



SNAPSHOT

Moving Mandera County Forward through Citizen Engagement

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***Elyas Noor, Ward Forum
Committee Member, Khalalio
Ward***

Mandera County, like most counties in Kenya, was at the mercy of the county government. The county government would plan and develop projects without any community consultation and as a result, much-needed funds would go to waste.

In Khalalio Ward residents desperately needed water, the county government prioritised a market.

“It is living evidence of how projects fail when they do not involve service users. The project is strategically situated in the heart of Khalalio town, but it lacked proper planning and the participation of citizens, now wasting both space and resources,” observes Elyas Noor, an elder and a Ward Forum Committee member of Khalalio Ward.

One community-based organisation chose to resolve this perennial challenge of poor planning and lack of community engagement; Arid Lands Development Focus (ALDEF). With financial support from UKAID, through the Agile and Harmonized Assistance for Devolved Institutions (AHADI), ALDEF implemented a project to promote public participation in county governance and interrogate performance. This would help residents actualize the change they desired to improved service delivery.

In January 2019, ALDEF held a meeting bringing together the county government and citizens to discuss ways to improve and institute active public participation in the governance process in the county. This would see the resolution of the county’s perennial challenges to alleviate poverty and account for the KES 1.5 billion (USD 115 million) used to resolve the water challenges in the county among other concerns.

Ward based consultations were held selecting community representatives of wards to ensure equal representation across gender, disability, and youth. The 32 representatives would serve as community trainers, and would go through training on; public participation and benefits, county budget planning process, and devolution; Public Expenditure Management (PEM) cycle; and social accountability using social audits and the community scorecard.

This training yielded remarkable gains for communities across Mandera County. In March 2019, residents of Takhaba Ward submitted a memorandum to the county demanding improved water supply. Three months later the county had not responded and the community submitted another memorandum in June of the same year to the Chief Officer of Mandera County, through their Ward Development Committee.

The county government responded by extending water to Takhaba town, drilling a borehole and supplying five plastic tanks of 10,000 liters each in two villages within the town. The same has happened in Khalalio and Banisa Wards, which now boast of “their first-ever boreholes”, according to Mohamednoor Ali; Program Officer ALDEF. Residents no longer have to rely on unreliable earth dams, water pans or water trucking.

For years, Mandera County business was completely halted during the rainy season due to poor roads. Through a public radio show discussion sponsored by ALDEF, residents phoned in their concerns directly to the County Chief Officer for Public Participation, Governance and Civic Education on the Corner “B” Drift on the Mandera-Shafshafey Road, which would often cut off parts of Khalalio Ward from Mandera town whenever it rained.

The matter was forwarded to the county roads department and is now under construction; the drift was elevated to a bridge. Once completed, Corner B route will provide the cheapest, safest and most reliable road to surrounding areas such as Shafshafey, Hantaduu and Neboi villages.

“Before the repair works, the route, with a ‘V’ shaped drift, was prone to accidents and affected the transport system. Transport would come to a halt during the rainy season. Vehicles plying the route would take a longer way to access the town center,” Ali points out.

The recently formed civil society organisation (CSO) Network in Mandera will continue to strengthen the participation of residents in budget planning. The CSOs must be part of the Sector Working

Group and County Budget and Economic Forum to better push for community agenda.