

How slum dwellers are turning

The slums that belt Kampala's affluent neighbourhoods are not just shanty crime hot-spots. In this second installment of our new three-part series, *Life in Slum*, our correspondent **Jacinta Maria Kannyange** explores the daily travails undergirding the resilience and triumphs of the dwellers.

A short walk through Kamwokya main market at 7am on a Sunday takes us down a narrow, tarmac strip where business is humming along as usual, with kiosks, butcheries, and various offices open and in operation.

Strolling down the clean-swept market path with my guide Mackenzie, a well-known youth mobiliser and resident of Kamwokya, one gets the false impression that all parts of Kamwokya are this well-maintained.

In the market, there is a designated refuse disposal area. It is the kind of place where you might be comfortable ordering a drink and a hot meal.

Where the tarmac strip ends, one has to jump over a wide trench with a rickety wooden bridge. You catch the stench of the trench before you reach it. It is filled with polythene bags and old plastic buckets, lined with algae on one side, and yet children are happily playing close to it. Some of the children, a couple of boys, jump in to fetch their footballs.

This is Kisenyi village, a shanty neighbourhood located in Kamwokya II Parish, in the Central Division, one of five divisions that make up Kampala City. Mr Robert Ameko, the local council chairperson of Kisenyi II says, the area is inhabited by more than 2,000 people. The parish is made up of eight villages, including Kisenyi I, II, and III, Kifumbira I and II, Mawanda Zone, Church Area, and Butakabukirwa villages.

My guide says Sunday is the perfect day to visit Kisenyi I village because the residents largely do not go to church. This is evident as we walk through the slum made up of tin shacks and makeshift wooden structures. You will find men squatting next to a rubbish-filled drainage and sharing a cigarette as they reminisce about the previous night.

The rest of the residents are at home, relaxing, trying to clean their houses, and throwing all the resulting trash into the drainage channel.

Drunkards are about, discos are still playing, and youth are chewing leaves. As one navigates the narrow, winding path, it is prudent to mind where one's feet land because there is faecal matter everywhere.

Short of toilets everywhere

We enter Kisenyi II village as the sun begins to warm up in the sky. MacKenzie leads me to a makeshift wooden structure, from which a mixture of Afro beats and reggae music is blaring



A filthy Kamwokya drainage channel where residents dump waste, including human excrements. PHOTO/ISAAC KASAMANI

out from the dark interior. Inside, about ten, mostly deadlocked youth, are gathered around a wide board containing a game of Ludo, propped up on a small stool.

Some of the young men are playing cards for money inside the shack. I sense a mixture of strong, unpleasant smells wafting from the back of the wooden shack.

Upon inquiring, I learn that the stench is coming from the public toilet, one of three shared by all the villages in the parish. The public facility in question was set up 20 years ago by Coopi International, an organisation of Italian origin.

The odour in the backyard is compounded by the filthy, ever-present drainage channel that flows continuously through all eight villages that make up Kamwokya II Parish.

The guide leads me down a corridor where he tells me to be careful how I tread, as I could step on a polythene bag that has faecal matter. Meanwhile, we are looking for a wash room within the vicinity. As we walk, he explains that the area has a shortage of toilets.

"In Kamwokya here, there are only seven toilets, all of which are full. When you want a house, you can get it, but with landlords, constructing toilets is not a priority," he says.

Curious, I ask which facility one could use if they really needed to go. He hesitates and asks me if it can wait, but I tell him, "It can't wait, I need to use the bathroom."

Due to the desire to find out if there are functional facilities, MacKenzie leads the way to one of the two Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) facilities in the area.

From a distance, one is hit with an unpleasant sulphur-like odour coming from the pit-latrine. A group of children brave the stench and keep playing around it.

The drainage channel around it is filled with faecal matter mixed with polythene bags that prevent the channel's contents from flowing.

To enter the public toilet facility, one must jump over piles of trash strewn around the staircase to reach the five-stall structure, which is split into two sides labelled "Gents and Ladies". Also painted on the grey-brown walls is a sign written in the Luganda language, setting the price of a short call at Shs100, a long call at Shs200, and taking a bath at Shs300.

"That's the facility we use, it's full, but we don't have anything to do," he says.

After negotiating two rickety, makeshift wooden crossings over the drainage channel, we arrive at a metallic gate with faded paint with the name Give Love Uganda, the lettering written in a mix of white, red, and yellow hues.

Compost-based solutions

Give Love Uganda is a non-governmental organisation set up to try and manage waste, with a goal of turning it into compost.

The organisation's director Dickens Bileni, says this means collecting human waste and dead animals, which find their way into public spaces.

They keep the compost pile for a duration of six months. They have a thermometer-like device that gauges the readiness of the compost, which is sold to farmers around the country.

Part of what the organisation does is to make compost-based toilets. The toilet mechanism consists of two buckets: one filled with sawdust. The buckets act like toilets.

Ms Rose Sanyu, 38, is a beneficiary of the compost-based toilet initiative. The stinking KCCA toilet facility in Kisenyi II, described above, is just behind Ms Sanyu's house.

There is an open drainage trench along the side of her house. On the day

of our slum visit, she is sitting on a stool, cooking a meal for her six children. The children play in the compound under her supervision to prevent them from crossing to the other end, where the toilet is.

She says her children are victims of the effects of the neighbouring unsanitary public toilet, many have contracted diseases from playing near it.

She recalls the dark days of the Covid-19 lockdown, when public toilets became overcrowded and inaccessible.

"Everyone in Kamwokya had to queue for hours," she explains. "I used to get urinary tract infections from the dirty facilities. When it rained, everything, sewage, rainwater, and garbage mixed. I had no peace."

