

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: NAKURU COUNTY, KENYA

A nerve disorder transformed a gregarious man into a shut-in. With help of a WASHplus-trained community health volunteer, he has a new latrine, built-in commode, and supportive rails that deliver the promise of improved hygiene and dignity.

CONTACT

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The Rail of Hope for Radio Technician

Silas Nding’au, 65, misses meeting and chatting with different people who used to pass by his radio repair shop at the local shopping center in the remote Maiella Division of Naivasha, Nakuru County in Kenya. Nding’au fondly talks about his heydays as the pioneer radio repairman in the area. He also tells of his fame as an ardent folklore writer, a hobby that earned him an accolade with the BBC in the late 1970s.

Five years ago his life changed. What started as a slight pain in his legs, became a debilitating illness that left him unable to walk. He tried herbal cures for a while but still his condition did not improve. When Nding’au finally went to hospital, he was diagnosed with a nerve disorder. He was put on treatment and physiotherapy immediately. His condition limited his movement to his homestead in Nguguti village. He could no longer get to his shop or visit his treasured friends for an occasional chat and drink. Three years ago his condition worsened. He could not stand and was bedridden.

Wangari Ndung’au, a community health volunteer trained under the Ministry of Health and the WASHplus project, visited Nding’au to see how she could help. The old man told her of his misery. He would squat and crawl around using his hands. Going to the latrine several meters from his house was the thing he dreaded most. Often he would not make it to the toilet and had to relieve himself in the open. He had difficulty maintaining good hygiene. This made him feel inferior and unfriendly to anyone who visited him.

“I patiently started explaining to him the importance of maintaining good hygiene and washing hands. We eventually dug a pit latrine for him nearer the house and told him about its importance,” says Wangari. The new pit latrine was constructed by volunteers just beside his house. Using locally available poles, the volunteers built a rail along the path that he uses so he can support himself and walk instead of crawl.

“They made me rails so that I can support myself well while going to the toilet. It also helps me exercise my feet,” said Nding’au. “In the new latrine, came a commode, which was improvised from a plastic chair and enables him to sit with ease while using the latrine. I can now sit comfortably and don’t mind about staying long in the latrine because it does not pain as it used to before. I used to strain walking to the toilet, and squatting was my biggest problem.”

Next to the latrine Wangari fixed a leaky tin hand washing device to ensure that he washes his hands after using the latrine. “The water and soap or wood ash is for washing off germs, which I understand are of big harm to me considering my condition,” Nding’au says.

Wangari was among several community health volunteers who attended WASHplus training and learned to provide locally appropriate, low-cost solutions for people who cannot move around easily like Nding’au. Wangari is glad that she and the other community health volunteers are using the new knowledge and skills to benefit her community to improve sanitation practices. Their efforts are paying off. Most villagers used to go into their farms with hoes and dig up shallow holes in which to defecate. Now everyone has access to a toilet.

“Previously there were many cases of diarrhea and I didn’t know what caused this until I learned about the cycle of germs. Nowadays the cases of diarrhea have drastically reduced,” says Wangari.

