

RUBEN FM NAIROBI, KENYA

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INTRODUCTION

Supported by the [ARISE responsive challenge fund](#), the [African Population and Health Research Centre \(APHRC\)](#) with [Ruben FM](#) to address solid waste management (SWM) and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) issues in the community through media advocacy via the radio. This brief presents activities, key outcomes, lessons and recommendations. Community radio is a not-for-profit, informative, uncensored, community-owned and community-run radio station that cater to the informational needs of people living in a particular locality, in the languages and formats that are most suitable to the local context. They are key channels for dispersing developmental information from numerous actors on subjects such as health and wellbeing. Radio campaigns are instruments for raising public awareness and providing a voice to the voiceless. In Kenya these stations are usually initiated and controlled by members of a community of interest, or geographical community, and are platforms to express their concerns, needs and aspirations without outside interference or regulation from the Independent Broadcasting Authority. Despite extensive knowledge about the role of radio stations in advocating for health, well-being, and issues related to SWM and WASH in informal settlements, this medium remains under-explored and under-utilized. This brief presents the activities, key outcomes, lessons learned, and recommendations based on our work.

KEY ACTIVITIES

1. Inception and open forums

The project commenced with an inception event, followed by open forums led by young people, where discussions took place in a round table format. These forums provided a platform for the community to voice their concerns, particularly about sanitation, which was widely recognised as a significant issue. Feedback from these discussions was carefully documented, and the community showed support for the proposed activities under the ARISE project. These activities aimed to address accountability and responsiveness in WASH and SWM services, laying the groundwork for sustainable improvements in health and well-being.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Need for scale up:** scaling up radio talk show initiative to achieve wider impact would require:
 - **Replication:** Replicating radio talk shows in other communities with WASH, SWM and other health and wellbeing challenges.
 - **Partnership:** Building strong partnerships with government agencies, civil society organisations, and media outlets to expand reach and resources.
 - **Capacity development:** Investing in the capacity of radio stations and community groups to produce high-quality talk shows and conduct monitoring and evaluation.
 - **Sustainability:** Developing sustainable funding mechanisms to ensure the long-term viability of the advocacy initiative.
 - **Policy integration:** Advocating for the integration of radio talk shows into national communication strategies in WASH and SWM service delivery.
- **Open forums and dialogues:** Regularly conduct community forums and dialogues co-led by diverse community members including but not limited to young people and marginalised groups. This nurtures radio talk show discussions, identifies priorities, and empowers residents to take action.
- **Volunteer participation:** Encourage community members, service providers and government officials to participate in radio shows, share experiences, and propose solutions.
- **Validate radio show topics:** Hold community dialogues to validate propose radio talk show topics, ensuring they resonate with residents' concerns.

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2. Community engagements

The project team organised a series of community engagement sessions that took the form of open and facilitated discussions. The sessions brought together diverse groups, including women, persons with disability and young people to voice their concerns about water and sanitation issues. These discussions provided a platform for community members to share their experiences and grievances, particularly about the challenges they face in accessing clean water and maintaining proper waste management. The insights gained from these sessions were combined with key discussion points from the earlier inception event, which had already highlighted similar concerns. This alignment with the initial research conducted by the ARISE team at the APHRC underscored the relevance and urgency of addressing WASH and SWM challenges.



3. Validation dialogues

Dialogue sessions were held with community members and actors with an interest in WASH and SWM, to validate identified SWM and WASH issues identified in prior engagements. During these dialogues the following challenges were agreed to be included in the talk shows ahead of the broadcast sessions:

- Deficiency of safe water for consumption.
- Inadequate communication on water related issues due to regular closure of the local Nairobi City Water and Sewerage Company (government utility) office at the community.
- Dearth of public participation in allocation of water resources, as such public resources ended up in local leaders' plots.
- Widespread privatisation of water boreholes and commodification of water services.
- Safety was not considered in constructing sanitation facilities and water kiosks.
- Insufficient toilets in residential areas.
- Absence of a designated dumping site in the community led to contaminating of water bodies and filling up toilet facilities at a faster rate.

4. Radio talk shows, outdoor broadcasting and accountability programs

Building on these validated insights, the Ruben FM team co-designed radio shows. The programs were designed to amplify the voices of the community, raising awareness about the critical WASH and SWM challenges identified during the discussions. By broadcasting these issues to a general audience, the talk shows fostered community-wide engagement, encouraged dialogue, and promoted collaborative efforts to find sustainable solutions. The main goal was to ensure that the concerns raised by the community not only reached decision makers but also sparked collective action to improve WASH and SWM service delivery in the area. Decision makers were also invited to the talk shows to respond to the issues.

