



Kenya



Bio-Centre Initiative

Umande Trust   

The Bio-Centre Initiative helps create open-defecation free urban neighborhoods through offering a menu of cashless payments, sanitation financing, and making sanitation facilities affordable.

Launched in 2012, Hybrid (For-profit / Not-for-profit) , Drinking Water , Policy & Governance , Safe and Sustainable Cooking , Informal Sector Workers , Informal Settlements , Women's Empowerment , East Africa: Kenya

Partners: Community groups & enterprises operating bio-sanitation units, Equity Bank, NIC Bank, Bankable Frontiers, respective county governments, water services boards and water and sewerage companies.

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Problem Addressed

There are numerous sanitation issues facing the communities within which Umande Trust works in Kenya. First, open defecation is rampant in urban neighborhoods as a result of limited access to sanitation, unhealthy hygiene practices and lack of appropriate technology choices. Second, insurance and micro-finance agencies often do not view investments in urban sanitation as bankable and profitable. Third, even in cases of improved access, user-pay pricing structures inhibit universal access by all members of the household, especially urban poor women and children. And finally, the existing cumbersome cash payments are prone to under-reporting, abuse, and reduced spending on operation and maintenance of improved sanitation services because cash can easily be misplaced or stolen.

Innovative Approach

Umande Trust has pioneered a way to increase the incomes and savings of community members through giving them ownership over community sanitation facilities. With the funds that the toilet operators gain from people using these facilities, they can save and lend the profits to community members, pay for their staff and general upkeep, and pay Umande Trust a small amount so it can expand its services and build toilets in additional communities.

This community lending project ensures that the project not only improves the health of the community but also gives people the opportunity to escape poverty through their social business. Each bio-centre has chosen to use the money according to the needs of the entrepreneur and community. Umande Trust has also pioneered a cashless payment system, using card readers, for the sanitation centers. This ensures the security of the sanitation facility and incentivizes people to use the facilities consistently.

Program Solution

The overall aim of the Bio-Centre Initiative (BCI) is to develop sustainable and scalable models for efficiently delivering safe, accessible and decent sanitation for the poor living in Africa's urban informal settlements. The focus is on

progressive reduction of the unsustainable supply and subsidy-led urban sanitation delivery models. The program encompasses a business mind-set via 4-5 core components. The first core component are pricing models that encourage all the members of the household as well as community members to comfortably and consistently use the facility.

The second is making the case for bio-centre facility-level profitability, for example income, expense and shareholding statements, in order to attract commercial financing of on-site urban sanitation services by banks and micro-finance agencies. The third component is leveraging the micro-payments space in order to promote efficient, transparent and accountable cashless payments of sanitation services via mobile money payments, and card readers. The last core component is networking and policy influencing to secure endorsement by public agencies, county and national governments and peer civil society organizations (CSOs) on some of the above innovations.