

Please scroll down to read more about our Village Health Team Programme in Budaka District

Budaka District is a rural area which has a fast-growing population, currently around 220,000, of whom almost 40% are under the age of nine, and 65% under the age of 20. Around half live in deep poverty (according to the UN measure of less than \$1.90 per day).

Although originally a fertile area, there are now serious signs of soil degradation in the district. Crop yields are falling, and with a rapidly expanding population, food insecurity is widespread. Other challenges for villagers in this area include lack safe water and of sanitation facilities. Poor housing is also a problem, with 99% of people 'not in decent homes' according to the most recent census, and around one in five in a temporary dwelling. Our three new programmes link together to tackle these issues.

Village Health Teams

An important step on the road to improving livelihoods is improving people's basic health and the most effective way of reaching and educating communities in good healthcare practices is through their own people.

Health care provision in Uganda relies on Village Health Teams (VHTs) to provide a crucial link between communities/households and the sparsely provided Health Centres in each sub- county. Village Health Team members are volunteers who complete a one year Government healthcare training programme, delivered by trained health ministry staff. These volunteers then work within their villages, teaching their neighbours about hygiene and basic health maintenance, pre and post-natal care, care of infants, assisting with Government health programmes in the community, and making referrals to Health Centres. They are supervised by the local Health Centres.

When we were introduced to the Lyama area, in the south of Budaka District, there were no active VHTs operating there and only two local Health Centres providing basic services to the 24,000 local population. When we were asked if we could support VHT training, we were delighted to begin this new venture, since improving healthcare clearly supports the struggle against poverty.

This programme involves, in the first year, training 66 village health team members from the 16 villages of the Lyama area and mobilising them within their communities. This training, which involves four weeks' full time training over the course of a year, started in October 2022. By end March 2023, the initial training and induction process had been completed for 18 new volunteers, with the other 48 to follow during 2023. All these new VHT members will be carrying out their household visits in their villages throughout 2023, initially under the supervision of trained Health Centre staff.

In future years, ongoing training of the VHT members will continue and some of these will be selected for further training at a higher level. The entire programme is a seven year commitment for Just Small Change.