The Radio talk shows were characterised by the following:

- **Call-ins:** Listeners phoned in to share their experiences, ask questions, and provide feedback.
- **Social media:** Online platforms were used to extend the conversation, gather input, and mobilise community support.
- **Community listening, live broadcast and feedback sessions:** The program team organised sessions to engage with specific community groups and gather in-depth feedback.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS CONTD:

- **Focus on accountability:** Dedicate airtime to facilitate the community to demand action from service providers and government officials.
- **Engage government and service providers:** Constantly invite government officials and service providers to participate in talk shows, fostering two-way communication and problem solving with the community.
- **Highlight successful cases:** Use radio programs and other advocacy strategies to showcase successful initiatives, innovations and case studies to enhance scope up.
- **Policy integration:** Advocate in integrating radio talk shows into national communication strategies for WASH, SWM and other health and wellbeing needs to achieve wider impact.



Tweet reads in English: Mr. Chirchir (a teacher) in the studio discussing effects of lack of water in learning institutions.

- The talk shows served as a platform for open dialogue, allowing community members, government officials, and service providers to engage in constructive conversations about the challenges and opportunities in WASH and SWM. By highlighting the interconnections between these sectors, the programs emphasised the importance of integrated approaches to address these issues.
- Accountability and responsiveness were core themes explored throughout the talk shows. Listeners were encouraged to share their experiences, raise concerns, and demand actions from relevant stakeholders. The programs facilitated a two-way communication channel, enabling community members to hold service providers and government officials accountable for their commitments.

5. Accountability checks

Following each talk show, accountability checks were conducted. These checks involved monitoring media coverage, and field visits to track the implementation of commitments made during the programs. By evaluating the outcomes, Ruben FM demonstrated the effectiveness of radio as a tool for social accountability and influencing positive change.

The radio talk shows broadcast by Ruben FM were instrumental in driving accountability and responsiveness within the WASH and SWM sectors. By providing a platform for open dialogue, the programs created a space for community members to voice their concerns, expectations, and experiences related to these essential services.

One notable instance of accountability demonstrated through the radio talk shows involved a community facing persistent water shortages. By platforming the community's grievances, the show exposed the water utility company's failure to address the issue despite numerous complaints. Following the broadcast, the company was compelled to investigate the problem and implement measures to improve water supply, ultimately resulting in increased water access for the community.

Responsiveness was evident in a different case where a caller expressed concerns about improper waste disposal and its impact on public health. The local government promptly organised a community clean-up campaign and initiated educational programs on waste management. This swift response not only addressed the immediate problem, but also empowered the community to take ownership of their environment.



KEY OUTCOMES

- Urban marginalised people are better able to come together, identify their priorities on health and well-being, and develop action to achieve these.
 - Ruben centre contributed to construction of toilet facilities that responds to the needs of school going children with special needs. Structural design is being adjusted to be friendly to children with special needs.
 - Women and youth groups encouraged the local government authorities to involve them in community development programs in their respective areas, as they felt left out.
 - Youth groups took the lead role in championing for the sanitation rights of the community members.
- Stronger relationships between community organisations, between urban marginalised people and government/other organisations/ community
 - The Ruben FM team conducted community dialogues and live broadcasting in the community that brought the community members to interconnect with their leaders.
 - Through radio talk shows, youths expressed a willingness to be guided by the local administration in water vending business. The local administrative on the other hand expressed a willing to give their full support.
- Increased accountability and responsiveness to meet priorities of urban marginalised people from local government, community-based and development organisations:

Increased accountability

- **Demanding action:** Community members were empowered to hold service providers and government officials accountable for their promises and commitments. By publicly airing grievances and concerns, community members exerted pressure on relevant stakeholders to take corrective actions on WASH and SWM service delivery.
- **Monitoring performance:** Regular talk shows served as a platform to monitor the performance in WASH and SWM service provision, prompting necessary improvements.
- **Transparency and information sharing:** Talk shows, dialogues and open forums encouraged open communication between service providers and the community.

Increased responsiveness

- **Two-way communication:** Talk shows fostered a two-way communication channel between service providers and the community. By actively listening to community feedback and concerns, service providers tailored their services to meet the specific needs of the community.
- **Problem solving:** Radio programs provided a space for collaborative problem solving. By bringing together community members, government officials, and service providers, the talk shows facilitated co-identification of solutions to common challenges.
- **Rapid response:** In some cases, the talk shows led to immediate responses to critical issues. By highlighting urgent problems, such as water shortages or sanitation crises, the programs prompted swift action from relevant authorities.

