Sharing Success
Stories from a Transforming University
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Acknowledgment

The members of the Student-Community Twinning Project (STP), Internship and Community Engagement committee would like to acknowledge that the implementation of the STP 2016/2017 and subsequent release of this e-magazine were carried out under supervision of the Department of Community Engagement and Service Learning.

In addition, we recognize and appreciate the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, Mbarara University of Science and Technology from whom we obtained the financial assistance to facilitate the implementation of the STP and subsequent publication of its e-magazine. The STP activity assists second year students from the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies to comprehend community life and utilize the grass root experiences shared by ordinary people to collectively develop life changing points of action in a real life community setting.

The Student-Community Twinning Project committee would like to appreciate all the communities in the divisions of Kakoba and Kamukuzi of Mbarara Municipality with whom we have partnered in the shared learning and collective action experiences in the past academic year (2016/2017).

We also recognize the support of the Community Development Officers at Kakoba and Kamukuzi Divisions, Mbarara Municipality who have been useful not only in linking us to the grass root community leadership but also providing guidance on community entry and diagnosis.

We are grateful to the University top Management for their continued financial support to this academic activity and for promoting community based learning initiatives such as STP.

The Student-Community Twinning Project committee would like to acknowledge the expert contribution of Mr. Mugira Fredrick, a Communications Specialist who has supported the team to write and organize the release of this e-magazine.
Community engagement and service learning are fundamental to the education process designed for University students. A key aspect of community engagement and service learning is the opportunity for University students to interface with the community realities in their understanding of what is needed to transform livelihoods for a sustainable future. The Student-Community Twinning Project is one of the authentic University - community relations platforms promoted and implemented under the Department of Community Engagement and Service Learning at the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, Mbarara University of Science and Technology.

The Student-Community Twinning Project is categorized as a skilling strategy that is enshrined in the curriculum at the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies and aims at creating students as change agents with holistic practical skills for future employability and self-reliance.

For the past three years, the Student-Community Twinning Project has mainly concentrated its activities in Mbarara Municipality specifically in the Divisions of Kakoba, Kamukuzi and Nyamitanga. At community level, students are attached to a village and together with the community members identify, analyse the area’s key challenges and collectively devise means of addressing them with a development agenda in mind.

It is apparent that from the Student-Community Twinning Project, communities have benefited from the efforts of this partnership by establishing community-based initiatives such as waste management solutions, mushroom growing, soap making, wine making, crafts making and bakery.

The good will of the University, Municipality and Community Leadership has offered students and communities an opportunity to design solutions that are relevant to local problems. On the whole, the prospects of optimizing the benefits of service learning through the Student-Community Twinning projects point to a positive trend where students together with the grass root communities get committed to promoting community responsibility, innovation and the spirit of collective action.

STP is built on MUST’s teaching philosophy of community engagement.

STP is an examinable course that all students of Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies must undertake. It is a two-semester course where students go to the community on a weekly basis and spend four to five hours practically with the community members to identify community problems, resources and solutions.

For students of Interdisciplinary Studies, learning with and from the community provides an opportunity for understanding realities of one’s immediate environment through exposure and participation. The STP learning platforms break classroom monotony which most of the university students have been to since they were as little as two years old. It’s a ‘learning by exposure’ student centered learning method which also brings the community on board.

The programs which offer STP as a course include: Bachelor of Science in Planning and Community Development, Bachelor of Science in Gender and Applied Women Health and Bachelor of Agriculture Livelihoods and Farm Production.

Rita Barbara Naggayi
Coordinator, Student Community Twinning Project
Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies;
Dr. Damazo Kadengye and Dr. Neema Clementia Murembe STP Garbage Project Field Supervisors.
In Mairo Ibiri, a small but vibrant suburb of Mbarara municipality, whose name literally means ‘two miles’, garbage usually piles up along the thoroughfare, corners, empty spaces or rather wherever people find place to throw it.

This is part of the 200 tons of waste generated by residents of Mbarara municipality monthly according to the national environment watchdog-NEMA. Just like other parts of the town, a lot of this junk and rubbish is thrown away anyhow at Mairo Ibiri.

But students of the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies of the Mbarara town-based Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST) are out to stop this culture.

