



# **Using Community Structures to Improve Public Social Service Delivery at the Local Government Level**

## **Acknowledgement**

This brief is a publication of the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) and forms part of the organization's research, monitoring and documentation work on Social Accountability and Citizen participation at the local government level in Uganda.

ISER is particularly very grateful to all our Community Advocates in the different districts of operation for the work done over the years – to monitor, document and demand for improved public social service delivery in their respective jurisdiction.

Furthermore, ISER is grateful to the District Local Governments of Kumi, Namayingo, Buikwe and Kayunga with whom ISER has Memoranda of Understanding for the regular and positive engagements and efforts made to address community demands to improve public social service delivery.

## Introduction

Since 2016, the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) has been implementing a community-based model known as the Community Advocates (CA) Program to monitor and document Economic and Social Rights (ESRs) including the rights to education, health, social security, water and sanitation with the aim of improving local government service delivery.

Article 176, 2(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995 as amended) adopts decentralization as a principle applying to all levels of local government to ensure people's participation and democratic control in decision making. The Local Government must ensure that each member of the community has access to basic social services as provided for under Section 30(1) (2) of the 1997 Local Government Act. [ISER's research](#) on citizen participation and local government service delivery in Uganda, revealed a strong nexus between participation and quality of service delivery, with low levels of participation linked to poor service delivery or poor outcomes in the health, education and water sectors.

The CAs are volunteers who are passionate about making a positive impact in their communities. The identification of CAs is carried out in consultation with the District Community Development Office. They work in close coordination with other community-level systems and structures including local council leaders, School Management Committees (SMCs), Health Unit Management Committees (HUMCs), and Water User Groups. ISER builds the capacity of the CAs on basic human rights as it applies to the different areas of focus (health, education, water and sanitation, and social protection and receive ongoing support including accompaniment from ISER on how to monitor and document human rights violations, use of redress mechanisms and engagement with local government leaders.

This community mobilization and engagement strategy plays a crucial role in addressing the needs of their respective communities. The CAs serve as advocates, raising awareness about local issues, and advocating for improvements in public social service delivery.

The CA program started with ten community members initially branded as Community Health Advocates (CHAs) in Kayunga, Buikwe and Mukono Districts initially tracking health service delivery in their respective communities. The program was later extended to Namayingo and Kumi districts tracking violations in education, health, social protection and other economic and social rights.

Insufficient citizen engagement in the demand for the realization of economic and social rights generally was ISER's biggest motivation to start this program acknowledging that once the community is empowered, they are able to promote accountability for their rights in their respective areas. Participation of the rights holders is essential to realizing economic and social rights. However, despite having the right to participation in Uganda's Constitution, ISER's research found that there are few mechanisms to enable people to meaningfully participate and hold their leaders accountable for the realization of economic and social rights. ISER's [audit](#) of social accountability mechanisms in local government processes in Uganda found current social accountability mechanisms fostered by government like Barazas do not necessarily constitute meaningful public engagement but rather serve as a formality for the realization of performance targets by the duty bearers.

ISER realized at an early stage that community engagement has had limited impact to the extent that communities remained detached from national development programs and view service delivery by duty bearers as a favour rather than rights. This contributed to a number of adverse factors including community inability to exploit redress

mechanisms in situations where economic and social rights violations occur; high levels of corruption in the public sector and poor social service delivery among others.

To date, CAs remain a critical component of ISER's programming structure as they continue to monitor, document and report economic and social rights violations within their respective communities and were very instrumental during and after the COVID-19 pandemic to provide real time information for advocacy on emerging human rights issues, observation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) continued learning, COVID-19 vaccination uptake and around school re-opening.

Through petitions to local leaders, filing of complaints with the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), engagement of community accountability structures embedded within Uganda's legal and policy framework and dialogues with duty bearers at the local level, the CAs have led to positive changes and improvements in the quality and accessibility of public social services. Specifically, the CAs have registered results in access to education in previously underserved areas, caused the construction / upgrade of health facilities, and provided assistance to older persons in their communities enroll onto the Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE) program. SAGE is a government social protection program that provides cash transfers to citizens aged 80 and above.

This brief showcases some of the achievements by ISER's CA program over the years.

