THE EAST AFRICAN SUSWATCH E-BULLETIN

(FORMERLY *THE LVEMPII CIVIL SOCIETY WATCH E BULLETIN*)

A *Monthly* from the East African Sustainability Watch Network founded by Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development (UCSD), Tanzania Coalition for Sustainable Development (TCSD) and SusWatch Kenya

JEEP Readies School of 500 students in Nebbi district to Improve Energy Efficiency

Constructing the Institutional Efficient Energy saving stove at Max Foundation Secondary. **Photo: JEEP**

Uganda meets more than 93% of its energy demand from biomass. The demand for firewood for cooking exceeds supply, leading to deforestation. fuel wood is largely used for cooking in rural areas while charcoal mostly provides for the cooking needs of the urban population. High demand for fuelwood used inefficiently results in overuse and depletion of forests. Uganda is facing a significant threat to its forest cover that has declined from 24% (or 4.9 million ha) in 1990 to 9% (1.83 million ha) in 2018, accounting for a loss of (loss of 3 million ha) in just 25 years (ENR CSO Network, 2018). As the land available is becoming scarce, households prefer to use the land for food crops rather than planting trees.

In Nebbi district (West Nile sub-region of Uganda), cooking for both households and institutions like schools and hospitals have been associated with high fuel wood consumption. This contributes to the current major environmental challenges faced in Nebbi district including soil degradation, deforestation, overfishing, wetland / river bank encroachment, and uncontrolled bush burning. To date, the continued use of the inefficient and the wasteful 3-stone fire place has led to a fuel crisis as evidenced in the poor quality of firewood being used for cooking, that is also becoming expensive in both urban and rural areas in Nebbi district. Due to the swelling demand, it is not unusual for school trucks to move long distances in search of firewood due.

As part of the *East African Sustainable Energy and Climate Action* (EASE&CA) *Project*, JEEP selected one of the schools in Nebbi district as an action to address the wasteful use of the remaining fuelwood stock in Nebbi. In this regard, one institutional efficient energy saving stove was constructed in March 2020 at Max Foundation Secondary School, that has a student population of over 500. However, use of the stove has delayed due to closure of all schools in the country because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As soon as the schools are opened, the efficient stove will be used for preparing meals for the students, and is expected to result in savings in terms of time and finances. In the meantime, Max Foundation Secondary is ensuring that it maintains the efficient stove by cleaning it and monitoring any cracks that may come up during the drying process. Max Foundation Secondary also expects to become a demonstration center for other schools in Nebbi district that do not have these devices. This will among others involve information dissemination to other school administrators, parents and students about the benefits of using institutional efficient energy saving stoves.

In the EASE&CA baseline study carried by Joint Energy and Environment Projects (JEEP) in September 2019, 77% of the people in Nebbi were cooking inefficiently using the 3-stone fire place with firewood, and none of the respondents interviewed then, were using the hydroelectric power. The EASE&CA Project (July 2018 – June 2022) seeks to increase access to sustainable energy and other climate solutions to local communities in Uganda (Nebbi, Nakaseke and Nakasongola districts), Kenya and Tanzania with both women's and men's full and effective participation and leadership for improved livelihoods and reduction of poverty. This will be realized by combining Civil Society Organization activities on local, national and international levels in ways, where they reinforce each other.

Need to Concretize Public Education and Communication on Proper Management of COVID-19 Health Care Waste in East Africa

Waste pickers at Kiteezi landfill (Kampala). **Photo: Flickr - Lars Schoebitz (2014)**

Health care wastes are considered the second most hazardous wastes globally after radiation waste. Healthcare wastes encompass various forms of waste such as sharps, human body parts, blood, chemical wastes, pharmaceutical wastes, and medical devices. These wastes are majorly generated from hospitals and primary care facilities, laboratories, mortuaries, autopsy centres, laboratories, blood banks, nursing homes among others. With COVID-19 pandemic, business-as-usual in management of health care waste is no longer an option, as any laissez-faire attitude could heighten infections across East Africa.

In Uganda, most primary health care facilities lack proper health care waste management facilities, Despite the policy guidelines on injection and health care waste management developed by the Ministry of Health, Uganda, there is sufficient evidence that health care waste including in Kampala health facilities is not properly handled (Wafula, S.T., et al., 2019). With COVID-19, there are impending risks from increased virus emission due to scavenging of waste dumped at gazetted and ungazetted dumpsites.