KEY LESSONS

- **Responsiveness:** Radio programs are avenues for government utilities and service providers to demonstrate responsiveness. There were efforts by government utilities like Nairobi Water Company to report their response on water scarcity i.e., by deterring the water cartels and supporting licensing of water vending.
- **Demanding accountability from leaders:** Community groups can use radio shows to demand for basic services from service providers and the government. These groups brought together vulnerable groups in forums where they spoke with one voice, thus amplifying their challenges, and demanding equality in resource mobilisation and distribution.
- **Collaboration is key:** Partnerships between government, community leaders, and social accountability groups can amplify the impact of advocacy efforts.
- **Addressing specific challenges:** Targeting accountability demands towards particular individuals or entities (like structure owners) can yield tangible results.
- **Persistence is crucial:** Community radio is a key tool to advocate for policy changes that benefit the community. Persistence is important as advocacy may take a long time to yield results.
- **Communication platforms:** Radio shows proved to be effective platforms for engaging communities in informal settlements. They allowed for interactive discussions through calls, text messages, and social media, facilitating direct feedback and participation from listeners.
- **Empowerment:** Education through talk shows empowers the community. Empowerment and educative talk shows have shifted power to marginalised groups. Talk shows and dialogues have created a more conducive space for involving everyone and marginalised groups have taken a keen interest in contributing towards the implementation of water projects in the community.
- **Volunteering:** Members of the community volunteered to come to the radio station to contribute to emerging issues including programs on water and sanitation.

“The project has been fulfilling in every sense. More responsibility is needed for the protection of water facilities. Community members demanded that we invite a community health promoter to the radio show to talk about the importance of clean water tanks [which we did]. Ruben Centre Clinic tested water from nearby tanks and found them contaminated. That was an eye opener. Through Ruben FM, the program reached over 350,000 listeners via our talk back radio and social media engagements as we spread the WASH and SWM issues across all daily programs. In the future, there is a need to continue this education through more partnerships. Exchange and the creation of complimentary programs by all the different the players will go a long way in making a lasting difference.”

Radio Producer at Ruben FM.

SUGGESTED CITATION:

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ABOUT ARISE AND THE RESPONSIVE CHALLENGE FUND

The ARISE Hub – Accountability and Responsiveness in Informal Settlements for Equity – is a research consortium, instituted to enhance accountability and improve the health and wellbeing of marginalised populations living in informal urban settlements in low-and middle-income countries.

The ARISE vision is to catalyse change in approaches to enhancing accountability and improving the health and wellbeing of poor, marginalised people living in informal urban settlements.

ARISE is guided by a process of data collection, building capacity, and supporting people to exercise their right to health. ARISE works closely with the communities themselves; with a particular focus on vulnerable people living in the informal settlements; often overlooked in many projects and initiatives.

ARISE was launched in 2019 and is a five-year project. It is implemented in four countries: Bangladesh, Kenya, India and Sierra Leone.

Through a £1 million Responsive Challenge Fund, ARISE provided small grants to organisations that test innovative approaches to improving health and wellbeing linked to the ARISE Theory of Change.

ABOUT APHRC

The African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) is a leading pan-African research institution. Headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, the centre seeks to drive change with evidence led by a growing cadre of research leaders from across Africa.

APHRC has for the last two decades run numerous research projects and generated evidence that has shaped policy and practice across African countries. The center has actively engaged policymakers and other key stakeholders to achieve measurable policy impacts informed by rigorous evidence-based research.

ABOUT RUBEN FM

Ruben FM is Mukuru's community radio station that aims to empower and unite the Mukuru community through our slogan "UNGANISHA JAMII" (Connect the community). It broadcasts from Ruben Centre, a faith-based organisation in Mukuru Kwa Ruben. The radio station was launched in 2016. Ruben FM's area of broadcasting is 2.5km radius which covers Mukuru Kwa Ruben slum, Mukuru Kwa Njenga slum, Kware, Imara Daima, Viwandani area, Pipeline and Mukuru Kayaba. Ruben FM's mission is to offer quality educative, informative, and entertaining programs to the Mukuru Community.

The UKRI GCRF Accountability for Informal Urban Equity Hub is a multi-country hub with partners in the UK, Sierra Leone, India, Bangladesh and Kenya which we call ARISE. The Hub works with communities in slums and informal settlements to support processes of accountability related to health. It is funded through the UKRI Collective Fund.