## ***Improving access to education through strategic litigation with the Equal Opportunities Commission***

1. For many years, pupils attending Bukewa Primary School (a public school) in a remote village - Bukewa West, Buhemba Sub-County, Namayingo District Local Government in Eastern Uganda studied under a harsh environment. 1384 pupils had to share 121 benches and 20 desks. P.1 to P.3 learners were forced to sit on the floor reserving the available furniture for the upper classes. Due to the inadequate infrastructure, some classes were conducted under trees which meant that some learners missed out on school during the rainy season.

After observing the learning environment, the continuous decline of the school performance in national examinations and the non-responsiveness of duty-bearers to the plight of the learners, in 2019, ISER's CA Mr. Wanjala Martin brought the issue to ISER's attention. ISER conducted monitoring visits and had engagements with the school governance structure - School Management Committee (SMC) and other leaders at the district. ISER found that most classrooms were dilapidated and unsafe, while the furniture was insufficient. Worse still, the school had only two staff houses. The verandah of the two class-room block also served as a staff room, store, and Head Teacher's office.



***Staff house doubling as the Head Teacher's office, staffroom  
and store at Bukewa Primary School***





*The old latrine structures (on the left) and the new latrine structure (on the far right) at Bukewa Primary School*

With facilitation from ISER, and utilizing knowledge and tools gained through various training sessions, Mr. Wanjala Martin mobilized the SMC and local leaders to lodge a complaint with the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), calling on the district local government to build adequate classrooms; provide sufficient desks and build staff quarters at Bukewa Primary School. Subsequently, the EOC conducted a fact-finding visit, during which ISER represented the complainants. On 21 October 2021, EOC conducted a Mediation hearing between ISER, the community, and Namayingo District Local Government. The EOC tribunal ruled that Namayingo District Local Government deploys six new teachers and progressively increase the number to 12; constructs six classrooms and 20 latrine stances; and ensure that each classroom is allocated adequate furniture. With financial support from the Iceland Embassy, construction of new classroom blocks and rehabilitation of dilapidated classrooms commenced on 1 January 2022.



*Ms. Atori Elizabeth ISER's Legal Officer submitting during the mediation hearing conducted by the Equal Opportunities Commission at Namayingo District*

Bukewa Primary School now has two new blocks of seven classrooms, two blocks of four staff houses, 20 toilet stances, a sports ground, and a new administration block. The community members are happy with the new structures and they are certain that this will greatly motivate the learners to perform.



*Some of the newly constructed structures with classroom blocks, staff houses, administration office and latrines at Bukewa Primary School*





*Pupils of Bukewa Primary School attending class in the newly constructed classroom*

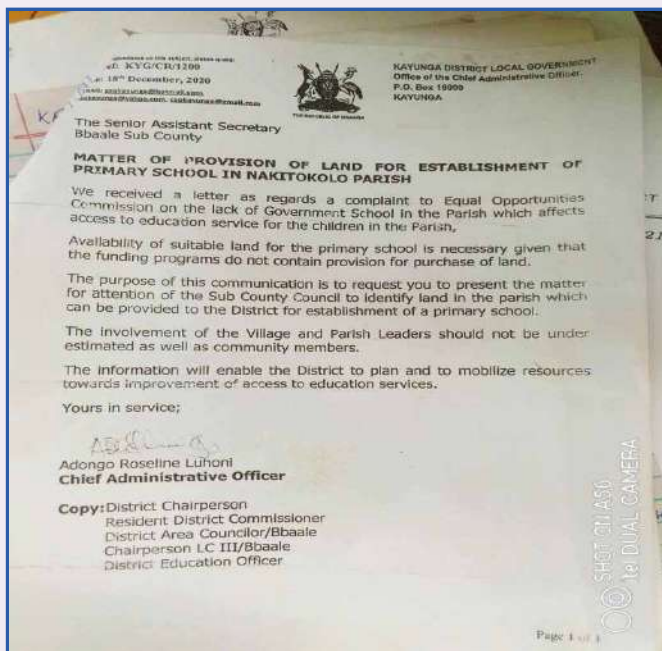
2. In Nakitokolo Parish, Bbaale Sub-County, Kayunga District, ISER's CA Ms. Nakato Esther led efforts to have a primary school constructed in the area to save learners from walking an average 10kms every day to access the nearest public school. Nakato led this advocacy after learning from ISER's Baraza (dialogue between community members and duty bearers) in April 2019 on local government service delivery that government has a responsibility to provide a public primary school in every parish or within a 5km radius.

