

63,400 PADER RESIDENTS GET SOLAR-POWERED CLEAN WATER

PHOTO BY LAWRENCE MULONDO

By Lawrence Mulondo

For years, Zuena Awol's mornings began long before sunrise.

At 6:00am, the 14-year-old Primary Six pupil at Odum Primary School in Puranga sub-county, Pader district, would pick up a jerrycan and begin the 2km journey to River Aswa to fetch water for her family.

THROUGH THICK BUSHES

She walked the dark paths with her sisters, often frightened by the thick bush and narrow trails. "It was always scary," Awol recalls. "Sometimes we found snakes on the road and the paths were difficult to see in the darkness."

Awol, a resident of Odum A Village in Odom Parish, says a borehole existed about a kilometre from their home, but it broke down, forcing families to rely on the river.

After fetching water, she still has to do housework and prepare for school.

Most days, she arrives late and exhausted.

Awol's experience reflects the reality faced by many pupils across Pader.

Menson Atua, the deputy headteacher at Lutini Primary School in Aware sub-county, said water scarcity disrupts learning.

WATER HARDSHIPS IN SCHOOLS

The school relied on a private community borehole that was frequently locked. When the school was allowed access, it had to pay about sh10,000 for water.

"Teachers sometimes came to class without bathing because water was expensive and unreliable," Atua says.

Maintaining hygiene in the school environment became difficult, and the institution could not host events, such as music or sports competitions.

SOLAR-POWERED WATER RELIEF

Relief came through the One Health for Inclusive Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Services Project implemented by Amref Health Africa Uganda with support from Water for All.



Pupils of Odum Primary School in Puranga sub-county, Pader district utilising one of the water sources that were set up from the nine solar powered systems

The initiative introduced solar-powered piped water systems to water-stressed schools and communities in the district.

The One Health approach recognises the link between the health of people, animals and the environment.

Adolescent girls have benefited the most, according to Kasozi.

"In the past, girls experiencing menstruation often stayed home because schools had poor sanitation and no water," he said, adding: "Now they can access proper facilities and feel comfortable attending school."

As conditions improved, enrolment in schools doubled. Each community contributed sh200,000 towards installation, while those whose boreholes were rehabilitated contributed sh100,000.

Households also pay sh2,000 monthly to water management

committees for maintenance. Sanitation facilities have also been constructed in six schools, including drainable ventilated improved pit latrines connected to water, hand washing stations, changing rooms and incinerators for safe disposal of menstrual hygiene materials. These improvements reduced the pupil-to-latrine ratio from over 80 pupils per stance to about 40, the standard ratio recommended by the education ministry.

EDUCATION OFFICER COMMENTS

Margaret Alanyo, the Pader district education officer, said the district has long struggled with water access due to the rocky terrain that makes drilling boreholes difficult.

Before the water systems were installed, schools had fewer than 200 pupils. Today, some enrol up to 800 learners.

Pader has 107 government-aided primary schools spread across vast distances; some are relocated up to 85kms from the town.

According to national data, Pader has about 95% safe water coverage. However, many boreholes were drilled years ago in former internally displaced persons camps and are no longer functioning.

'WASH' PROJECT RELIEF

Issa Sematimba Kasozi, the project officer for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Services Project implemented by Amref Health Africa Uganda in Pader, said the six-year project began in 2021 and is now in its final year.

It targets disadvantaged communities that have limited access to groundwater. During the first phase, six solar-powered piped water systems were installed to serve six schools and 18 surrounding communities and health facilities in Pader.

In the second phase, three additional systems with 10,000-litre reservoir tanks were installed in three schools and extended to nearby villages. "By bringing water closer to homes and schools, we have reduced the walking distance from over one kilometre to less than 200 metres," Kasozi said.

Where piped systems could not be installed due to limited funding, the project rehabilitated boreholes. Thirty boreholes were repaired during the first phase and 13 more during the second phase. About 23,400 pupils now have access to safe water in their schools, in addition to an estimated 40,000 community members.