M

y name is Maria Mawisha from Mankuti village in Bulb Ward 12. As the Habakkuk Trust Community Advocacy Action Team, we went around all villagers giving community members feedback on what we had learnt during the two-day local level advocacy training workshop we attended in October. We asked people who attended the feedback meetings if they had toilets in their households, over 20 people said they did not have. We took down their names and asked them to be digging toilet pits and once they are done they should inform us. Twelve of them came back to us after they had finished digging the pits. We then told them to mould bricks for the toilets and once they are ready they should inform us again.

The community now has the moral ground to encourage to build their toilets because we should all be responsible for our own hygiene. They thought there was a donor that was coming to build toilets for them but when they realised that they were going to do it themselves, they were not happy about it but there was no going back. We advised them to buy ready-mixed cement and kick off the building process. Some told us they can’t afford cement which is about $15 a bag. We would rather advise them to get their chickens or a goat in order to raise the money to buy the cement. Development starts in the mind. That is why Habakkuk Trust always emphasises that a good leader needs to be bold, brave, trustworthy and be loving towards others.

According to the local authority’s income statement on development levies, in the process, collecting the highest amount compared to other Wards in the District. Lack of knowledge and growing apathy were some of the reasons cited as to why most people in this Ward use fields, bushes to dispose of human waste thus especially open defecation in their community.

We then told them to mould bricks for the toilets done they should inform us. Twelve of them came to the Village Heads to encourage the people to pay development levies, in the process, collecting the highest amount compared to other Wards in the District. Lack of knowledge and growing apathy were some of the reasons cited as to why most people in this Ward use fields, bushes to dispose of human waste thus especially open defecation in their community.

This came after the Habakkuk Trust Action Team in Ward 26 conducted a research on sanitation which established that about 90 per cent of Households in the Ward use fields, bushes to dispose of human waste thus exposing others, especially children to serious health hazards. Section 73 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe recognises the right to a clean environment that is not harmful to the health and well-being of the people.

Speaking at a Habakkuk Trust organized policy dialogue meeting held at the Nkayi Rural District Council Boardroom recently, a representative from the district Ministry of Health and Child Care, Ms Nqele Nyaladzi urged villagers to be on the lookout for those who perpetrate the unhygienic practice in the area. She called on the villagers to set standards and create systems that can effectively develop their areas. She encouraged communities to take responsibility of their environment.

"If a single household does not have a toilet, it doesn’t mean it only affects that household alone, it affects the whole community," she said. "People should come together and discuss what measures they will take for those defecating in the open and what systems they would put in place regarding toilets for every household."

She said it was easier for communities to cooperate with the mechanisms they put in place themselves than the policies created by people from outside. She encouraged communities to take responsibility of their environment.

The policy dialogue meeting is part of the Habakkuk Trust Local Level Advocacy Programme cycle which gives Community Advocacy Action Teams an opportunity to meet various stakeholders to share their advocacy issues, interact and get knowledge on how these issues can be addressed.

There are three headmen in her area at the moment. Chieftainship. Though it has not completely gone away, it has become a lot better than before, " she said. "People now strongly believe they can effectively develop their areas."

Chief Ndube is one of the traditional leaders Habakkuk Trust has trained on human rights empowerment. He said much of the money was collected between the months of August and October contributing this to the capacity building and advocacy work Habakkuk Trust has been doing in the area during the same period of time. He requested the organisation to conduct capacity building trainings in more Wards, in all Wards so that the whole district realise development.

Ward 22 Action Team Coordinator Mr. Siqinza Mphale who was visibly impressed by this improvement said Ward 26 had never exceeded $500 in household levies collection for a very long time. He urged the villagers to save the money they have in the bank and use it to complete the sanitation Projects they have started.

"This has never happened before, this shows the great work Habakkuk Trust is doing in the communities through the Community Advocacy Action Teams," he said.

"We did not care much about paying household levies but after capacity building trainings, we know how important it is to pay these levies so we now inform the villagers about them," she said. "When we were doing researches on our issues, we also urged village heads to encourage their people to pay levies."

She said the Action Team was happy that their advocacy efforts were finally bearing fruits. Very encouraged by the response to their advocacy efforts, the Action Team is planning to conduct trainings in other Wards around the district to further improve the sanitation level in the Ward, so that all people in the area can improve their health standards.

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Public consensus building meetings: a resounding success

Habakkuk Trust Community Advocacy Action Teams in Nkayi andInsiza Districts recently managed to mobilize community members to actively and openly participate in community development, decision making and prioritization of community issues through community consensus building through consensus building.

Many communities in the drought-stricken Matabeleland region rarely participate in local governance, economic and development processes that do not have immediate solutions to their perennial problems. Most community members usually partake in meetings where handouts in the form of food and farming inputs are being distributed and thus lack the capacity to create sustainable solutions to their problems without external assistance. This dependency syndrome has made people fail to actively participate in identifying and responding to community issues to ultimately implement the work done by development organisations and the government.

Habakkuk Trust Community Advocacy Action Team in Nkayi Ward 22 mobilized 267 people for a public consensus building meeting at Katasa pre-school and they agreed to work on development of village plans. 214 villagers converged at Marumbana Primary Centre in Insiza Ward 2 and agreed to prioritize the building of a secondary school so as to ensure children access secondary education in the Ward.

189 villagers who attended a consensus building meeting at Mdengelele Primary School in Nkayi Ward 26 decided on tackling perennial water problems and poor sanitation facilities in the Ward while in Insiza Ward 15, a total of 80 people gathered at Mihwazi Community Hall in Filabusi and resolved to focus on solid waste management at Filabusi Centre. More than 70 per cent of the participants in all the meetings were women underlining the fact that men generally shun taking part in development projects in their areas.

Habakkuk Trust Community Advocacy Action Teams in these Wards were trained on the importance of citizen participation in decision making and on how to mobilise community members to participate in economic processes. They shared the knowledge with other community members hence the increase in the number of people who attended the public consensus building meetings.