After fact finding visits, ISER facilitated Nakato and the community members to petition the district leadership. They also submitted a petition to the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC). The EOC conducted inquiries and a successful mediation at which the district authorities tasked the community members to identify and secure a suitable and accessible plot of land measuring at least five acres for the construction of a public school by Government.



*Mr. Bubaale Dan Senior Education Officer, Kayunga district making submissions on behalf of Kayunga District during the Nakitokolo case hearing presided over by the Equal Opportunities Commission at the district*

In a display of remarkable compassion, one of the residents in the affected area generously donated three acres of land for this purpose. Construction of the school commenced in the 2021/22 financial year and the first phase comprising of a two-classroom block and a five-stance pit latrine was completed in May 2022. The establishment of Nakitokolo Primary School marks a significant milestone in addressing the community's lack of access to free public primary education. This public school is expected to lead to increased enrollment of children in the Nakitokolo Parish area.



*A letter from the Chief Administration Officer Kayunga District requesting the Sub County Council and the community of Nakitokolo parish to provide land for the establishment of the primary school*



*A two classroom block constructed at Nakitokolo Primary School following the EOC ruling*



*A four stance pit latrine recently constructed at Nakitokolo Primary School*

### ***School/community gets access to clean and safe water after petition to district leadership***

1. Namihinya Primary School situated in Lufunya village, Buswale Sub-County, Namayingo District had long struggled with the challenge of accessing safe and clean water. Learners, staff and the neighboring community relied on a seasonal pond within the school premises as the only available water source which they shared with livestock. As such, learners were exposed to waterborne diseases like diarrhea and typhoid. This dire situation forced learners to walk long distances outside the school in search of clean water, leading to disruptions in their learning.





*The seasonal water pond at Namihinya Primary School that is being used by the school and the community*

ISER's CA Ms. Nekesa Doreen worked with the School Management Committee (SMC) of Namihinya Primary School to mobilize the affected community to sign onto and file a petition to the Buswale Sub-County leadership. The petition highlighted the plight of the learners and demonstrated how the lack of access to safe and clean water contributed to poor education outcomes. The Sub County engaged the district water department conducted a site visit and identified a suitable spot for the borehole to be sunk. As a result, in 2021 the district leadership sunk a borehole at Namihinya Primary School compound, benefiting both the learners and the community.

Notably, there has been an increase in enrollment, with the number of pupils rising from 558 in 2020 to 644 in 2022. This improvement can be directly attributed to the availability of clean and reliable water provided by the borehole.



*The School Management Committee of Namihinya Primary School and the community members drawing water from the newly drilled borehole*

2. In February 2023, an NGO called Evidence Action joined forces with Namayingo District Local Government in Bukewa East village to address waterborne infections by treating all available water sources. As a result of this collaboration, a comprehensive mapping of water points was conducted to identify areas that required intervention.

After the completion of the mapping process, a one-day workshop was organized to inform the leaders of various villages about the initiative. During the workshop, details were shared regarding the placement of chlorine tanks, including the specific locations and timelines for installation. ISER's CA Mr. Wanjala Martin noticed that his community had been omitted from the plan. Mr. Wanjala approached the local council three chairperson about the oversight, who then forwarded the issue to the focal point and the district coordinator. Thanks to his vigilance, a chlorine tank was eventually installed in his village thus improving access to clean and safe water.





