



SNAPSHOT

Lamu Residents Raising their Voices for Better Education

“Now we are seeing changes in terms of renovation, our children can safely study in the ECD centers.”

Faza Kambi, resident, Lamu County

In Zebra, Miruji and Bopwe areas across Lamu County, early childhood development (ECD) centers were ghost towns. No residents were interested in risking the lives and health of their children in the dilapidated classrooms and crumbling toilets.

“Some schools had toilets with roofs and walls falling off and no doors, posing a danger to our children. We were so angered; we constantly raised the matter with the county government’s education department.” Faza Kambi, a Lamu resident recalls.

It had been years of complaints filed with authorities which had seen no change in the county. This left many parents completely frustrated, forcing them to walk further distances to ensure their children had a safer schooling environment.

In 2018, Act Change Transform (ACT!), a non-governmental organisation operating in the county, conducted a governance and public participation training funded by USAID through the Agile Harmonized Assistance for Devolved Institutions (AHADI) program.

The training covered the Public Expenditure Management (PEM) cycle, i.e. county budget cycle, budget formulation and monitoring of budget execution; public participation in the county development processes; social accountability techniques; the right to access to information; policy analysis and advocacy; and devolution and the functions of national and county governments.

26 community trainers and 13 civil society organisations were armed with knowledge and confidence to engage the county leadership. And actively speak up and work together with the county on development projects the community was keen to see either developed or resolved.

It wasn’t an easy task; county officials and elected legislators were initially apprehensive, they avoided phone calls, refused to share public information and avoided all meeting requests. This forced the community to take matters into their hands.

Ms. Hafswa, a community trainer recalls her area MP leave a burial ceremony in a rush to escape the fury of citizens demanding accountability and service delivery.

“Subsequent leaders who had planned to visit Matondoni have since postponed or cancelled their visits to evade the wrath of citizens’ quest for their unmet needs,” Hafswa observes.

Local leadership is increasingly conscious of citizens’ oversight of their work, this makes them wary of making empty promises to residents. Hafswa and other community trainers reached over 37,000 residents across 10 wards across Lamu County sharing the knowledge they learnt on the various aspects of governance, accountability and development.

As a result of this, residents in the county conducted over 50 social audits of various government projects across the county. This has now seen (ECD) centers across the county rehabilitated, constructed and equipped. Toilets have been refurbished and new ones put up to improve the learning environment.

“Now we are seeing changes in terms of renovation, our children can safely study in the ECD centers,” Kambi concludes.

ACT! urges the county government to simplify key documents to enable more residents to understand the documents to enable greater public participation in decision making. And further develop project development committees for all initiatives, to ease monitoring and accountability.