



Empowering and Mobilizing Communities to Address Flood Displacement

Winam Grassroots

is a community-led organization that aims to place grassroots communities at the center of development. In doing so, it works on a range of topics including climate action, disaster response, and livelihoods and enterprise development, paying particular attention to the needs and empowerment of women and youth.

AREA AND SCOPE

Winam Grassroots works in Kisumu County, Kenya. In East and West Kisumu, the organization primarily engages with rural communities, whereas its work in Central Kisumu targets communities living in informal settlements. In order to facilitate this engagement, Winam Grassroots has supported the establishment of 38 community structures, each consisting of roughly 12 people, across the county.





CONTEXT

Flooding constitutes a significant threat to both rural and urban communities across Kisumu. Flooding events are increasing in frequency and intensity as a result of construction along the riverbanks, which constrains the natural flow of rivers and increases the risk of flooding, and sand mining, which has expanded the riverbed and prevents water from retreating after floods occur. Climate change, including through its impacts on the intensity of precipitation, is further compounding these risks.

**More than
5.000
people were displaced by floods
in June 2023 across Kisumu**

Floods, and the displacement they may trigger, threaten the ability of community members to effectively enjoy their rights to food, water, and adequate housing, among others. Winam Grassroots found that following a displacement event, displaced persons in the Obunga, Nyalenda, and Nyamasaria informal settlements have one meal a day on average, lack basic amenities, are casually or entirely unemployed, and face mental health challenges. Water, sanitation and hygiene facilities are generally insufficient and vastly inadequate during floods, with sewage flowing in front of houses and water stagnating almost everywhere in informal settlements. Women are disproportionately impacted by these challenges, as they are often responsible for caring for their families, which may consist of 4-5 and up to 10 children. When evacuation sites are full, mothers are responsible for building makeshift shelters around their damaged or destroyed homes.

RESPONSES

Winam Grassroots seeks to empower communities to address and respond to the adverse impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, including flood displacement.

Research

The organization has commissioned several studies to better understand disaster displacement in Kisumu. These studies shed light on the challenges communities face, help identify potential areas for intervention, and provide relevant recommendations. Topics addressed by these studies include loss and damage suffered by local communities, food sovereignty, and community resilience and leadership.

Advocacy and Capacity Building

Winam Grassroots promotes climate change awareness, disaster preparedness and response, and access to climate finance through advocacy and capacity building. It engages communities in several ways including by:

- 1 Partnering with organizations, including Sustainable Environmental Development Watch and Advocacy Alliance, to provide Training of Trainers workshops for participants to train their communities on disaster preparedness and early warning systems;
- 2 Creating community structures, whereby information from the organization is passed down to the grassroots level and easily communicated through community representatives;
- 3 Collaborating with radio stations, including Nam Lolwe and Sky FM, to share preparedness and advocacy messages.

Preparedness and advocacy messages were broadcast to more than **350.000** PEOPLE

Winam Grassroots also engages with duty bearers, in particular by participating in the Kisumu Environmental Committee, a ward-level structure that brings together county government and local community representatives to address environmental issues.

Mobilizing Through Community Structures

“ Our driving force is the community structures, this anchors us. ”

Mary Were Opot

The organization facilitates and coordinates community-led responses to flooding and other disasters through its community representatives and volunteers. Community members are well placed to lead these responses due to their understanding of the area and of the specific needs of community members, including the healthcare needs of specific individuals. Community members also assist with mapping exercises to identify who has or has not been accounted for and/or assisted after a disaster.

CHALLENGES

The availability and allocation of resources to address disaster displacement remains a challenge, with a limited number of shelters, safe spaces and facilities identified and equipped to support displaced persons. Where such spaces exist, they are often inadequate, lacking furniture

and privacy and infested by bats. Others are used by private businesses instead of for disaster management purposes. As a result, official responses to displacement are often ad hoc, with churches and state schools transformed into temporary shelters.

This approach was especially utilized during the COVID-19 pandemic, when schools, including Nanga Primary School in Dunga, were closed. While this provided a temporary solution, the reopening of schools left displaced persons with nowhere to go, resulting in a displacement that has yet to be addressed. The majority of people displaced by the 2020 floods are still living in makeshift camps or informal sites.

Displaced persons may face a heightened risk of abuse in informal settlements and temporary shelters. To address this risk, Winam Grassroots tries to ensure that its volunteers are reputable and that proper safeguarding mechanisms are in place.

Likewise, the lack of effective waste management systems in informal settlements presents a significant challenge in the context of disasters. During floods, water mixes with sewage, exposing communities to untreated waste and resultant health implications. While community members have been sensitized on waste management issues and are ready to take action, they require external support, for example to obtain excavators to pick up the waste.

Finally, access to funding has been identified as a challenge for Winam Grassroots, with its six staff members operating as volunteers when there is no project-specific funding.





RESULTS

The research conducted by Winam Grassroots enables the organization and other stakeholders to better understand the challenges faced by communities in Kisumu, as well as the practices and interventions they have deployed to address these challenges. This information can strengthen and support advocacy and capacity building activities. The advocacy and lobbying efforts of Winam Grassroots, together with other organizations, have resulted in concrete actions being taken by duty bearers, including the renovation of facilities and safe spaces designated for disaster displaced persons.

Moreover, communities in Kisumu are increasingly aware of flood risks and understand how to identify, prepare for, and respond to such events. Through its community structure system - which currently consists of roughly

450 people - the organization is able to ensure that communities remain engaged with these issues.

The organization is able to ensure that communities remain engaged with these issues. Likewise, its use of local knowledge, dialogues and peer-to-peer learning drives inclusive and contextualized approaches to disaster displacement. By affording particular attention to the rights of women and youth, Winam Grassroots is also able to address intersectional vulnerabilities.

This is reinforced by the fact that women and young people make up 40% of the community structure representatives.

Photos: © Winam Grassroots

The PDD implements the project to “Avert, Minimize and Address Displacement Related to the Effects of Climate Change” (PAMAD) to assist countries and communities facing the challenges of Loss and Damage and Displacement. Under PAMAD, and in partnership with the Global Network of Civil Society Organisations on Disaster Reduction (GNDR), the PDD promotes peer-to-peer learning on effective responses to displacement and climate change in Kenya. The project is supported by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad). For more information, visit <https://pamad.disasterdisplacement.org>

