

WOMEN INCREASE PARTICIPATION IN NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION IN KAMWENGE DISTRICT

BY: Nabakka Elizabeth.

Communication Officer-JESE

Since its inception four years back, the IWRM program has had a remarkable influence on women participation in natural resource conservation practices. With support from PROTOS, several partners including JESE, HAWESA and NRD, have been at the forefront of bringing this initiative to action, in respect to the key intervention areas of; restoration, sanitation services and safe water conservation practices of water catchment areas of Mpanga, Semuliki and Upper Lake Albert in the districts of Kamwenge, Kitagwenda and Buliisa respectively.

Based on the annual end of year survey for the programme for 2020, result findings indicated that women participation had increased from 20% to 44% direct involvement in activities of tree planting, conservation of water catchment areas and climate resilience farming practices. What follows below is a story of different championing women in the different communities the programme is implemented.

Ms. Nyanzi Hope, the Lady Councilor of Nyakeera Ward, Bukulungo town council, in Kitagwenda district, says that before the program rollout in 2017, Nyakeera was a very hot area, with limited green cover and trees planted. The only available source of water for domestic use was Lake George, where humans competed with domestic animals for the same water. The water was usually contaminated with feces for humans given the limited number of latrines at the landing site and a high level of open defecation, a situation which escalated the outbreak of water borne diseases, including; bilharzia, diarrhea, and typhoid. The strong winds at the site usually left devastating effects of loss of houses and plants. Below is a photo showing Nyakeera landing site after JESE interventions.



The intervention of JESE and other partners however, availed an opportunity for being trained in tree planting, better sanitation and hygiene practices, among others. The program also support us with ecosans latrines at a cost sharing basis, built energy saving stoves and established a water filtration system to supply humans and a cattle trough for animals to drink from. The established tree nursery bed was

instrumental in availing tree seedlings for planting by household members as a restoration effort to the degraded environment, which majority of women in Nyakeera greatly embraced.



A photo showing the established water trough for cattle in Nyakeera.

To enhance household food security and nutrition, women were trained in kitchen gardening and supported in their establishment through the extension service component of the IWRM program.

The frequent strong winds at the landing site usually left devastating effects such as broken roofs from community member houses, however, the planting of trees and wind breakers brought a ray of hope and was an inspiration to women involvement in the restoration process. Tree planting also equally doubles as a source of wood fuel for cooking and provide shade with fresh air for taking rest on sunny days.

Given the above interventions, water retention levels have gone high, with its availability guaranteed through all seasons. With the support on kitchen gardening, women can now plant vegetables throughout the year, thus spend less money on the same. Beneficiaries were initially provided with vegetable seeds, but due to the realized benefits, they have been inspired to buy vegetable seed by themselves to establish kitchen gardens.

The training on hygiene and sanitation was a big inspiration to many community household members as the construction of drying racks, ecosans latrines, digging of rubbish pits, and access to clean water among other initiatives, led to improved health conditions, with reduced outbreak of water borne diseases and thus less expenditure on medical expenses. Hence the reduced expenditure on medication has enabled women save more on household incomes and can pay for clean water and are able to buy household basic needs with less dependence on their husbands.



A photo showing a before latrine structure and after ecosan toilet constructed for one of the Nyakeera members.

Mrs. Kakuru Jennifer is a resident of Kengoma village, in Kamwenge district and one of the actively participating women in natural resource restoration practices. She explains that before JESE's intervention, there was a lot of deforestation in the community and along the River Mpanga catchment area, which effect led to scarcity of fuel wood; hence women were tasked to walk long distances to access firewood.

When JESE intervened, it taught us as a community on natural resource restoration practices in the Mpanga catchment area and put restrictions on wetland encroachment through installation of demarcation markers. We were trained on the importance of conserving the environment and also built networks through which to report cases of wetland encroachers on the catchment. The above move inspired us to form committees responsible for supervision of restoration practices in the Mpanga catchment and JESE has continually provided technical guidance in this respect.

Mrs. Amumpire Priva, who hails from Rushango 1 village, in Kamwenge district, revealed that before JESE interventions, cutting down of trees and burning charcoal along the river banks was rampant, thus impacting negatively on the water table and subsequent seasonal drying up. Amumpire adds that, during the dry season we no longer move far to get the water because we were taught on how to conserve the environment and subsequent water levels.

The sunshine would be too much and the rains had become scarce. But with JESE's training in planting trees, the rains are now back. The gardens would be highly affected because we were taught on how we would conserve the water levels. The sunshine would be too much and the rains are now back. The gardens would be highly affected because of the sun, but now we plant trees in the rift valleys that have benefited our gardens that no longer dry up. We now grow plants and even benefit from that.

My love for preserving the natural resources came after I saw how I was affected by the destruction of the environment. When they would cut down these trees and burn charcoal, rain became so scarce to the extent that even when I would plant my crops, they would dry up and I made a lot of losses. I used not to plant trees, but when I started to plant trees, my crops were giving me yields, and the Rushango wetland could not dry up so we could draw water for home consumption. I became accountable to the environment around me that I started to question people who would get involved in cutting down trees.

RukundoRacheal of Rushango 1, said when we would grow our crops, we used to grow them until the boarder of the wetland, when JESE came it informed us that the plantations would draw the water from wetland it dries up. But they demarcated the area and now we plant far from the wetland hence enabling it to keep the water. Even without getting close to the wetland, my crops are flourishing well.

In conclusion, the active participation of women in Nyakeera aims at achieving that women and girls, have equal rights and opportunity, in activities geared towards natural resources restorations. Women's equality and empowerment is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, but also integral to all dimensions of inclusive and sustainable development. On that note, it's important to involve women in conservation efforts and climate resilience.



A photo showing some of the women actively participating in the restoration of natural resources in Kamwenge.