“We aim at making sure people dispose of their wastes correctly,” declares Ngonga Immaculate, a student of MUST, speaking of the importance of their Student-Community Twinning (STP), in the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies.

In this project, narrates, Dr. Viola Nilah Nyakato, Dean of Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, students are offered, “opportunities to interface with the community realities through an examinable field based course called Student-Community Twinning.”

Students work with communities in and around Mbarara municipality weekly to identify and utilize community resources.

Awareness and sensitization of communities on waste management is one of the activities students undertake in this project. In particular, this activity is being practiced in Lower Cell, Nyamityobora ward in Kakoba division. Other activities include skillling some residents about making a home bakery and pastry-making business, soap making and mushroom growing among others.
The student community twinning project, was started in 2013 under the then faculty of Development Studies. However, after a rigorous curriculum review, the project was extended to include students from the Departments of Planning and Governance, Human Development and Relational Sciences as well as Department of Environment and Livelihood Support Systems under Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies.

STP aims at bridging the gap between the university and the outside community as well as showing the community that their students are studying what they are supposed to. “It unites us with the community. People get to see how practical their children are,” notes Dr. Nyakato.

“The project takes a process of exploring resources in the community. And the community gets mobilized. This creates rapport between the two parties.”

Without question, the Student-Community Twinning Project does not only benefit communities but also the students. Students in this project...
acquire comprehensive experiences and also get to see directly how communities function. This provides a valuable understanding of the communities in which students work once they graduate.

“We really have many stories from students in relation to this project. It helps them to go back to the community and this way, they learn how to become their own bosses,” argues Dr. Nyakato.

Citing the example of some of the students that graduated in the recent past, Dr Nyakato says this project helped to shape their careers. This, she notes, is because the project skilled them more about the career path they were chasing.

Also, by interacting with communities, contends Dr Nyakato, the students and the university in general gain new connections.

“For us, we have gained a lot because we understand our environment better,” reveals Dr Nyakato further stressing that through this project, “we have started working with Mbarara municipal council because we have to build a network.”

“We also link up with local council leaders. So we are benefiting in many ways and the community is able to work with us because we are community oriented.”

According to Ms. Rita Barbara Naggayi, STP Coordinator; Dr. Damazo Kadengye and Dr. Neema Clementia Murembe, STP Field supervisors, this project was started with an aim of turning garbage into wealth.

This was after the residents of the Lower Cell in Nyamityobora ward raised poor waste management as, an outstanding source of problems affecting their health.

Some residents there, according to Dr. Kadengye, “never knew how resourceful their garbage is. We had to sensitize them about the usefulness of garbage.”
The first sign of change was the disappearance of swarms of houseflies. Then the stench gradually disappeared. By the time residents of Lower Cell in Nyamityobora, Kakoba division in Mbarara municipality became fully aware of the Student-Community Twinning Project of Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST); their houses had no garbage at all.

‘WE ARE NO LONGER CHOKED WITH UNCOLLECTED HEAPS OF GARBAGE’

Mohammed Kayiira, Chairperson Local Council One, Lower Cell, Nyamityobora ward, Kakoba division

Mohammed Kayiira C/ Person Local Council One Lower Cell Nyamityobora ward, Kakoba division

Up to 200 tons of waste are generated by residents of Mbarara municipality monthly.
Twinning Project, the community has been linked with a private operator who is regularly collecting the troublesome garbage.

Under this project, students with their lecturers move house to house in Lower Cell situated in Nyamityobora ward, Kakoba division of Mbarara Municipality to raise the awareness of the community members on waste management. Apart from actively taking part in collecting the garbage, students sensitize the residents against dumping waste in uncontrolled open dumps and burning waste such as the polythene bags in the open fires which could lead to significant public health risks among others.

As a result, the challenge of garbage collection is now history in the Lower Cell, Nyamityobora ward, Kakoba division, according to Mohammed Kayiira, a village leader.

“We are no longer choked with uncollected heaps of garbage which used to cause fear of possible disease outbreak.”

Kayiira agrees that before the intervention of the students, some of the residents he leads never knew how to manage their garbage properly.