*A chlorine tank constructed at Bukewa East village water point.*

### *Improving access to health through petitions to local leaders and complaints to EOC*

1. For years, the community of Nkokonjeru Town Council in Buikwe District was receiving healthcare services from Nkokonjeru Health Center II (popularly known as Nabuwundo due to its location in Nabuwundo village) a government health facility, and Nkokonjeru Mission Hospital, a privately owned facility under the Roman Catholic Diocese of Lugazi. This health center
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However, the said government health facility at its current level lacked maternal services, forcing the locals to seek assistance from a nearby private health facility - Nkokonjeru Mission Hospital. Unfortunately, the private facility is not affordable for many residents, leading to situations where patients are detained due to unpaid medical bills. The Nkokonjeru Town Council community severally requested duty bearers to upgrade the government health center from Centre II to Centre III to be able to offer more health services; especially maternal services.

Following ISER's [research on patient detention](#), ISER's CA Ms. Harriet Rwabugahya, mobilized 50 community members who signed a petition voicing their concerns and officially submitted to the Town Clerk of Nkokonjeru town council on April 14, 2021.



*The Town Clerk of Nkokonjeru town council Mr. Kavuma Ronald receiving the petition from Ms Nanyonga Jane on behalf of Nkokonjeru community-demanding for the upgrade of Nkokonjeru Health centre II to a Health Centre III*



*Nkokonjeru community members being addressed by the Town clerk Nkokonjeru town council after receiving the petition*

Following the submission of their petition, the community members received assurance from the town clerk that their concerns would be addressed. In May 2022, their advocacy paid off as funds were allocated for the upgrade of Nkokonjeru Health Centre II to Health Centre III. Ms. Nambalirwa Daisy, the Health Center's In-Charge, confirmed the receipt of the funds.

The allocated funds are being utilized to construct essential infrastructure, including a maternity ward and a separate section for the Out Patient Department (OPD). Furthermore, a refrigerator was acquired for the proper storage of vaccines. In addition to the infrastructure improvements, the facility plans to expand its workforce by hiring nineteen (19) new staff members. These developments will significantly enhance the capacity and services provided by the now

Nkokonjeru Health Centre III. Nkokonjeru Health Centre II achieved an upgrade to Health Centre III status on July 1, 2022. The facility was inspected by the Ministry of Health Permanent Secretary Dr. Diana Atwine, the area woman MP Hon. Diana Mutasingwa and the area MP Dr. Lulume Bayiga to ensure compliance with health standards.

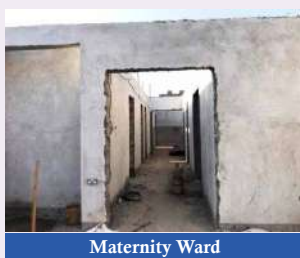


*Nkokonjeru Health Centre II before its upgrade to a Health Centre III*



*Ministry of Health officials together with the Buikwe District officials inspecting Nkokonjeru Health Centre II before its upgrade*





*Construction of new structures at Nkokonjeru Health Centre III (including Out Patients Department, the maternity wing and latrines) to facilitate its upgrade*

## ***2.Improving access to healthcare for residents of Sigulu Islands in Namayingo District***

Residents of Sigulu islands received a ferry to enhance connectivity and referrals between health centres on mainland and islands. After the launch of ISER’s research report [“Here When You Are Poor You Die: Access to Healthcare on Sigulu Islands”](#) prompted community members and the Sigulu Member of Parliament in 2018 to file a complaint against the Ministry of Health before the Equal Opportunities Commission on the lack of access to healthcare. ISER’s research revealed that on islands like Sigulu, there are no health centres and the few existing ones are debilitated, including one that was bat infested. Pregnant women often died on the shore, trying to get transport to the health facilities on the mainland.

Following sustained advocacy and mediation by the EOC, government commissioned a ferry to Sigulu islands-MV Sigulu; the health facility that was bat infested in Rabachi was renovated and a health worker posted there. Since then, ISER's CA attached to Sigulu has reported improvements in access to health care.



*Rabachi Health Centre III before its renovation*



*Rabachi Health Centre III after the renovation*

3. Community Advocates have also displayed remarkable determination in mobilizing and advocating for adherence to the health workers' code of conduct and advocated for health facilities to remain operational during weekends. For example, CAs in Buikwe joined hands with the community concerning the closure of Buikwe Health Centre III over the weekends. They voiced their concerns to the district leadership. Responding to the community's complaints, the district took action and addressed the issue. As a result, Buikwe Health Centre III is now accessible to the community seven days a week. This positive outcome reflects the district's responsiveness to the needs and demands of the community, ensuring continuous access to healthcare services at the health center.





