UNICEF staff inspecting one of the toilets constructed by villagers in Macha through the Community Led Total Sanitation programme



Mbabala, UPND member of parliament Emmanuel Hachipuka sharing a joke with chief Macha during the One Family One Toilet meeting in Macha.

ing to many participants and it's important that this is the case, as this shock factor is a key part of the triggering process," the fact sheet read in part.

Now, the No S**t Please campaign in Macha could not have been described as a success story by the various stakeholders if chief Macha had not thrown away some of his 'cultural' dignity to spearhead the toilet construction campaign in his chieftain.

An excited chief Macha said in his address during the event that he was very elated that the toilet campaign was first launched in Macha.

"When I became a chief in 1990, I was a very sad person, but now I understand what it means to be a chief: to be a chief is to be a community leader," he said. "Sometimes it is good to be insulted over your convictions, because you are leading the people."

Chief Macha said his vision was to see that his subjects go a step further in the No S**t Please Campaign.

"I am very happy that this has happened during my tenure in office," a delighted chief Macha said. "But I want you to understand this point that UNICEF is not here to build a toilet for anybody, including me. To build a toilet is our own responsibility."

He revealed that it was initially very hard for him to accept the campaign given the secrecy that surrounds toilet issues, but the social and economic impacts of having poor sanitation facilities in the community gave him the impetus to take up the challenge.

"I want us to go further. We want permanent toilets," chief Macha said. "There are several challenges in people's lives and this is one of the challenges."

He said it is only through having proper and well-managed toilets that a strong family unit could be guaranteed in his chieftain.

"A family is a very important institution," chief Macha said. "If there are good toilets, you will build a strong family and community; a strong local government and also central government."

Indeed, sanitation activists have said 2008 being the year for sanitation, there was need to remove the stigma that has dogged the issue of the toilet all along.

"The time for action is now. Like

taboo, head of UNICEF Zambia's water, Sanitation and Hygiene Education (WASH) section Peter Harvey said. "Improved hygiene behaviors coupled with access to toilets not only lowers child mortality rates but it also increases the number of girls that go to school, reduces malnutrition and infection rates and affords a greater dignity and privacy for all, particularly women who suffer disproportionately from the lack of safe, clean toilets."

The availability of a toilet is also part of the Millennium Development Goal No. 7 that seeks to halve the proportion of people without access to improved sanitation.

"Poor hygiene and lack of access to toilets together account for 1.5 million diarrhoea-related under-five deaths each year. Children weakened by frequent diarrhoea episodes are more vulnerable to malnutrition and respiratory infections such as pneumonia."

UNICEF has indicated. "According to a recent World Health Organisation study, every dollar spent on improving sanitation generates an average economic benefit of US\$9.1. The economic cost of inaction is astronomical."

UNICEF further states that improved disposal of human waste protects the quality of drinking water sources.

"Each year more than 200 million tonnes of human waste go uncollected and untreated around the world, fouling the environment and exposing millions of people to disease and squator," they stated. "We can influence political leaders to act now. The estimated US\$9.5 billion annual cost to halve the proportion of people without basic sanitation by 2015 is affordable. If sustained, the same investment could achieve basic sanitation for the entire world within one or two decades."

For chief Macha however, his biggest wish is to have President Levy Mwanawasa visit his area so that he could get acquainted with the toilet revolution that is taking place in Macha.

A representative from the Ministry of Local Government and Housing's National Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Programme (NRWSSP) Mwehya Muleya said during the gathering in Macha that the toilet campaign in the chieftain was not

taken within the framework of the NRWSSP, which aims at scaling the percentage of access to water and sanitation among the country's population to 60 by 2015 and to greater heights by 2030.

Southern Province local government officer Dickson Mandala urged for the replication of the programme in other parts of the country.

In any case, given the above scenario the reality is slowly settling and it will not be long when humanity would be hit with a bout of realization that the privacy of the toilet after all, need not be as clandestine as it is being considered now. The people of Macha have blazed the trail in the No S**t Please campaign and only time will tell how many more communities will break the shades of secrecy, through the establishment of proper toilets, and save humanity from an unavoidable social and economic malady.

The One Family One Toilet is a life-giving one and is therefore a lifestyle.