The potential impact on health and environment arising from improper management of COVID-19 health care waste was graded significant, in a recent UN Environment Programme (UNEP) webinar training on the environmentally Sound Management of Waste in the Context of COVID-19.

According to UNEP's Prof Abdouraman Bary with COVID-19, healthcare facilities and individuals are producing more waste than usual, including masks, gloves, gowns and other protective equipment that could be infected with the virus.

'If not managed soundly, infected medical waste could be subject to uncontrolled dumping and to open burning or uncontrolled incineration, leading to the release of toxins in the environment and to secondary emission of diseases to humans. Wastes can also reach water sources and add to riverine and marine pollution,' Prof. Abdouraman Bary warned.

He added that this is against World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines on treatment of infectious and sharp waste from healthcare facilities, and the requirement of the Bamako, Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions.

Fortunately, interventions by UNEP are already underway to address this challenge, which could be replicated in East Africa. For example, a UN COVID-19 response strategy for South Africa to minimize impact of the virus seeks to provide protection and income to informal settlements mainly potentially high risk communities like waste pickers; increase capacity and support to municipalities; promote education and communications; and to develop local enterprises to produce useful items.

In South Africa, the education and communications intervention seeks to ensure that all communities (especially the youths and vulnerable) receive information in best ways for their circumstance, in their languages with a view to providing positive approaches and using hope to promote winning attitudes.

This calls for coordination of all partners by the respective Governments to prioritize this principal action to be part of a deliberate and targeted support from the COVID-19 recovery plans.

SusWatch Kenya and Partners Call for Promotion of Decentralized Renewable Energy Systems in Kenya
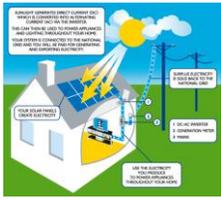

Illustration:
greenleaf-solar.com

There is a growing consent that sustainable energy is a pivot to meet most Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as it is crucial for better health; education; jobs; food production and agricultural value-addition; irrigation and supply of clean and safe water. According to Hivos (2018), provision of sustainable energy to spur development, involves decentralized solutions that are changing how people interact with each other and their energy providers. It influences the role of citizens not only as consumers but also as "prosumers" or energy entrepreneurs.

While UN SDG 7 calls ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, this access is not just an end in itself. It is also a stepping stone to overcome two major challenges the world is facing: mitigating climate change and degradation of natural resources; and ensuring that all people everywhere are able to take charge of their own lives in inclusive and open societies (Hivos, 2018). Decentralized Renewable Energy (DRE) systems are increasingly recognized for their role in achieving universal access to energy and clean cooking in many energy scarce regions including Sub-Saharan Africa.

Kenya's energy policy (2018) seeks to ensure sustainable, adequate, affordable, competitive, secure and reliable supply of energy at the least cost geared to meet national and county needs while protecting and conserving the environment. Two power plants have helped push renewable energy generation's contribution to an awesome 93% in Kenya (Cleantechnica, 2020). These are the 310 MW Turkana Wind Farm and the 54.6 MW Garissa Solar PV Plant. The other major contributors in Kenya's energy generation mix are geothermal and hydro.

Kenya's market for decentralized renewables is the fastest moving in Africa. Already 15-20 percent of Kenyan households use solar lighting and the country is home to a pioneering green mini-grids program, thousands of biodigesters and 3,000MW of micro-hydro systems. Kenya has set ambitious targets as far as access to energy is concerned.

Given the global and national focus on 'universal access', there is a need for measures that ensure that even the poorest and most vulnerable members of society have access (and clear benefits for example lighting and clean cooking).

While Kenya's Energy Act (2019) places the obligation of facilitating the provision of affordable energy services to all persons in Kenya and the responsibility of ensuring access to affordable energy for all citizens on government. But there are challenges to realization of this, one of which is the low level of capacity by both State and the Non State Actors.

Based on the above, SusWatch Kenya and Partners therefore recommend that there is need to prioritize action to support skills needed to promote DRE in Kenya, which also has a jobs multiplier effect (a major opportunity for rural women and youth) while improving people's ('prosumers') living conditions.

Although it is just gaining momentum, DRE has already grown a direct workforce comparative to traditional utility-scale power sectors. For example, Pico-solar appliances (small solar power system used in rural electrification to provide indoor lighting in off grid locations) and Solar House Systems accounted for 75% of Kenya's total direct, formal DRE employment in 2017–18 (Power for All, February 10, 2020)