*A petition to the Town Clerk of Buikwe Town Council signed by the community members over the closure of Buikwe Health Center III especially during the weekends and at night*

4. At Nazigo H/C III in Kayunga District's Nazigo Town Council, community members faced challenges due to a lack of privacy in the ward and the absence of adjustable beds for pregnant women with disabilities. These issues significantly hindered individuals from seeking medical services at the health facility. Additionally, the facility lacked blinders, exposing patients to public view during treatment and dressing. Ms. Nakalema Margret, a Community Advocate from Nazigo, advocated for the inclusion of blinders in the ward during her discussions with the health facilities In-Charge.

However, due to financial constraints, the In-Charge indicated a lack of funds to purchase adjustable beds, mattresses, and blinders. To address these concerns, the In-Charge advocated for support from the Nazigo community SACCO, emphasizing the importance of upholding human

rights in healthcare settings. Recognizing the significance of these issues, the SACCO acquired the curtains to serve as blinders and the ministry supplied the adjustable bed. The acquiring of these items led to a considerable improvement in service delivery at Nazigo H/C III. The community's collaborative advocacy efforts effectively contributed to positive changes within the health facility.



*An adjustable bed was given by the Ministry of Health and the blinders were donated by Nazigo Community SACCO to Nazigo Health Centre III*

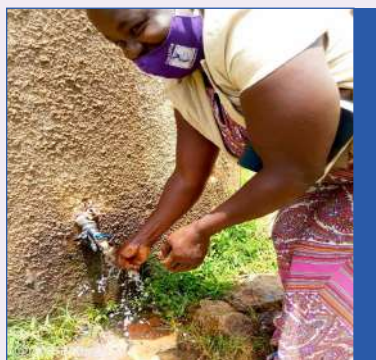
5. Ms. Tapit Lorna, ISER's CA in Kumi District determination led to changes at Mukongoro Health Centre III as regards to physical access for Persons with Disabilities. When Ms Tapit visited the facility and noticed that disabled individuals were unable to access medical personnel, she raised the issue with the In-Charge, who promised to rectify the situation by installing a ramp. However, when Ms. Tapit checked after a week, no

progress had been made. The furious Ms. Tapit gathered bricks and constructed a makeshift ramp herself. The In-Charge noticed her efforts and requested her to stop, promising to address the issue within two days. Ms. Tapit returned to the facility after a week and found a proper ramp.



*Mukongoro Health Center III in Kumi District before (on the left) the construction of the ramp and after (on the right) to ease access by persons with disabilities and the elderly*

3. It took the intervention of ISER's CAs in Kumi District to have running water restored at Mukongoro H/C III following damaging of the water pipes due to the construction of the Pallisa Kumi highway. Both the CAs and the members of the Health Unit Management Committee (HUMC) of the facility took various actions, including writing a letter to the district and urging the Uganda National Road Authority (UNRA) to address the issue. The situation at hand caused disruptions in the operations of the health center and the facility was forced to purchase water using its meagre resources.



*Reconnection of water at Mukongoro Health Center III, Kumi District*

Eventually, their efforts paid off, as the water pipes were reconnected with the assistance of the water department at the district.

Furthermore, the CA and the HUMC of Mukongoro H/CIII have continued to advocate for the construction of staff quarters and toilets for the maternity wing at the health facility. Their continued efforts have not gone unnoticed as Team for You (T4U) heard their cry and came to their rescue and constructed for them a staff quarter.



*Staff quarter constructed at Mukongoro Health Centre III,  
Kumi District to accommodate the facility in-charge officer*

4. Over the years, ISER has invested in building capacity of social accountability structures like HUMCs and SMCs on their roles and responsibilities. ISER's partnerships with various districts have yielded positive outcomes, as evidenced by the testimony of the In-Charge of Buyinja H/CIII in Namayingo District. He noted that during the training, they learned about patients' rights, which they subsequently translated into their local language and displayed on notice boards. Patients now have access to information regarding their medication, and the facility has put labels on different wards.