Ms Sanyu recalls that she has so far spent Shs200,000 in treating urinary tract infections in herself and her children.

She says since the toilet filled up, many resort to other means of easing themselves, which has cost the community in terms of health.

"Since the pit-latrine filled up, some still use it despite its condition, but many are resorting to polythene bags, which, after use, are thrown into any compound or the drainage channels, which affects the children and the whole community," Ms Sanyu says.

Housing issues that deepen the sanitation crisis

Mr Robert Ameko, the area chairperson in Kisenyi II, when approached, says his area has a problem of human waste that is not properly disposed of, putting residents at risk of acquiring diseases.

He blames the landlords in the area who do not prioritise building of toilets but are only after collecting money from tenants.

Mr Ameko, says even when land is available to construct a small pit-latrine, the landlords of the area prefer setting up makeshift shelters for people to live in.

The makeshift shelters are just slightly bigger than a dog kennel and are only big enough to hold a mattress. They are raised from the ground using wooden pallets, and some of the nightly occupants use old iron sheets held down by bricks to prevent them from being blown away.

For these temporary structures, the occupants pay the landlord anywhere near Shs50,000 a month to rent. Rental rates for permanent structures start at Shs80,000, which is too expensive for the temporary lodgers, who have no access to toilet facilities, given the nature of their tenancy.

"When a communal pit-latrine is constructed in the area, the cost of its maintenance becomes hard. We appeal to landlords to at least construct toilets for their tenants," he adds.

Mr Ameko says residents of the area that has poor sanitation, diseases like cholera, diarrhoea, are surviving by the grace of God.

He called for tough conditions to be placed on landlords who have houses without pit-latrines or toilet facilities of any kind.

A bio-solution

Despite the unsanitary conditions described, Give Love Uganda is demon-

2,000

Population: Mr Robert Ameko, the local council chairperson of Kisenyi II says, the area is inhabited by more than 2000 people.

waste into wealth

strating compost-based solutions for not only the congested environment in Kamwokya, but also for their garbage.

Ms Alisa Keesey Puga, the executive director of the organisation, appeals to KCCA to adopt such interventions because small organisations like hers cannot reach everyone.

She estimates that she spends \$45,000 (about Shs161m) per month on workers' wages, constructing toilet facilities for people with disabilities, and rent of office premises, among other expenses.

Birth of the compost idea

Mr Bileni says the idea started in March 2019 when Give Love Foundation trained an Innoveight team member in Karamoja on container-based sanitation (CBS) approaches, including organic waste and manure composting.

Mr Bileni says this was an appropriate solution to the few and overflowing pit latrines in an area such as Kamwokya, where the water levels are high.

Later that year, Give Love Uganda trained 50 youth in compost site management. Mr Bileni now oversees 50 youth directly employed in the waste collection and curing process.

Composting process

The manure, including human waste collected from slums such as Kisenyi I village, is transported to the composting site in containers, carefully avoiding spillage, before it is emptied into a large compost bin.

Technicians compost the humanure by integrating the mass with dry cover material.

A thick layer of dry grass is added to the fresh material after all the containers are emptied to act as a 'biological roof' to keep flies out and keep the moisture inside the pile.

All of the black water used for cleaning the containers is added to the compost bin, together with food scraps, and kept at a stable temperature of about 35 to 40 °C.

"When composting a compost pile, the main concern is to prevent groundwater and surface pollution from leaching. The composting cages are constructed in a way that prevents any runoff of black water," he says.

Regular monitoring of the temperatures is carried out by taking records that include the date when the piles were opened and when they will be closed.

The treatment accomplishes two things: it reduces the odour of the sludge, and it decreases the number of pathogens in the bio-solid.

Birth of new toilets

Mr Bileni says compost toilets function like a conventional sit-down flush toilet except that they are made of a bucket in which the toilet user covers their waste with sawdust after use instead of flushing with water. Other cover materials can be rice hulls or sugar-cane bagasse.

Mature compost

When the compost pile is in balance, it creates an ideal environment for beneficial micro-organisms and fungi to flourish. Such a composting process works like digester because micro-organisms compete and feed off each other.

The process and metabolic activity of the micro-organisms generate high levels that can reach 65-50 °C and higher, a

process known as hot composting.

Mr Bileni says a period of six months is given to enable the production of good-quality manure and to eliminate disease-causing pathogens that do not favour agriculture.

"Immature compost produces phytotoxins that are toxic to plants," Mr Bileni explains.

What health authorities say

Dr Herbert Nabbasa, the commissioner-in-charge of environmental health at the Ministry of Health, says the country's sanitation coverage is very low, despite the multiple forms of sanitation available.

He says despite the government implementing public interventions, the situation remains stagnant, making the public prone to diseases.

"The sanitation coverage in the coun-

try is below 50 percent, it's worst in slum areas of congestion and poor living standards," he says.

Dr Nabbasa says to improve the sanitation for the people in the different areas, the mindset of the people needs to be worked on to improve with the available resources.

"We are introducing the market approach in a few piloted districts to train people to use the limited resources to establish sanitation facilities," Dr Nabbasa says.

Mr Vicent Byendaimira Biribonwa, the director of Physical Planning at KCCA, says development in areas like Kamwokya is in the pipeline, but it is being

hindered by resources that stretch over all areas.

He says the slums are being identified in the various hotspots to plan implementation.

"We think of the whole city, but resources hinder us," Mr Biribonwa says.

He adds: "It is our intention to improve the slums, but this year we are working on slums in Kawempe and part of Rubaga near Kabaka's lake, where Shs1 billion has been placed."

The third and final installment runs tomorrow.