

Community monitors leading the fight against corruption in Karamoja

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MOROTO

Advertorial



Mr. John Abingwa
The RDC Nakapiripirit district



Mr. Rymon Korobe
The Education officer Nakapiripirit

From late 1970s to 2007 Karamoja was a no go zone due to cattle rustling and insecurity. Infact no one wanted just to hear the word Karamoja. Insecurity persisted until 2001 when government launched a voluntary disarmament exercise, which was intensely resisted until government introduced a forceful disarmament exercise.

To date, up to 50,000 guns have been recovered from the hands of the Karimojong warriors according to reports, and this has come with great opportunities for development.

The return of peace was the turning point for the sub-region, which is now trying to catch up with the rest of the country.

The sub-region however still remains the country's most disadvantaged, with nearly 80% of the people living below the poverty line, 82% of the people are illiterate and below the national average. People still lack basic amenities like education and health.

Karamoja also still experiences periodic famine, and media reports have revealed people dying due to prolonged famine and drought in the region. Karamoja is also greatly dependent on aid from government and international agencies.

The good conducive environment has now allowed many development projects from both government and NGOs. However, peace and the influx of development aid has come with a new problem - corruption. Much as substantial resources have been poured into the region by development partners and government, there is little or nothing to show for it.

Substantial amounts of money meant to develop Karamoja continue to be misused without anyone following it up. Officials sent from Kampala to Karamoja

to investigate or implement development projects in the region have often stopped along the way and made their reports without stepping in the region.

Despite government interventions aimed at improving livelihoods in Karamoja, there still exists high illiteracy levels and lack of basic competencies among the citizens which limits their participation in decision making processes and monitoring of government programmes in their localities.

There have also been limited efforts of civil society in augmenting civic participation in transparency and accountability, since most of them are engaged in livelihoods and direct service delivery.

The lack of an active civil society movement on good governance, transparency and accountability, has often made monitoring government programmes impossible.

In essence, a baseline conducted by the Anti Corruption Coalition Uganda in 2017 revealed that 49% males and 51% females had no interest in matters of governance in the districts of Napak, Moroto and Nakapiripirit. The study further revealed that the key impediments to citizen involvement in governance work are lack of information and low literacy levels.

The findings state the different manifestations of corruption as; bribery, extortion, fraud, embezzlement, nepotism, forgery, vote buying amongst other forms. Findings in all districts highlighted that district officials are the most corrupt (60%) with emphasis being put on drug thefts in health centres, more so at the sub-county level.

To address this gap, Anti Corruption Coalition Uganda

(ACCU) in November 2017, with funding from Irish Aid officially launched the Karamoja Anti Corruption Coalition (KACC) - an umbrella agency that coordinates CSO interventions against corruption.

Karamoja Anti Corruption Coalition brings together other civil society actors which include; Moroto-Nakapiripirit Religious Initiative for Peace (MONARLIP), Karamoja Christian Ethno Veterinary Program (KACHEP), Rural Action for Development Organisation (RADO), St Thereza Women's Organisation, and Women's Development Association-Nakapiripirit (WUDEA).

"Our role has been to unite the anti-corruption organisations in the region under one umbrella organisation, so that we can work together to address accountability and transparency violations in the region," says Joy Namunoga, the advocacy officer at ACCU.

KACC has been working through a network of over 100 community based monitors that are spread out in Napak, Moroto, Nabilatuk and Nakapiripirit. These monitor public service delivery and document transparency and accountability cases in the 4 districts, and so far 122 corruption cases have been reported.

The monitors also mobilize and sensitize local communities at village level to be anti-corruption ambassadors, and to report corruption cases.

These monitors have greatly done a recommendable job according to Mr. John Abingwa the resident district commissioner Nakapiripirit. Mr. Abingwa explained that the locals have become more vigilant in demanding for accountability for any project in their village.

"These anti corruption monitors have helped us in arresting corrupt people and also followed up projects that have been poorly implemented," he said.

Mr. Alosysus Oloka the chief administrative officer Nakapiripirit also commends the work of the anti corruption monitors and appeals that more people be empowered to demand for accountability.

"Am very happy for the work these sub county monitors are doing because most of the time we are in the office and we may not know what's going on at the sub county but we get reports from these monitors," he says.

Mr. Michael Lote one of the monitors in Nabilatuk district says that at first the monitors were being intimidated by people they accused of corruption. "Some district officials tried to intimidate us whenever we made our reports and presented them in any meeting but they later understood our role as anti corruption monitors," he says.

Ms. Cissy Kagaba the executive director of Anti Corruption Coalition Uganda says fighting corruption in Uganda needs collective responsibility and that the local communities need to be empowered to take the lead in the fight against corruption.



Community based monitors attending a training on transparency and accountability in Nakapiripirit district



Community based monitors converge for a quarterly planning meeting in Nabilatuk

"We are empowering the local communities to be anti-corruption champions because they are the beneficiaries of the projects at the grass root level," she says.

Mr. Raymond Korobe the district education officer Nakapiripirit says that the anti corruption monitors have been key to monitoring the absenteeism of teachers and reporting to the education office.

"They are working as our eyes and ears at the grass root because they give us reports about low school enrolment and teacher absenteeism whereby we take action," he says.

Ms Kagaba however says that the monitors are challenged by long distances between communities and projects monitored. The poor road network and limited means of transport also make coordination and reporting difficult. In a few instances, the monitors also face intimidation.