



Amongin Jacqueline (right) making a presentation on access to water during the 63rd UN conference on women in New York on Wednesday

Access to water, sanitation key for gender equality

By Vision Reporter

Without access to clean water, there can be no gender equality. This is the message from women representatives of UN member states and civil society organisations gathered in New York at the sidelines of the 63rd Session on the Commission on the Status of Women.

According to delegates, the majority of rural women do not have access to clean water and have to walk several miles in search for water.

In her presentation on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), a parliamentarian's perspective in strengthening gender equality, Jacqueline Amongin, on Wednesday said rural women are vulnerable due to social prejudices that deny them their human right to access water.

"Women are subjected to discrimination, sexual and physical violence due to WASH-related factors especially when they walk long distances looking for water," Amongin said.

She added: "Women fail to relate to their domestic chores effectively because they are overwhelmed with long distance to water points."

Amongin told the delegates that as a way of addressing these challenges, in 2012, the Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Water and Sanitation (UPF-WASH) was formed to raise awareness and advocate water and sanitation-related aspects.

To this end, she said, the forum has influenced budgetary allocations to the district water and sanitation conditional grant to address the needs of women and girls.

Amongin explained that there is a strong linkage between access to water, sanitation and hygiene, and gender equality; and

that focus should therefore be put on promotion of gender equality and women empowerment by ensuring convenient access to water and sanitation facilities.

While giving her country's experience, Immaculata Raphael, the head of National Water Sanitation Development Programme in Tanzania, said access to WASH and healthcare facilities leads to better health outcomes for women and children. She added that when women are healthier, they have more time to invest in income-generating activities.

Experiences from Colombia, Zambia and Niger, demonstrated the idea that access to water, sanitation and hygiene was a pathway to gender equality.

Alex Ndeze, the MP for persons with disabilities, said water and sanitation-related aspects had not been given the due attention needed during the ongoing women's conference.

"The main programme of this year's session on the Commission on the Status of Women does not adequately capture water, sanitation and related issues and yet we believe that without promoting WASH issues, it is impossible to attain gender equity. It is also impossible to enhance the welfare of women, especially rural women, if access to water is not a priority," he explained.

The legislator recommended that the next session on the Commission of the Status of Women should prioritise access to water and sanitation on its agenda.

The 63rd session has been meeting under the theme, *Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.*

The two-week annual event closes today.

60 water facilities launched

By Paul Watala

Sixty six climate resilient water and sanitation facilities have been commissioned in six districts in the eastern region of the country by the commissioner for rural water supply and sanitation department in the Ministry of Water and Environment, Eng. Joseph Eyatu.

The facilities were constructed with funding from the African Development Bank to implement climate-resilient water and sanitation intervention.

The facilities include; eight enviroloos, 10 cesspits and 40 very improved pit-latrines, and were constructed at a cost of over sh5.3b.

Martha Naigaga, the sanitation co-ordinator in the Ministry of Water and Environment, says the expected outcome from the additional funding will improve access to safe and clean water for domestic consumption in drought-prone districts.

Naigaga said increased access to climate-resilient sanitation in flood-prone peri-urban areas will improve awareness of technologies, measures and practises to increase resilience to climate change in flood and drought-prone areas.

She named Budaka, Kumi, Pallisa, Soroti, Butaleja and Bukedea as the six benefiting districts. She also said all the facilities in schools have rooms and incinerators at the girl's toilet to enhance menstrual hygiene management. Others are stances for persons with disabilities (PWDs), handwashing facilities and gates to enhance security has been put in place. Other projects include distribution of 1,500 fruit tree seedlings to enhance environmental



President Yoweri Museveni commissioning Lirima gravity water scheme last year

THE EXPECTED OUTCOME FROM THE ADDITIONAL FUNDING WILL IMPROVE ACCESS TO SAFE AND CLEAN WATER FOR DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION IN DROUGHT-PRONE DISTRICTS

conservation.

However, the local leaders in the benefiting districts wondered as to why the facilities were being commissioned when they already had cracks.

Budaka LC5 chairman Sam Mulomi said the representative district pit-latrines-pupil ratio has been standing at one to 120, adding that construction of more pit latrines in schools will improve poor disposal of fecal matter.

He said in some schools, pupils and teachers share pit latrines, exposing the girlchild to defilement and lack of privacy.

"We had old, overflowing

and smelly pit-latrines and our girls had been absenting themselves from schools when in their menstruation periods," he said.

Eyatu revealed that the ministry plans to construct sanitation facilities along highways to control poor disposal of waste by travellers.

He also said some of the facilities had not been constructed to the standard,

but appealed to the contractor to rectify the mess before the final inspection is done.

"We have reached 95% of the works, but hope the contractor will put what had gone wrong right. We shall not issue a certificate until final inspection clears it," Eyatu said.

He said the facilities will also be monitored for 12 months, adding that their lifespan is between five to 10 years. He thanked the funders for extending assistance to needy communities.

The commissioner appealed to local council leaders and school management committees to monitor and make sure that the facilities are put to good use, adding that vandals should be brought to book.

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