“They now collect it in one place. Later some people who want to turn it into manure for their crops pick it using vehicles.”
With the ever-growing population and increasing consumer lifestyles, the volume of waste produced in Mbarara town is soaring. Piles of garbage in different parts of Mbarara town usually spur fear of disease outbreak.

Equally, poor garbage management in different parts of the town regularly prompts political debates and occasional heated discussions. In fact, in the recent past, cases of residents storming the Mbarara municipal council to demonstrate against accumulated garbage in their areas flared.

But, Kakyebzei Robert Mugabe, the mayor Mbarara municipality says with such initiatives, garbage should not be a problem in the municipality in the near future.

“Such efforts should be supplemented by our local people. The LC system should also help them,” notes Kakyebzei, speaking about the waste management initiative the community training project (STP) is engaged in.

“We need more of such initiatives. Like other 10 to 15 groups.”

“As I have always said,” narrates Kakyebzei, “let everybody be in charge of their garbage because we are the people who generate it.”

Relatedly, Kiconco Jocelyn, the Community Development Officer, Kakoba Division, Mbarara Municipality says her efforts for promoting proper disposal of garbage have been eased by the students under this project.

She narrates that some of the people that have been sensitized by the students have formed groups that offer waste services for residential homes; including garbage collection.

“The groups are now selling the garbage they collect as part of income generating activity.”

“If all universities in the municipality had such programmes,” further narrates Kiconco, “then we would not have challenges in our communities.”
Only 120 tons of garbage out of the 200 tons generated in Mbarara municipality monthly are taken to the sanitary landfills.

‘That Is the Way to Go’

Jeconeus Musingwire,  
Focal person,  
National Environment Management Authority (NEMA)  
South Western

Of the 200 tons of garbage generated in Mbarara municipality monthly, 120 tons are taken to the sanitary landfills.

“The other 80 tons remain in circulation,” narrates Jeconeus Musingwire, the focal person for the national environment watchdog – NEMA in south western Uganda. This may not sound like much, but it’s a shocking amount of uncollected garbage given the town’s population of 195,013 according to the recent national population census.

But also, it is a warning that garbage should be collected at its origin given the erratic nature of where it might end up.

This is the reason why Musingwire argues that what the Student-Community Twinning Project is doing in Lower Cell, Nyamityobora ward, Kakoba division is, “the way to go.”

As they participate in such an initiative, students are connected to the world around them, learning practically about the environment they are in.

And so they come to learn that, “the role of environment management is entirely their responsibility and they have a very big role to play,” says Musingwire.

He however calls for proper management of the collected garbage before it is applied in the gardens.

“It is not right to collect and dump it in the banana plantations. It creates accumulated heat which has an effect on crop roots and soil organisms,” Musingwire advises.
A lot has been said and written about Uganda’s education system being too theoretical. However, for the students of MUST under this project, this does not apply.

“Socially, this project has helped us to collect experiences to enrich our professional wisdom. We are also able to put in practice what we are taught in lecture rooms”, notes Mugume Banabas, the project’s student coordinator.

“For example,” notes Mugume, “this project has improved our communication skills because...
some of our members were unable to address an audience but this project has solved it. It is no longer a threat to the students,” Mugume explains.

Incredibly, amidst all these benefits, the project is facing some challenges. For example, Ngonga Immaculate, a student under this project is worried about lack of cooperation from some community members.

“Some people are not cooperative and their attendance is not constant. Others demand money as an incentive to attend our sensitization meetings.”

This, according to Ngonga has affected them greatly because, almost every meeting, they have to, “sensitize new people.”

Likewise, Rachael Kyampeire, a student in this project says rains hinder them from executing their field work effectively.

“And yet despite regular sensitization sessions,” further narrates Kyampeire, “some residents continue to mix biodegradable with non-biodegradable garbage making it hard to separate them.”

Some town dwellers also mistake the students to be government officials wanting to apprehend them for poor waste disposal.

Amidst these challenges, Dr. Viola Nilah Nyakato, Dean of Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, is optimistic that the project will expand further beyond Mbarara district to other areas in the region.

University students engaging in garbage collection and sensitizing people on how to manage their wastes tells a narrative: of hard working and being community oriented, transforming communities for social change.
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