*Putting signage of the different wards at Buyinja Health Centre IV, Namayingo District*

5. Mr. Tamale Patrick Kitaka, a devoted Community Advocate acknowledges that ISER's efforts, including Barazas, radio talk shows, and trainings, have instilled confidence in him and others to hold their duty bearers accountable something that has led to positive outcomes. Mr. Tamale mobilized community members to lodge a complaint against an unethical health worker at Wabwoko Health Center III located in Kitimbwa Sub-County in Kayunga District. The complaint was made to the HUMC and the district Secretary for Health. As a result, the health worker was summoned and cautioned by the disciplinary committee, leading to a noticeable improvement in her attitude. She was eventually transferred from the facility. The community members greatly appreciated the advocacy efforts. As a result, they were motivated to seek medical services at Wabwoko Health Center III. The disciplinary action taken against the unethical health worker also served as a powerful example to other health workers. It highlighted that failure to uphold ethical codes of conduct can lead to reprimand and disciplinary measures.



## *ISER's Community Advocates contribute to access to social protection benefits for the elderly*

1. ISER's Community Advocates continue to advocate and follow up on individual older persons to ensure that they benefit from the SAGE program. This advocacy is being done in Kayunga, Kumi, Namayingo, Mukono, and Buikwe districts.



*Some of the older persons that ISER Community Advocates are assisting to access the Social Assistance Grant for the Elderly (SAGE)*

Their dedication and collaboration with different government offices like the office of the Community Development Officers and district National Identification Registration Authority (NIRA) offices demonstrate a commitment to ensuring that all qualifying individuals have access to the benefits provided by the program.



For example, Mr. Okia John, ISER's CA from Kumi District, continues his efforts to assist Ms. Geretuda Amoding, an 89-year-old crippled woman, in applying for a national ID to benefit from the SAGE program. He worked closely with Mr. Akol Flex, the LC1 Chairperson of Bazaar Ward, North Division, Kumi Municipality to have a NIRA official to conduct the registration at Ms. Amoding's home. The registration took place on September 17, 2022, in the presence of her son, with the expectation of receiving the national ID within three months. However, when Mr. Okia followed up with Ms. Amoding, he discovered that she had not yet received her identification card due to errors within the NIRA system. As a result, her details were recaptured on 6 July 2023, to rectify the error. Efforts are ongoing to ensure that Ms. Amoding receives her national ID.



*Ms. Geretuda Amoding being registered for a National Identification card by a National Registration Authority (NIRA) officer at her home*

2. In a positive development, several Community Advocates (CAs) in Kayunga, Namayingo, and Kumi district local governments reported positive outcomes in their efforts to assist older persons in receiving SAGE payments. Below are some examples:

1. Ms. Nansubuga Zewulence (Kayunga) was added to the SAGE list and hopefully she will be a beneficiary for the next disbursement.

2. On 25 November 2022, Ms. Asege Marabu (Kumi), one of the complainants, received her first SAGE payment of 150,000 Ugandan shillings and noted she would use it for essential supplies and medical costs.

3. Mr. Egessa Stephen (Namayingo) received his first SAGE payment of 375,000 Ugandan shillings on 25 November 2022.



*Ms Asege Marabu of Kumi Municipality, Kumi District and Mr Egessa Stephen of Buswale Sub County, Namayingo district are now SAGE beneficiaries as result of ISER'S Community Advocates efforts to ensure they got enrolled on the pay roll*

These successful stories demonstrate the significant impact of the CAs' advocacy work in ensuring improved public social service delivery by the local government. It is also important to note that not all advocacy by the community has yielded positive results. A complaint filed with the EOC on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2019 on behalf of residents of Tisai islands in Kumi District on total lack of health facilities and clean and safe water is yet to be disposed off. Many CAs have reported challenges while doing their work especially as regards participation in the budget process and budget allocation as per their needs that remain on the books for recurring financial years as unfunded priorities.



Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER)  
Plot 60 Valley Drive, Ministers' Village, Ntinda  
P.O Box 73646, Kampala - Uganda  
Email: [info@iser-uganda.org](mailto:info@iser-uganda.org) Tel: +256 414 581 041  
Website: [www.iser-uganda.org](http://www.iser-uganda.org)

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